

CONSPIRACY CULTURE IN AMERICA AFTER WORLD WAR II

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

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May 2005

## **Dedication**

For my mother, Rose Joycelyn Buffet Holliday  
1929-2000

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Joseph Kronick for his tireless attention to my readmission, after a brief hiatus, to the English doctoral program at Louisiana State University. Without his efforts, the work that follows would not have materialized.

I would like to thank Professor Kevin Mulcahy for serving on my committee as the Graduate School's representative.

I owe many thanks to Professor Katherine Powell and Professor Patricia Suchy for enthusiasm for this project early on. Their support and their willingness to serve on my committee was absolutely invaluable in my search for the courage to persevere.

Kristin Ross in a spirit of great cheer and collegiality read drafts of Chapter 4 and commented extensively. I thank her warmly for the many long late-night phone conversations and her page-by-page attention to detail.

I would like to thank Professor Ed White both for sitting on my committee and for his dogged commitment to reading early drafts of chapter three. After four single spaced pages of comments, several conversations, and a book recommendation or two, the final draft is in every way influenced by his sharp sense of texts. His gentle and straightforward candor and his temperate attitude toward graduate students have been most significant. I am also very appreciative of Professor White's tutelage in the Marxist Reading Group, the influence of which may be felt in the present manuscript.

As well, Professor Pat McGee has offered his guidance in the Marxist Reading Group, and under his auspices I have learned a great deal. Many years ago, Professor McGee ignited in me a profound interest in literary theory with his passionate fervor, an

ember that has never died out. I shall always be grateful to him for showing me the possibilities for change and the merit of an articulate political expression.

I would like to thank Professor Elsie Michie for encouraging me years ago to embark on the journey that ends with this document. While on the journey, she taught me her unique and keen method of critical discourse, of which the following dissertation is a pale but earnest instance. Professor Michie read patiently drafts of every chapter and gave invaluable and insightful comments, all of which have contributed significantly to the following piece of writing. She gave generously special time and attention to the final draft, for which I am especially appreciative.

I would like to my express deepest gratitude to my teacher and director, Professor Carl Freedman. He has been ever present throughout this entire process, available to me at a moment's notice, and has persistently ensured that I did not drift away into ABD oblivion. He has nurtured both the production of the present work and my professional development in ways that surely must be above and beyond the call of the office. In cultivating my advancement he has invited me to join him as a peer, while never forgetting that I was a student with all the burdens incumbent upon that position. And he has reminded me endlessly in word and deed that scholarship should be *fun*. Scholars should have a sense of humor, the absence of which is indeed an occupational hazard, and one for which there is no known OSHA regulation. For all of these things, none more important than the other, I thank him most warmly.

Finally, I would like to thank my partner, Delicia Justice. Perhaps not behind every good woman is there a good woman, but behind me there is. The dissertation that follows here is only in existence because she gave me the love, life, and time to write it.

For all the tears, uncertainty, and days on end staring at the back of my head, I only hope that I may step behind her now.

Needless to say, all mentioned here have had a profound impact on the text that follows. What is good is the result of their influence; what leaves something to be desired must be attributed entirely to me.

## Preface

This dissertation assumes that Marxist categories have been woefully insufficient in accounting for gender. I contend that this failure to account for gender has as much to do with the reification of gender as a theoretical category as with any intentional or unintentional misogyny. Gender analysis should not be figured exclusively as a specialized area of study. Major theoretical paradigms, such as the ones I've privileged here—Marxism, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction—should all *as a matter of form* include gender as they articulate human structures. Jean Paul Sartre's methodological work in Marxism and existentialism serves as an instructive example. In Search for a Method (and subsequently in the Critique of Dialectical Reason) Sartre argues that Marxism and psychoanalysis fail to account for human freedom, which signifies a paucity of ontological categories in these two methods. Accordingly, Sartre concludes from his search for a method that we must understand Marxism together with existentialism in order to envision a revolutionary world. While Sartre does not articulate gender as a significant category, and in fact overlooks it himself, his method allows an accounting of gender. Whether we have taken seriously Sartre's call for a synthesis of Marxist and existentialist methods, the present work marks an attempt to dereify gender and integrate it more seamlessly into the workings of Marxist, psychoanalytic, and deconstructionist analysis.

Conspiracy culture serves as a useful aperture for envisioning a theoretical paradigm that assimilates gender into the forms of Marxist, psychoanalytic, and deconstructionist investigation. Conspiracy narratives have come to amplify the postmodern condition of the masculine subject in crisis in America since World War II.

The masculine subject in crisis is an historical figure, emerging in concert with the developing post-World War II American security infrastructure. Marxist analysis has focused on this period in history as the third wave of capitalism, and this analysis has done much to elucidate the economic conditions and their concomitant ideological structures. However, Marxist inquiries have all too often failed to account for the way gender shapes these ideological contours. Conspiracy culture demonstrates the way in which this economic analysis *must* include a study of gender in order to understand the economic, ontological, epistemological, and political categories that are at work in the postmodern period. Psychoanalysis articulates the human structures that explain the post-war phenomenon of conspiracy culture, specifically with a few to the way gender shapes human psychosexual development. Using psychoanalytic categories we can see that the conspiracy theorist is indeed a gendered subject; once we have done so, we have refined the aperture through which we view history to include the important category of gender. The post-World-War II conspiracy theorist typically takes as his object of interest the workings of large historical institutions such as the American government, political system, and corporate infrastructure. By analyzing him and his psychosexual formation, we then have a better understanding of the relationship between human structures and the political, social, and economic terrain out of which he emerges and in which we dwell.

Above all, the conspiracy theorist is characterized as paranoid, both in lay and academic circles, but a study of Freud's categories will show that ordinarily the conspiracy theorist is not paranoid but rather hysterical. Freud, in his analysis of the case history of Dr. Daniel Schreber, tells us the paranoiac progresses through three phases of repression that more adequately express the pathology of paranoia. The first phase is

fixation, where some libidinal investment or instinct does not develop normally along with other instincts. The second phase is repression itself, where the paranoiac has a strong aversion to some libidinal investment that he finds in himself. These first two phases, however, are not abnormal. These occur in normal psychosexual development. The pathology of the paranoiac lies principally in the “failure of repression, of *irruption*, of *return of the repressed*. This irruption takes its start from the point of fixation [the failure of some libidinal investment to develop], and it implies a regression of the libidinal development to that point” (Complete Works v 12 67-68 Freud’s italics). The paranoiac ceases to focus his libido on a love object. Symptoms of paranoia appear when the paranoiac *negates* his love object. The paradigmatic statement in this case would be “*I do not love at all—I do not love anyone*” (CW12 65 Freud’s italics). But, as Freud points out, “since, after all, one’s libido must go somewhere, this proposition seems to be the psychological equivalent of the proposition: ‘I love only myself’” (CW12 65). The particular pathology of the paranoiac centers primarily on a *negation*. The love object was originally the focus of the libidinal investment; when the paranoiac rejects the love object, symptoms of the illness appear. The libido demands a presence; the ego then becomes the focus of the paranoiac’s libido—this Freud calls megalomania.

But the paranoiac moves beyond this phase of his illness; he reassumes the love object, albeit in an altered, delusional way. In the case of Dr. Schreber, Freud found that Schreber had suffered an abrupt truncation of his relationship with his father; he transferred his feelings for his father onto his physician, Dr. Flechsig. At some point, Freud postulated, Schreber rejected Flechsig as a love object, although Freud maintained he could not know this directly. It was only through the symptoms that he could see this

rejection. However, Schreber eventually reassumed Flechsig as a libidinal investment, but in a radically altered way: he believed that Flechsig was persecuting him, trying to murder his soul. For Freud, the important difference of paranoia from other disorders is the process of reconstruction: “*The delusional formation, which we take to be the pathological product, is in reality an attempt at recovery, a process of reconstruction*” (CW12 71 Freud’s italics).

Freud’s discussion implies the paranoiac is not altogether pathologically disabled. The delusional formation is part of the process of recovery. Dr. Schreber was, except in the deepest throes of his illness, a normally functioning German government official. He was married (happily, according to his memoirs), and a respected judge. He carried on his affairs for the majority of his life with competence; he was astutely aware of his own mental condition, enough to write it all down in his memoirs for the purpose of scientific study. In the formation of the delusions the paranoiac attempts to recover. For the conspiracy theorist as paranoid, the attempt to formulate a systematized story of a conspiracy is a gesture toward reconstruction, a reinvestment of libidinal drives.

The reinvestment of libidinal drives also signifies the moment at which the paranoiac begins to reconstruct his subjective world. The paranoiac’s belief in either the end or the eventual end of the world is symptomatic of his rejection of the love object. Freud says, “The patient has withdrawn from the people in his environment and from the external world generally the libidinal cathexis which he has hitherto directed on to them . . . The end of the world is the projection of this internal catastrophe [of failed repression]; his subjective world has come to an end since his withdrawal of his love from it” (CW12 70). When the conspiracy theorist negates his investment in his love object, he invests his

libido in his own ego. He thereby reverts to a kind of narcissism. He is at the center of the world. But once he begins to form a story of the conspiracy, he begins to reconstruct some version of a healthy psychosexual development. The conspiracy theorist reconstructs his subjectivity as he reconstructs the world. If the conspiracy theorist in America since World War II has no place, then the existence of that subjectivity is unstable. The process of the paranoiac's recovery involves reconstructing a world; once he does so, he is in some measure "cured." The conspiracy theorist both constructs a story to explain history and at the same time creates a location for his own subjectivity. There is a sense, then, in which the conspiracy theory itself is an integral component of subject-making in post-World-War-II America. The conspiracy theorist cures himself of paranoia, and of his subjectivity in crisis, by theorizing conspiracy.

For Freud, though, one of the pathogenic functions in the paranoiac is megalomania—the turning of the libido toward the ego. The paranoiac, in the process of his recovery—by consciously reconstructing his world—locates himself at the center of the persecution. The conspiracy theorist, however, does not consistently show this megalomaniacal symptom. Oliver Stone, a key conspiracy theorist in 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century America, does not locate himself anywhere in the conspiracy network laid out in *JFK*. In fact, Stone effaces the center of the conspiracy as much as he can—Lyndon Johnson may be *near* the center of the conspiracy, but the implementation of the assassination only occurs as the work of discrete but curiously and mysteriously related cells (the Mafia, Cuban counter-revolutionaries, American military personnel, politicians, and appointed officials). Stone not only does not situate himself megalomaniacally as a victim of this conspiracy, he works assiduously to erase the impression of *any* center.

Regardless of any speculations about Stone's personal egomania (and anecdotal evidence does suggest that he is an egomaniac),<sup>1</sup> Stone's conspiracy theory does not register this key component of Freud's theory of paranoia.

There is, moreover, a close relationship, for Freud, between paranoia and hysteria. The symptoms of both of these illnesses are caused mainly by a repressed homosexual wish, that both paranoia and hysteria reveal bisexuality, a point that Freud felt he could not stress enough. The function of repression works differently in each illness. Whereas the paranoid's fantasies tend to irrupt into consciousness, the hysterical fantasies tend not to return so quickly, if at all. More technically, hysteria is characterized by its tendency toward condensation. In Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria, Freud finds condensation in Dora, where very often her dream imagery served to represent several different and intersecting repressed wishes—what Freud called overdetermination. He isolated “switching words,” which served as something like railroad track switches, in her speech and her dreams on which these intersecting fantasies pivoted (Dora 82).<sup>2</sup> By contrast, paranoia tends toward decomposition. Freud's paranoid, Dr. Schreber, had an elaborately and carefully designed schematization of the nature of God. Schreber's persecutor was, at the same time and in some sense the same entity, both his physician and God. Schreber then further divided his physician, Dr. Flechsig, into “God Flechsig” and the “real Flechsig” whom Schreber knew in some sense not to be his persecutor. God, too, was divided into an “upper God,” a fair God not unlike the Aryans, and a “lower God,” a dark God somewhat like the Semites. But Freud is extremely quick to point out that the process of decomposition in the paranoiac is more complicated because the paranoiac decomposes *after* he has gone through some unconscious process of

condensation. He says, “Paranoia decomposes just as hysteria condenses. Or *rather*, paranoia resolves once more into their elements the products of the condensations and identifications which are effected in the unconscious” (CW12 49 my italics). The idea of the conspiracy theorist as paranoid fails to register the hysteric component of condensation. After all, the conspiracy theorist is such precisely because he seeks and finds intersections. For Stone, these intersections are the different cells of the conspiracy, such as the Mafia, Cuban counter-revolutionaries, and American business interests in Cuba. Stone’s decomposition of the center of this conspiracy is only relevant once he has condensed these components into unified cells. To the degree that Stone fantasizes a vast and seamless, if disarticulated, conspiracy, his film is a symptom of paranoia. In order, however, to construct this theory of the Kennedy assassination, Stone must condense several fairly disparate components of American life; to that degree he is unequivocally hysterical.

Hysterical condensation in the conspiracy theorist shows itself inexorably in the form of a reasserted Oedipal drama and resolution. In order for the conspiracy theorist to cure himself of paranoia he must condense his intersecting fantasies into a coherent story. Over and over again, as we shall see, the ordering narrative for the conspiracy theorist is the narrative of Lacan’s rereading of the Oedipal complex: the symbolic order as the Law of the Father. The symbolic order is reinstated in the conspiracy theorist’s move from paranoia to hysteria. The 1997 film Conspiracy Theory is a fine illustration of the relationship between paranoia and hysteria. Jerry Fletcher (Mel Gibson) is a New York cab driver who is convinced somebody is out to get him. Jerry gives the usual litany of theories: “they” put flouride in the water to control American minds; Jerry Garcia is still

alive and serving as a British agent with “00” status. His apartment is lined with some sort of metallic sheeting; we later learn that he has rigged his apartment to incinerate with the press of a button without burning any other apartment in the building. In addition to several deadbolts, he balances a beer bottle on the doorknob; his refrigerator and all of the food canisters inside of it have combination locks on them. He prints a newsletter called “Conspiracy Theory,” which has 5 subscribers. Jerry cannot, however, remember very much about the real conspiracy in which he is caught. One of the goals of the MK Ultra Program, which developed Jerry into an assassin, is to induce amnesia in the subjects so they don’t remember the treatment.<sup>3</sup> Jerry was assigned, we find out at the very end of the film, to kill a federal judge who was about to reopen a case that would expose the MK Ultra program and its conspirators. Jerry did not kill the judge because he knew in some vague way it was wrong; the film implies that the mind control technology is not foolproof. The judge was killed nonetheless by some other conspiratorial agent. Jerry, in his anamnesis, remembers enough to find and attach himself to the judge’s daughter, Alice Sutton, and become her guardian, as a promise to the dying judge. Jerry remembers little of this traumatic event until the final scenes of the film. The issue of mind control plays up the irony of the unconscious: if the unconscious is indeed unconscious, then it ought to be controllable without the subject’s knowledge; but, if it is unconscious, then there is some facet of it that is always outside of conscious (both the subject’s and others’) view.

Jerry is obviously paranoid. He has situated himself as the focus of a sinister network; in this regard, he shows the megalomania that Freud attaches to the paranoid personality. He is also aware, at least to some degree, of his pathology, even if not as

much as Freud's Dr. Schreber. Jerry's amnesia, however, about his torturous past requires that he piece together his memories; he exhibits the anamnesis that Freud finds in hysterics.<sup>4</sup> Jerry is provided with someone who will help him recover his memories—Alice Sutton (Julia Roberts) is an attorney with the Justice Department for whom Jerry has affection. Jerry's main problem is that he cannot remember what happened to him—his pathology is characterized by a hysterical repression, the same repression that Freud found in his study of Dora in Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria. Jerry is also viscerally afraid of being penetrated; the locks on his refrigerator and food canisters resonate with the metaphorical force of Dora's jewel case.

Both Alice and Jerry are embroiled in an Oedipal drama; while the judge's assassination is an unconscious trauma for Jerry, it is a conscious trauma for Alice. The first scene in which Alice has dialogue is in a conference with her boss, who is reprimanding her for reopening the Ezekiel Walters case—the case for which her father died for attempting to reopen it. She is deeply disturbed by the mystery surrounding his death. But while her father's death is immensely important to her, we discover in the final scenes of the film that the Oedipal drama is really Jerry's, not Alice's. Alice is a pivot around which Jerry revolves as he works out his hysterical symptoms, which are the repressed memories of his training as an assassin. Alice is initially a love interest for Jerry; in the first scene where we see them together, he has on a tie, symbolic of masculinity, and he asks her out on a date. She replies no. He meets her the next time in the lobby of her office building. At this second meeting he does not have on a tie, and he is extremely upset and incoherent; he has just escaped from the director of the MK Ultra Program, Dr. Jonas (Patrick Stewart), who had abducted him for torturous questioning.

Alice talks Jerry into relinquishing the gun he has swiped from a lobby guard and quiets him down. By the end of the scene, Alice has rested Jerry's head in her lap in a maternal pose. Jerry is missing the trappings of masculinity in this scene; and to the degree that he is constructed as prelinguistic, he is also constructed as feminine. He is nearly incoherent, but he calms down when he is enfolded into Alice's maternal plenitude. He is the son cathected fully to his mother.

In the shallow background, however, is Jerry's motive to protect Alice. Alice's father as he was dying had asked Jerry to look after Alice; Jerry assumed this patriarchal role fully even in his anamnestic condition. This motive is working against his desire to be enfolded in Alice's maternal bliss. In the climactic scene of the film, Jerry "abducts" Alice—the film gives the scene ambiguity in order to suspend knowledge for the viewer—and takes her on a drive to her family's ranch, where her father was killed. Jerry doesn't know this is where he is driving—he is still working out his hysterical repression. Alice, under the influence of Dr. Jonas' deception, believes that Jerry murdered her father and that he will also murder her. When they arrive at the stables, Alice confronts Jerry about the murder, asking him if he did it. Extremely confused, Jerry knows he is close to remembering. Alice gets upset and physically assaults him; this brings Jerry's Oedipal drama to a crisis. He needs to remember the repressed memory (recover from his hysteria) and reconstruct his narrative (recover from paranoia) so that he can assume finally and fully his position as Alice's protector. He struggles, finally remembers, and Alice believes him. He is able to assume the patriarchal role for Alice that was designated for him when her father was slain. Once he reveals the drama to Alice, he simultaneously recovers from his hysteria and enters into the reconstruction phase of his paranoid illness.

Jerry assumes the role of the father *when and only when* he regains control over his own narrative. His libidinal drive is reinvested in the position of patriarch. Conspiracy Theory's staging of this Oedipal drama illustrates that paranoia is above all a *masculine* construction. Likewise, the conspiracy theorist, to the degree that he exhibits clinical paranoia, is also a masculine construction.

Alice, for her part, serves for Jerry first as a love interest, then mother, then daughter. She is the object of Jerry's libidinal investments, which shift and change as he resolves his Oedipal drama. The love affair between Jerry and Alice never materializes. When Alice rescues Jerry from Dr. Jonas, they kiss in a friendly, non-eroticized way. They pause, realize there is an erotic tension, and begin to kiss more passionately, but they are interrupted before their lips touch by Jonas' agents.<sup>5</sup> They never kiss again. Agent Lowery, who is a doubly secret agent working to stop Dr. Jonas, takes Jerry into his protective custody at the end of the film. He tells Jerry that as long as Alice thinks he, Jerry, is dead, and Dr. Jonas' people think Jerry's dead, then Alice will be safe. Jerry regretfully, and paternally, acquiesces to this arrangement. He rejects his investment in Alice as both lover and son and accepts his libidinal investment in her as father. Lowery's assistant then hands Jerry a stack of the day's newspapers so that he can piece together the next conspiracy from the myriad headlines. Jerry comes to rest upon an investment in Alice as her paternal caretaker; in doing so, he rejects the megalomaniacal ego investment that Freud found to be characteristic of the clinical paranoid.

Examining the category of paranoia in this way shows the degree to which the appellation is imprecise with regard to the conspiracy theorist. The majority of works this dissertation studies demonstrate the conspiracy theorist most often as hysterical. By

destabilizing the idea of the conspiracy theorist as paranoid, we may better appreciate the refined question of what the conspiracy theorist actually knows. As Lacan said, all knowledge is paranoid knowledge. By that he meant all knowledge is within the realm of the symbolic order, which as such is only attained once the subject is irrevocably split. The paranoid remains at the threshold of the visible, not acceding to the symbolic. The conspiracy theorist, as we will see, finally accedes to the symbolic order in positing theories about historical events. The issue of knowledge thus functions as a lynchpin in establishing a paradigm for understanding the conspiracy theorist as both a psychoanalytic subject and a capitalist subject. The chapters that follow are organized in order to show the ways in which the masculine subject has been constructed in post-World War II discourse and specifically through what historical and political circumstances this subject has come to be in crisis. This period encompasses the Cold War but also includes the post-Cold War period. Critics such as Robert Corber have argued that Cold War political discourse was shaped by gender; this is true, and I will show that the discursive contours of post-Cold War discourse are also shaped by gender.

We will begin by examining the historical and psychoanalytic categories that define the post-war masculine subject. Chapter 1 will periodize precisely the post-war conspiracy theorist by looking at the historical circumstances out of which he arises. As well, by asking whether the conspiracy theorist is crazy or right, Chapter 1 raises the epistemological issues that are at stake in the culture of conspiracy. We will find that the conspiracy theorist is not truly paranoid because he eventually accedes to the symbolic order. Both psychoanalysis and capitalism have reified the primacy of the image, and because feminism has found that the image is prioritized because of the dominance of the

masculine look, we will find that the capitalist subject and the psychoanalytic subject are always masculine. As such, the conspiracy theorist is also always masculine.

The assassination of President John F. Kennedy is the paradigmatic conspiracy narrative of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It flashes up out of history as the Benjaminian glimpse that illuminates both the past and the future; the assassination has both dimmed and glowed in its role as oracle of history. Chapter 2 will examine two narratives of the assassination—one by Oliver Stone and the other by Don DeLillo—and explore the ways in which these two artists deal with the implications of gender and capitalist ideology in conspiracy culture. Both JFK and Nixon revolve around the Bay of Pigs Invasion, Stone's *objet petit a*, as a way of explaining the assassination, the resignation, *and* the Vietnam War. The Bay of Pigs is the *object* of desire for Stone, the explanation that can only be obliquely viewed in order to remain an explanation. The Bay of Pigs invasion is that necessary excess, the remainder of the process of bringing the symbolic order into the undifferentiated real. Don DeLillo's Libra is a significant point of comparison to Stone's relationship to history. DeLillo foregrounds the problem of history in his version of the assassination more self-consciously than Stone. Rather than attempting to connect disparate historical events into a seamless narrative, DeLillo uses fiction to liberate history from traditional epistemic categories. Where Stone tries to *order* history into a coherent narrative, thereby acceding to the symbolic realm, DeLillo reimagines the possibilities for knowledge of the assassination by engaging the genre of historical fiction more openly. Chapter 2 will consider the ways in which even academic discussions of the Bay of Pigs reify the symbolic order. I will consider in detail Van Gosse's Where the Boys Are, which is a study of the ideological affinities between Cuba and the United

States. Taken with my critique of Stone's films and DeLillo's Libra, Van Gosse's work will show the ways in which the masculine is reified in both works of fiction as well as theoretical discourse.

Chapter 3 will examine John Frankenheimer's film version of The Manchurian Candidate (1962) and Sidney Lumet's Fail Safe (1964) in order to illustrate the political, social, and psychic fields of the postwar subject. We will find from this examination that conspiracy culture is the gateway through which we might view the discursive formations of gender and capitalist ideology and at the same time articulate a theoretical paradigm for future discussions of these discursive formations. Taken together, these two films mark the trajectory of the pleasure principle of Cold War discourse and the ways in which narrative and gender are imbricated in the production of political agendas.

Conspiracies often involve a fairly seamless interaction between government entities and non-terrestrial races. Conspiracy culture, thus, cuts across at least two genres—this dissertation considers several works of historical fiction; it will also consider several works of science fiction as well. I will look at Philip K. Dick's works as instances of Cold War science fiction. We will see in Dr. Bloodmoney, The Man in the High Castle, and Martian Time-Slip the beginning of a critique of masculinity that at moments dereifies the masculine. We will also see a failure to account for gender in Jameson's theoretical discourse about Dr. Bloodmoney.

Chapter 5 will turn to the television series and the film version of The X Files, which is emblematic of both Cold War and post-Cold War conspiracy culture. I will show the emergent pattern of Oedipal dramatization and entry into the symbolic realm that is evident in the relationship between Fox Mulder and Dana Scully. This relationship

closely resembles the relationship between Jerry Fletcher and Alice Sutton in Conspiracy Theory, with some important differences. Unlike the film Conspiracy Theory, The X Files appears in both televisual and filmic forms; as such the X Files film disrupts the formal qualities of the television series in a way that we cannot envision in the film Conspiracy Theory. We will see that the X Files phenomenon in its very production—as both film and television series—represents capitalist commodification.

In the Coda, I will consider a 21<sup>st</sup>-century conspiracy novel, William Gibson's Pattern Recognition (2003), and suggest possibilities for whether the masculine subject continues to be in crisis in the post-Cold War era of globalization. We will find that even though Gibson has placed a woman character at the center of his novel, the symbolic order is nonetheless still effectively reasserted in the novel's globalized setting.

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<sup>1</sup> A production of Don DeLillo's Libra was underway at about the same time Stone was working on the production of JFK. Rumor has it that Stone worked to make the Libra production go away—and it did. The film was never made. While Stone works to efface the center of the conspiracy in his theory, he nonetheless worked to have his decentered theory placed at the center of all productions about the assassination. See Chapter 3 for a full discussion.

<sup>2</sup> These intersecting points are, in Lacan's register, *points de capiton*.

<sup>3</sup> This plot circumstance, amnesiacal brainwashing, is the film's homage to The Manchurian Candidate (1962) to which we will turn in Chapter Three. Raymond Shaw is similarly brainwashed in Manchuria during the Korean War, and similarly fails to carry out his final mission. While Shaw does not regain his memories as Jerry does, the control over Raymond's mind nonetheless begins to fragment.

<sup>4</sup> This feature of Jerry's psychic world closely resembles the circumstances in the film The Manchurian Candidate; Raymond Shaw (Laurence Harvey), though, has fewer recollections of his treatment. Bennett Marco (Frank Sinatra) is put to the task of psychoanalyzing Raymond in order to understand the conspiracy.

<sup>5</sup> We will see the interruption of a kiss again in The X Files: Fight the Future. See Chapter 5.

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## Abstract

Feminism has all too often been reified as a theoretical category. Specifically, Marxist critical categories fail to account for the integral importance of gender in any sociopolitical critique. This dissertation attempts to dereify gender and demonstrate a theoretical model that seamlessly integrates psychoanalysis, Marxism, and feminism. Conspiracy culture in America since World War II is an ideal aperture through which we may envision such a theoretical approach, and indeed see the critical need for such an approach. This dissertation looks at several post-war American conspiracy narratives, including Oliver Stone's *JFK* and *Nixon*, Don DeLillo's *Libra*, Sidney Lumet's *Fail Safe*, John Frankenheimer's *The Manchurian Candidate*, several novels by Philip K. Dick, and Fox Broadcast Network's *The X Files*. Through this study of conspiracy culture we see the post-war construction of masculinity and its connections to economic structures.

## Chapter One

### Introduction: The Conspiracy Theorist: Is He [sic] Crazy or Is He [sic] Right?

I began this investigation into conspiracy culture in America because I found intriguing the always-widening web of deception around the JFK assassination—Oliver Stone made visible, if not plausible, the tracks of a vast conspiracy to assassinate President John F. Kennedy in his film JFK. I got the itch to trace the originary causes. Two years after Stone's film was theatrically released in 1991, The X-Files debuted on Fox Broadcast Network, a television show that posited a vast infrastructural network of American governmental deception in both the normal and the paranormal worlds; I was hooked on conspiracy. When I revisited Stone's film a couple of years ago, I realized that he posited the Bay of Pigs Invasion as one of the central reasons for Kennedy's assassination. I assumed that concerted study in the history of this American political and military event would reveal some missing piece of the assassination. I found myself, instead, making an unexpected journey backward through history. Instead of understanding the Bay of Pigs Invasion, and thus understanding the reasons for Kennedy's assassination if not learning the identity of the assassins, I was deferred. Each time I put in place one key piece of the puzzle, several other pieces would scatter. Worse, the boundaries, the limits, of the puzzle seemed to grow. Not a unique experience by any means: DeLillo's Nicholas Branch experiences just such vertigo in Libra. Appointed by the CIA to investigate the assassination, Branch finds himself literally surrounded by thousands and thousands of pages of data that seem to stretch up and out to infinity. People in the government who might have wanted Kennedy dead had been in power for a long time; their alleged involvement in Kennedy's assassination would have been just another execution of the policies they had been implementing since at least immediately

after World War II. I found that Stone was wrong to make the Bay of Pigs Invasion a structural necessity of the JFK assassination.

Perched at the edge of a dizzying abyss, I decided that instead of trying to get away from this vertigo—by attempting to apprehend history in its totality—I would instead work from the vertigo and apprehend its causes. The JFK assassination is the unanswerable question, indeed the unintelligible question. I stopped trying to answer this question—and all the other questions of American governmental conspiracy—and began interrogating the question of conspiracy itself. I made a move, in that key decision, from conspiracy theorist to investigator of conspiracy culture. Rather than, in other words, positing theories of who killed JFK, I decided to investigate *why* we need to know who killed JFK and *how* we try to answer that question. This decision rearranged the JFK inquiry, making it a theoretical matter. The vertigo caused by the seeming infinite regress of history is the origin of my critical approach. It is no coincidence that my critical investigation begins in a spinning sense of falling—it is synechodal for my experience of history. I abandoned the idea of conquering American history—reaching back far enough to isolate the originary moment of when the conspiracy began—and settled instead for trying to discover why notions of conspiracy are posited in the first place.

Conspiracy theories have been around for a long time in the United States. Jedidiah Morse in 1798 delivered a sermon to a Boston congregation warning of the vast international conspiracy by the Illuminati to overthrow Christianity. Illuminism was thought by Americans to have been instrumental in starting the French Revolution at Ingolstadt; American fear of the French Revolution and its implications was exacerbated by and linked to the rise of Jeffersonian democracy (Hofstadter 13). The anti-Masonic

movement in the United States is linked to this fear of Jacobinical plots; the Masons were thought to be anti-government, in much the same way the Illuminati were seen (Hofstadter). During the 19th century, both abolitionists and southern slaveholders maintained that the opposing side was infiltrating the channels of power in American government to overthrow the other. While the two sides were certainly opposed, the idea that cabals from either group had formed to control federal power is less certain (Davis).

But 20<sup>th</sup> century conspiracy theories differ from notions of conspiracy that were characteristic of 19<sup>th</sup> century America because the former exhibits a peculiar dispossession that we do not see in the latter. Hofstadter puts it this way:

The spokesman of those earlier movements [in the 19<sup>th</sup> century] felt that they stood for causes and personal types that were still in possession of their country--that they were fending off threats to a still well-established way of life in which they played an important part. But the modern right wing, as Daniel Bell has put it, feels dispossessed: America has been largely taken away from them and their kind, though they are determined to try to repossess it and to prevent the final destructive act of subversion (23).

For Hofstadter, the conspiracy theorist of 19<sup>th</sup> century America had *a place* from which he spoke, and a place that he felt it his duty, honor, and responsibility to defend. By contrast, the 20<sup>th</sup> century conspiracy theorist has *no place*, it having been taken away from him by “not merely outsiders and foreigners but major statesmen seated at the very centers of American power. Their predecessors discovered foreign conspiracies; the modern radical right finds that conspiracy also embraces betrayal at home” (Hofstadter 24). Hofstadter’s project in The Paranoid Style in American Politics is not to periodize particular kinds of American paranoia, but rather to identify the common denominator in all conspiracy culture in America. He finds conspiracy culture largely in the right wing of American politics, an unexamined point in his work and one to which I will turn later.

Rightly, he identifies it as paranoid; however, this paranoia he identifies is not a clinical paranoia, but rather a generalized style of political discourse. He declines to define paranoia in any more detailed way; for the goals of his project, no further definition is necessary.

At this point in the study of conspiracy culture—that is, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century—it seems to me to be necessary to explore some of the critical implications of Hofstadter’s work. First, Hofstadter’s early postmodern designation of an American political subject with no *place* requires elaboration in light of subsequent critical work on subjectivity. Second, Hofstadter’s unpolished notion of paranoia, while highly appropriate to his project in Paranoid Style, demands psychoanalytic elucidation; to do so enunciates further Hofstadter’s point about the subject with no place. Third, and Hofstadter fails to see this altogether, a study of the paranoid shows that the American political subject of conspiracy theories is a masculine construction. Fourth, Hofstadter identifies 20<sup>th</sup> century conspiracy culture as being dominated by the right wing, thinking of what was at the time of his writing, 1965, the recent wave of McCarthyism. Doubtless, Joseph McCarthy was on the radical right wing of American politics in the early 1950s. But Hofstadter too easily puts the responsibility of McCarthyism in the hands of the right wing. Conspiracy culture did not then, and does not now, fall neatly along the lines of bipartisan American politics.

Timothy Melley, in his book Empire of Conspiracy, notices the “bipartisanism” of conspiracy theories. He sees a deep commonality between J. Edgar Hoover’s Masters of Deceit and Vance Packard’s The Hidden Persuaders. Hoover writes of the communist conspiracy to overtake America; Packard writes about various operations designed to

control the American citizen's thought processes and purchasing decisions through the use of psychological wisdom. Melley notes that in both cases, the real cause for concern is over *agency*—a phenomenon that Melley calls “agency panic.” Conspiracy theory, as exemplified by these two texts, is not dependent upon an idea of “private messages,” but rather suggests “that whole populations are being *openly* manipulated without their knowledge. For mass control to be exercised in this manner, persons must be significantly less autonomous than popular notions of individualism would suggest” (3). The bipartisanism of conspiracy theories is, I believe, more political than Melley's notion of agency panic would imply. The “agency” to which Melley refers is a doubled category—human agency and government agency—and while Melley is aware of this doubling, his category fails to register how the one (government agency) produces and shapes the other (human agency). Robert Corber points to the Cold War consensus, or what he calls “the postwar settlement,” as the concessions liberals made in order to reclaim “liberalism from the cultural politics of the Popular Front” (In the Name of National Security 3). Liberals who were interested in preserving some version of the New Deal found a common ground with conservatives in the anti-Communist hysteria of the 50s. Liberals and conservatives could happily agree that the American government was being infiltrated by commies and faggots. So long as this hysteria held, the liberal interest in social justice for women and minorities might in some measure be maintained. The women's and black power movements of the 60s and 70s in some sense were permitted to happen as part of the Cold War bargain. In a bizarre move Cold War liberals, Corber suggests, divided and conquered social mobilization precisely by appearing to consolidate the liberal position. The postwar settlement thus “prevent[ed] competing

constructions of social reality from mobilizing popular support . . . in so doing, [Cold War liberals] gained control over the production of the postwar subject” (3). One of the great conspiracy theories of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in America, the theory of Communist conspiracy, was forged from disparate political interests—and this is the point—for political purposes. There *is* a panic over agency, but it is traced along the contours of political discourse. The Cold War consensus limited the social field for a specific political agenda.

The economic and political structures that locked in during and after World War II must be analyzed in order to understand American conspiracy culture of the post war period. World War II came with the development of several major technologies the likes of which had never been seen before. Ernest Mandel, in his Late Capitalism, places World War I squarely in the middle of what he calls the second technological revolution, which runs from the 1890s up to World War II. The major technological developments that Mandel identifies during this period are electricity and cars. World War I did not, for Mandel, engender any major technological revolution that was not already in motion by the time of the start of the war. The third technological revolution, however, begins precisely with the advent of World War II, when control of machines was given over to electronics and nuclear weapons technology was invented (120-21). Wartime goals and the demands of wartime economy are exclusively responsible for this explosion of technological development. Mandel calls these technological revolutions “long waves of capitalism,” a notion which very clearly indicates the relationship between clusters of technological advances and capitalist development. World War II marks the beginning of the third long wave of capitalism.

Mandel does not point specifically to the rapid development of airwave technology after World War I as a major component of the third technological revolution. However, this particular technological advancement contributed to the invention of the most revolutionary information technology to date: the television set. Television technology had been slowly developing since the 1920s; but television sets did not impact the American marketplace significantly until the late 40s. Sales of television sets in America jumped 600% from 1948 to 1949 (Television History). By the 1950s, “mass media” had become a meaningful term. Not only did television make it possible to communicate news of the nation and the world more quickly, it also accelerated the growth of the advertising industry. Constructing consumer desire for products rapidly became a profitable undertaking for producers, broadcasters, and advertisers. At the same time, the post-war economy made it possible for consumers to afford such luxuries as the television set; both the war- and peacetime economies changed the way Americans produced and consumed information. In spite of the fact that the technology emerged prior to World War II, it is this intersection with the economic circumstances of World War II that makes television part of the third long wave of capitalism.

Hofstadter is well aware of the effect of the mass media on conspiracy culture after World War II:

The villains of the modern right are much more vivid than those of their paranoid predecessors, much better known to the public; the contemporary literature of the paranoid style is by the same token richer and more circumstantial in personal description and personal invective. For the vaguely delineated villains of the anti-Masons, for the obscure and disguised Jesuit agents, the little-known papal delegates of the anti-Catholics, for the shadowy international bankers of the monetary conspiracies, we may now substitute eminent public figures like Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower, Secretaries of State like Marshall, Acheson, and Dulles, justices of the Supreme Court like Frankfurter and

Warren, and the whole battery of lesser but still famous and vivid conspirators headed by Alger Hiss (24).

The mass media made possible the *visibility*—as Hofstadter puts it, the vividness—of both the conspiracy theorist and his inflaming rhetoric as well as the alleged conspiratorial public figures. The post-war saturation of American culture with television sets introduced for the first time the primacy of the *image*; the economic conditions of the post-war period made the image a mass-consumable product in a way that film never did. Kennedy's success in the televised presidential debate with Nixon in 1960 was mainly because he *looked* so much better than Nixon—he was young, handsome, and self-assured, whereas Nixon was sweaty, nervous, and uncertain. Although Franklin D. Roosevelt was the first American president to be televised, John F. Kennedy was the first president to make successful use of television in his campaign and term of office. Political figures became aware, as a matter of profession, that their image could and would exist independent of their records in office. Image became something to be managed. In the new era of mass-produced and consumed political images, there came to be a *split* in the identity of political figures—the image that the public sees, and the increasingly shadowy “real” person in office. As Hofstadter points out, vivid political figures on television replaced the “vaguely delineated” villains of the pre-World War II period. Nonetheless, political figures after World War II, by virtue of the technology and economy that animated their images, began to cast a long shadow themselves. In spite of their bright and vibrant images on television, politicians came to have a secret life behind the image.

The development of the American national security infrastructure enhanced the secret life of politicians. Again, certainly there were government secrets prior to World

War II. But secrecy in the American government was not systematized until after World War II; on July 26, 1947 Harry S Truman signed the National Security Act, which legislated what would come to be a state of perpetual mobilization. World War II was the first war in American history that was not followed by demobilization of the military. Because of the Cold War, the United States undertook an entirely new policy of maintaining a substantial military force, as well as dedicating significant funds to the research and development of the new nuclear weapons technology. The Cold War was not a stalemate; each element in the standoff changed significantly in the process of and as a direct result of the dialectical relationship between global communism and global capitalism. The secret security infrastructure developed in America after World War II in order to conduct a war without combat. Government officials began to cast a long shadow, a place marked less by the presence of something tangible and more by the *implied* presence that a shadow gives. A shadow in itself is nothing but the absence of light in an otherwise well-lit place; it is the absence that most hauntingly, and most inapprehensibly, suggests a presence. A shadow is *no place*.

For Hofstadter, the 20<sup>th</sup> century conspiracy theorist has *no place*, no tangible sense of country. The space of the shadow, that place where the shadow falls, is in effect no place. There is some sense in which the conspiracy theorist is in *no place*. He is as Hofstadter puts it a disenfranchised political subject; he is also a desiring subject—that is to say, a subject constructed by his lack (of knowledge of the truth of the conspiracy). He seeks the *good place*, the place where the answers are, that place in the shadow that reveals all there is to know. Etymologically, “utopia” means both “no place” and “good place.” We might strive for utopia but never, definitionally, achieve it. It is the

paradigmatic fantasy, the ultimate object of desire, for it both exists—as possibility—and can never exist. The conspiracy theorist posits the conspirator, but only as an implication of the shadow in which he seeks knowledge. The conspiracy theorist's goals are essentially utopian and fantastic. He alleges the possibility of obtaining full and unmediated knowledge of the conspiracy; in so doing, he also constructs his own fantasy.

The material realities of capitalism in no small part influence and define the categories of psychoanalytic discourse. Consider the coincident appearance in the 16<sup>th</sup> century of capital accumulation in Venice and the first use of manufactured mirrors. The emergence of a product which enabled humans to apprehend their own form more clearly than ever before (although not perfectly, as much as it may have seemed to the 16<sup>th</sup>-century subject, and perhaps to us) marks the beginning of the Lacanian category of the mirror stage. I am not suggesting there is a direct causative relation between clear reflective surfaces and the Viennese capitalist hegemony. But there is no way to circumvent the fact that the production of a certain commodity, namely the mirror, essentially invented a psychoanalytic category. The historical production of the psychoanalytic subject coincides with the commodification of that image in the mirror. The 16<sup>th</sup>-century subject was, as Carl Freedman points out in The Incomplete Projects, both simultaneously a psychoanalytic and a capitalist subject (151). In the same way, the conspiracy theorist is a subject of post-World-War-II capitalism, a product of specifically late capitalist commodification of the image. To understand him, we must turn to a close analysis of the historical psychoanalytic categories implicit in this period of history.

Lacan's theory of ego formation explains how the conspiracy theorist is paranoid and yet not megalomaniacal. Lacan maintains a distinction between the ego and the

subject. The ego is above all an irreducible and inaccessible object, and it is not at the center of the human psyche. The paranoid's megalomaniacal investment in his ego, however brief, is not a matter of placing himself at the center of the conspiracy against him, but rather relating himself *to himself as object*. This situates the paranoid in what Lacan understands to be founding moment of the ego—the mirror stage. The human infant apprehends itself in the reflection of the mirror in two simultaneous and distinct ways. First, it understands the reflection *as* itself, what Lacan calls *me-connaissance*, or “me-recognition.” Second, the infant also perceives “a contrasting size (*un relief de stature*) that fixes [the exteriority of the image] and in a symmetry that inverts it, in contrast with the turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating him . . . Thus, this *Gestalt* . . . symbolizes the mental permanence of the *I*, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination” (*Écrits* 2). Lacan plays on the homonym “*méconnaissance*” in order to convey the duality in the formation of the ego. *Méconnaissance* means both “misrecognition” and “self-knowledge.” What is key for Lacan is the fact that the paranoid in some sense *knows* that he is misrecognizing what he sees, even if only vaguely. This is so much the case that Lacan is led to assert that all human knowledge is paranoid knowledge: “What I have called paranoid knowledge is shown, therefore, to correspond in its more or less archaic forms to certain critical moments that mark the history of man’s mental genesis, each representing a stage in objectifying identification” (*Écrits* 17). If “the mirror-image would seem to be the threshold of the visible world,” then the paranoid in Lacan’s register exists in it (*Écrits* 3). Freud, too, saw evidence in Dr. Schreber’s memoirs of an awareness of his illness *as illness*. The conspiracy theorist does not libidinally invest in his ego; to the extent that he

skips this phase of the paranoiac pathology, he is not clinically paranoid. The conspiracy theorist shares with the paranoiac the privileged relationship to *méconnaissance*. Melley sees this affinity as a “crisis of interpretation”: “[I]t is remarkably difficult to separate paranoid interpretation from ‘normal’ interpretive practices” (17).

The conspiracy theorist’s failure to libidinally invest in his ego is not, however, the only difference between him and the paranoiac. As I’ve shown in the analysis of the film Conspiracy Theory—and will also show later in an analysis of The X-Files—the conspiracy theorist rejects ego investment *precisely in order to* reinvest in his role as patriarch. The paranoiac does not make this investment. Lacan disagreed with Freud that the primary process in paranoia is a repression of homosexual desire. Lacan felt instead that the primary process in all psychoses is *foreclosure*—and this involves primarily the exclusion of the symbolic father. Foreclosure is not repression or negation; the paranoiac forecloses on the name of the father as if it never existed at all (Evans 63-64). The ego is above all in the realm of the imaginary order; the paranoiac, standing as it were in the threshold of the visible world, functions in the realm of the imaginary. He rejects the symbolic order of the father. By contrast, the conspiracy theorist acquiesces to the symbolic order of the name of the father when he rejects the megalomaniacal ego investment characteristic of the paranoiac. Because, as Freud said, the libido must go somewhere, in the conspiracy theorist it must go to the symbolic. The conspiracy theorist organizes his desire around the Oedipus complex; to the degree that he enters into the symbolic order, the conspiracy theorist deviates from the pathology of paranoia.

To note this deviation is not to suggest that the conspiracy theorist is not paranoid. The conspiracy theorist is paranoid to a degree; and he is not, in fact, the only

paranoiac—the psychoanalyst must also be in some measure paranoid in order to apprehend the meanings of unconscious irruptions. In the process of his analysis of Dora, Freud decomposed things himself. For instance, in a 1923 note to the original text, which was published in 1905, Freud said that he was wrong in 1905 to suggest that the motives of hysteria are not present at the beginning of the illness, since motives very often appear prior to the illness. He endeavors to clarify this view by positing a *distinction* between the paranoiac gain (primary advantage of the illness) and the epinoic gain (secondary advantage of the illness). This analytical move, while perhaps medically sound, is curiously like the decomposition that he describes in his analysis of Schreber. The psychoanalyst must be in some measure paranoid in order to divine the secrets of the unconscious by way of derivatives. Freud’s finding at the center of all human psychic development the component of sexuality is, I believe, exemplary of the affinity between conspiracy theory and psychoanalysis.

The privileged relationship to *méconnaissance* that the conspiracy theorist and the paranoiac share is elucidated by Lacan’s notion of the *modèle optique*, or optical model. *Méconnaissance* is a kind of vision; it is the double vision of simultaneous recognition and misrecognition, much like the anamorphosis that Lacan discusses in the seminar of 1959-60 (The Ethics of Psychoanalysis), to which I will turn below. Dylan Evans describes the optical model as “an optical experiment which is constructed by means of a plane mirror and a concave mirror. The concave mirror produces a real image of an inverted flower-pot, hidden from view by a box, which is then reflected in the plane mirror to produce a virtual image. This virtual image is only visible to a subject who places himself within a particular area of vision” (Ethics 130-31). For Lacan, the optical

model demonstrates the importance of the “position of the subject in the symbolic order (represented by the angle of the plane mirror)” and how it “determines the way in which the imaginary is articulated with the real . . . The optical model thus illustrates the primary importance of the symbolic order in structuring the imaginary” (Evans 131). While both the paranoiac and the conspiracy theorist share the privileged vision of *méconnaissance*, they do not share the same position relative to the plane mirror within the optical model. The symbolic order (the plane mirror) in this model acts as a guide to ordering the imaginary. The conspiracy theorist is able to organize his experience into the symbolic order, mainly by way of the Oedipus complex. His vision includes the virtual image that the plane mirror refracts. The paranoiac, on the other hand, is in a different position in relation to the plane mirror. He cannot see the symbolic order in the same way that the conspiracy theorist does. So, for instance, the paranoiac will experience as hallucinations those things that he cannot assimilate into the symbolic. The conspiracy theorist is less prone to hallucinations, precisely because he is able to include the name of the father in his psychic structure. To the degree that the conspiracy theorist enters into the symbolic, he also fails to sustain the anamorphic suspension between *mis-*recognition and recognition.

Nonetheless, the double vision that the conspiracy theorist and the paranoiac share is a privileged vision. Lacan discusses the anamorphic art of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in The Ethics of Psychoanalysis (Book VII of the Seminars). There he points to Holbein’s *The Ambassadors* where “you will see an enigmatic form stretched out on the ground. It looks roughly like fried eggs. If you place yourself at a certain angle from which the painting itself disappears in all its relief by reason of the converging lines

of its perspective, you will see a death's head appear, the sign of the classic them of *vanitas*" (Ethics 135). The painting gives over two images, but only relative to the viewer's temporal and spatial positions. Holbein's painting is for Lacan the optical model. Both the conspiracy theorist and the paranoid have a measure of control over what they see; in the case of the paranoid, he moves occasionally into the space where he is unable to see the refracted image of the symbolic. The conspiracy theorist is no less vulnerable to hallucinations—he is just less frequently so. Both the paranoid and the conspiracy theorist have spatiotemporal control over their subjectivities, but in varying degrees. Lacan's primary point, however, about anamorphic art is that it is essentially organized around *emptiness*. In the case of the Holbein painting, it disappears as a result of converging lines of perspective. It is this emptiness that both the paranoid and the conspiracy theorist see. The conspiracy theorist can order his imaginary realm through the refraction of the symbolic and so avoid the pathology involved in staring into emptiness. The paranoid lacks the structuring safety of the symbolic, which articulates the emptiness of the undifferentiated real for the conspiracy theorist. When the paranoid sees the undifferentiated, unmediated real, he hallucinates.

Lacan warns that the optical model should not be taken too seriously as an analytic tool; the images with which the optical model deals do not correspond in any meaningful way to the images with which psychoanalysis concerns itself. The imaginary realm is not reducible to captive images. Thus, he opts for a topological model, which eschews the Euclidean sense of space (Evans 130). Nonetheless, the primacy of the image in Lacan's work is undisputed. Kaja Silverman goes so far as to point out that Lacan's prioritization of the specular in ego formation "has made it extremely difficult to

theorize the role played there by bodily sensation” (Threshold 14). Lacan is certainly aware of the body in space and time; the optical model and anamorphosis make this clear. Silverman is right, though, to point to the primacy of the specular—in order to show subject position, Lacan uses as model and metaphor none other than the *optical* sensation.

It is Lacan’s prioritization of the image as fundamental to human psychic development that makes his work so fully historical. The latter half of the twentieth century is nothing if not dominated by the primacy of the image.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the model of the optical apprehension of knowledge has been paradigmatic at least since the beginning of the age of reason. Silverman’s work in The Threshold of the Visible World represents an attempt to shift the paradigm of ego formation from the highly localized, phallic, masculine construction of the look to an alternative one that disseminates sensory and knowledge apprehension across the surface of the entire body. Laura Mulvey demonstrated in 1975 that the classic construction of Hollywood cinema is organized around this patriarchal look; in spite of the fact that we are now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the look is still organized by masculine pleasure, and Mulvey’s work still pertains. In Conspiracy Theory, Alice Sutton’s *first* appearance is through a window, where Jerry is watching her with binoculars from his cab on the street. The closing scene of the film is of Jerry watching Alice from the tinted window of Agent Lowery’s SUV. Jerry’s recovery is both framed and organized by his ability to watch Alice as an object, and in both cases without her knowledge that she is being watched. What is even more persistently relevant about Mulvey’s work is that she articulates so well the materiality of psychoanalysis. There *is* a subject seated in a dark theater playing out a psychic drama with the screen, and that drama is specifically political. Mulvey demonstrates not only the

historicity of psychoanalysis, but also the psychoanalytic subject's place in history. The subject in relation to the image is, for Mulvey, male, and in the register of my discussion of conspiracy theorists, this point cannot be underemphasized. If capitalism has produced a historical moment defined by the primacy of the image, then both the psychoanalytic subject and the capitalist subject are masculine.

I have so far been arguing, first, that the conspiracy theorist after World War II is structurally different from the conspiracy theorists of earlier periods and, second, that the conspiracy theorist exhibits psychic structures both similar to and distinct from the paranoid. I have not been attempting to prove the conspiracy theorist is not paranoid and therefore not crazy. Rather, I have been trying to problematize the intimate connection between the conspiracy theorist and the paranoid in order to put into relief the epistemological issues that are implied by the category of paranoia. Lacan argues that *all* human knowledge is paranoid knowledge; therefore, if we assume unproblematically that the conspiracy theorist is wholly paranoid, then it would seem the conspiracy theorist is a privileged exemplar of human knowledge. This assertion, however, is not exactly tenable when we look at the ways the conspiracy theorist accedes to the symbolic. The paranoid remains at the threshold of the visible world ultimately because he exists in the dialectic of *méconnaissance*. The question is exactly *not* whether the conspiracy theorist is crazy or right, but rather what the conditions for human knowledge are at all. The conspiracy theorist is not a clinical case—he eventually opts for recognition; he is, in fact, a wholly historical figure, one who negotiates the vicissitudes of human knowledge with the material of history. The post-World-War II American conspiracy theorist could not have

appeared a moment before the onset of World War II, precisely because he emerges as a subject of specifically post-World-War-II capitalism.

Cold War politics, the development of televisual technology, and the mass dissemination of the image on the small screen all interact dialectically to create the necessary historical conditions for the post-war conspiracy theorist. But we also need to work in the other direction in order to understand conspiracy culture more fully. That is, it is also the case that the conspiracy theorist himself *constructs*—he is not merely a product of the culture out of which he arises. The special propensity for interpretation is, after all, one of the primary features of both the paranoiac and the conspiracy theorist. The object of interpretation for the conspiracy theorist is history. This is the matter with which the remainder of this dissertation is concerned. Robert Corber makes the important argument that the Cold War consensus served bipartisan interests by surreptitiously limiting the postwar subject's experience of the social field and, thus, eclipsing the mobilization of the Popular Front. Corber demonstrates the social compact Hitchcock made in the Cold War consensus by making films that ideologize the link between anti-communism and ideological constructions (in Corber's work it is homophobia). Corber's work is useful both for the way in which he shows the political implications of accession to the symbolic that the Cold War consensus engineers, and for the way in which homophobia energizes that consensus. Ed White points out that "institutional innovations . . . emerge not from some functionalist mechanism but from the vernacular tracing of the social field. Conspiracies offer perhaps the best illustration of this cultural praxis for in many instances they were organizational innovations made in response to an unconsolidated institutional field" (26). What White here calls the "unconsolidated

institutional field” is essentially Lacan’s imaginary. The conspiracy theorist develops theories about government, corporate, and other institutional activities in an attempt to consolidate the increasingly sprawling field of the Cold War geopolitical map. And as globalization since World War II has spread so has the anxiety about how the world may be organized both capitalistically and globally, and how the postwar masculine subject may be situated within it. In this way, the psychoanalytic structures of the post-war conspiracy theorist intersect precisely with the historical circumstances of the third long wave of capitalism. The post-World War II conspiracy theorist is a capitalist and psychoanalytic masculine subject in a crisis of history.

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#### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Fredric Jameson discusses the primacy of the image in his chapter on “Diva and French Socialism” in Signatures of the Visible, New York: Routledge, 1992.

**Chapter Two**  
**Where the Boys Aren't**  
**The Failure of Masculinity in Narrative Accounts of the Bay of Pigs**

In three major American historical fictional accounts of conspiracy—Oliver Stone's JFK and Nixon, and Don DeLillo's Libra—U.S. relations with Cuba figure prominently. Specifically, the U.S. Invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs functions as a signal moment for these three narratives. This chapter will undertake three simultaneous tasks: first, it will examine historical narrative as a means of political commentary and the concomitant epistemological implications inherent in such commentary, focusing specifically on how the epistemology of historical narrative is linked to the politics of gender. This examination of historical narrative will involve a comparison of several genres. In addition to Stone's and DeLillo's works, I will include a discussion of Douglas McGrath's The Company Man, which will demonstrate the continuity, across literary and filmic genres, of political commentary in historical narrative as satire. Second, this chapter will examine the situated position of the Bay of Pigs invasion as a characteristic mark of masculine U.S. fantasy regarding Cuba, and especially its revolutionary leader, Fidel Castro. The work of Van Gosse, in his important book Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America and the Making of a New Left, contributes to an understanding of the idea of Cuba as masculine fantasy and sets Fidel Castro up as reified masculine image. Finally, by showing Cuba's function as fantasy, I will indicate the ways in which masculine desire interferes with the potential political agenda undertaken by both Stone and Gosse. Necessarily, narrators fail in degrees; accordingly, I will compare Stone's and DeLillo's works for their relative failure or success in narrating the Kennedy assassination.

The event that took place in Dealey Plaza in Dallas, Texas on November 22, 1963 and the months leading up to it is one of the most theorized affairs in American history.<sup>1</sup> Film plays a major role in the discourse surrounding Kennedy's assassination. An otherwise ordinary Dallas citizen, Abraham Zapruder, succeeded in filming the entire assassination from his perch near the grassy knoll. Curiously, Zapruder never flinched, even as shots allegedly came from behind him. His film has been the centerpiece of the debate over what happened that sunny Friday afternoon. We can see the killing, Jackie Kennedy's raw grief and shock, in all of its power, and these images somehow exceed the limits of verisimilitude to suggest pure unadulterated truth. And yet the Zapruder film has worked, as has no other length of 16 millimeter motion picture, to challenge the legitimacy of official narrative to the degree that the Kennedy assassination is characterized by an excess of questions with the promise of no answers. In its plenitude of truth, the Zapruder film marks the emptiness at the center of human knowledge.

Above all, the assassination comes self-consciously to us in the form of narrative. The Warren Commission Report, the official American government narrative of the assassination, even in its purported legitimacy, may be positioned as just one of many possible explanations. Even Warren Commission defenders are forced by the very nature of epistemic uncertainty to reveal the dubitable position of official narrative, simply by virtue of the fact that they must so vehemently defend it. People *believe* in one narrative or another: the Kennedy assassination is less about truth than it is about *faith*. Less prominent in the American memory is Congress' House Assassinations Committee's 1979 conclusion that there probably was a conspiracy in the assassination of John F. Kennedy. In this report the American government itself has timidly questioned its own

1964 conclusions in the Warren Report. The House Assassinations Committee Report does nothing more than foreground the problem of narrative and the way human apprehension is formed. Even in attempting to rectify the official record, legitimating narrators continue to indicate the postmodern condition of knowledge. The House Assassinations Committee's timidity in its conclusions is a testament to the fact that truth is duplicitous, and that any truth claim often declares its own unintended deconstruction. For the House Assassinations Committee to assert that there was a conspiracy in the assassination also meant that they would in some measure delegitimize the power of the American government to construct official narratives—a move that they were reluctant to make, for obvious reasons.

In fact, the assassination does everything to renegotiate the conventional distinction between theory and fact. All knowledge about the Kennedy assassination amounts to *theories*—even those narratives that bear the legitimacy of governmental office unintentionally join the fray of dispute, with the result that they, too, are nothing more than theories. No one ever talks about conspiracy *facts*, evidence of which is abundant regarding the assassination. The notion of conspiracy seems to be connected inextricably to the notion of theory, so that any time anyone posits a conspiracy they are categorized as nothing more than a theorist. If researchers do find conspiracy, they are no longer conspiracy theorists but *reporters*. Consider the reputations of Watergate reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. Before they discovered the malfeasance of the presidential office, it would not have been unfair to consider them conspiracy theorists. Conspiracies can and do in fact occur, and not all knowledge about them amounts to theory. But in the American mythology, people who posit conspiracies are *paranoid*;

once their theories are proven to be correct, they lose the title “conspiracy theorist” and its lay designation of “nuts” and become simply reporters of facts—they *don’t* become “conspiracy reporters.” The opposition between fact and theory, as blurry as it becomes in conspiracy narrative, is deferred to an opposition between reportorial—or objective and sane—narrative, and conspiratorial—or highly subjective and insane—narrative. The notion of “conspiracy,” then, is the lynchpin on which the radical condition of human knowledge pivots. Rather than functioning as a site for the interrogation of knowledge, conspiracy culture is instead *pathologized*. Woodward and Bernstein are not thought of as nuts, but had they not found Nixon’s conspiracy, we would now think of them as nuts, and not just merely *wrong*.

The diagnosis that is most often made of conspiracy theorists is paranoia. I have shown in chapter 1 that this characterization of conspiracy theorists as clinically paranoid is imprecise, that they are often in fact hysterical as well. Nonetheless, the discourse of the pathology of conspiracy theorists is tilted in the direction of paranoia. This is precisely because the pathology of conspiracy theorists implies that they are masculine subjects who are *feminized*. The conspiracy theorist’s anxiety about feminization is displaced onto a reassertion of the Oedipal drama. That is, the conspiracy theorist organizes his desire around the symbolic order and so deviates from the pathology of paranoia. This Oedipal organization of desire characterizes hysterics, which is a feminine category. Paranoiacs tend, by contrast, to disorganize desire and thus resist the assertion of the symbolic order. The discursive formation of conspiracy theorists as paranoid is perfectly coterminous with Lacan’s discovery that all knowledge is paranoid knowledge,

since, as I have shown, conspiracy theory functions as the lynchpin in the study of the structure of human knowledge.

The discipline of history above all others maintains a claim of privileged jurisdiction over the accumulated knowledge of human events. Similarly, governmental committees charged with the task of investigating and narrating events have a privileged access to legitimacy, by virtue of their institutional status. The status of such works as Stone's JFK and Nixon, and Don DeLillo's Libra as historical fiction loses traction in the struggle for legitimacy, precisely because of their designation as fictional. Historians and governmental committees enjoy the privilege of being *official*, whereas works like Stone's are at best *unofficial* accounts. The official narratives are categorized as history because they have the power of truth behind them. Yet as Hayden White has shown, historical writing is similar to fiction. Examining the transparency of the distinction between history and fiction yields a model that more adequately approaches the condition of official and unofficial narratives. We see the contours of genre that criss-cross the seemingly impermeable boundaries of the categories of history and fiction. The unofficial narratives that I will discuss below represent in various ways the historical events surrounding the relations between Cuba and the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. By looking at the representation of the historical event of the U.S. invasion of Cuba in 1961, we can see that history and fiction inhabit the same space.

Hayden White in his formalist analysis of historical writing in Metahistory considers "the historical work as what it most manifestly is---that is to say, a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of *explaining what they were by representing*

them” (2 White’s emphasis). His analysis traces the specifically literary forms that historical writing takes, and he uses Northrop Frye’s framework to identify at least four modes of what he calls emplotment: romance, comedy, tragedy, and satire (7). This analysis does not suggest that all historical writing is fiction, but rather that any historical account bears the forms of literary discourse. To that extent, historical writing and historical fiction fall within the same field.

It is not so much a matter of distinguishing between fact and fiction as a matter of the connections between fact and narrative, and how the two are inextricably linked in both historical writing and historical fiction. The problem of knowing is a unique one for historical writing, which purports to give a record of “known” facts, in its most rudimentary functions. White argues that “the best grounds for choosing one perspective on history rather than another are ultimately aesthetic or moral rather than epistemological” (xii). While I agree that aesthetic and moral concerns inform any historical narrative—I would, in fact, extend “moral” to political, ethical, and ideological—more so than epistemological concerns, I think the problem of knowing with regard to history must be engaged in order to explore more fully how the historical narrative deploys its ideological agenda.

Oliver Stone has produced two tragedies that tell the stories of JFK’s assassination and Nixon’s resignation specifically to offer the Bay of Pigs invasion as an explanation for these events. Another film, Douglas McGrath’s The Company Man, deals with U.S./Cuban relations and the Bay of Pigs Invasion in a comedic/satirical mode. In each case, the stories are told through what White calls “explanation by formal, explicit, or discursive argument” (11). By this he means that the historian attempts to make sense

out of the story, “to explicate ‘the point of it all’ or ‘what it all adds up to’ in the end” (11). The writer shapes the story into a meaningful piece of narrative. But it is not just for sheer understanding that the writer does this shaping: White points out that “[T]here does, in fact, appear to be an irreducible ideological component in *every* historical account of reality” (21 my emphasis). In the case of Stone’s historical films, he is trying to suggest that the Bay of Pigs is the irreducible trace which links JFK’s assassination with the tragedy of Vietnam. His ideological purpose is to show that had JFK not been killed, the Vietnam War would never have happened because Kennedy would have de-escalated it. Everything that Stone says about the Bay of Pigs Invasion must contribute to this ideological assumption. The Company Man is less interested, given the features of satire which I will discuss below, to propose an alternative narrative of the Bay of Pigs Invasion than simply to critique satirically the American Security State. This is still, though, fueled by an ideological assumption, namely that U.S. intervention in Cuba deserves satirical critique.

In JFK and Nixon, Oliver Stone insinuates that the domestic politics around the U.S. invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in 1961 largely caused the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Watergate, and ultimately the resignation of President Richard M. Nixon. In the introductory credit sequence of JFK, Stone produces a montage “of documentary images [with the intention of] setting the tone of John F. Kennedy’s Presidency and the atmosphere of those tense times, 1960 through 1963” (JFKBF 1). Contained in this documentary montage is imagery from events related to the invasion, including scenes of “the beach, the bombardment, the rounding up of prisoners, Kennedy’s public apology” (JFKBF 2). The voiceover during these images, which

sounds much like documentary voiceover, includes the following claim: “Kennedy, taking public responsibility for the failure [of the Bay of Pigs Invasion], privately claims the CIA lied to him and tried to manipulate him into ordering an all-out American invasion of Cuba. He vows to splinter the CIA into a thousand pieces and fires Director Allen Dulles, Deputies Charles Cabell and Richard Bissell, the top leadership of the Agency” (JFKBF 2). Given that the CIA has been rather roundly implicated by Stone in the assassination of Kennedy, Stone’s voiceover clearly suggests a prominent motive, namely Kennedy’s reaction to the Bay of Pigs failure, as reason for his murder.

Similarly, in a scene deleted from the released version of Nixon, Stone places Nixon (Anthony Perkins) in Director of Central Intelligence Richard Helms’ office for a tense confrontation between the two men. Nixon tells Helms (Sam Waterston) that he wants CIA leaks to the press to stop and that Helms should stop spying on the White House, an accusation Helms smoothly denies. Nixon then tells Helms he wants all the documents regarding a “certain phase” of Nixon’s service. Helms replies dryly that Nixon must be referring to a “special operations committee” that Nixon chaired during his tenure as vice president. The film quickly cuts to a close-up of two documents that contain the words “Bay of Pigs”, “assassinate”, and “Fidel Castro”. Nixon agrees feebly that he is referring to those documents. Helms then tells Nixon that he, Helms, made certain that his own name was never associated with such operations as Trujillo, Guatemala, Iran, and Cuba and that “it’s a shame that you didn’t take similar precautions, Dick.” Helms secures his power over Nixon in this exchange, and the ensuing conversation reveals Nixon’s subordination. Helms makes a disingenuous promise that he will search for those “lost” documents, but it is clear that Helms has ensured a more or

less solid positioning at the CIA. When Nixon says he wants the documents that place the CIA people with the “gangster elements,”—a weak attempt to put Helms in check, Helms replies, “Kennedy threatened to smash the CIA into a thousand pieces. You could do the same.” Nixon is visibly shaken. This scene, in one sweep, ties together Stone’s separate but ideologically related views that, first, the CIA was involved in JFK’s assassination, and, second, that the Bay of Pigs was an originary point for both Nixon’s demise and JFK’s death. It effectively makes JFK and Nixon two volumes of the same historic and ideological work.

In a similar way, John Ehrlichman, in his roman à clef The Company, suggests that there is a connection between a Bay of Pigs-like operation and the scandalous demise of a President. In The Company, the Director of Central Intelligence, William Martin, obtained the information about President Monckton’s illegal break-ins in order both to retain his position as Director and to force President Monckton to destroy the CIA Inspector General’s Primula Report. The Primula Report had to do with the “Rio de Muerte Operation,” which implicates Martin in the operation. The Primula Report resembles an actual historical government document called informally the Kirkpatrick Report. Ehrlichman suggests a quid pro quo exchange between the Director of Central Intelligence and the President, that the DCI was actually equally as concerned about his position as the President was. In contrast, Stone represents the DCI as having the President in a vise grip, by suggesting the President was implicated in the Bay of Pigs documents, whereas Helms had ensured that he himself was not. In fact, the CIA Inspector General’s Report on the Bay of Pigs, released to the public in 1998, very clearly implicates Richard Helms in the conception, implementation, and failure of the

Bay of Pigs Invasion, during which he served as the Chief of Operations (Bay Of Pigs Declassified).

Don DeLillo, in his novel Libra, puts the CIA, or at least its denizens, at the center of the plot to kill President Kennedy. He puts Lee Harvey Oswald in the position of CIA pawn on the assassination chessboard. The CIA agents in the novel who conceive and implement the plot in Dallas are the same agents who were involved in the CIA-sponsored U.S. operations in Cuba. DeLillo suggests an unusual but powerful bond between the CIA agents and the Cubans who were involved in the Invasion Brigade—that they feel they *owe* it to the Cubans to exact revenge on the President who failed to take Cuba back. Naturally, of course, at least one of the agents has some financial interest in Cuba as well, in the form of U.S. investments that were seized by Castro after the Revolution. President Kennedy’s betrayal of the CIA and the Cubans, by not ordering the air strike to support the Brigade, counts as one of the premier reasons the agents organize the assassination. However, in DeLillo’s novel, only one of the agents actually intends to kill Kennedy—the other two mean for it to be only a scare tactic.

Oliver Stone has made the connections between the Bay of Pigs, Nixon’s resignation, and JFK’s assassination most visible to the American public, with his high-profile controversial style. Stone suggests that the 18 minutes of recording that are missing from the Nixon tapes have to do explicitly with the Bay of Pigs, and that Nixon used the term “Bay of Pigs” as an exact synonym for Kennedy. There is a seamlessness between JFK and Nixon with regard to the issue of the Bay of Pigs, such that the narration of Nixon in a very clear way picks up from JFK and logically follows from it.

Stone is creating an elaborate counternarrative to our received notions of the period from Eisenhower's administration to the end of Nixon's administration.

As a testament to the real power of Stone's work, former President Gerald Ford, who was on the Warren Commission, called for the House to release all records pertaining to the Kennedy assassination. On January 30, 1992, George Lardner Jr. of the Washington Post reported that Ford "favors disclosure of most records still under seal to counter the charges of government involvement in Kennedy's death and a subsequent cover-up made in the movie JFK" (JFKBF 423). The reverberations felt throughout American culture after JFK are well documented, but none are as powerful as those which prompted Congress to pass a joint resolution to release some of the assassination documents.

In terms of historical films such as Stone's Nixon and JFK, knowing is indeed a problem because in every case there are competing narratives which assert radically different stories. In the case of JFK, the film asserts a position that completely debunks the conclusion of the Warren Commission. By extension, then, Stone's film calls into question the integrity of the U.S. government. Don DeLillo, in a very discreet author's note at the end of the 1988 edition of Libra, puts it this way:

In a case [like the Kennedy assassination] in which rumors, facts, suspicions, official subterfuge, conflicting sets of evidence and a dozen labyrinthine theories all mingle, sometimes indistinguishably, it may seem to some that a work of fiction is one more gloom in a chronicle of unknowing.

But because this book makes no claim to literal truth, because it is only itself, apart and complete, readers may find refuge here---a way of thinking about the assassination without being constrained by half-facts or overwhelmed by possibilities, by the tide of speculation that widens with the years (Libra unnumbered final page).

DeLillo eschews the distinction between fact and fiction as a fundamental premise of the novel. To do so, he says, is a matter of providing *refuge*, not gloom. There is, in other words, something gloomy about the prospect of knowing, and rather than wildly pursue the truth about what really happened, he has chosen to create a space of narrative knowledge that is technically not incommensurate with known facts. DeLillo presents a more fully developed picture of Lee Harvey Oswald, one which does not necessarily compete with the notion that he was involved in the assassination, but does compete with the received narrative that he was a “lone nut” who killed the president. About alternative narratives, Carl Freedman, in Critical Theory and Science Fiction, says that

When Doctorow conducts such famous historical figures as Houdini and J. P. Morgan through fictional events and in and out of the lives of fictional characters, and when DeLillo constructs the *Entwicklungsroman* of a presidential assassin, they are indeed creating “alternative” histories, narratives that are complex and plausible but that insinuate in their very letter the ideological and epistemological problems in establishing their own relationship to historical truth (61).

This is also applicable to the historical film, though Freedman speaks here only of novels. The historical film and novel are self-conscious about their own problematic relationship to truth and make that problematization part of their agenda. Freedman puts the point this way: “For the science-fictional historical novel, historical knowing is the *central* conceptual problem, and the principal cognitive estrangement produced by the form is the defamiliarization of historical knowledge, which is shown to be, for determinate ideological and political reasons, deeply problematic and the reverse of transparent or metaphysically sanctioned” (CTSF 61 Freedman’s emphasis). The notion of cognitive estrangement is a term Freedman borrows from Darko Suvin and which he develops further in his inquiry into science fiction:

[S]cience fiction is determined by the *dialectic* between estrangement and cognition. The first term refers to the creation of an alternative fictional world that, by refusing to take our mundane environment for granted, implicitly or explicitly performs an estranging critical interrogation of the latter. But the *critical* character of the interrogation is guaranteed by the operation of cognition, which enables the science-fictional text to account rationally for its imagined world and for the connections as well as the disconnections of the latter to our own empirical world (CTSF 17 Freedman's emphasis).

Freedman argues that “cognition and estrangement, which constitute the generic tendency of science fiction, are not only actually present in all fiction, but are structurally crucial to the possibility of fiction and even of representation in the first place” (CTSF 22). The historical novel or film is both cognitively accessible to us and also estranged from us, and in that dialectic it critiques the culture out of which it arises. The main apparatus of critique that the historical novel or film achieves is one of *defamiliarization*—the historical film and novel estrange us from the received narratives of our history and yet do so in a way which is cognitively accessible to us—even if unacceptable—and they achieve this cognitive estrangement, namely, by narrative forms. The epistemological problematic of cognitive estrangement elucidates the political and ideological mechanism in narrative form. An analytic of knowledge with regard to history, in spite of White's dismissal of epistemology as a central concern, is useful in understanding further how history—and more specifically our *consciousness of history*—is structured by narratological forms that shape an ideological agenda. Narrative is the means by which we order information into a recognizable, iterable story, so that we may communicate what we know. This ordering of information is, however, not neutral. Jameson argues that in interpretation “the political perspective [is not some] supplementary method, not . . . an optional auxiliary to other interpretive methods today .

. . . but rather as the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation” (PU 17).

Ordering of information *is* an interpretive act and, as Jameson argues, it occurs radically on a political and ideological horizon.

The historical film or novel which produces a counternarrative to the one we have received suffers the scrutiny it does—as did JFK—simply because we have been given to *think* we know the truth about its content. The science fictional film or novel does not come under the same scrutiny because it is not being presented as counter to some received grand narrative. Science fiction’s burden is to be recognized as a legitimate object of study for literature, an argument which Freedman makes.<sup>2</sup> But if science fiction is a privileged generic object for critical theory, what status does the historical film/novel maintain as a mode of critical theory? And further, do other genres serve particular critical purposes? And finally, do some genres serve a sociopolitical critique better than others or at particular moments in history? Freedman’s rendering of cognitive estrangement is flexible enough to consider both future-directed texts (speculative or science fiction) as well as past-directed (historical fiction) texts; this flexibility depends on a linear model of contiguous temporality.

This conception of knowing through time is essentially right, but fails to allow for the possibility that some modes of critique are better than others in particular moments in history—in other words, that the critical theoretical apparatuses of science fiction and historical fiction ought as well to be historicized. Science fiction might best address sociopolitical concerns at one particular historical moment regarding one particular historical event; historical fiction might be better suited to address that particular historical event in *another* historical moment. Or, even further, historical fiction may be

the *only* suitable mode for critiquing certain historical conditions. This temporalized privilege of historical fiction may very well explain the fiery impact that Stone's JFK had on history itself. Stone's foregrounding of the problem of historical knowledge in this film led to the public release of more classified documents regarding the Kennedy assassination, in an attempt to quell the raging public opinion that the government was withholding knowledge. Libra, by contrast, had no such effect at all.

In contrast to Libra, JFK, and Nixon, The Company Man takes up the subject of U.S. involvement in Cuba and makes a sardonic commentary on the CIA and the Bay of Pigs Invasion. It is a kind of historical fiction, in the sense that it tells the story of events in American history. It tells this story in the mode of satire, which White identifies as a legitimate mode of narrative in historical writing. I will look at the film and the satirical mode in order to see how it shapes its account of history in order to serve an ideological aim. This examination of The Company Man will demonstrate clearly that sociopolitical critiques are indeed historically situated, and that certain genres are suited to particular historical moments and circumstances. The Company Man centers on a bumbling English teacher, Allen Quimp, who inadvertently becomes during 1960-1961 the CIA's "man in Cuba." The film parodies the CIA's attempts to assassinate Castro, spur counter-revolution among the Cuban people, and invade the country at the Bay of Pigs. Woody Allen, John Turturro, Sigourney Weaver, Denis Leary, and Alan Cumming star in the film. The historical events that the film shapes are all roughly verifiable somewhere in the historical record as having occurred.

There is an obscure reference to the Yale secret societies at the end of the film in an outtake that is not directly related to the narrative trajectory of the film. During the

film credits, a scene rolls where a group of older, obviously privileged men are seated around a lush room completely naked. Some men are being flogged lightly with whips, and an a cappella choir of naked men is singing the Whiff n' Poof song, a reference to the upper-class, all male, Old Yale secret societies. A waiter brings a drink to a naked older man in a plush chair. The older man directs the waiter to take the drink to "Mr. Bush, who is at the whipping table with Mr. Buckley," a reference to the Yale Skull and Bones secret society of which both George H.W. Bush and William Buckley were members. The visual codes are plainly homoerotic. This scene is certainly amusing in itself, but if the reference is understood, then the effect becomes instantly satirical. The club where this scene takes place may very well be Mory's Restaurant, where Yale elite congregate. But more importantly for the film's purposes, the Skull and Bones secret society is the place from which the Central Intelligence Agency has hired many of its agents. The reference to Yale secret societies, while seemingly disconnected from the diegesis, in fact extends the critique of the American security state, since some of the members of Yale secret societies become agents.

Dustin Griffin's Satire: A Critical Reintroduction is organized around the critical issues of satire, rather than around particular satirists or historical trends of satire. This organization is particularly suited to the present discussion, since literary forms of historical writing are, I argue, in their structure critical modes. Two of the critical functions of satire, he argues, are as a mode of *inquiry* and of *provocation*. He says of satire as inquiry, "Many of the terms we use to describe the formal properties of satiric discourse—*lanx satura*, *sermo*, *farrago*, dialogue, essay, anatomy—suggest that the form lends itself to open-ended inquiry rather than to steady progress toward conclusion, either

predetermined or (as in scientific discourse) predicted” (SCR 41). Satire is intended to inquire into a particular problem, but not necessarily to conclude what the reader’s/viewer’s particular moral or political stance ought to be. Historical fiction, on the other hand, is intended to delve further than inquiry and produce a narrative counter to the one our received notions of history provide. Inquiry is a dialectical feature of historical fiction, but not its singular aim. Satire aims to explore the possibilities of a subject: “the satirist writes in order to discover, to explore, to survey, to attempt to clarify . . . [M]any of the traditional features of satiric discourse suggest that the satirist does not really know where he is going” (SCR 39).<sup>3</sup> At the same time, Griffin tells us, satire is also provocation, a mode which is “‘negative,’ a critique of false understanding” (SCR 52). Satire provokes in two ways: by its difficulty and by paradox. Satire “cultivates obscurity, using elliptical syntax, cryptic or abrupt allusiveness, brevity, and roughness of rhythm” (SCR 52). The reference in The Company Man to the Yale secret societies is somewhat obscure, as Griffin argues. The Yale scene is also rough cut in between blacktracks where the credits roll. It is abrupt, and the rhythm is rough. If the reference to Yale is missed, the scene is simply odd and amusing rather than a source of satirical critique.

Griffin defines “paradox” not so much as we understand it, a “self-contradictory statement,” but rather as it was understood in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries: “. . . as late as Johnson [satire] carried within it the notion of a challenge to ‘received opinion,’ as paradox challenges ortho-dox” (SCR 53). It is hard to imagine that the Central Intelligence Agency of the 1960s planned to administer secretly a depilatory to Fidel Castro in order to make him lose credibility with his people by having his hair fall out, but the CIA did

do that, and The Company Man both presents this fact and ridicules it in the same stroke. The film's representation of this phase of the "Covert Plan to Overthrow the Castro Regime" challenges our received opinion of American governmental institutions as rational, methodical, and sensibly administrated.

Satire is set apart from historical fiction as a method of critique. Historical fiction does not stop at inquiring or provoking: it presents a narrative counter to the one we know as "history." Satire stops short of this presentation. But historical fiction and satire may not be that far apart from one another. Griffin argues that we need

to define more precisely the nature of satire's relation to history. To do so [we] would have to recognize that the events and persons in satire are raw historical data that are given some shape, just as they would be in a historical narrative. It is naïve, we can now see, to declare either that satirists simply use preestablished historical "facts" or that they "transform" events and people into "fictive" creations. Satirists do not simply name names and point fingers. Satirists, no less than historians, must construct their characters, in the sense that they must decide what attitudes and responses they wish to evoke, what aspects they choose to bring into focus. To assume that a satirist *or* a historian is simply referring to "truth" or to "history" is to be persuaded by that writer's version of events (SCR 132, note deleted, Griffin's emphasis).

Griffin places history and satire on the same horizon. His take on satire's relation to history is in tandem with the idea that history and historical fiction fall somewhere in the same field because of their reliance on literary forms.

Satire and historical fiction, then, have a good deal in common. Given that Griffin has placed satire and history in the same field, in much the same way that we have placed history and historical fiction in the same field by way of narrative, thus we can imbricate Griffin's theory of satire rather neatly with Freedman's theory of science fiction. Recall that Freedman's theory of science fiction relies on the notion of cognitive estrangement—the dialectic of what we know against what is strange. In the movement

of this dialectic is a historical materialist critique of culture. Recall also that estrangement is a feature, Freedman argues, of all fiction. Satire, since it falls on the spectrum of narrative, estranges us even as it is cognitively accessible to us. Satire is cognitively accessible because it works off of features of the political and ideological landscape that we know. It estranges us from these landscapes, not by way of the future as science fiction does or by countering received narratives as historical fiction does, but by way of the comically absurd.

We have essentially arrived at a theory of satire which explains within our present register how satire works as a sociopolitical critique. Satire takes "raw historical data" that is familiar to us and brings that raw data to an absurd and comic extreme, thus making the dialectically estranging move. We need to explore, now, whether satire is more appropriate at a given historical moment to critique culture than historical fiction. As Lukács has shown, genres have emerged out of an age's particular sense of history itself (HN 20). In fact, Lukács eschewed the exploration of comedy in his Marxist account of genre in favor of a discussion of tragedy: "We have only have the problem of [the totality of] tragedy to deal with here (In comedy the problem is somewhat different for reasons which cannot be explained here.)" (HN 91). According to Lukács, the tragedy must attempt to represent reality in its totality, even as it cannot actually do so. It must appear to represent the totality of the life process. Comedy does not attempt to represent life as a totality. We will find that comedy as political commentary in the form of satire does not work as totality, but rather as an open-ended ideological suggestion.

We can understand the open-endedness of satire by looking at how satire and jokes differ. Griffin turns to Freud's discussion of jokes in Jokes and Their Relation to

the Unconscious in order to understand what he calls the pleasures of satire. Jokes, for Freud, which have a purpose “bring pleasure by enabling us to evade obstacles to our expression of hostility” (SCR 162). But it is also that jokes reduce the amount of energy we require to prevent hostility. Griffin ultimately concludes that Freud’s reading of jokes does not apply to satire fully, because of the fundamental differences between a joke and a satirical work. Jokes, Griffin argues, are concise whereas satirical works (Griffin is referring only to literary texts) are often lengthy and elaborate. Griffin says that for Freud jokes must be clear and obvious and not arouse “conscious intellectual interest”; satire, by contrast routinely arouses intellectual interest. Further, for Freud, the jokemaker is concealing her own hostility from herself in the process of making a joke, whereas satirists do not. Griffin does grant that “Freud . . . can probably tell us *something* about the pleasure we take in reading” satire (SCR 163 Griffin’s emphasis), since Freud does in some way demonstrate that jokemaking is a kind of triumph over an objectionable person, place, or thing. He concedes that “when we simplify Freud’s complex description of the way wit overcomes our inhibitions against aggression, we recognize that there is probably something very satisfying to most of us in satire’s power to hurt” (SCR 164).

But Griffin is speaking here of the *pleasure* of satire. If the discourse is shifted to the *politics* of satire, then Griffin’s critique of Freud in relation to satire is not really necessary. It is true that Freud is speaking principally of an economy of pleasure in his discussion of jokes. Freud says of jest that “It is now a question of prolonging the yield of pleasure from play, but at the same time of silencing the objections raised by criticism which would not allow the pleasurable feeling to emerge” (JRU 158). But he concludes by pointing out that “what stands in the *foreground* is the satisfaction of having made

possible what was forbidden by criticism” (JRU 158 my emphasis). Griffin himself grants in his discussion of the politics of satire that “satirists would seem to *prefer* indirection to frontal attack . . . As Freud said, comparing the satirist and the dreamer, ‘the stricter the censorship the more far-reaching will be the disguise and the more ingenious too may be the means employed for putting the reader on the scent of the true meaning’” (SCR 139 Griffin’s emphasis). Satire as a political mechanism is fundamentally an avoidance tactic—the text avoids objection while still making its meaning known.

Moreover, Griffin’s argument that satire and jokes in the Freudian view are different doesn’t really hold. Griffin argues that for Freud jokes do not arouse conscious intellectual interest. This is not exactly Freud’s point about the simplicity of jokes. Rather, it is that the interest in a joke ceases usually because of the passage of time and the changing of circumstances, and “the business in question [the subject matter of the joke] is settled” (JRU 150). It is not that jokes do not arouse conscious intellectual interest, but that they are situated historically---a joke transported from one historical moment to another may lose its pleasurable feeling because the joke is no longer relevant. Jokes thus historically displaced are “difficult for us to use now because they would call for long commentaries and even with such help would not produce their original effect” (JRU 150). Historically displaced jokes get all the fun sapped out of them, in other words, because they have to be explained elaborately in order to be even marginally funny. The reverse, then, ought to hold: if a joke is funny, it is because it occurs in its appropriate historical moment. Jokes, like satire, are radically historically situated---a joke that “arouses intellectual interest” is simply one that is out of place historically. Thus,

Griffin's hairsplitting over the differences between satire and jokes disintegrates in the face of the political discourse of satire.

Satire works as sociopolitical discourse in several ways. It stops short of presenting a counternarrative by limiting itself to inquiry and provocation; it challenges received opinion; it avoids objection by indirectness; and it is its own case of cognitive estrangement. Satire is different from historical fiction mainly because it does not produce a counternarrative to the story it is telling. Satire stops short of producing a counternarrative because it is *avoiding objection*—as we have seen, historical fiction does not avoid criticism and scrutiny precisely because it foregrounds the problem of knowing our history. Satire estranges us from the narrative that we have received and achieves a measure of sociopolitical critique by way of the comically absurd, while it *avoids putting the problem of historical knowing in the foreground*. Instead, satire puts in the foreground the satisfaction obtained from expressing precisely what is *forbidden*. Thus, in spite of—or perhaps because of—the starkness of its ridicule, satire passes under—or directly through—the radar of criticism more or less undetected.

The Company Man is a Freudian joke, in that it attempts to express an unconscious aggression without confronting either our own hostility about its subject matter or resistance from authority. It's not that the details of the Cuban Plan are funny. It is that the Bay of Pigs Invasion calls for sociopolitical critique, and for this particular sociohistorical moment satire, because of its indirectness and its ability to critique without foregrounding the problem of knowledge, is the best way to engage it. The failure of the Bay of Pigs Invasion is more than just a lost war: it is a symptom of the deeply recessed American security infrastructure, and to that degree the invasion reflects

a failure in that infrastructure. This failure is not especially funny—but in a sense we need in *this* moment of history for it *to be* funny.<sup>4</sup> In this case, comedy works not as verisimilitude but as an unclosed ideological suggestion about how the viewer/reader should interpret historical facts.

By contrast, the historical film takes up a particular role as sociopolitical critique and confronts decisively what has been given over as “the facts” about our history, by its own narrative trope foregrounding the narrative trope of history as we have come to receive it, and doing so in a way that both science fiction and satire cannot. The historical film’s ability to present a counternarrative to our received grand narrative makes it a particular kind of sociopolitical critique apart from science fiction. Oliver Stone and Zachary Sklar compiled a collection of 100 articles, essays, and editorials that spoke to the film JFK in a collection entitled JFK: The Book of the Film. In it they present commentary from such disparate voices as Gerald Ford, Norman Mailer, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and Jimmy Breslin. In nearly every case, the issue was how well or poorly, usually poorly, Oliver Stone represented the assassination.

The historical fictional novel or film has control over the information that it foregrounds—it foregrounds what it will in the interest of its ideological purpose. Oliver Stone stops short of telling the Bay of Pigs Invasion directly because to do so would foreground the problems of the Kennedy administration. Stone asserts that both John F. Kennedy’s and Richard M. Nixon’s administrations hinged significantly on the 1961 Invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. According to Stone, although Kennedy was initially committed to removing Castro, within three months of his taking office had demonstrated a reluctance to be openly involved in an invasion of a tiny country, and to violate the

sanctity of the United Nations and the Organization of American States. When he orally agreed never to invade Cuba after the Cuban Missile Crisis, it was clear his thinking on Cuba was beginning to change. According to Stone, when Kennedy gave his Pax Americana speech at George Washington University on June 12, 1963—where he made clear his commitment to global peace (“we all breathe the same air”)—he sealed his destiny at Dallas, Texas on November 22, 1963. Stone postulates that Central Intelligence Agency denizens who had been involved in the Bay of Pigs Invasion, radical anti-Castro Americans and Cubans, American business interests, and organized crime members all converged in the assassination plan because of Kennedy’s policy on Cuba. This assertion serves Stone’s ideological purpose in explaining why the Vietnam War ever happened. His answer to that question is because Kennedy was killed. The Bay of Pigs story, as he has constructed it—that is, in an oblique way—serves that end well. To tell the story directly, however, would call into question some of the failures of the Kennedy administration---the Bay of Pigs Invasion would logically end up in thorny patches that would muddy Stone’s vision of Kennedy. Stone has constructed this version of history as a double tragedy: the tragedy of the JFK assassination and the tragedy of Vietnam.

In the alternate ending of JFK that was deleted from the theatrical and the DVD releases of the film (Stone includes the scene on the DVD but as a deleted scene), X, who is fashioned after Colonel Fletcher Prouty, gives his reflection on the few days after the assassination. He refers to the 26 of November, 1963 when President Lyndon Johnson signed National Security Action Memorandum No. 273 which effectively started, according to Stone, the Vietnam War. Stone uses grainy, black and white film to depict Agent X’s reflections. President Johnson is seated with top advisors in the Oval Office

and he tells them that he is not going to de-escalate the Vietnam War and have it “go like China did.” He states that he is “personally committed” and that he is “not going to remove one soldier until they know we mean business.” The scene is voiced over by Agent X’s voice, who says, as Johnson picks up a pen to sign the NSA memorandum, “And that was the day Vietnam started.” After Johnson signs the memo, he tells the advisors, “Just get me elected. I’ll give you your damn war.” The face of the actor who plays Johnson is always cast in shadow, never completely visible at any point during the film. Stone constructs these scenes so that they resemble the documentary genre in some way. Agent X is constructed as the man with the truth; his narration of the NSA memo scene lends it a narrative plausibility. This scene is what JFK is singularly working toward, and yet Stone chooses to keep it out of both the DVD and theatrical releases of the film. It is almost as if both the Bay of Pigs story and the implication of Johnson in the coup d’etat are too direct for Stone’s explanation of the Vietnam War. He must deflect them, mediate them through the documentary filmic technique in order to represent them. To do otherwise would be to call his pat explanation of the Vietnam War into question.

Stone’s exclusion of the scene where Johnson states he escalates the Vietnam War in order to get reelected may be traced to a dispute over National Security Action Memorandum 273. At the beginning of production Stone relied largely on Colonel Fletcher Prouty’s accounts and interpretations of documents and events in order to shape his story. But late in the production of JFK, another source emerged, an active-duty military man named John Newman (who insisted on anonymity), who called into question the key element of Prouty’s explanation of NSAM Memo 273. Newman found that National Security Memorandum 273 did not entirely repudiate President Kennedy’s

goals of de-escalating Vietnam: “[T]he draft NSAM represented no real change in Kennedy policy” (JFKBF 226). This late breaking development in the historical information Stone was receiving was deeply troubling. Stone was largely basing his theory of Vietnam on Prouty’s interpretation of NSAM 273. But rather than substantially rework the film or alter the trajectory of his explanation, he simply deleted the troubling suggestion about NSAM 273 and left the substance of the film intact. As Hayden White shows, the discursive argument of a historical tale is shaped by the historian’s take on “what it all means.” For Stone, the assassination, the Bay of Pigs, and America’s perverted national security state all add up to how we got into the Vietnam War. Any suggestion to the contrary must simply be left out, and the narrative remains intact.

Stone manages by way of the second film to pick up the narrative logic of JFK and explain for him a third American tragedy, Watergate and the resignation of Nixon. He postulates in Nixon that Nixon was in some way involved at the inception of the Bay of Pigs operation, before it even became an invasion, during his tenure as vice president in Eisenhower’s administration. Stone has suggested that even though the CIA had briefed Kennedy on Cuba and Kennedy subsequently used that information against Nixon in a televised debate, Kennedy essentially knew nothing about the Cuban plan. Stone also postulates that whatever it was exactly that Nixon did not want revealed about his involvement in the Bay of Pigs, Nixon was prepared to sell himself to Richard Helms for it. Stone has Nixon tell Haldeman that there was a “Track 1,” which was the Bay of Pigs Invasion, and a “Track 2,” which was apparently a plan to assassinate Castro, in which he, Nixon, was involved. Nixon tells Aldermann that when Kennedy found out about Track 2 after the fact, he called Nixon a “two-bit grocery clerk from Whittier.” Stone

makes it clear in this scene that Kennedy was not informed by the Central Intelligence Agency of its plans and operations in Cuba until the plans could no longer be concealed.

Stone funnels most of his vision of the Bay of Pigs influence through the scene in Nixon where Alexander Haig brings Nixon the resignation letter. Nixon is huddled unshaven in the Lincoln Room when Haig gently but very firmly convinces him to sign the letter. He tells Nixon that the Congressional committee heard him, Nixon, mention the Bay of Pigs several times before the blank 18 and a half minutes of tape. Nixon dismisses Haig's concern about the blank tape, saying that Congress will never know what's missing. Haig then leans in very closely to Nixon and tells him "I know for a *fact* that it's *possible*" that there is a second set of tapes somewhere. Nixon asks Haig as a last gasp effort if there is any way out of resignation; Haig says no, of course, so Nixon snatches the letter out of his hand and signs it. This scene suggests very strongly two things: that Nixon had something very dark to hide about the Bay of Pigs, and that *someone* besides himself *may* have been taping him. Whether this is true and if so who it was is of course not known, but in the scene between Nixon and Helms discussed above, Stone suggests that Helms was taping Nixon. In any event, it is, for Stone, Haig's suggestion that the Bay of Pigs matter might come out that finally and certainly tips Nixon's mind in favor of signing the letter.

Stone's works rely heavily on his narrative of the Bay of Pigs invasion, and he can offer his version at least in part because we don't have much of an established narrative of it, in the way that we have a received narrative of the Cuban Missile Crisis, for instance. Robert Kennedy did not write a narrative of Operation Zapata, or Playa Giron, or Brigade 2506---all aspects of U.S/Cuban relations. He wrote a narrative of the

thirteen days of October 16 through October 28, 1962 because they resulted in the peaceful resolution of a development between the United States and Cuba which, according to received notions, and Castro himself, brought us very near to the brink of nuclear war. The Cuban Missile Crisis, as told by Robert Kennedy, has a relatively definitive beginning, middle, and end—an end which tells the story of a Kennedy administration that was gaining a vision of a foreign policy which included global peace. It is a good story to tell, and indeed the film Thirteen Days (2000) tells this story in pro-Kennedy style.<sup>5</sup> The Bay of Pigs Invasion, on the other hand, was a cataclysmic failure, which would explain its not being a story that we tell and retell in films and on television. It is not, however, just that we lost the invasion that makes this a bad story to tell. The Bay of Pigs Invasion at its heart is about the post-World War II United States security infrastructure. Our relation to this story of the Bay of Pigs, moreover, highlights the epistemological slipperiness of history.

To tell the story of the invasion is to air out the laundry of a republic turned empire. As Gore Vidal points out, on July 26, 1947, the National Security Act “without national debate but very quiet bipartisan congressional support, replaced the old American Republic with a National Security State very much in the global-empire business” (LE 315). The Bay of Pigs Invasion is that illumination, as Walter Benjamin so eloquently articulates in “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” that flashes up out of the past and tells us something about our present and our future and, for that matter, our past as we have come to know it. Vidal’s connection of the security state with empire shows how the Bay of Pigs invasion is entirely symptomatic of American imperialism. Stone is not interested, though, in the flash of the Bay of Pigs as a symptom of empire. Rather, he

reifies the Bay of Pigs in the service of his ideological agenda. Stone apparently sees this illumination of American imperialism, as he has referred to it repeatedly in Nixon and JFK, but he has stopped short of telling the story. If Stone were to tell the story of the Bay of Pigs invasion, he would be confronting not just a grand narrative of our received understanding of that event, but rather a much grander narrative of our understanding of the American government and what we believe its fundamental functions and assumptions to be. But it is not just this confrontation that Stone is avoiding. If Stone tells the story of the Bay of Pigs invasion, his vision of Camelot, of a Kennedy administration that would have stopped Vietnam, would disintegrate. Stone has seen the flash of illumination, but because of his own ideological agenda with regard to Vietnam, he must tell the story of the Bay of Pigs not as a security structure out of control but as a perversion of an American security system which explains Vietnam. He must leave out questions of how Kennedy failed to control American bureaucratic institutions, and other sticky issues like why Robert Kennedy did not pursue prosecution for the assassination as Attorney General and how the Kennedys were connected to the mafia. He needs Camelot to remain intact—otherwise his explanation of Vietnam does not work. JFK and Nixon are shaped by this ideological imperative. In the process, the flash of the Bay of Pigs invasion flickers and dies.

But there is more than just the preservation of Camelot that is at work in historical literary and filmic fascination with the Bay of Pigs. Van Gosse, in his study of U.S./Cuban relations entitled Where the Boys Are, gives a compelling explanation of the bonding that occurred between Americans and Cubans before, during, and after Castro's revolution. Gosse argues that Castro and his men, in the late 50s and up to the revolution

in 1959, represented for American males a paradigmatic machismo, and gave shape, however apolitical at times, to the “rebel without a cause” condition of such American icons as Jack Kerouac and the Beats. After Castro failed to keep his pre-Revolutionary promise not to go Communist and nationalized U.S. assets, the anti-Castro Cubans, both exiled in the United States and still on Cuban soil, then came to represent raw masculine power in American popular culture. Gosse says, “The path that leads from the cult of ‘the rebel’ (whether the book by Camus or Nick Adams in his Confederate Army cap on the TV Western of the same name) to the beginning of a cult of Fidel begins with ‘desire’ in its rawest form, and both its politics and its lack of politics” (53). American fascination with Cuba is specifically about masculine desire. Gosse gives ample evidence of this American fascination most prominently in the form of Herbert Matthews, who while reporting for the New York Times in February 1957 broke the story that Castro was still alive and well after the Cuban government had claimed that he was dead in December 1956.

Both Matthews and the New York Times became the American megaphone for the Cuban revolution after Matthews’ series of stories ran, and they both significantly influenced events surrounding Cuba from that point on. Aside from the astonishing show of media power engendered by Matthews and the Times, what is most fascinating is Matthews’ positioning of himself in relation both to Cuba and his own reporting. Gosse says, “It is most notable now that, from the first, Matthews wrote nearly as much about the significance of his reporting, with himself cast as another protagonist, as about Cuba itself” (WBA 72). Gosse then gives an exemplary quote from Matthews’ series of reports: “Fidel Castro, the rebel leader of Cuba’s youth, is alive and fighting hard and

successfully in the rugged, almost impenetrable [sic] fastnesses of the Sierra Maestra. ... No one connected with the outside world, let alone with the press, has seen Senor Castro except this writer. ...” (WBA 72); and again, Matthews says of himself, “The articles on Fidel Castro and the Cuban situation which I did in February have literally altered the course of Cuban history” (WBA 73). Matthews’ alliance with the Cuban leader clearly had as much to do with personal prowess as politics. Gosse shows further that Matthews’ interest in placing himself at the scene of the Cuban Revolution was characteristic throughout his reportage of the events. Matthews often “found evidence of his own agency everywhere, and duly put that evidence on the front page” (WBA 73). Matthews’ reportage is a site where we may see clearly the overlap of politics and masculine desire with regard to U.S./Cuban relations in the 1950s.

The politics of U.S./Cuban relations, however, must be examined a little more closely in order to understand the unusual phenomenon of U.S. interest in Cuba. Doubtless Castro’s ultimately broken promises of democratic, anti-Communist revolution and overt shift to socialism in 1960 traced clear political contours in the United States. Cuba became after that yet another global chess piece in the geopolitics of the Cold War. However, because of its complex pre-revolutionary relationship with the United States, Cuba never quite figured neatly into Cold War politics. As Gosse shows, “the solidarity [between Americans and Cubans] of 1957-58 was constructed, not as a conspiracy, but by often uncoordinated responses to serious political contradictions affecting a wide range of North Americans and Cubans” (WBA 62). Gosse’s title, Where the Boys Are, refers to a 1960 novel of the same name by Glendon Swarthout that chronicles the phenomenon of “Cuban Revolution as spring break” that overtook many college students

in the 1950s. Gosse documents several cases where college students expressed interest in fighting for Cuba over the summer, as long as they could return for fall semester. The Cuban Revolution appeared to many young American males in the late 50s as a viable alternative to the restlessness of being rebels without causes, an opportunity for adventure. On the whole, radicalism was not a primary motive for many of these young men. As long as Castro professed a democratic revolution, his cause needed no further qualification.

In fact, in the late 50s Castro's cause resembled, at least in rhetoric, the American revolution, in that a small, outnumbered group of people were dedicated to the overthrow of tyranny and the establishment of a government built on democratic principles. The Left, as Gosse shows, had been entirely decimated by the Cold War consensus between liberals and conservatives, and was not in any meaningful way organized into action. American fascination with Castro's movement did not follow the contours of ordinary geopolitics. Rather, American obsession with Cuba in the late 50s amounted to a very structured instance of cultural politics. Gosse points to the "uncoordinated responses" of Americans to Cuba, but this assertion should be clarified to say that there was no coordinated *geopolitical, national, and institutional* response. As Gosse himself amply shows, the cultural politics of American response to Cuba, while not necessarily coordinated by any overt political movement, nonetheless has within its structure easily identifiable landmarks of gender politics. In his defense, Gosse is attempting to show the origins of the "New Left," and so is interested precisely to show the uncoordinated political tides at work in the late 50s. I argue that while U.S. fascination with Cuba was not radicalized and coordinated in the late 50s, it was nonetheless part of a structural

political agenda of gender, the coordination of which is maintained largely by cultural logic and did and still does not need an overt political movement in order to thrive.

As I have shown in chapter one, a crisis of agency—both personal and institutional—came to dominate the American cultural landscape in the 50s and 60s.<sup>6</sup> This crisis is best seen in the 1955 publication of Kerouac's On the Road, where the restless Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty set off on American highways in pursuit of the elusive American dream. Discovering that the American dream may not be all that it promises, Sal and Dean nonetheless try to make the most out of their subjective experiences. Their experiences rush in and rush out with little staying power in much the same way that the American dream fails to obtain. It is almost as if Sal and Dean have no history with which to organize their subjectivity. They are “free” to roam the country, but there is no sweeping force of history to give their wanderings any meaning.

Published in 1955 and re-copy righted in 1957, On the Road was on the same cultural horizon as the Herbert Matthews articles that appeared in the New York Times in February of 1957. At this time, Cubans both in Cuba and the United States were talking of their country and their cause, and they had a distinct sense of their participation in their own history. The Cubans, then, had something North Americans males were searching for: agency. Gosse points out that “it was the rebels’ insistence on themselves as the subjects of their own history, even in the streets of North America, that made them so magnetic to their would-be cousins and *compañeros* in the North” (61). It cannot be stressed enough that this cultural shift was not a radical movement. Rather, it was a culturally logical development of solidarity based on a politics of gender. U.S. interest in Cuban revolution was political, but not in the sense of overt radical organization, at least

during the 50s. Instead, the development of a perpetually mobilized United States together with a newly developed secret security infrastructure sparked a crisis of agency in post-war American males. The Cuban revolution magnetized American masculinity to the robust leader of the Revolution and his band of macho freedom fighters. This cultural political development was less an organized activism and more a politically unconscious act. As Jameson says, “we never really confront a text immediately, in all its freshness as a thing-in-itself. Rather, texts come before us as the always-already-read; we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations, or—if the text is brand-new—through the sedimented reading habits and categories developed by those inherited interpretive traditions” (PU 9). The Cuban Revolution, in the late 50s, was destined to be read by North Americans with the interpretive lenses afforded them. As it was, the Cuban Revolution in its early phases was a North American fantasy of virility, machismo, and, most importantly, meaningful historical agency.

But, of course, Cold War politics and this “apolitical” beatnik sympathy for Cuba would clash in 1959 when Castro nationalized U.S. assets in Cuba. Commensurate with Cold War politics, Castro’s Agrarian Reform played to North America as the first step to Communist dominance. More realistically, nationalization was a betrayal of nervous American elites whom Castro had promised he would not socialize assets in Cuba; more precisely, a few financially and politically powerful people lost an enormous amount of income and assets and they were murderously angry about it. While Gosse makes a strong case that the New Left was born out of U.S./Cuban relations, the fact remains that the preponderance of policy on Cuba was dominated by Cold War imperatives. The “apolitical” North American sympathizer with Cuba, whose appearance is grounded in a

cultural logic of gender, was rushed inexorably into the political. Stone, for his part, kept his fascination with Castro silent until 2003, when he produced the documentary Comandante for HBO. Unsurprisingly, HBO elected post hoc not to air it, on the grounds that it appeared too pro-Castro. Subsequently, Stone made a rushed trip back to Cuba to interview Fidel for a second, less polemical documentary entitled Looking for Fidel that HBO aired on April 14, 2004. Stone's retreat may be seen in the respective titles, where initially Stone's approach was from the point of view of the revolutionary leader, but finally he settles on a reference to his own position of being at a distance, "looking" for the man who would be his hero. We can thus see to this day a residue of Cold War politics that in some measure both trumps and reinforces a politics of the masculine rebel.

There is a rough comparison in the mythologies of Castro and Kennedy, as Mailer so adroitly identified. They both signaled "new eras" in their respective countries: Castro brought a revolutionary vision with his commanding and enigmatic persona; Kennedy, young and attractive, asked Americans to consider what they might do for their country, and as Mailer put it, "[Kennedy was] handsome as a prince in the unstated aristocracy of the American dream" (PP 6). Stone, in a submerged politics of gender, has valorized both of these myths. Stone holds fast to his belief that Kennedy would have directed the United States into an entirely different history had he not been killed by agents embedded in the secret world of American government. Most recently, Stone has indicated his admiration for Castro in his more cautious second documentary. While questioning Castro about human rights abuses in Looking for Fidel, Stone blusters, apparently bearing in mind that he is not to appear too "pro-Castro," that no major human rights organization has found any evidence of abuses. Castro has little to say to Stone's question as Stone has

already answered it positively for him. For Stone, it is of paramount importance, however, that both the mirroring of Kennedy and Castro *and* the fragmentation of that image reflection not be overtly stressed, for the reason of Cold War politics, even in this post-Cold War era. Hero worship of Castro was submerged as the result of Cold War politics; in its place, for Stone, was put the myth of Kennedy. More important than fears of red-baiting, though, is the fact that, for Stone's project, between the politicized reflective images of Kennedy and Castro is the specter of the Bay of Pigs invasion.

The cultural, domestic, and global politics surrounding the Bay of Pigs invasion is extremely complex. In order to understand how the Bay of Pigs Invasion is a lynchpin for American cultural politics as well as a turning point for domestic politics, we must try to apprehend as much of the discourse around it as possible. As it is, the Invasion is a highly overdetermined and charged issue, with an absolute plethora of opinion coming from a multitude of positions that often do not coincide with their own conventional political camps. For instance, Van Gosse, while remarkably reasoned in his study of the origins of the New Left, becomes vitriolic in his criticism of Kennedy in his final chapter on the Bay of Pigs, claiming that "There is a strong element of apologetics to this writing [on the Bay of Pigs], as if the unannounced invasion of a small country with which the United States was not at war by the greatest military power in history somehow 'just happened' through bureaucratic inertia, confusion and bad advice" (WBA 212). While I agree with Gosse that Kennedy's excuse for the Bay of Pigs was weak, nonetheless Gosse minimizes the truly powerful inertia of permanent government. The Bay of Pigs invasion is a cultural return of the repressed, and in its flash we see the inexorable and

inseparable overlay of the politics of gender, the culture of secrecy, and American domestic and foreign politics.

Gosse's indictment of Kennedy for the Bay of Pigs invasion is an example of the way in which polemics and the desire for certain historical narrative come to interrupt political critique. Gosse's view, naïve at best and reactionary at worst, fails to take into account the real power of the culture of secrecy that was in full swing by the early 1950s.<sup>7</sup> On the heels of a fantastically articulated critique of gender politics, Gosse abandons his critical acuity and elects to oversimplify the American executive position in 1961. It is reasonable to assume that Gosse's vitriol for Kennedy and his Cold Warriors stems from his fundamental sympathy for Castro and the Cuban Revolution. This is the first case I present of a meaningful political critique being interrupted by a trenchant masculine fantasy.

There is no doubt that, beyond any mitigating factors, Kennedy was the President of the United States and as such had the authority to call off the Invasion and he did not. For what reasons he chose this path are less clear, but what is clear is that there were a number of critical factors that may not be dismissed as mere apologetics. To begin with, the counterinsurgency in Cuba upon which the CIA embarked began in 1959 during President Eisenhower's administration. By all accounts, Eisenhower preferred to know as little as possible about the CIA's plans, and to give the appearance of a minimum of involvement on his part. As it was, Eisenhower chose to send Vice President Richard Nixon to meet with Fidel Castro on April 19, 1959, who later concluded that "Castro is 'either incredibly naïve about Communism or is under Communist discipline . . . I became a leading advocate for efforts to overthrow Castro'" (BOPD 267). Regardless of

appearances, late in October of 1959, President Eisenhower approved a program to support anti-Castro elements in Cuba. The CIA and the Department of State were jointly involved in the implementation of this program. This original plan to overthrow Castro involved the implementation of CIA-sponsored covert guerrilla operations and, subsequently, in March of 1960, the CIA began training 300 anti-Castro Cubans. On March 17, 1960, Eisenhower approved a CIA document entitled “A Program of Covert Action Against the Castro Regime.” On this date Eisenhower essentially authorized the CIA to initiate and conduct the Cold War, however hot and however doubtful Castro’s affiliation with the Soviets at that time, in the western hemisphere. The March 17 document delineated a plan to conduct secret—not overtly associated with the United States government—operations in Cuba designed to agitate resistance from within Cuba. During this March 17 meeting, Eisenhower stated that he “is concerned about leakage and breach of security. He argues that everyone must be prepared to deny its existence and only two or three people should have contact with the groups involved, agitating Cubans to do most of what must be done” (BOPD 269). Brigade 2506 member Haynes Johnson, in his narrative of the Bay of Pigs Invasion from the point of view of the Brigade leaders, observes that “Eisenhower chose a method of accomplishing his goal [of overthrowing Castro] that was alien to the American past. Instead of taking his decision to the people, enlisting their support, and then acting on it, or acting openly out of historical precedents, he relied on a secret agency to achieve good ends by dubious means. His decision was implemented, not in the public arena, but in the shadows of the CIA” (TBOP 29). The culture of secrecy in which the Bay of Pigs plan was hatched was thriving fully before Kennedy ever took office.

In spite of Eisenhower's insistence that Cubans do the work, some time between September and November 1960, the CIA decided to transform the "program" from a covert guerrilla operation into a military assault force.<sup>8</sup> CIA Inspector General Lyman Kirkpatrick, in his internally conducted analysis of the Invasion, observes that

Between the plan approved by President Eisenhower on 17 March 1960 . . . and the invasion plan actually carried out on 17 April 1961 . . . there was a radical change in concept. Originally, the heart of the plan was a long, slow, clandestine build-up of guerrilla forces, to be trained and developed in Cuba by a cadre of Cubans whom the Agency would recruit, train and infiltrate into Cuba.

But thirteen months later the Agency sponsored an overt assault-type amphibious landing of 1,500 combat-trained and heavily armed soldiers. Most of them were unversed in guerrilla warfare. They were expected to maintain themselves for a period of time (some said a week) [on the beachhead at the Bay of Pigs] sufficient to administer a "shock" and thereby, it was hoped, to trigger an uprising (BOPD 48).

Because Eisenhower was concerned about presidential plausible deniability and his final term as president was coming to an end, he became increasingly less interested to know what the CIA was doing. During this time, Stone has repeatedly suggested, the CIA's Cuban operation grew "appetites," as CIA Director Richard Helms says in Nixon, and developed more or less on its own without much meaningful administrative guidance. Official documents corroborate that in order to facilitate this transformation, the CIA had to give the State Department and the White House the impression that the CIA-operated military invasion would succeed. The CIA reported to both organizations that the guerrilla ops-turned-military invasion had a "fair" chance of success and that even if it proved not to be a success on the beachhead it would ultimately result in an uprising on the Cuban island—that desire would, in other words, be infectious.

In actuality, the CIA's intelligence from Cuba was decidedly mixed—the Agency was not entirely certain that the "psychological climate" of the Cuban island was ripe for

uprising against Castro. In spite of the fact that the “United States Intelligence Board, Office of National Estimates, and Office of Current Intelligence studies on Cuba available at the time provided clear warning that a calm reappraisal [of the Bay of Pigs Invasion] was necessary,” the CIA pressed on (BOPD 54). The CIA Inspector General concludes of his colleagues that they “had been subjected to such grueling pressures of haste and overwork for so long that their impetus and *drive would have been difficult to curb*” (BOPD 54 my emphasis), and that “Cancellation [of the Invasion] would have been embarrassing” (BOPD 55) to the United States because the 1,500 Cuban men of Brigade 2506 had been working very hard under American auspices for almost a year to take back their country. The Inspector General’s comment supports the idea that the Cuban Invasion Plan had “appetites” of its own, as Stone has Helms say in Nixon. The Bay of Pigs, then, is as much about *desire* as it is about foreign policy. While Gosse argues that bureaucratic inertia is an insufficient explanation, his claim fails to account for the sheer force of desire. Moreover, he misses the opportunity to link the desire for masculine subjectivity with the Bay of Pigs, however well he does so in his critique of *fidelismo*.

Even more significantly, Gosse’s indictment of Kennedy signals the need to find a singular and unified subject on whom to place the blame for events. It is far less comforting to realize that the subject is inexorably split—perhaps for Gosse between Kennedy and Castro—and that desire is a cultural phenomenon predicated on the illusion of wholeness. Fragmented subjectivity is the *object petit a*, which for Lacan is that which causes desire (for unified subjectivity) and that which remains (fragmented subjectivity) after the symbolic order (Gosse’s blame, Stone’s history) has been introduced into the real. In the case of Gosse, the Bay of Pigs interrupts his critique of U.S./Cuban relations

to the detriment of his argument. Indeed, he says, “Patently, Cuba lessened as an issue because of the likelihood that the US, having failed once, would not intervene directly again” (WBA 241). This assertion is simply wrong: Kennedy agreed, for better or worse, never to invade Cuba as a result of the negotiations during the Cuban Missile Crisis, in spite of hawks encouraging him otherwise, a move that some assassination researchers have said was reason for the plot against Kennedy. In any case, Gosse conspicuously ends his book at the Bay of Pigs Invasion, for, aside from book length concerns, to extend his discussion to the Cuban Missile Crisis and beyond would be to complicate his view of Kennedy as nothing other than a Castro-hating Cold Warrior.

While of the obverse idealizing orientation, Stone’s critique of American history is likewise interrupted by his fantasy of Kennedy as the king who would save the world. Stone’s monumental film about the JFK assassination and Garrison’s trial to prosecute some of those involved is no doubt an ingenuous search for the truth. And to some degree, Stone is closer than Gosse to a genuine embrace of the Maileresque parallel mythologies of Castro and Kennedy, however much and for whatever reasons he effaces his admiration of Castro. The Bay of Pigs marks in both of Stone’s films, however, the tear in the symbolic order that even the sheer monumentality of his work cannot overcome. Like Gosse’s importune and abrupt ending of his text before his discussion of the Bay of Pigs ever really begins, Stone cannot represent the Bay of Pigs without destroying his carefully constructed myth. It is important to note that in either Gosse’s or Stone’s case a detailed representation of the Bay of Pigs could and would serve either a radical left or a radical right perspective. As they both no doubt realize at some level, however, the culturally irruptive nature of the Invasion disrupts their political projects

before they ever start. In Gosse's case, it fragments his blame of Kennedy and at the same time undoes his critique of masculinity; in Stone's case, it fragments his adulation of Kennedy which would in turn fragment his explanation of the Vietnam War. The Bay of Pigs, in other words, is a perniciously uncategorizable event. It at once serves no political agenda and every political agenda. It is the unsymbolizable real, the *objet petit a* that always remains after symbolization is introduced into the real. As I have shown in Chapter One, attempts in the annals of conspiracy literature are always to symbolize, and they are always predicated on masculine desire. But as this examination of the Bay of Pigs in literature and film shows, something unsymbolizable always remains. Patrick McGee, in an unpublished article on the JFK assassination, puts it this way: "From this breach [of the assassination], which makes visible a hole in the real, a discourse has emerged; or perhaps one should say that millions of words have been written and spoken in the attempt to fill the hole and to reconstitute the fabric of what must have existed before the hole appeared. But there is another way of looking at this strange cultural production [of literature on the assassination], one that students of psychoanalysis and cultural studies can hardly ignore. Perhaps the discourse that tries to close the gap and to bring back an earlier state of things has invented the hole" ("Purloined President"). McGee quickly indicates that he is not suggesting the assassination itself is invented, but that it has "left its irrefutable traces in the historical record," and "has a double, a shadow, a symbolic counterpart." The Bay of Pigs is at least one instance of that symbolic counterpart. Rather than cast the discourse of the assassination as an "inventor" of the hole, I would suggest that the discourse manifests a cultural space wherein the random irruptions of the real may appear.

Don DeLillo comes closer than any of these commentators to articulating the crisis of male subjectivity that is characteristic of U.S./Cuban relations and the assassination, as well as the discourse around these historical events. In Libra, male subjectivity in crisis comes in the form of Nicholas Branch, a retired CIA senior analyst who has been working for fifteen years on the CIA's official secret narrative of the assassination. He is utterly paralyzed by the sheer mountain of books, documents, notes, and evidence that has colonized a room in his house. In contrast to the image of the conspiracy researcher searching for the missing document, Branch has every imaginable document available to him. He need in fact only ask the archivist for anything and it is promptly sent to him. Branch, in all of his privileged access to the historical proof for which conspiracy theorists hunger, suffers from the agony of plenitude. Branch's circumstance indicates the degree to which history, rather than a blank page to be filled, is instead an irreducible excess, a plethora of unrecognizable remainders. In the face of it, he often falls asleep, in "the room of growing old" (14). There is no recognizable order to all of these papers, "no formal system to help him track the material in the room" (14-15). Nonetheless he knows intuitively where everything is, by memory, color, and shape. He tracks everything not by the symbolic order, but rather in the blind way that an infant intuitively knows its mother's form. He is, in this room, in a maternal plenitude. At the same time, he dwells in the conspiracy theorist's fantasy: a room full of evidentiary documents that tell everything there is to know about the JFK assassination, with supporting access to all things CIA. And yet, he feels old and tired, and somewhat impotent in the face of this avalanche of history. That Branch dwells in this fantasy place articulates yet again the degree to which the conspiracy theorist is feminized, even at his

allegedly most powerful. DeLillo indulges this fantasy in order to situate history properly—that is, history does not hold a unified, singular truth out and away from us for only the enterprising researcher to discover. It is, rather, the nature of history to be narrated, and always to leave something unsymbolizable, even in the fantastic case of full and unrestrained access to “proof.”

At the end of the book, Branch begins to suspect that the curator is beginning to hold information back, not filling requests promptly or ignoring them. At this moment when Branch begins to wonder whether the CIA can ever represent its own self to itself, the curator “begins to send fiction, twenty-five years of novels and plays about the assassination. He sends feature films and documentaries. He sends transcripts of panel discussions and radio debates. Branch has no choice but to study this material. There are important things he has yet to learn. There are lives he must examine. It is essential to master the data” (442). While this shift to fiction and other obviously mediated narrative seems to indicate an evasion on the part of the curator, Branch’s resolve to study the material suggests that there is no neat or distinct line between “official” documents and fictional accounts about events connected to the assassination. DeLillo does not suggest that history is fiction or the reverse. He suggests, rather, that history and fiction, as Hayden White demonstrates, are of the same formal structure. The distinction between truth and fiction is a product of the symbolic order, the attempt to organize things into metaphysically discrete categories. However, both history and fiction arise only in language—and as language is the symbolic order, they both always leave behind an unsymbolizable remainder, an *objet petit a*. In the countenance of this real, Branch embodies the crisis of masculinity. It follows, then, that the irksome inapprehensibility of

history, and its resistance to totalizing symbolization, is also a crisis of masculinity. DeLillo, better than Gosse or Stone, interrogates this condition.

DeLillo structures Libra as alternating narrative, between the viewpoints of Branch, Lee Harvey Oswald, the three key figures in the assassination plot—Mackey, Parmenter, and Everett, and several other participants in the affair. These characters walk onto the stage of Libra from both historical documents and DeLillo's imagination. Perhaps the most enigmatic and overdetermined figure in all of 20<sup>th</sup> century American history comes in the form of Lee Harvey Oswald, the simultaneously maligned and exonerated alleged assassin of JFK. The question of assassination history comes down always to whether Oswald shot the president by himself—to answer no to this question necessarily implies conspiracy by definition. With this much historical implication staked on him, it is no wonder that Oswald's enigma has persisted. In the spirit of history as form, DeLillo chooses to give as much voice to this enigma as he possibly can. Oswald is a principal character in the story, and DeLillo culls from biographical data and imaginative speculation to complete this complicated portrait of the accused assassin. As if to underscore the inexorably seamless horizon of history and fiction, DeLillo has his fictional plotter Win Everett literally construct Lee Harvey Oswald, who is of course an historical figure: "Win Everett was at work devising a general shape, a life. He would script a gunman out of ordinary dog-eared paper, the contents of a wallet" (50). DeLillo gives much time to how exactly the plotters manage to create a gunman and the neatness with which Oswald steps into the construction. There is, of course, much speculation in the historical record about whether there were two or more "Oswalds" in the months leading up to the assassination. DeLillo's point is to show how his "fictional" narrative

formally resembles the accounts of facts that support this theorized counterespionage doubling. Whatever the case with Oswald, it is a certitude that we will never hear his story and because of this he remains an *objet petit a*, both the cause of much desire to know and the frustrating, unsymbolizable remainder of the attempt to symbolize the assassination.

DeLillo frees us from the drive to know the truth about Oswald, as he says on his unnumbered final page of the book, by deliberately avoiding any pretense to historical fact. In doing so, we are freed of the frustration of that which is unsymbolizable in all of the historical facts about the assassination. This freedom is a mark of the success of DeLillo's work. Stone, by contrast, has an interesting relationship to his representation of Oswald in JFK. In the theatrical release of the film, Stone included a fantasy sequence of Oswald in a courtroom alone, speaking to the camera. In the DVD released on January 6, 2001 Stone deleted the fantasy sequence from the version of the film compiled there. Stone put the 2001 DVD release through a number of permutations, deleting some scenes and including others that had not been included in the theatrical release. Stone's reasons for deleting the Oswald fantasy sequence, while not altogether clear, cannot be because of time concerns. He otherwise adds a featured seventeen minutes to the DVD version. Moreover, deleting the fantasy sequence was undoubtedly technically involved, because it was imbricated deeply into the scenes of Garrison's closing arguments and actual footage of JFK's funeral. His reasons for eliminating Oswald's voice from the grave, therefore, must be at least narratological and therefore ideological. Oswald's voice in the fantasy sequence is not diegetically embedded; he is speaking directly to the camera from the grave, and as such it is the only scene like it. In only one other instance does any actor

look directly at the camera: Kevin Costner at the end of Garrison's closing arguments looks directly into the camera, in a move that feels as if Costner is speaking and not Garrison, as he says to both the jury and the viewing audience, "It's up to you." Narratologically, however, the Oswald sequence is vastly inconsistent with the rest of the film's strategy. Stone envisions secret meetings in Johnson's Oval Office in black and white, where he speculates about what might have been said. But these scenes are not diegetically from the grave; they are embedded in the progression of the plot. While Stone may have felt the narratological inconsistency was too striking to leave in the DVD version, the ideological implications of both the inclusion of it and the subsequent deletion are profoundly more resonant.

Because Stone was attempting to present another historical account, for which he was deeply criticized, any element that contributed to an overt commitment of "fictional extrapolation" would have undermined his goal. Oswald's emphatic insistence on his innocence in the fantasy sequence, however plausible, is not part of the evidentiary record, which Stone was quite concerned to represent. The Oswald fantasy sequence and its place on the cutting room floor therefore shows up the degree to which Stone is invested in the distinction between the form of history and fiction. Stone was obviously well aware of the interpretivity of his work, and arduously defended his interpretation. However, the Oswald fantasy sequence goes directly to the heart of the condition of history and fiction as of the same form; and while Stone and his critics were acutely aware of history's being subject to interpretation, nowhere would it have served Stone's ideological agenda to interrogate the formal similarities of history and fiction. His agenda was to present a revelatory history, the history that lies underneath the layers of received

history, and in that regard was always intended to be the “truth.” Much more radical than accusing the United States Government of committing and then covering up the assassination is the claim that history and fiction are formally the same. Stone can maintain his fantasy of symbolic order in the celluloid on which JFK is stored. Stone’s fantasy interrupts the more powerful critique of history for which his work has potential. Even more tellingly, Stone’s deletion of the Oswald fantasy sequence expresses the degree to which the human subject desires to eradicate the pernicious *objet petit a*, that remainder which marks indelibly the failure of any introduction of the symbolic into the real.

Above all, DeLillo successfully interrogates the American crisis of masculinity in the prominence he gives not only to the Bay of Pigs but also to the Cubans and the North American men who were involved in the Invasion as well as the assassination. Gosse argues that the significance of this “male bonding” cannot be overlooked: “[the American] degree of determination [for solidarity with Cuba] would have been meaningless without the coming together of a radical shift in the subjectivity of one sector of North American society with the Cubans’ own agency, which, like all impulses to self-determination remained also a highly contingent, subjective ‘human’ factor” (WBA 61). While such arguments of “personal” and individual determinations appear to be apolitical, they are in fact highly determined political conditions. I have attempted to make a meaningful distinction here between the politics involved in foreign and domestic relations and the politics that shape cultural discourses. This distinction is provisional, because all politics inform and influence one another; but the provisional distinction is necessary so that the politics of masculinity can be seen for all of its effect on the national

and international developments that evolved around the relation between the United States and Cuba. The personal attachment between Cubans and Americans that DeLillo, Gosse, and historical documents articulate cannot be dismissed as mere sentimentalization.

Don DeLillo explores the unusual bond between CIA agents and anti-Castro Cuban fighters in Libra, suggesting that it might be a significant if partial explanation for the anti-Kennedy sentiment which resulted in his murder. Brigade 2506 member Haynes Johnson reports that “From the beginning, the Cuban counter-revolutionists viewed their new American friends with blind trust” (TBOP 27). From the very beginning the men were told that these were *not* CIA agents and that the U.S. Government did *not* have anything to do with their training. Business interests were financing their revolt, they were told. But the men all knew that it was CIA and the United States. Johnson quotes Manuel Artime, Brigade leader:

“I don’t know why, but in the bottom of my heart I believed those people [the CIA agents] would help me. I was impressed by the way they got me out of Cuba and took me through immigration with no problem at all. And I thought about that lie detector---you couldn’t buy that in a ten-cent store. And besides that it came to my mind that they were obviously more than a group of rich men. The kind of questions they asked me, and what they said, indicated a big organization. And there was always their preoccupation with my trustworthiness. Even though I didn’t have anything concrete, everything indicated that these were people who could help me a lot” (TBOP 28).

It is this aspect of the Bay of Pigs Invasion where things like “heart,” “help,” and “betrayal” become a part of the story. Johnson gives Pepe San Román’s observation, another Brigade leader:

When Carl [a code-named CIA operative] finished [explaining what to expect in their training] it was nearly two o’clock in the morning. For a moment there was silence, and then Pepe San Román asked the

question in every man's mind: "What help is the United States going to give?"

"We are here to help Cuba, and if you are here for that reason we will get along well," Carl replied. Evasive as it was, Carl's answer satisfied the eager Cubans. . .

"We were taught how to fight as guerrillas," Pepe said. . . "There was the danger of getting lost, and there were snakes. It was a very deep jungle [at the training camp in Guatemala]. The equipment and living conditions were poor, but we did not really mind. At that point we believed that we were going to train a large number of Cubans for guerrilla war, that we were going to Cuba, and that we would always have what we had then---organization and control, good control. We knew we might die in Cuba, but we were doing something organized by people who really cared. Those instructors did a good job with us. We never thought things were going to be handled the way they eventually were" (TBOP 39).

It is clear that the Brigade leaders were not well-informed about the status or the nature of the operation they were involved in. They had to settle for speculation about who was backing them. But one thing is painfully clear: the Cubans trusted both the agents that worked with them and the United States explicitly. Johnson observes:

. . . virtually all of the Cubans involved believed so much in the Americans---or wanted so desperately to believe---that they never questioned what was happening or expressed doubts about the plans . . . To Cubans the United States was more than the colossus of the North, for the two countries were bound closely by attitudes, by history, by geography and by economics. The United States was great and powerful, the master not only of the hemisphere but perhaps of the world, and it was Cuba's friend. One really didn't question such a belief. It was a fact; everyone knew it. And the mysterious, anonymous, ubiquitous American agents who dealt with the Cubans managed to strengthen that belief (TBOP 27).

This part of the narrative of the Bay of Pigs Invasion helps to explain DeLillo's speculation that the CIA agents involved in JFK's assassination felt terribly guilty about what had happened to the Cubans that they had come to know and respect during the training and invasion. For their part, DeLillo speculates, the CIA men, Parmenter, Mackey, and Everett, felt angry about Kennedy's betrayal and the difficult position he

put them in with the Cubans, and feel personally guilty for the enormous disappointment the Bay of Pigs was for the counterrevolutionary Cubans. Assassination plotter T. J. Mackey reflects on his stint at the Bay of Pigs. No Americans were supposed to be directly involved, but he was nonetheless on one of little boats with the Cubans. He is angry with the CIA and the administration for the betrayal: “He’d seen too many evasions and betrayals, fighting men encouraged and then abandoned for political reasons . . . This was the only war story he knew, the only one there was or could be, and it always ended the same way, men stranded in the smoke of remote mediations” (69). Mackey is acutely sensitive to the fact that he had made promises to these men; his presence at the Invasion itself gave him a firsthand look at the profound disappointment and injustice of the whole affair. It is as if above all else his word and his *honor* have been besmirched—a grave fate for masculinity to suffer. Mackey is ashamed: “It was the grimmest, most godawful thing, to be ashamed of your country” (73). To underscore the depth of Mackey’s sense of betrayal, DeLillo outlines a plot within a plot—while Parmenter and Everett expect only to stage an attempted assassination, Mackey instead surreptitiously plans and executes the actual assassination, against Parmenter’s and Everett’s less ambitious wishes. Where Parmenter and Everett want mainly to influence U.S. policy on Cuba by scaring the president with a fake assassination attempt, Mackey is truly and deeply angry with the president about Cuba and wants to kill him.

The story that the Cuban Brigade members tell in their memoir is a betrayal story—a tragedy of a particular kind. The Cubans who “believed” in the United States were betrayed by the great colossus of the North. DeLillo picks up on this theme in Libra:

“I thought about it a lot,” Raymo said, “and I’ll tell you my beliefs. I believed in the United States of America. The country that could do no

wrong. It was bigger than anything, bigger than God. With the great U.S. behind us, how could we lose? They told us, they told us, they promise, they repeat and repeat. We have the full backing of the military. We went to the beaches thinking they would support us with air, with navy. Impossible we could lose. We are backed by the great U.S. What happens? We find ourselves lost in the swamps, lost and hungry, we are eating tree bark by this time, and the radio is saying, 'Attention, brigade, the owl is hooting in the barn'" (294).

It is not only a betrayal of the Brigade Cubans, but a reversal of the U.S.'s original intent to recognize Cuba's new government in 1959. Stone tells the story of a coup d'etat, a Caesarian tragedy, but he does so without shattering the myth of Camelot. To tell the betrayal tale is to put the Camelot myth at risk, and it is here that the ideological difference between Libra and JFK becomes manifest. In November 1991, Robert Sam Anson reported in Esquire that Oliver Stone had taken aim at an effort to produce a film version of Libra that A&M Films optioned around the time Stone was working on JFK. Stone denied the charge, claiming that the Libra film "was rejected on the basis of its quality, or lack thereof" (Stone, letter, Esquire, December 1991). Whatever the case, it is unfortunate that Libra was never made, because it presented a new and compelling narrative of events around the assassination. It is more than economic factors like competition and market flooding that would have put a film version of Libra at cross purposes with JFK. A film version of Libra would have presented a narrative which challenged Stone's pristine vision of Camelot because of its representation of the anger men felt toward Kennedy about Cuba. Both Libra and JFK are interested to explain the JFK assassination, and both do so by shaping narrative and by foregrounding the problem of historical knowing. But they do not share the same ideological purpose or the same epistemology. Libra's goal is not to preserve Camelot in order to explain Vietnam. Libra is more interested to explore the epistemological implications of sifting through all the

historical knowledge of the assassination, through the character of Nicholas Branch, the CIA writer charged with narrating the events related to the assassination.

Because Libra's ideological centerpiece is the formal similarity between historical fiction and history, it is less afraid of the residual *objet petit a* that remains after the attempt to symbolize the truth. The introduction of the symbolic order is a masculine enterprise, circumscribed ultimately by the realm of fantasy. In this regard, DeLillo's work exemplifies an ideological work that is not disrupted by a masculine fantasy; that Branch dwells in a world of maternal plenitude is a mark of DeLillo's attempt to interrogate the feminization of conspiracy culture rather than suppress it. Stone and Gosse, by contrast, representing both historical critical and historical fictional works, typify the degree to which ideological projects that attempt to represent the truth ultimately fail to interrogate the politics of masculinity and thus undermine their own ideological missions. It is thus clear, then, that the epistemological stakes in these works are much higher than simply "the truth" versus "the lies"; also at stake are the implications of a politics of masculinity and its dangerously disruptive nature in any critical project.

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#### End Notes

<sup>1</sup>The events of Watergate, the other major conspiracy in American history, are not theorized in the same way, simply because "what happened" has been made to seem more clear in the public record.

<sup>2</sup>We will leave the discourse of science fiction running in the background because its issues and its privileges, which Freedman points out, will be brought to bear on the following discussion and in Chapters Four and Five. For Freedman, "science fiction functions as a privileged *generic* object for critical theory" (CTSF 86 my emphasis). Freedman puts into play a theory of genre in his discussion of science fiction, arguing that because, principally, of science fiction's cognitive estrangement, it is uniquely situated as a critique of capitalism. The subtleties he traces through fantasy fiction, historical fiction, and science fiction all depend on a notion of genre as an ideological categorization.

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<sup>3</sup> By contrast, the historical fiction writer/director has a very clear understanding of the trajectory she or he wants to present. In the case of Oliver Stone, he based his story of the assassination heavily on both Jim Garrison's and Colonel Fletcher Prouty's accounts. He was not just exploring: he was actively countering the received narrative of the Warren Commission. In this regard, Stone's work is far more effective in its ideological aims than The Company Man.

<sup>4</sup> There is a sense in which both the American Security infrastructure and aggravating symptoms like the Bay of Pigs is the unconscious. Lacan says that "The unconscious is that part of the concrete discourse, in so far as it is transindividual, that is not at the disposal of the subject in re-establishing the continuity of his conscious discourse" (Ecrits 49). In other words, the subject cannot access the deep recesses of her unconscious in the milieu of the analytic method even though the unconscious is inevitably a part of the concrete discourse of the analytic method. The unconscious is the real, which in Lacan's view from which we are always already split off from the moment we obtain language. While we may talk about the Bay of Pigs Invasion, we do not have at our disposal the discourse of the Security State. We are, in a sense, split subjects with regard to understanding our own cultural and political unconscious. Still, speech is the material of the analytic method, and it is the means whereby we "reorder past contingencies by conferring on them the sense of necessities to come" (Ecrits 48). I think of narrative as being Lacanian speech. Therefore, insofar as narrative may reorder past contingencies---that is to say, that we might lay on the couch and talk and get better---should we continue to tell stories about our past. I think, too, of Lacan's notion of the real as something like Benjamin's illumination, of which we periodically obtain a glimpse. Benjamin sees the illumination as something which reorders our sense of the past and of the future. To glimpse it, and to tell what we can of it, is a success, even as we are doomed to fail. Oliver Stone's work in this regard is both a success and a failure.

<sup>5</sup> For a review of the film Thirteen Days by the historian who transcribed the Kennedy tapes of the Cuban Missile Crisis, see Ernest R. May's "Thirteen Days in 145 Minutes," in National Forum: The Phi Kappa Phi Journal, Spring 2001, v 81 n 2, 34-37. I might add here that Ken O'Donnell's son was involved in the financing of the film, which could explain his otherwise historically unfounded prominence in the film. Robert Kennedy mentions O'Donnell three times in the entire book on which the film is based.

<sup>6</sup> Timothy Melley argues the case for agency panic in his book Empire of Conspiracy.

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, that culture of secrecy has reached well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as Kevin Phillips has adequately demonstrated in his 2004 book American Dynasty, and for which the younger Bush's administration is being heavily criticized.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. The Perfect Failure: Kennedy, Eisenhower, and the CIA at the Bay of Pigs, Trumbull Higgins, New York: W.W. Norton, 1987.

### Chapter Three

#### On Being Re(a)d: Narrative, Gender, and Cold War Discourse

Beyond the pleasure principle we encounter that opaque surface which to some has seemed so obscure that it is the antimony of all thought—not just biological but scientific in general—the surface that is known as the death instinct (Lacan, Ethics 21).

[T]he essential point to remember here is the link of the sexual drive to death . . . (Lacan, “Phallic Phase” 120).

Sadism demands a story . . . (Mulvey 35).

#### Introduction

American discourse from the 1950s to the 1980s, from cultural productions to political dialogue, articulates the terror of the story of total nuclear destruction and the inability to resist telling it. Narrating the story of cold war only ends in one thing, and we can't resist telling the unthinkable. Countless films emerge out of Cold War American discourse, which are both productive of and contiguous with the politics of the Cold War. This chapter will examine two of these films for the ways in which the discursive formations of gender, conspiracy, and Cold War narrative overlap, intersect, and shape one another: The Manchurian Candidate (1962) and Fail Safe (1963). Taken together, these two films mark the trajectory of the pleasure principle of Cold War discourse, and the ways in which narrative and gender are imbricated in the production of political agendas. The Manchurian Candidate does not deal directly with total destruction. Instead, this film demarcates the boundaries of conspiracy in Cold War discourse. By examining this film, we can see the way in which conspiracy narrative is defined as both an Oedipal

drama and also a drama of psychoanalytic dialogue. Fail Safe will then reveal how the pleasure principle plays out in narratives where the Cold War shifts politically to a hot war.

According to Freud, the pleasure principle is that process whereby the tension of a given circumstance is resolved by the avoidance of pain or production of pleasure. The path to this resolution is always the only one the subject will choose. This chapter will argue that the conspiracy narrative, on which much Cold War discourse is based, is the gateway through which we may design a theoretical apparatus that will map a site for the intersection of narrative, Marxist theory, and feminist theory. Before we may pass through that gateway, we must establish a Lacanian reading of Cold War discourse. Because Lacan's model is optical, we are able to *see into* the theoretical gateway. However, Lacan's model is in the main an optical one and as such does not truly render reality in three dimensions. Two dimensional images—such as a film—may give the impression of space but are not themselves articulated in space. In spite of Lacan's insistence on a topology, we need Jameson's model of cognitive mapping in order to render the apparatus in space. Jameson's discussion of conspiracy films both opens the gateway to the crossroads of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Marxist theory, and at the same time closes the gateway to feminism; this chapter will reopen that gate. Before we begin articulating the special relationship conspiracy narrative has with theoretical discourse, we must first trace a working theory of narrative. This chapter will begin with a discussion of Cold War narrative using Lacan's theory of narrative and art, and then move toward an expression of conspiracy narrative as a paradigmatic emblem of 21<sup>st</sup>-

century theory.

### **Being Re(a)d**

The Cold War concept of deterrence as a global military strategy has at its center the maintenance in tension of a consummate drive toward total destruction. Freud's discussion of pleasure and death as being in the realm of drives helps to enunciate the perversions of Cold War discourse. We still live with the possibility of nuclear destruction. Even though the Cold War ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the nuclear weaponry that made the concept of "mutually assured destruction" possible still exists, and is in the hands of various countries. Cold War discourse is distinct from the post-1989 world in part because total annihilation was made specifically, as a matter of policy, a central element of the discourse. The nuclear capability on the globe today is roughly the same as it was during the Cold War, but we don't speak of it anxiously as though global destruction could happen at any minute. What gave Cold War discourse its real impact was the possibility of total annihilation; the idea of total annihilation is still possible today, at least in the sense that if all existing nuclear materiel were used in a simultaneous detonation the majority of humanity would be destroyed or significantly impacted; but it doesn't frame cultural and political discourse today as it did during the Cold War. Cold War rhetoric is plausible enough to create the *fear* of total annihilation. Why, then, were we so anxious about total nuclear destruction then, and are hardly concerned about it now?

In fact, the post-Cold-War discourse of total annihilation has transmogrified into a notion of nuclear detonation as a very serious but nonetheless not totalizing event. The

advent of tactical nuclear warheads has generated the military idea of “controlled” nuclear attack. In this regard the development of technology not only coincides with but also in fact determines political discourse. What is militarily possible (massive nuclear detonation—even if not politically likely—*or* tactical accuracy) and what comes to determine the contours of cultural discourse (the totalizing destruction of Cold War discourse or the limited tactical destruction of post-Cold-War global terrorism discourse) are two entirely different things. Both massive destruction and tactical or “surgical” nuclear destruction are presently possible in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What determines the discursive usage of either is their political significance. It is now politically untenable to discuss massive nuclear destruction, and more useful to foreground the tenability of surgical nuclear attack. The sheer totalizing power of nuclear weapons is now largely forgotten, or better said, unremembered. Indeed, worldwide simultaneous nuclear detonation to destroy all of humanity has been noteworthy modified by military analysts on CNN. In fact, nuclear weapons technology has come on occasion to be represented in film as the only thing that will *save* the human race. Post-Cold-War films like Armageddon (1998) and The Core (2003) present nuclear technology as the only thing powerful enough to stop the inevitable destruction of humanity by some natural event. In the case of Armageddon, astronauts plant and detonate a nuclear device inside of an asteroid that is heading directly for the earth. In The Core, a team of scientists drills into the core of the earth to detonate several nuclear devices that will jumpstart the rotation of the earth’s core. During the Cold War, however, the idea that nuclear weapons technology could have any other function than totalizing or near-totalizing destruction

was unthinkable.

Certainly, the political terrain shifted post-Berlin Wall, and the Communist Soviet Union transformed into capitalist Russia, which explains the evaporation of the military and political concept of mutually assured destruction. But there's more to the story than that. The concept of mutually assured destruction, on which deterrence is based, is that self-imposed limit that appears at the surface to be an ethical paradigm—that total destruction of humanity is obviously an outcome to be avoided. But in reality, deterrence is the limit we placed on ourselves during the Cold War in order to sustain the painful pleasure of the idea of total destruction. While deterrence was rhetorically situated as a policy by which the American government responsibly avoided hot confrontation with the Soviets, it is in fact that structure which imbued the idea of America with a sense of restrained *power*. Without the limit of deterrence, the idea of total destruction would not have been so awfully *fascinating*. The real and unequivocal limit, one may suppose, is death; but enjoyment is, one may also suppose, not possible in the non-existence of death. Deterrence as a preemptive device is indeed the pleasure principle of the Cold War.

Narrative sustained the Cold War in the field of political significance. From Truman's campaign in the late 40s to Reagan's administration, the Soviet Union was the godless communist oppressor and the evil empire that sought to destroy freedom and democracy and all humanity. The Soviet Union, however, in reality was hardly a significant threat to the United States until around the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. The U.S.S.R. was devastated after World War II. Militarily, the effects were staggering: around 26 million Soviet troops died in the second world conflict. By

contrast, about a half a million American troops died. The Soviets were in no position to match the growing military power of the United States immediately after the war. And yet, the fear of communism only grew in the United States in the latter 1940s and the 1950s. The likes of Richard Nixon and Joseph McCarthy made themselves household names by propagating the Red Scare. While it is perhaps possible that the Communist ideology could have spread without Soviet government sponsorship (and thus without the financial and military support necessary to maintain such subversion), it can hardly be said that the United States was under a significant military threat in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Nonetheless, in Cold War rhetoric, the Soviet Union was a gigantic nation of heretical demons, Communism was taking hold of this country through government infiltration, and the cinema industry was propagating pro-Communist ideology—all of these notions were propagated by narrative. They are easily told and easily iterable. Whether or not these stories are true begs the question, for it is the discursive field of the Cold War itself where the analysis begins.

Lacan comments in 1959-1960 on the advent of total annihilation:

I don't want to indulge in overdramatization. All ages have thought they had reached the most extreme point of vision in a confrontation with something terminal, some extra-worldly force that threatened the world. But our world and society now bring news of the shadow of a certain incredible, absolute weapon that is waved in our faces in a way that is indeed worthy of the muses. Don't imagine that the end will occur tomorrow; even in Leibnitz's time, people believed in less specific terms that the end of the world was at hand . . . confront that moment when a man or a group of men can act in such a way that the question of existence is posed for the whole of the human species, and you will then see inside yourself that *das Ding* is next to the subject (Ethics 104-5).

Lacan seems hesitant to become swept up in doomsday talk, since doomsday talk is itself

common to every generation. The death drive is a feature of Western culture, and as such the evidence of it is as clear in today's world as it is in Cold War discourse. What is different is the *narrative*. Whether or not totalizing annihilation is probable does nothing to the fact that the narrative of it *frightens* people. Lacan himself seems awed by it in this passage. And yet he knows that the real issue here is not total annihilation but the very question of the drive toward death itself. *Terrorism* is what frightens people in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Fear, for Lacan, is the mechanism through which we are “purged, purified of everything of that order [of tragedy]” (Ethics 247). The narrative with which we frighten ourselves will change, but the structural necessity of fear remains. We have no grand narrative but only small ones, which emerge only in the conversation as we speak. Lacanian psychoanalytic dialogue is a means through which we might approach it.

Laura Mulvey makes the point that “Sadism demands a story, depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an end” (35). Teresa de Lauretis adds to Mulvey's point that “[Medusa and the Sphinx] are obstacles man encounters on the path of life, on his way to manhood, wisdom, and power; they must be slain or defeated so that he can go forward to fulfill his destiny—and his story” (de Lauretis 110). Lacan points out that “Sade lays out for our benefit the theory that it is through crime that man collaborates in the new creations of nature” (Ethics 210). Narrative is sadistic; Sadism, as Lacan identifies it, is in part the theory that new histories are written through criminal acts. Crime is that thing that reminds us we have the limit of the law to exceed. The discursive contour of Cold War deterrence is marked by its

function as the law that we may exceed in order to imagine our own destruction. Our destruction is unimaginable without it; more importantly, our destruction is not sadistically *pleasurable* without the law of deterrence. Desire arises out of limits; if there were no limits there would be nothing to desire. Deterrence is that limit that makes the narrative of Cold War destruction pleasurable.

One of the reasons we may never have seen the total nuclear destruction of the Cold War in films is the impossibility of totality. As Lukács has shown, art is a “relative, incomplete image,” and it must “appear like life itself, indeed in a more heightened, intense and alive form than in objective reality” (HN 91-92). The problem of totality is a formal one, for the form of art, as relative, must somehow represent life in its entirety. Frederic Jameson has made this point in The Geopolitical Aesthetic. In his discussion of the film All the President’s Men (1976), Jameson notes that “it is the impossible vision of totality—here [in the Library of Congress scene in All the President’s Men] recovered in the moment in which the possibility of conspiracy confirms the possibility of the very unity of the social order itself—that is celebrated in this well-nigh paradisaical moment” (GA 79). Conspiracy narrative posits the possibility of totality, but it cannot sustain that vision. Totality, and the impossibility of it, implies the epistemological limits of human apprehension. We apprehend information successively, taking in only those perceptual fields that acquire our attention. In terms of Jameson’s critical category of cognitive mapping, we always only apprehend a portion of the total perceptual field so that at any given time the space we inhabit is always only partially represented. Film, Jameson argues, is made up significantly of the aural and the visual, and these two perceptual

fields add up to the illusion of totality. This illusion is what makes conspiracy film especially effective, because it promises a vision of the total social and political field. However, the representation of totality is always an unrealized promise; Jameson points out that the conspiracy film attempts the view of totality, “and yields a brief glimpse of the providential, as what organizes history but is unrepresentable within it” (GP 79). What Jameson here calls “providential” I call the *real*. Lacan established the category of the real as that which it is impossible to symbolize or mediate in any way. The conspiracy film represents an attempt to symbolize the real—it is the ultimate fantasy.

Jameson shows us that the conspiracy film maps out postmodern space and time by manifesting the shifting grounds of the social and political fields underneath the narrative characters’ feet. For Jameson, the paradigm is the film Videodrome (1983), where the lead character’s status shifts from detective to victim to murderer based on the spatial and temporal circumstances that the diegesis sets up. The totality of conspiracy is thus mapped at least partially in the filmic universe. Based on Richard Condon’s 1959 novel of the same name, John Frankenheimer’s 1962 film The Manchurian Candidate maps the postmodern landscape in much the same way, by articulating conspiracy and counterconspiracy. The film tells the story of Sergeant Raymond Shaw (Laurence Harvey), a veteran of the Korean War. While a prisoner of war in Manchuria, Shaw is made the subject of a mind-control experiment; upon his return stateside, Shaw has no recollection of his treatment in Manchuria nor is he aware that he is programmed to be a dangerous assassin for the Communists. Shaw lives a fairly ordinary if uninspired life when he has control of his own faculties. However, when he sees the Queen of Diamonds

from an ordinary deck of playing cards he slips into a trance of unconscious origin. After this trigger, Shaw acts on the very next suggestion he hears, from whatever source. Shaw, then, is an American war hero unwittingly under the control of the Communist menace. He represents the perfect subterfuge—a trusted American icon that secretly carries out on American soil under perfect cover the will of a Communist government. Shaw's mother, Mrs. Iselin (Angela Lansbury), is married to John Iselin, a McCarthy-like character whose career is dedicated to accusing American officials of being Communist. While, unlike Raymond, he has control of his faculties, John is nonetheless largely under the influence of Mrs. Iselin, who professes a rabid anti-Communism. In truth, Mrs. Iselin is a secret Communist operative who is in charge of handling her son Raymond and directing his missions. Under the cover of her husband's anti-Communist program in the U.S. senate, Mrs. Iselin works to undermine the American government from the inside. Her ultimate goal is to secure the presidency for her husband by whatever means necessary in order to bring the United States under the control of the Communists. Major Bennett Marco (Frank Sinatra), who served with Raymond in Korea and who was also a subject of the Manchurian mind control experiments, is back stateside and plagued with disturbing dreams about his experience in Manchuria. Marco was evidently not selected by the Communists to be an agent. Because of his troubling dreams, Marco becomes convinced that something is fishy about Raymond Shaw. Once the Army begins to take Marco's claims of foul play in Manchuria seriously, he is appointed intelligence officer in charge of decoding the mystery of Raymond Shaw's unconscious.

Marco becomes, then, a reader, both of Raymond Shaw and of himself. He

functions in the film as both analyst and analysand because he knows that he is both responsible for unlocking Raymond's unconscious and implicated in the effects of Raymond's unconscious. When Marco finds out Thomas and Jocie Jordan have been killed, he holds up a newspaper with the headline of the incident, which does not indicate a suspect, and says to Rosie, "Raymond Shaw shot and killed his wife early this morning." Rosie says that she doesn't see that fact in the headline, but Marco has to read past the headline—he has to analyze the paper for its meaning effect, and as analyst he makes an accurate reading. But he also has to analyze himself simultaneously in the process. By letting Raymond go on his honeymoon instead of holding him in custody, Marco releases his hold, his control. He tells Rosie, "It wasn't really Raymond that did it. In a way it was me" (MC ch. 30). He has to analyze himself as a collaborator in the meaning effects of the Queen of Diamonds. Marco knows he is stupid. The Queen of Diamonds is the film's representation of the real, that effort to symbolize the unrepresentable source of the conspiracy. In the face of the Queen of Diamonds signifier, Marco recognizes his own stupidity, his own inability to assimilate its significance.

For Lacan, stupidity is the place where analytic discourse begins, the place where the analysand says things that do not make sense: "It's stupidity because I myself obviously collaborate in it" (Encore 12). Marco uses a forced deck to reappropriate the meaning effect of the Queen of Diamonds for Raymond. When Marco realizes Raymond is not going to call him to tell him the plot of the conspiracy (his mother's desire to kill the presidential candidate), Marco questions himself for thinking he could accomplish this goal. He doesn't yet know that Raymond has reappropriated the signifier for himself.

While waiting for Raymond's call Marco exclaims, "Okay, Milt, I blew it. I blew it! My magic is better than your magic. I shoulda known better. Intelligence officer. Stupidity officer is better! Pentagon ever wants to open up a stupidity division they know who they can get to lead it. Ya know, Raymond was theirs, he is theirs and he'll always be theirs" (MC ch. 33). It is as Lacan says: "My sole presence—at least I dare believe it—my sole presence in my discourse, my sole presence is my stupidity" (Encore 12).

The spatiotemporal universe of conspiracy shifts and orbits around Marco. First, in Manchuria, Marco is a subject in Communist mind-control experiments, a fact about which he is unaware for the first half of the film. As he begins to attain the ability to read his and his unit mates' dreams, he grasps the reality of the Communist conspiracy to develop assassins. It then becomes his task to crack the code of Raymond Shaw's unconscious in order to understand the Communists' intentions. In the spatiotemporal universe of the film, then, the Communism of Manchuria is relocated physically—and physiologically—onto American soil and inside American bodies. Simultaneously and diametrically, John and Mrs. Iselin as quintessential American icons work to subvert the democratic process of American presidential elections by murdering the presidential nominee for which John is serving as vice-presidential hopeful. Marco is unaware until the very end of the film that the Communist conspiracy has resided all along inexorably in Raymond's mother, Ellie Iselin. And yet, even while Marco gives a eulogy for Raymond Shaw at the end of the film that expresses the impossibility of Raymond's position as an American soldier and hero, Marco represents that ability of the psychoanalyst to glimpse, if only temporarily, the unrepresentable real.

The Manchurian Candidate, released November 10, 1962 in America, arises out of a complicated history of American anxiety over Communism, geopolitics, and domestic political subversion. It does not exploit fear of total nuclear annihilation, but it does articulate fears of Communist intrigue and the ever-shifting terrain of Cold War politics. McCarthyism raged in America in the decade prior to the release of the film; the film industry felt the effects of the Red Scare acutely during HUAC hearings, with blacklistings ending careers and ruining lives. One of the executive producers of The Manchurian Candidate, Howard Koch, had himself been blacklisted in the early 1950s. McCarthyism was symptomatic of a very real fear that somehow the evil of Communism could infect unseen the American infrastructure and debilitate it. Eisenhower's agencies, the CIA and the FBI, were the unseen antibiotic, but the fact that the cure itself could not be seen caused at least a modicum of uncertainty—the CIA and the FBI were no D-Day Normandy invasion.

So how can a film like The Manchurian Candidate arise out of these conditions? Although McCarthyism was over by 1962, the Cold War was in full swing. Manchurian suggests not only a subversive Communist element in America. It also suggests that the McCarthy-like figure, Johnny Iselin, was influenced by, if not himself, a Communist. To suggest in a work of art that a central American political figure is subversive, during the historical peak of the Cold War, seems a radical, even if liberal, idea. And yet, Lacan sees this radicalism as perfectly part of the structure of art: "The relation of the artist to the time in which he appears is always a contradictory one. It is against the current, in opposition to reigning norms—including, for example, political norms, or indeed, systems

of thought—that art attempts to operate its miracle once more” (Ethics 142). So, in the same stroke that film attempts to imitate its object it also attempts to subvert it; imitation is utilitarian in that it is part of the apparatus of film/art, but it is not film’s aim or end. This is film’s jouissance: “[G]iven the equivocation between *faillir* and *falloir*, the jouissance that should be must be translated as the jouissance that shouldn’t be/never fails” (Encore 59). Lacan is referring to the linguistic intersection of the verbs *faillir* and *falloir*, which mean, respectively, “to fail” and “must”, in the third person singular present tense. They both conjugate to *faut*, which also sounds like *faux*—false, forged. This conjugation of the two verbs is a pivot point in the articulation of jouissance: it must be and it must fail and it resonates as false. Film should not be imitation but it never fails to be imitation. The same may be said of the other side: film should not be subversion but it never fails to be subversion. Film must not, but it never fails.

Film in this sense has a double vision of a sort. Lacan articulates this double vision in art as anamorphosis. Generally defined, anamorphosis is “any kind of construction that is made in such a way that by means of an optical transposition a certain form that wasn’t visible at first sight transforms itself into a readable image. The pleasure is found in seeing its emergence from an indecipherable form” (Ethics 135). He refers specifically to the artistic movement at the beginning of the seventeenth century, using Holbein’s *Ambassadors* as an example, where the skull emerges in the painting only as one is leaving the room (Ethics 160). For Lacan, what is interesting about anamorphosis in art is precisely that from within the act of art as representative, art deploys the illusory in a move to encircle the Thing. Film works in precisely the same way; in some ways it

approaches the real even more closely than art simply because the medium *looks* so much like the real, in spite of the dimensional shift from three- to two-dimensions. When film subverts, does what it shouldn't do, it deploys the illusory to encircle the Thing. The trick to reading film, it seems, is to hold the plane of the image at such a distance from one's vision so as to see the readable patterns emerge from the unreadable. Film is an optical puzzle. The Manchurian Candidate articulates, by showing us the way the conspiratorial world shifts around Marco, the manner in which politics occur in a spatiotemporal universe. Manchurian attempts to show both a liberal and conservative idea, namely that Communists are taking over American government. Manchurian enunciates the shifting terrains, in other words, of the Cold War liberal consensus.

### **At the Gateway of Conspiracy Theory**

Lacan theorizes that mapped location called the cognitive, and articulates the way in which film approaches the unsymbolizable real. Lacan wants to articulate a topological model rather than an optical one, and “replaces optical images with topological figures which are intended to prevent imaginary capture . . . Nevertheless, as Freud said of his own optical models, ‘we need the assistance of provisional ideas’” (Evans 130).

Jameson's model more adequately explains the topology of the social and political fields with which film is contiguous, thus amplifying Lacanian politics in the service of a useful film theory. Jameson's model of cognitive mapping gives filmic diegesis the three-dimensionality that is lost in the transfer from reality to celluloid. He places the cognitive—that is, the perceiving human—onto the map of the filmic experience.

Examining conspiracy film foregrounds the need for this topology, and only by looking at

conspiracy film may we render this theoretical problematic into an apprehensible idea. Jameson brings us to the theoretical gateway of the conspiracy film.

In The Manchurian Candidate, as in Conspiracy Theory, ideologies of gender actually work with the structure of the conspiracy narrative to coordinate an image of masculinity that is threatened and then reconstituted. Jameson fails to map adequately the way in which gender is woven into the social and political fields. Put simply, the theoretical problem is whether to privilege capital or gender as the organizing category of the social and political fields. Feminists interested in socialism almost immediately perceived the seeming incommensurability of Marxist theory and feminism. Not least is the historical fact of the sexism in the resistance movements of the 60s and 70s. Situating the position of women in the day-to-day efforts of revolution amounted to secretarial work and coffeemaking (Sargent xiii-xviii). And while nearly 40 years have lapsed since the 60s revolution, Marxists still have a tendency to marginalize the category of gender in their theoretical work. Jameson, as late as 1995, still emphasizes capital as the organizing category of postmodern society. In his review of a scene in Videodrome “in which males are feminized by the insertion of organic cassettes (if not revolvers) into a newly opened dripping slot below the breast bone,” Jameson observes that “[c]orporeal revulsion of this kind probably has the primary function of expressing fears about activity and passivity in the complexities of late capitalism, and is only secondarily invested with the level of gender itself, which however knows a separate or *semi*-autonomous figuration elsewhere in the plot [in the traditional feminine triad of the bad mother, the insatiable wife, and the vestal virgin]” (GA 30-31, my emphasis). Gender is on the second tier for Jameson; and

while I am uncertain what it means exactly to be “semi-autonomous,” I assume that gender figures more prominently for Jameson in areas of the film where gender is more overtly addressed. The “semi-autonomy” of gender seems to mean that gender is a contingency in Jameson’s theoretical paradigm. Jameson rightly identifies late capitalist fears about activity and passivity in the bodily insertion scene; but it is hard for me to see how Jameson can give gender a secondary place in the genesis of these fears.

The theoretical problematic involved in any discussion of Marxism and feminism must necessarily include an examination of how we view critical categories. Socialist feminists responded to the trivialization of gender in Marxist theory by calling for a paradigm that “sees women first”. In 1983, Mia Campioni and Elizabeth Grosz pointed out that “socialist feminism remains locked in a paradox as a *feminist* position unless it can somehow develop a radically *woman-centred* version of ‘socialism’ which entails ‘seeing women first’, conceptualizing a space which allows women to be considered autonomous shapers and creators of meaning” (367). This position, while addressing the failure of Marxist theory to register sexism, essentially inverts the opposition that has been identified by critics between Marxism and feminism. The critical conversation about the “unhappy marriage” fell early on, and still dwells in, the mire of phallogocentric thinking. bell hooks as early as 1984 perceived the fallacy of this theoretical problem and expressed her disappointment in socialism and feminism for not addressing it: “Much socialist-feminist writing has focused on a feminist critique of socialism rather than on the imagining of a liberatory radical theory of socialism that would more adequately address interlocking systems of domination like sexism, racism, class oppression,

imperialism, and so on” (28). hooks sees the radical potential of a socialist-feminist project; she understands that being feminist and being Marxist are not mutually exclusive propositions. And while the critical community has taken much of French feminist theory and assumed it as fairly unproblematically true, the critical work in Marxism and feminism still tends toward prioritizing one theoretical paradigm over the other.

hooks calls for an address of “interlocking systems of domination” that would leave behind discussions of “who/what comes first.” The challenge is to articulate clearly *how* those systems of domination interlock. Marxist feminists have addressed a number of ways in which capitalism and sexism intersect: the household as a site for gendered capitalist domination; the commodification of women’s bodies; the value of women’s labor in the marketplace. It is, however, still easy to imagine structural analyses that abandon either a Marxist or a feminist critique in favor of the other. Jameson’s excellent analysis of conspiracy film is just one example. The hegemony of capitalism is not prior to the hegemony of sexist domination. Discussions about whether capital or gender historically came first fail to render the way in which gender and other forms of oppression are imbricated inextricably in the system of capital. One way to clarify a theory of hegemony that would articulate *how* these systems interlock is to turn to a theory of subjectivity. The subject that in Jameson’s paradigm expresses late capitalist fears of activity and passivity is the same subject of Lacan’s psychosexual structure. Where Lacan’s theory reaches for a topology on which the postmodern subject may appear, Jameson renders it in three dimensions more fully; and when Jameson’s critique abandons gender, Lacan registers gender as inescapably a part of the human

psychosexual structure. And as Jameson shows, the conspiracy film is the site where we may bring these interstices of the postmodern subject into view. Conspiracy theories bring into the brightly lit foreground the problem of agency and subjectivity in postmodern culture; agency and subjectivity is the site of the capitalist paradigm as well as the problem of gender discrimination.

Jameson's observation of the dichotomy of activity and passivity in late capitalist culture is indeed accurate. He argues that the capitalist subject suffers anxiety as the result of being made passive in a consumer culture. What Jameson's analysis fails, however, to perceive is that conspiracy culture is an expression of fears about the *feminization* of the American white male. The insertion of a technological device into the chest cavity of a white man who finds himself at the crossroads of a conspiracy and counter-conspiracy highlights the way in which anxiety over agency, which Timothy Melley calls agency panic, weaves inexorably with fears of demasculinization. Fear of demasculinization is not incidental, or "secondary" as Jameson identifies the status of gender, to the conspiracy narrative but rather constructive of it. Repeatedly, gender figures not only prominently but also preeminently in conspiracy narratives of post-World War II America. In the film Conspiracy Theory, Jerry's diagnosis as hysterical, as I showed in Chapter 1, is resolved by the reenactment of the Oedipal story. Fears of the status of male subjectivity are also well represented in The X Files, as I will show in Chapter 5, even as the series works to complicate the issue of gender.

The principle gender ideology at work in The Manchurian Candidate is the ideology of motherhood. The Communist conspiracy to gain control of the minds of U.S.

soldiers is realized on American soil in the form of Ellie Iselin, Raymond Shaw's mother. In de Lauretis' model, she is the Medusa, the obstacle "man encounters on the path of life" that he must overcome in order to "fulfill his destiny—and his story" (110, see above). The Communists choose her as an operative presumably because of her proximity to Washington and her potential for ending up in the White House as First Lady. It is made fairly clear that Johnny Iselin's McCarthy-like project to accuse vast numbers of politicians and government officials of being Communist is engineered by Ellie in order to accelerate Iselin's path to the White House. Ellie's plan to assume control of the United States takes two paths that are to converge at the White House: gain the vice presidential nomination for Johnny Iselin, and at the same time direct her mind-controlled son, Raymond Shaw, to kill the presidential nominee so that Johnny may assume the position. All of this is done under cover of the patriotic Americanism of the Red Scare. The vectors of conspiracy and counter-conspiracy intersect entirely at the site of the woman's, and specifically the American mother's, body.

As both Michael Rogin and Robert Corber have shown, "momism" offers a clear picture of the way in which ideologies of gender and Cold War politics intersect. Women participated actively in the labor effort during World War II; when American troops returned home, women were expected to return to the space of domesticity. Promises to women of independence and personal productivity were rescinded in the interest of prevailing gendered capitalist ideology. In the 1950s women were growing restless and discontented; as a response to that, motherhood became a glorified occupation, in order to give women the sense of a privileged position in culture. And yet, at the same time,

“many Americans resented the glorification of motherhood because it supposedly gave women too much power over the domestic sphere. For example, Philip Wylie, who coined the term *momism* in his bestselling book Generation of Vipers (1942), argued that American society was rapidly becoming a matriarchy in which domineering and overly protective mothers disrupted the Oedipal structure of the middle class nuclear family by smothering their sons with ‘unnatural’ affection” (Corber 197).

The domineering mom and the subversive Communist become one and the same in The Manchurian Candidate. The Oedipal drama in The Manchurian Candidate is indeed disrupted. Johnny Iselin is Raymond Shaw’s stepfather, who functions in much the way Claudius does in Hamlet, as a sort of substitute for the father. However, Johnny Iselin is essentially directed by his wife. The absence of Raymond’s real father as well as Johnny Iselin’s passivity serves better to highlight his mother as uncastrated. The ideology of the film is that the uncastrated mother is un-American, and indeed functions as a part of the conspiracy to overthrow the American government. Marco functions as the stable subject to which a totality of understanding will be attributed at the end of the film. Marco’s stupidity in the face of the signifier is only a temporary threat: his position as the stable masculine subject is reasserted when he gives the “final” words on Raymond Shaw’s life in the eulogy. He is military officer and priest in this scene, both powerful symbols and figures of patriarchal culture. In addition, he is recently married to Rosie, and so presumably will figure in his newly formed family as the only stable father figure the film ever represents. Further, Sinatra’s off-screen persona of hypermasculinity works in the final scenes of Manchurian to resolve the Oedipal drama. Jameson’s paradigm fails

to map the way in which ideologies of gender both inform and instruct cultural ideas of conspiracy. Taken together, Lacan's optical model and Jameson's model of cognitive mapping are a powerful theory of film. Both models manifest the filmic phenomenon in space and time.

Like The Manchurian Candidate, Fail Safe (1964) is an excellent example of Cold War narrative, and it too imbricates ideologies of gender with Cold War discourse. The film is less about conspiracy, however, and more about the results of nuclear detonation. Fail Safe opens with a dream sequence that Brigadier General Warren Black (Dan O'Herlihy) experiences in New York at 5:30 in the morning. In it, he watches passively a traditional bullfight, which is post-Hemingway a reified symbol of masculinity. The matador stabs the bull with several swords. Blackie (General Black's nickname) closes his eyes as the bull collapses, closes his eyes, and dies. Blackie wakes up drenched in sweat, and he tells his wife, "I had the dream again. Always ends at the same place. . .Some time I'm going to see that matador, find out who he is. When I do, that's it! That's the end of me." It is not until the end of the film that Blackie discovers that he, indeed, is the matador. At the end of the film, after he has deployed the nuclear weapons which destroy New York, he takes the military-issue suicide injection and as he dies says, "The matador. . . the matador . . . the matador . . . is me!" In the end, Blackie must be the one who raises his hand in sacrifice—he must take Abraham's position in the narrative, another powerful patriarchal symbol—but unlike Abraham, Blackie does actually drop his hand in murder.

The film immediately cuts to a dinner party scene with Professor Groeteschele

(Walter Matthau) that is taking place at the same time in Washington D.C.—5:30 in the morning. Dr. Groeteschele has been holding forth most of the night about his thoughts on policy. The scene opens with him and another dinner guest arguing about “acceptable losses” in a nuclear confrontation. The dinner guest, Mr. Foster, invokes the argument that there is no winner in total annihilation, but Dr. Groeteschele maintains tenaciously that the U.S. will *have* to use nuclear weapons—there is no escaping that fact. For Dr. Groeteschele, it is possible ensure that nuclear destruction is deployed in such a way that America *wins*. Dr. Groeteschele seems to understand the inevitability of the death drive. His strategy is to try to defeat it, or to anticipate it so that his side wins. He also knows that there is no end—cold war narrative is designed to tell the story of the end. But Dr. Groeteschele points quite clearly to the fact that nuclear confrontation does not necessitate the end of the story. In fact it is precisely that story that he knows will go on over which he wants to ensure America has control. In an exchange with Mr. Foster Groeteschele elucidates his point about (hi)story:

Mr. Foster: War isn't what it used to be.

Groeteschele: It's still the resolution of economic and political conflict.

Mr. Foster: Oh, what kind of resolution with a hundred million dead?

Groeteschele: It doesn't have to be a hundred million.

Mr. Foster: Even sixty!

Groeteschele: Same as a thousand years ago, sir. When you also had wars that wiped out whole peoples. The point is still who wins and who loses, the survival of a culture.

Mr. Foster: A culture! With most of its people dead, the rest dying, the food poisoned, the air unfit to breathe? You call that a culture?

Groeteschele: Yes, I do, Mr. Foster. I am not a poet. I am a political scientist, who would rather have an American culture survive than a Russian one.

It is quite clear that Dr. Groeteschele does not assume total annihilation in the nuclear confrontation. In fact, he quite plainly assumes the continuation of a culture, albeit a

rewritten culture that is decidedly in the favor of his own political inclinations. His view here is not entirely untenable, in a Lacanian analysis—for Lacan, there is no end. In this scene, Mr. Foster is invoking the narrative of the Cold War scenario in order to make his point for nuclear disarmament. Dr. Groeteschele, on the other hand, assumes quite completely the drive toward destruction. He says as much later in the car with Elsa Wolf. He wants only to control the narrative in the aftermath. It is important to point out that this scene foregrounds the fact that Mr. Foster is invoking a narrative that *does* something: it scares people.

In this film, rather than the ideology of motherhood, the ideology of the whore is taken up and used as a political symbol for the desire for death. Immediately following the exchange with Mr. Foster, who throws up his hands and walks away, the film cuts to a long shot of Dr. Groeteschele in the background and the posterior profile of a woman in the foreground. The scene is framed fully on the left with her image. She is clearly in a seductive posture. Her image frames the scene in which Dr. Groeteschele discusses who would survive nuclear deployment. As he ponders, the camera cuts to a medium frontal shot of the woman, who is quite clearly feeling erotic about Dr. Groeteschele. After a pause, he says:

I would predict . . . convicts and file clerks. [As someone laughs, Dr. Groeteschele shoots the laughter a serious look to indicate there is nothing funny. The laughter abruptly stops.] The worst convicts. Those deep down in solitary confinement. And the most ordinary file clerks. Probably for large insurance companies. Because they would be in fireproof rooms, protected by tons of the best insulator in the world—paper. Then imagine what will happen.

The woman whose body frames the scene is eroticizing the topic. And one would expect Dr. Groeteschele to proceed to say that the convicts (whom the viewer and dinner guests assume

is male) and the file clerks (assumed to be female) will procreate and carry on the species.

But he does not, and it is plainly in contrast with the woman's eroticization of it. Dr.

Groeteschele continues:

A small group of vicious criminals will fight the army of file clerks for the remaining means of life. The convicts will know violence. The file clerks will know organization. Who do you think will win? [He looks around at the silent and serious dinner guests, then laughs.] It's all hypothesis, of course, but fun to play around with.

Groeteschele does not eroticize the post-apocalypse narrative at all. In fact, he sets up the scenario as a scene of struggle and conflict. He does not foreground a narrative where sexuality is reduced to a matter of procreation, absent of pleasure. He does foreground, though, a world where need prevails. Pleasure just simply doesn't figure into it. In fact, Groeteschele does not make the biological distinction between sexes. The only distinguishing feature of these two groups is their unique situation of survival. Jacqueline Rose points out that "when Lacan himself did refer to biology, it was in order to remind us of the paradox inherent in reproduction itself, which, as Freud pointed out, represents a victory of the species over the individual. The 'fact' of sexed reproduction marks the subject as '*subject to*' death" (35). For Lacan, the sexual drive "determines the limits within which we experience our sexual life. If there is no straightforward biological sequence and no satisfaction of the drive, then the idea of a complete and assured sexual identity belongs in the realm of fantasy" (Rose 35). Groeteschele neither identifies the biological sexes of the two groups nor does he assume there is a straightforward biological sequence. In fact, the file clerks form in his

scenario an army with the advantage of organizational skill. In any event, he laughs at the place his narrative has taken the guests—he does take pleasure in “playing around with” them. The subsequent scene bears out Dr. Groeteschele’s relation to pleasure.

The party breaks up, and as Dr. Groeteschele approaches his convertible, he finds the seductive woman from the dinner party sitting in the passenger seat of his car. She tells him her name is Elsa Wolf and that she would like him to take her home. Groeteschele is skeptical, but gets in the car and says, “You’ll have to give me directions.” She replies, “Just stay on this road.” She does not give him a specific address or a specific location toward which to travel. It is clear that she wants to go for a *drive* with Groeteschele. For his part, Groeteschele is quite practical about the matter, as he is already aware of the end result and not interested in ends, but rather renewals. During this directionless drive, Wolf says, “You make death an entertainment. Something that can be played in a living room,” to which Groeteschele replies, “As good a place as any.” At this, Wolf gives a direction, toward *jouissance*: “No. No, there’s an even better place. Turn there.” She desires the power of nuclear destruction, of ending it all, and her desire is directed toward Groeteschele. When she tells him to turn, she is turning him toward the field of sexual desire, which is a remove from her desire for death. Groeteschele is, for Wolf, *objet a*. He turns onto a quiet country road and stops in the middle of a gently wooded area. He steps on the emergency brake, cuts the engine, and turns to her and says, “This where you live?” As she looks down and reaches for his crotch, Groeteschele slaps her hard across the face and says menacingly, “I’m not your kind.” Groeteschele does not sublimate the drive toward death. He is not the “kind” that occupies the space where death and sexual desire intersect. He is interested only in who wins

and who loses and in the culture that will persist after destruction has occurred.

But before Wolf reaches for her *objet a*, Groeteschele's penis which constitutes her desire for the Real, Groeteschele analyzes Wolf's psychosexual order:

I am the joker. I make death into a game for people like you to get excited about. I watched you tonight. You'd love making it possible, wouldn't you? You'd love pressing that button. What a thrill that would be. Knowing you'd have to die, to have the power to take everyone else with you, a mob of them, their plans [Wolf begins to breathe heavily as Groeteschele says this], their little hopes. Born to be murdered, turning away from it, closing their eyes to it. And you could be the one to make it true. Do it to them [Her finger moves in and out of the opening between Groeteschele's index finger and thumb]. But you're afraid, so you look for the thrill someplace else. And who better than a man who isn't afraid?

Groeteschele is lucidly calling attention to Wolf's displacement of desire onto himself. Even his words are highly eroticized for Wolf. It is in fact his language that arouses her to take his handkerchief out of his breast pocket and wipe her lipstick on it—it also looks as though she is breathing (her life) into it as well.

Although Wolf is set up here as the intersection of desire and death, Groeteschele, too, is implicated in this intersection. He permits this seduction so that he can lure her into the ultimate prohibition. He is seducer, as well, but he seduces her into the limit of the Law, which he enacts by slapping her hard and violently across the face. He freely submits to take the drive with her, to dare to go to “the even better place” with her, if only so he can engage the prohibition. His desire is to de-eroticize the drive toward death, to position himself as the rational political scientist intent only on making the absolute best of nuclear annihilation—to ensure that America and its way of life comes out on top. He is positioning himself here as the master of culture, the master of the drive toward death that he understands in advance. But neither can he resist the desire to master. He cannot but fail in his attempt to segregate

the death drive from the field of pleasure. He takes his pleasure in rationality, in understanding in advance, and indeed playing with people (at the dinner party) as he enunciates the scenario he himself knows to be bleak. Thus, Elsa Wolf's name—there are only two choices in jouissance: either Groeteschele, or else a wolf.

This narrative of desire is one “small narrative” that is told in Fail Safe, but there is another powerful narrative that is invoked as the President (Henry Fonda) is negotiating the terms of this disaster with the Premier of the Soviet Union. The narrative of Abraham at Moriah is invoked in this film as a way of making some sense out of the terms of the negotiation. Once it becomes clear that the Soviet Union will not be able to get all six of the American Vindicator jets, which are carrying nuclear bombs toward Moscow, the President begins making arrangements. He is arranging it in advance that if the Vindicator gets through to Moscow, General Black will be in position to drop an equivalent amount of nuclear tonnage on New York as a sacrificial lamb for the Moscow bombing. His plans are not clear during the negotiations—this is left out in order to build suspense. All the same, he is making plans to exact the eye of his own country should the eye of Moscow be plucked. But instead of quoting this passage of the Bible, which refers to the ethical paradigm of an eye for an eye, he calls for General Black in the War Room and says: “Blackie? Remember your Old Testament? . . . Remember the story of the sacrifice of Abraham, old what's-his-name used to use it in chapel at least twice a year.” General Black replies, “I remember, sir.” The President continues: “Keep it in mind the next few hours. Blackie, I need your help. Get out to Andrews Field right away. Orders will be waiting for you there. Blackie, are Catherine and

the kids in New York?” Blackie replies quizzically that his wife and children are indeed in New York, to which the President replies, “I may be asking a great deal of you.”

Why, then, if the spirit of the act is actually from Leviticus 24:13-24, which enunciates God’s order to give an eye for an eye, does the President refer to Genesis 22:1-18, God’s call to Abraham to sacrifice his son? The Leviticus passage suggests that there is an equivalent exchange—“fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has disfigured a man, he shall be disfigured. He who kills a beast shall make it good; and he who kills a man shall be put to death” (Oxford 153). This story suggests there is no excess in the exchange. But the annotations for this passage from Genesis refer back to Exodus 21:22-25, where the eye-for-eye law is also invoked fairly seamlessly. In Exodus 21:26-36, however, the system of exchange is not closed: “When a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female, and destroys it, he shall let the slave go free for the eye’s sake” (Oxford 95). In other words, the slave gains his/her freedom for an eye. The eye does not translate into an exact rendering of another eye for itself—something else is gained or lost. Later, intention is also accounted for: “When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be clear. But if the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past, and its owner has been warned but has not kept it in, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned, and its owner also shall be put to death” (Oxford 95). Things outside the economy of the exchange of the eye-for-eye law come into play in Exodus. Derrida calls this excess the “mechanism of debt” in Christianity (Gift 114). There is a fundamental incommensurability in any ethics of obligation.

It is the similar with the story of Abraham and Isaac at Moriah. God asks Abraham to give his only son in order to prove his love for God. There is an incommensurability in the exchange. But there is a fundamental difference between the eye-for-eye law, even in its incommensurable formulations, and Abraham's sacrifice. As Derrida calls it, it is a *gift* of death. Abraham does not exchange anything with God. It is a gift of love, which is also a gift of death. What is essential to Abraham's gift is that he keep it a secret. He cannot tell his family, and he is wholly other from God since God must exact this request in order to know Abraham's mind. "Abraham is the other, and another, God as the other, as wholly other. Abraham himself is in secret, cut off both from man and from God" (Gift 79). When Isaac asks him from where will the sacrificial lamb come, Abraham's answer is a non-answer, both the truth and an evasion—God will provide. Derrida notes, "This is a strange responsibility that consists neither of responding nor of not responding. Is one responsible for what one says in an unintelligible language, in the language of the other" (Gift 74)? The President's negotiation with the Soviet Premier is not a gift; it is in the idiom of the eye for an eye law. The President's hand is raised over New York, but it will only fall if Moscow is destroyed. The President's act is not an act of ultimate faith. So why does he invoke the Abraham story instead of the eye-for-eye law?

First, it is because, at the surface, Abraham's story looks like a story of sacrifice. But in fact, the story of Abraham is not at all about sacrifice. Abraham is in the Real—caught incommensurably between man and God in a place from which he cannot speak, or rather, where he can only speak the most undecidable of signifiers. What Derrida calls Abraham's

secret is Lacan's language of the Other. The President invokes the story of the Father of Judaism, the signifier of the Law of the Father, in order to make sense of the radical situation at hand, even as it does not apply; the President is engaging an ethics of obligation under the rubric of a story which really about a gift: Abraham's gift of death to God. This is the President's lie: "Things are such that this man [someone like Abraham] would surely be condemned by any civilized society. On the other hand, the smooth functioning of a society, the monotonous complacency of its discourses on morality, politics, and the law, and the exercise of its rights . . . are in no way impaired by the fact that . . . because of the mechanisms of external debt and other similar inequities, that same 'society' *puts to death or allows* to die of hunger and disease tens of millions of children . . . Not only is it true that such a society participates in this incalculable sacrifice, it actually organizes it" (Gift 86). The President invokes that grand narrative, the master signifier, of Abraham as the ordering principle of what are essentially the workings of a capitalist regime. Five million New Yorkers must die because it is the right thing to do—much the same as Abraham was right to raise his hand to Isaac. What gets lost in this invocation is this: Abraham raised his hand to Isaac out of *love*—love for God—not out of obligation. For Lacan, obligation is the limit of the Law.

Second, the Abraham narrative is above all a narrative of the Father. The discursive structure of the eye-for-an-eye paradigm does not register the law of the father but rather the law of capital exchange. While the negotiation scene is in fact constructed as barter, a gentlemen's agreement, it is discursively formulated to appear as a narrative of "fatherly love." The

president must not function as a capitalist subject but instead as a paternalized figure who is prepared to and indeed does make the ultimate sacrifice. The U.S./Soviet negotiations are a conversation between *fathers*. The discourse of the Law of the Father *must* eclipse the law of capitalist exchange. And while no women figure significantly in the U.S./Soviet negotiations scene (Blackie's family, who are to perish in New York when the president gives the order to drop a nuclear bomb, are never even seen after the opening sequence of the film), the discursive work is done. Gender ideology serves to *mask* the ethics of capital.

### **Conclusion**

It is impossible to say which came first—gender difference or the difference inherent in a system of exchange. Such a project is purely archaeological; but even more importantly it is unnecessary for understanding the ways in which gender and capitalism work discursively *both* in culture *and* in theoretical discourse. Conspiracy culture is situated as one possible intersection for understanding the theoretical problematic of subjectivity, precisely because conspiracy culture arises out of the condition of the instability of the poststructural subject. The subject of conspiracy culture is synecdochal for the post-war subject in principally two ways: the condition of the conspiracy theorist's knowledge is the same as that of the Lacanian subject; and the discursive contours that shape conspiracy culture fall inexorably along the lines of gender. These discursive contours of gender work dialectically to both conceal and reify capitalist ideology. The study of conspiracy culture and its narratives gives us a way—but not necessarily the only way—to see and articulate these ideological systems.

## Chapter Four Masculinity in the Novels of Philip K. Dick

My wish is that . . . the typical male subject, like his female counterpart, might learn to live with lack (Silverman Male Subjectivity at the Margins 65).

The quintessential Dick character is the paradigm of masculine subjectivity in crisis: he is uncertain in his job, his interpersonal relationships, and in his own sense of himself. Carl Freedman has noted that Dick's "stature [as the greatest of all science fiction authors] can be at least partly explained by his preeminence in the production of paranoid ideology, his uniquely rigorous and consistent representations of human subjects caught in the web of commodities and conspiracies" (Incomplete Projects 157). Dick's most meaningful representations of subjectivity are almost exclusively of a masculine subject in crisis. When Dick represents women, if they are not essentially irrelevant or reactive, they figure as integral components of the conspiracy webs in which the main male characters are netted. The one exception is The Transmigration of Timothy Archer, where the main narrator is a woman who makes all the observations.

Rather than consider in detail Dick's representation of women, I will instead consider Dick's representation of men in Martian Time Slip and Dr. Bloodmoney as a way of suggesting that within Dick's larger critique of American hegemony is the beginning of an analysis of gender in post-atomic culture. It will become clear that atomic detonation is a reified image, to the degree that it functions as the organizing symbolic in Cold War ideology. In this way, atomic detonation functions as the desired phallus. This is so much the case that I will show the way in which Fredric Jameson's critique of Dr. Bloodmoney also reifies atomic detonation to the degree that he forecloses

some of the abundant possibilities of the novel. Dick works to dereify atomic detonation in Dr. Bloodmoney; because of this, his novel begins an analysis of gender, even if it does not finish that analysis or maintain a self-consciousness about doing so. In fact, we will see that Dick articulates, rather than a trafficking in women's bodies, an unending tradeoff in men's bodies.

It may certainly be argued that Dick's record of representing women is the result of a virulent misogyny. The important point to notice, however, is that even Dick's male characters, who emerge squarely in the Cold War era between the 50s and the 70s, are as equally in crisis as is the 90s, post-Cold War SF/conspiracy character Fox Mulder of the Fox Network television show The X Files.<sup>1</sup> Mulder emerges as the paradigmatic conspiracy theorist of the 90s. Here Mulder is paired with Dana Scully, an intelligent and independent woman who in addition to being an FBI investigator is also a medical doctor. The X Files may properly be thought of as post-second-wave feminist, to the degree that it represents an independent woman functioning in a traditionally male profession. It is possible to think that this "post-feminist" historical moment is the cause of masculine crisis, and thus explains Mulder's particular paranoia. Dick's novels demonstrate, however, that the masculine American subject has been in crisis for much longer, and not as a reaction to any substantive change in the status of women. There are a number of similarities between Fox Mulder and Dick's characters, such that in a sense Mulder is indeed an heir to some of Dick's most famous subjects.

Any serious study of Dick's work will show preeminently two things: that Dick's accomplishments were remarkably uneven, and that Dick felt generic pressures in nearly

every direction. The former is, no doubt, causally related to the latter. Dick wrote several realist novels, only one of which was published during his lifetime. Dick began to write science fiction mainly because of economic pressures: he couldn't make money writing his realism, but when in 1952 Dick published his first science fiction story, he knew that generic demands necessitated his writing SF in order to support himself. Generic pressures, in other words, show themselves here for their material reality. However, as Kim Stanley Robinson notes, Dick was not satisfied to produce the kind of SF that was characteristic of the Golden Age; he preferred instead to pursue his goal of sociopolitical critique. SF magazine Astounding editor John W. Campbell had throughout the 1940s demarcated and effectively controlled the parameters of the genre of science fiction with his strict editorial limits on the content of the stories he published. He was essentially conservative in his editorial tendencies. The period of the 40s, under Campbell's control, is considered the Golden Age. But by the early 1950s two new magazines had come into existence that were more open to the idea of a SF that engaged a sociopolitical critique. Anthony Boucher, editor of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, published Dick's first SF short story. When Dick began critiquing American society, he broke decisively from the Golden Age of science fiction (Robinson 8-12). In this regard, Dick became, given the material conditions, a genre bender. There is a sense in which, then, Dick both conforms and transgresses in the same move. In order to be published he conformed to the necessity of writing science fiction, but once associated with that genre he chose to push its boundaries.

There is much to be said for an author who challenges the limits of a genre. It is, indeed, as Derrida has shown in “The Law of Genre,” precisely the limits of genre which make possible those violations that result in new and innovative literature. One of the principal ways in which Dick implemented his sociopolitical critique was in the mode of satire. Regarding satire, Dustin Griffin notes that “Satirists, no less than historians, must construct their characters, in the sense that they must decide what attitudes and responses they wish to evoke, what aspects they choose to bring into focus. To assume that a satirist *or* a historian is simply referring to “truth” or to “history” is to be persuaded by that writer’s version of events” (SCR 132, note deleted, Griffin’s emphasis). As we saw in Chapter One, satire as a literary form is structurally very similar to historical fiction. And the mark of science fiction is its inexorable connection to history; for, if we follow Darko Suvin’s model of cognitive estrangement, the defining feature of SF is its connection to *this* world. The estrangement from our current circumstances is only meaningful if the narrative events present themselves as becoming a possible history. Therefore, one of Dick’s extraordinary accomplishments is the way in which he connected science fiction formally to the critical possibilities of satire. Dick extended the continuum of history and science fiction to include satirical discourse.

But Dick’s achievements in the bending of genre are limited. One of the more recent developments in genre theory has been the feminist critique of genre. Feminist deconstruction of genre has taken mainly two turns. It has noted the history of the notion of genre, and has made special use of its violability. Anne Cranny-Francis has noted that after the romantic period, with its valorization of the individual, inspired, original work,

genre came to have a pejorative sense because genre marks precisely the opposite of the romantic notion of the creative self: genre, in other words, marks commonness. In truth, however, all fiction, including romantic fiction, is generic. It's just that many genres work to hide their conventionality, and "When the conventions became invisible, so did their social and ideological function" (93). Second, and following from the first, feminists have used this specificity both to mark masculinist texts and to find a literature that expresses an exclusively feminist voice. While Dick's turn toward sociopolitical critique in his SF is a clear and visible bending of the genre, he has made no such turn toward a critique of gender. In fact, it may be said of Dick's work that the conventionality of his characters is obscured by just that invisibility that feminists have indicated. And while gender in Dick's oeuvre is, in the face of his otherwise sometimes incisive sociopolitical critique, remarkably conventional, it is my goal here to make the masculinism of his work visible, and to articulate the structure of that masculinity.

To begin with, several patterns of character development emerge in Dick's work that may be summarily articulated. Kim Stanley Robinson has noted that for a majority of his novels, Dick relies on a fairly stable character system that features, in Dick's own nomenclature, a "Big Protagonist" and a "Little Protagonist." The big protagonist and the little protagonist are always in meaningful relation to one another within the structure of the plot. And there is always, Robinson comments, a "Mistress" that somehow figures and occasionally mediates between the big and little protagonists (17-18). These protagonists are of course always male. This pattern is so consistent that its absence in

other novels, like The Man in the High Castle and Dr. Bloodmoney, makes for profound shifts in the structure of Dick's sociopolitical critique.

The fictional worlds that these characters inhabit in this pattern are worlds that most often situate women only in relation to men. Eve Sedgwick has called this phenomenon "the male trafficking of women" (16). Sedgwick argues that "changes in the structure of the continuum of male 'homosocial desire' were tightly, often causally bound up with the other more visible changes; that the emerging pattern of male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, rivalry, and hetero- and homosexuality was in an intimate and shifting relation to class; and that no element of that pattern can be understood outside of its relation to women and the gender system as a whole" (1). Dick's big and little protagonists relate to one another in a variety of ways, and in every sense Sedgwick's model describes these relations. The little protagonist "is little in the sense that he is poor and powerless . . . Usually the little protagonist is employed by the big protagonist, and usually the action of the plot revolves around the opposition between these two figures, although they may begin as allies" (Robinson 17). The relation between Dick's big and little protagonists is always constructed around class distinctions. The little protagonist is described as such not because he is a minor character—in fact, he is almost always the main character or hero—but rather because he is always inferior to the big protagonist within the character relations that are inscribed in the narrative. He is in fact usually the hero of the novel. In spite of his hero status, the little protagonist always finds himself answering to a man to whom he is subordinate.

In Martian Time Slip, for instance, Arnie Kott, the provincial, wealthy, and corrupt union boss hires Jack Bohlen, a working-class skilled tradesman, to be his personal repairman. Jack is the hero of the novel, although Arnie is a vaguely sympathetic character. The class relations between Arnie and Jack exacerbate Jack's nascent mental illness. At the same time, fitting Sedgwick's model, Arnie's mistress, Doreen, becomes involved with Jack. When Jack asks Doreen if their sleeping together is okay with Arnie, Doreen says, "Yes. Don't worry about Arnie; he's not possessive, if you know what I mean" (119). In a sense Arnie and Jack share Doreen; Arnie is always concerned mainly with what Jack can *do* for him. He is far less possessive of Doreen than he is of the objects that he has hired Jack to repair. If anything, Doreen is just one of so many objects to Arnie. Doreen is, as Sedgwick notes, precisely "between men." At the same time, Jack is the more powerless in this triad. Arnie is his employer, so everything that Jack does is mediated by this relationship. While Jack is the hero of the novel he is always in a position of taking directions from the person who controls his livelihood. Dick's heroes, in this way, are not the sine qua non of masculinity; a more powerful male figure in the class hierarchy always dominates him. In this scene with Doreen, Jack is, even as he is having sex with Doreen, anxious about his class position. Sedgwick's model allows for this class mediation; and even though Doreen is trafficked, that does nothing to mitigate the masculine anxiety that emerges in Dick's triad.

One of Dick's primary concerns throughout his work is the draining effect that business relationships have on personal life in 20<sup>th</sup> century America. In Martian Time Slip, as in so many of his novels, he puts a fine touch on his critique of this condition of

capitalism. So it seems somewhat odd that his rendering of gender relations would persist in such a conventional way. While one may be tempted to suggest that, after all, Dick was merely reflecting the gender ideology of the time, this temptation should be resisted. Much of Dick's work resisted the hegemonic ideology of the time in other regards, most notably capitalist human relations; so his failure to resist gender ideologies is inconsistent. Dick may or may not himself have been intimately acquainted with Marxism, but in any case his study of class, modes of production, and hegemonic ideologies certainly attests to some familiarity with its contributions. I contend that Dick's work is an instance of the failure of critiques of class relations to encounter and somehow account for gender in the structure of American society. Admittedly, Dick altered his positioning of his women characters somewhat in The Transmigration of Timothy Archer, where the main character is a woman and from whose first person point of view the story is related. But for a majority of his works he involves two men in a specifically defined class relation, and between them, often as negotiator, stands a woman who is almost invariably more two-dimensional in development than the men.

However, Dick does not maintain this pattern consistently throughout his novels. Most prominently, he alters this pattern in the novel Dr. Bloodmoney, to which I will turn shortly. It is not enough to say that Dick is sexist, because there are moments in his novels where he exhibits an almost prophetic vision of non-linear subjectivity. When in Martian Time-Slip Jack, Doreen, and Arnie all experience varieties of the time slip, Dick has them all experience a period of time over and over; the experiences overlap, such that it is impossible to tell who is experiencing the slip during any given viewpoint. This

deconstruction of subjectivity resembles the work of (dis)unified subjectivity in Joanna Russ's extraordinary 1975 feminist novel The Female Man. In that novel, Russ has four women from alternate timelines gather together in our present (of 1975)—however, they are all the same woman. That is, they are the same woman as she would be in each of these alternate timelines. Like Lacan, Russ challenges the teleological notion of a linear, unified subjectivity, which the French feminists furthered by challenging Lacan's privileged signifier. French feminists took Derrida's critique of logocentrism and modified it to account for the priority of the phallus in western culture; their work resulted in yet another neologism, phallogocentrism. The French feminist argument rests on the understanding that all too frequently western culture *and* its critics fail to acknowledge the integral place the phallus enjoys in western hegemony.

Dick engages a deconstruction of linear subjectivity in Martian Time Slip, and he does so by means of time manipulation, much like Russ. It seems unfair to suggest that Dick is *incapable* of making the connection of gender; what is more probable is that the connection simply did not present itself as structurally *necessary*. Jameson notes in "Pleasure: A Political Issue" that political agendas that wish to critique the hegemony often come up against gender because gender is so decisively coded as *pleasure*, regardless of the fact that gender may be plainly distinguished from pleasure. It is clear that for Dick gender means nothing other than heterosexual desire—romantic love. In any event, Dick never explored gender as a category separate and apart from pleasure; because of this, his sociopolitical critique suffers. Nonetheless, Dick's critique of

American culture comes terribly *close* to a critique of gender if for no other reason than because he represents masculinity as a subject in crisis.

The critique of phallogocentrism does not stop with the author of fiction. Critics as well often fail to make the connection of gender. Whereas Dick explores masculine subjectivity in crisis, Jameson in “Character Systems in Dr. Bloodmoney” forecloses on this important component of Dick’s novel, and he does so by reifying atomic detonation. He notes Dick’s remarkable ability to blend, or complicate, the distinction between subjective and objective reality: “Dick’s force lies in the effort to retain possession and use of both apparently contradictory, mutually exclusive subjective and objective explanation systems all at once” (27). However, as Jameson notes, in Dr. Bloodmoney we have an unusual narrative circumstance, one which does not appear often in Dick’s oeuvre: we see the actual mushroom clouds and bombs going off. Because atomic detonation, Jameson tells us, is the ultimate collective experience, Dick must assimilate this collective reality into his deconstructed paradigm. I argue that we need to stop and consider how atomic explosion figures into the drama of masculine crisis. Jameson seems to think, and he *is* writing in 1975, that atomic detonation is indeed totalizing; therefore, the imagery of the mushroom signifies for Jameson, and for the whole Cold War ideology, the ultimate real. Atomic explosion erupts both *as* the real and *as* the symbolic *into* the real. Atomic explosion is both inarticulable and the ultimate articulation. Jameson sets up the atomic detonation in Dr. Bloodmoney in his schemata as the final totality against which Dick must situate his aesthetic problematic.

I challenge Jameson's enunciation of the problematic in Dr. Bloodmoney, simply because Dick finally does not express atomic detonation as totalizing in this novel. The post-atomic world in Dr. Bloodmoney is neither collective nor especially coherent. The communities sustain themselves after a rural fashion and they rudimentarily communicate amongst themselves. In fact, Stuart McConchie resembles an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century entrepreneur in his plan for developing a transport system for Andrew Gill's cigarette products; the humans in Dr. Bloodmoney are reinstating capitalist enterprise. The communities have, in other words, survived, a fact that the notion of totalizing destruction does not allow, and they have survived precisely *not* in a collective or totalizing way. The final line of the novel emphasizes this point: "The business of the day had begun. All around her the city was awakening, back once more into its regular life" (298). While Dick's work is thoroughly an artifact of Cold War ideology, his schema in Dr. Bloodmoney is not as simple as Jameson's theory suggests.

In fact, Dick is working actively to deconstruct the notion of total destruction as actively as he is the notion of subjective versus objective reality. But before we consider Dick's articulation, we need to stop and explore the implications of a notion of total destruction. Admittedly, I am writing from a post-Cold War perspective, whereas Jameson is writing in a decidedly Cold War ideological moment. Twenty-first century denizens are more likely to imagine such a device as a "tactical nuclear warhead," which means essentially that nuclear detonation may be conceived as a non-totalizing event. Nonetheless, it is useful to remember that in 1975 Jameson is himself, as are we all, writing in a post-atomic age: Truman ordered the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and

Nagasaki in 1945. And while that detonation was certainly massively destructive to those communities, there is no sense in which we can really understand those events as totalizing. It is the *ideology* of the Cold War that imposes the notion of totalization, and for that reason we should be especially suspicious of it. I would in fact argue that totalization is a kind of fantasy; in this vastly decentralized, global, late capitalist, image-dominated world, the idea of totalization, even total destruction, works as a kind of hope for a final, collective, unified human experience.

I am not suggesting that total destruction is not *possible*. I imagine, as anyone would, that enough nuclear bombs detonated at exactly the same time, or even the resultant fallout, would destroy the planet as we know it. But this speculation is not substantively different from other possibilities of total destruction; therefore, speculation of total destruction is not uniquely the result of the nuclear age. In fact, speculation about total destruction is most often charged *politically*: in the cases of both nuclear destruction and global warming, the notion of total destruction is propagated by the opposing faction. The question is this: does the existence of nuclear detonation necessitate the historical, practical *feasibility* of total destruction? I am not saying it doesn't. I am suggesting that this question has not been, and cannot be, answered, whereas Cold War ideology gives us to think that it *has* been answered. The question of the practical feasibility of true total destruction cannot ever be answered because, quite simply, if it can indeed be accomplished there will be no one to know about it. The ideology of total destruction is the death drive *par excellence*.<sup>2</sup> If anything, nuclear detonation problematizes in a very special way the intersection of possibility, politics, reality, and history and uniquely

foregrounds the function of ideology. Moreover, atomic detonation foregrounds the desire for a unified, cohesive human subjective experience.

The atomic detonation in Dr. Bloodmoney functions as an important site for an exploration of the masculine subject in crisis. Since histories as well as ideologies (and the history of ideologies) are at issue here, Jameson's articulation of the aesthetics of atomic explosion is no less relevant for my disputing it. Jameson's schema of atomic explosion in Dr. Bloodmoney accurately represents Jameson's effort to reintroduce the symbolic into the real of the post-atomic world of the novel.

For unlike the time warps and the times sags, the hallucinations and the four-dimensional mirages of the other books, atomic holocaust is a collective event about whose reality *the reader cannot but decide*. Dick's narrative ambiguity can accommodate individual experience, but runs greater risks in evoking the materials of world history, the flat *yes* or *no* of the mushroom cloud (27, my emphasis, Jameson's emphasis).

But whereas Jameson effectively reasserts the symbolic in his theory, Dick's relation to the symbolic in Dr. Bloodmoney is more complicated. Lacan understood that the primary process in all psychoses is *foreclosure*, which involves primarily the exclusion of the symbolic father. Because in 1975 nuclear detonation was situated ideologically as the ultimate collectively understood utterance, for Jameson it is then the final assertion of the symbolic. He therefore forecloses the possibility that the articulation in Dr. Bloodmoney is not in fact a totalizing one. By contrast, Dick profoundly and uncharacteristically asserts the image of the mushroom clouds in Dr. Bloodmoney, but he does not finally accept it as a totalizing event. There are, in fact, *three* overwhelmingly destructive events in the novel: the first destruction of 1972, the subsequent event known in the novel as World War III, and the final nuclear explosions at the end of the novel. Dick may very

well be thought of as a true paranoid, unlike Jerry in the film Conspiracy Theory (as we saw in Chapter One), because he does not order the events of the novel around the drama of the Oedipal complex. The assertion of the phallus in the Oedipal drama effectively brings it to a close. Dick does not allow atomic blast to function as closure; in fact, the characters in Dr. Bloodmoney all function in a complex post-atomic community, albeit an altogether reorganized one. The paranoiac resists the symbolic; he remains in the realm of the imaginary and so rejects the symbolic order of the father. The net result of Dick's novelistic nightmare amounts to a vision of a subject without the symbolic power of the phallus.

Dick does not privilege nuclear detonation as the singular organizing event; in fact, the novel explodes into a complicated schema of masculine subjects who have a variety of proficiencies and deficiencies. I agree with Jameson's observation that Dick presents "a whole *constellation of peculiar characters*" to deal with atomic blast (28, Jameson's emphasis). However, I don't think, as Jameson does, that Dick has orchestrated this series of characters *in spite of* or even *because of* the narratological problems of nuclear destruction. Rather, Dick has cast the unusual host of characters in Dr. Bloodmoney as *structurally inherent* to the problematic of nuclear destruction. These characters are "peculiar" for Jameson because in 1975 the overt and explicit representation of masculinity in crisis was indeed quite "peculiar." Jameson acknowledges that very often in Dick's novels there are no pure heroes. They are typically, as in most post-Romantic narratives, anti-heroes with flaws, shortcomings, and not too clear a sense of themselves *as* heroes. This is even truer in Dr. Bloodmoney,

where there is not a central figure from which events are observed or actions taken. Dick does not have just *one* anti-hero in this novel; he has disseminated the masculine subject into four primary male figures, all of which have special powers and special deficiencies, a schema which Jameson articulates very well. It is precisely because Dick figures atomic blast as non-totalizing that these characters emerge in the post-atomic world of the novel. Since in the Dickian landscape no singular event can function as the organizing symbolic, the characters cannot arrange and define themselves as subjects adequately against it. In fact, Dr. Bloodmoney is unique among Dick's novels for precisely this reason, because in this novel we have four main male characters instead of Dick's usual characterology of Big Protagonist/Little Protagonist.

The four principal characters essential to the structure of Dr. Bloodmoney, as Jameson argues, are Hoppy Harrington, Bill Keller the homunculus, Walt Dangerfield, and Dr. Bruno Bluthgeld. Hoppy Harrington appears first, and while this fact might suggest he is at the center of the novel, Dick works actively to situate Hoppy within a structure of relations. Hoppy is a phocomelus; he perambulates by way of a device that is both a wheelchair and a prosthesis (provided to him by the American government). He is a thalidomide child from 1964, so his physical disabilities are not the result of the 1972 destruction. Hoppy, while he has no arms or legs, has kinesthetic power: he can manipulate objects at a distance. Walt Dangerfield is an ordinary human who, as the result of a failed mission to Mars, is orbiting the earth endlessly in a spaceship. He is in the privileged position of receiving communications from all areas of the globe and transmitting whatever information he thinks is interesting or necessary. He does not relate

*every* piece of information he receives, so while he has the capability of being a centralizing unified source of information he does not in fact provide that for earth. Very often, he transmits music or readings from W. Somerset Maugham novels; he sees himself as the guardian of what remains of human culture. Dr. Bruno Bluthgeld is the man responsible for the science that leads to the 1972 meltdown as well as the 1981 destruction of World War III. He has psychotic visions, and in characteristic Dickian style, it is never clear whether Bluthgeld's psychotic delusion of planetary control is nothing more than hallucination, or whether Bluthgeld does in fact have mental control over events. Finally, Bill Keller is a homunculus who lives inside of his sister Edie Keller's body. He can speak and hear, but he cannot see. He has a body, but it isn't until the end of the novel that we see how exactly he takes corporeal form. He can also hear the dead, which gives him a privileged position at key points in the narrative.

All of these characters are male and all of them enjoy certain privileges and suffer certain deficits. Jameson notes that these four characters roughly oppose one another, where Hoppy and Dangerfield are one rough opposition and Bill and Bluthgeld the other. However, Jameson is quick to note that these characters do not work meaningfully in opposition to one another. Rather, "these beings, taken together, organize themselves into systematic permutations of a fairly limited complex of ideas or characteristics which turns around the notion of *organisms and organs*, of mechanical contrivances, and (in the case of the phocomelus) of prostheses" (29). Dick situates these characters as integral components of a structure, the basis of which is a displacement of the opposition between subject and object (or narrating hero and bad guy) onto the opposition between organisms

and organs. And yet again, Jameson notes that this opposition is not any neater than any other of Dick's configurations. None of these four male characters are purely organic or mechanical but rather varying degrees of both. The important point is that they are structurally related to one another: when Hoppy attempts to overtake Dangerfield remotely, he sets in motion a shift in the relations between these four characters such that it is structural and systemic that none of these characters will ever emerge as a unified subject. Rather than turning on a single male subject, the novel turns, as Jameson points out, on a structural relation between organisms and mechanical contrivances. The condition of any one male character will change given certain narratological circumstances involving the other male characters: in the case of Bill the homunculus, he takes corporeal form as Hoppy's oppositional relationship to Dangerfield shifts and fails. Hoppy's prostheses can do nothing to resist Bill's propensity to "steal" bodies. In fact, Bill has no body on which Hoppy may act kinesthetically.

Jameson is arguing, although he doesn't put it this way, that these four characters are in relation systemically and so, therefore, it is meaningless to speak of any one of them as central or singular. Their respective ontological conditions cannot be understood apart from one another. I think Jameson is right; this characterology is essential to understanding the infrastructure of the novel. This "constellation of peculiar characters" is analogous to Dick's deconstruction of linear subjectivity in Martian Time Slip, and it is similar to Joanna Russ's feminist critique of linear subjectivity in The Female Man. Jameson's strength is his ability to tease out structures; what he fails to note is the way in which these structures are specifically *gendered*. Because Jameson fails to distinguish

total nuclear destruction as ideological, he is consigned to assert it as the organizing symbolic phallus—and in doing so he effaces its mark *as* phallus. As I noted above, Anne Cranny-Francis points out that when conventions become invisible, so do their social and ideological function. In Jameson's theoretical analysis, the ideology of total destruction *as* ideology becomes invisible. This analysis oversimplifies Dick's critique of hegemony in Dr. Bloodmoney.

Dick does not represent total destruction; his narrative of the day of nuclear explosion revolves around the disunified enunciation of the experience of several of the survivors and no one experience is prioritized over the other. Andrew Gill and Bonnie Keller have a sexual encounter during the chaos, indulging themselves as though, indeed, there were no tomorrow. But there is a tomorrow; Bonnie has twins (Bill the homunculus and Edie) as the result of the encounter with Andrew, and their story does continue. It seems that Dick is aware of the problem of conceiving total destruction, since it necessitates a supererogatory oppositional schema, something to which Dick is resistant. That Dick must then orchestrate a specifically *masculine* characterological system, even one that is in crisis, in order to stabilize the narrative is something that Jameson entirely misses. What is significantly different about Dr. Bloodmoney is the way in which the male characters are differently organized specifically as the result of the problematic of nuclear detonation. In Martian Time Slip, Dick figures the main male characters in opposition to one another as Big Protagonist and Little Protagonist with a woman mediating between them. This characterological schema diverges radically in Dr. Bloodmoney to include two more male characters, none of which are opposed

meaningfully to one another, and have no mediating woman, but rather work within in a complex morphology of masculine structures as a response to the problematic of the post-atomic age. There is no hierarchical relation between the four characters.

We can understand the substantive difference between the male characters in Dr. Bloodmoney and Martian Time Slip if we return to Eve Sedgwick's model of male trafficking in women and explore how the women are positioned in Dr. Bloodmoney. All four male characters are involved not in the exchange of women but rather in an unending tradeoff of male bodies. Hoppy Harrington, the phocomelus, has no primary relationship with a woman. He has no arms or legs and so must peregrinate in a government-issue wheelchair that is outfitted with mechanical arms. In this sense he lacks the typical virility associated with the masculine hero. He manipulates objects, however, not only by the prosthesis but also with his mind. He desires more than anything else at the beginning of the novel to prove his mettle to Jim Fergesson, the owner of the TV repair shop, by repairing a phonograph, and he does so using his kinesthetic powers. He uses his incorporeal ability to establish himself as a viable laborer in the workforce hierarchy, but he is not subordinated to his employer Jim Fergesson, who is killed in the blasts of 1981. This represents a profound break in Dick's characterological schema. By the end of the novel he has developed this unusual skill to extreme personal advantage. Hoppy is not in any hermetic oppositional relation to any one of the other men, and his relations with the other characters in the novel are not mediated significantly by a woman character. Hoppy, thus, compensates for his lack of body parts by a literally disembodied talent. Both Hoppy and Walt Dangerfield function

by means of mechanical prosthetics: Hoppy has his wheelchair, and Dangerfield has his spaceship with its communications system. Dangerfield's wife Lydia dies not long after their journey in the spaceship begins, so for the majority of the novel he orbits earth in the spaceship by himself. At the end of the novel Hoppy tries to overtake the communications system on the ship and pose as Dangerfield (Hoppy has a remarkable ability to mimic voices), but he fails. Jameson notes the opposition between Hoppy and Dangerfield; what is significant about this masculine interaction is that there is no woman who mediates this rivalry. The unwitting Dangerfield is vulnerable to this attack; and Hoppy ultimately fails to overtake the ship and its systems. There is a perpetual exchange of male bodies between Hoppy and Dangerfield: Hoppy has no organic appendages, but he compensates with his mind. He tries to assume Dangerfield's voice and identity, but cannot finally because Bill the homunculus stops him. In every sense, these male rivalries play out on a stage that is absent of any mediating female character.

The other two main male characters, Bluthgeld and Bill, do have relationships with significant female characters. Bonnie Keller has been Bluthgeld's apologist for a very long time, since at least the first nuclear accident of 1972. Bluthgeld had gone into hiding after the war of 1981. He lives in the Marin County community under the pseudonym Jack Tree, where Bonnie Keller also lives. She keeps concealed his identity until very late in the novel. Bluthgeld has similar powers as Hoppy, or at least it is never made clear whether Bluthgeld is psychotic or actually controlling events. At the end of the novel more nuclear explosions occur (for the *third* time in the novel's world) and Bluthgeld either imagines himself setting them off or actually does set them off by mind

control. That the novel leaves this unclear goes precisely to Dick's deconstruction of the distinction between objective and subjective reality. In any case, Bluthgeld succumbs to Hoppy's far superior kinesthetic powers; Hoppy sends Bluthgeld far up into the air and lets him drop to the ground—and he does this all from a distance. Bonnie does not mediate this rivalry. Bluthgeld stands as possibly the most powerful threat to Hoppy's ever-growing powers; this male rivalry is firmly resolved without the destruction or exchange of any women's bodies.

The relationship between Bill Keller and his sister Edie is perhaps the most troubling of all the relationships. Bill is a homunculus; the theory of the homunculus is a residue of the 18<sup>th</sup> century medical theory of preformation, where a fully formed human was thought to reside in the original sperm cell and only increased in size. Dick is therefore working with an antiquated biological theory in his story of the future. Bill resides in his sister's body for the majority of the novel. He is somehow able to exit her body when there is another creature near enough for him to enter, and at one point she does "give birth" to Bill by bringing him close to an earthworm. The symbolism is eerie, and Edie's menacing plan to put Bill in an earthworm is plainly Dick's misogyny presenting itself. Edie mediates sight for Bill—he can hear and feel but he cannot see anything. At the end of the novel, Bill leaves Edie's body of his own will and ends up trading bodies with Hoppy. Bill "becomes" Hoppy, and Hoppy dies as a barely formed homunculus. Edie mediates the world for Bill, and she nurtures him for a majority of the novel. And while Bill can only function as part of Edie, his ultimate rivalry with Hoppy is

resolved at the expense of Hoppy, and not at all at Edie's expense. Edie is not exchanged in the relationship between Hoppy and Bill.

All of these four male characters interact with one another on their own terms, without trafficking in women. Most importantly, these four characters experience profound exchange in *male* bodies rather than female bodies. In the end, Bill and Dangerfield survive, but with compromised bodies: Bill is phocomelic and Dangerfield is very sick, although he may very well recover from his illness. These characters must negotiate their masculinity under the extreme duress of partial male bodies. Jameson argues that Bluthgeld and Hoppy lose in this epic struggle because they are associated with physics—Bluthgeld being the mad scientist and Hoppy being mechanically inclined—and that this is because Dick is denigrating science and its “progress.” I argue that Bluthgeld and Hoppy's fates are by themselves less significant than the fact that *all four* of the male characters suffer the effects of radically mediated bodies. After Bill assumes Hoppy's body he says, “I have to get used to this body; it's heavy. I feel gravity . . . I'm used to just floating about” (286). Even though Bill now has a body with which he may see and interact with the world, he is still in no sense really whole. Similarly, while Dangerfield may very well recover from his illness, he is still stuck in the orbiting spaceship with no promise of ever being released from his lonely trajectory.

Because Dick must situate these characters in relation to the aesthetic problematic of nuclear destruction, his male characterology must then shift to accommodate it. Dick is aware of the reification of atomic detonation and destruction, and as is his tendency he avoids positing it as the unifying, totalizing event. In doing so, Dick divests the atomic

explosions of their position as phallus; once he displaces the phallus in this way, his male characterology is destabilized. None of the male characters possess the phallus in Dr. Bloodmoney and, in fact, none of the male characters ever emerge as superior or supreme even in the end. Most importantly, the phallus is never stabilized by the sacrifice or destruction of a woman. Rather than trafficking in women, the characters in Dr. Bloodmoney traffic in male bodies, all of which are compromised in one way or another not as the direct eventual result of nuclear destruction, but rather as part of the inherent structural condition of the dereification of the atomic explosion as phallus. Jameson's analysis of the characterology in Dr. Bloodmoney is entirely accurate until he reifies atomic detonation and thus forecloses on Dick's abundant study of male subjectivity in crisis. As Kaja Silverman has shown in Male Subjectivity at the Margins, the discourse of war is at the center of the construction of masculinity. In her study of the film The Best Years of Our Lives, she points out how World War II constructed that masculinity only to leave it completely destabilized in the post war period. Best Years represents the returning veterans in varying stages of mutilation. Dick's work does much the same, for in the post-atomic ages of Dr. Bloodmoney, the four main male characters are also in varying stages of mutilation. Dick goes a step further in dereifying the atomic blast itself as phallus.

As is often the case, masculinity is rendered invisible both in primary literary texts as well as the secondary theoretical discourses about those texts. In the case of the primary text, the invisibility often results from a particular mode of representation; in secondary critical discourse the invisibility comes in the form of effaced theoretical

paradigms. Silverman suggests that the horror of seeing representations of mutilated masculinity causes commentators to blind themselves to its reality. She says, “[Commentators’ reactions] . . . closely approximate the reactions attributed by Freud to the male subject at the sight of female genitals” (Male Subjectivity 89). I have been discussing simultaneously in detail Jameson’s effacement of the masculinity inherent in a theoretical paradigm of Cold War ideology of total destruction and Dick’s deconstruction of masculinity within his larger critique of American hegemony. Dick is frequently criticized for his narrowly developed characters, and while this criticism is often fair, his deconstruction of masculinity is far more than just casual. Nonetheless, it seems that Dick is hardly self-conscious of gender as he works through his various permutations of the male anti-hero. His female characters are ordinarily quite underdeveloped, if not simply villainous. This Dickian lapse in vision when it comes to gender is out of place when we consider his occasionally brilliant studies of American class and consumer capitalism. There is, thus, a similarity between Jameson and Dick in this way. Both Jameson and Dick, coming from their respective and dissimilar discourses, have gender in their (mostly Marxist) purviews, but they are uneven at best in their capacity to visualize the integral role that gender plays in *all* human structures.

And yet, when we evaluate Dick’s theoretical patterns, that of deconstructing oppositions and specifically that of the subject and object, it is clear that his work resembles Derrida’s critique of logocentrism. It is just four letters and a few steps to a critique of phallogocentrism, a journey many critics and fiction writers often fail to make. Moreover, Dick’s work shows up the degree to which critics of capitalism fail to estimate

the importance of gender to the fundamental structure of all ideologies. Nonetheless, while Dick fails to chart this critique his work cannot be dismissed as merely sexist, because he marks an important moment in a deconstructive and Marxist critique of masculine culture. His work in Dr. Bloodmoney articulates keenly how an analysis of American post-war ideological and an economic structure, which includes a complicated representation of masculinity in crisis, might begin.

We must return to a discussion of genre in order to understand more clearly why Dick fails to see gender as a critical category. Raffaella Baccolini has considered a new category of utopian literature, the critical dystopia, in order to understand how feminist science fiction writers of the 1980s and 1990s have incorporated resistance into their texts. She says, “A new genre seems to have emerged: science fiction novels that negate the notions of utopia and dystopia as mutually exclusive terms to describe a future alternative society. The science fiction novels of some women writers contain, instead, both elements at once” (18). Granted, it may seem unfair to use a late twentieth century model to evaluate Dick’s texts, especially one that addresses specifically a particular period; Baccolini’s work traces the history of resistance since the 1950s and argues that this special kind of feminist literature emerges as peculiar to the circumstances of the 1990s. However, I contend that it is precisely the benefit of retrospect that may give us the tools to understand the form of Dick’s work. Indeed, Dick’s work demonstrates some of the key features of the critical dystopia, so it is only appropriate to use the model to appreciate his work. Baccolini bases her model of the critical dystopia on the work of Tom Moylan and Lyman Tower Sargent. She works from Moylan’s notion of the critical

utopia as a representation of both the original society and the utopian society. Key for Baccolini is Moylan's observation of the formal quality of the genre, that is, "the way the text becomes self-aware and self-critical" (17). Sargent then asks whether a critical dystopia is even plausible, to which Baccolini answers that it is "not only plausible but is one of the preferred forms of resistance for the end of the century" (17). As Baccolini figures it, the critical dystopia is a representation of an alternative society as decidedly dystopian that nonetheless "maintain[s] the utopian impulse *within* the work" (18, Baccolini's emphasis). In order to see how gender figures in Dick's oeuvre, we must first understand the way utopia and dystopia appear.

The utopian impulse does not show itself often in Dick's work. However, as Kim Stanley Robinson has noticed, Dr. Bloodmoney is the one novel that depicts a utopian post-holocaust world (66). The pastoral communities mark a return to a less complicated way of life, where human activity is not parceled out into the discrete spheres characteristic of capitalist societies. There are elements of utopia in Dr. Bloodmoney, such as the spectrum of physical and psychological differences that we have seen in the main characters, as well as the relative chaos that still persists in the major cities. The novel functions best as a critical dystopia, in Moylan's sense, since it represents the dystopian society and then presents some criticism of it. For instance, Hardy tells Stuart McConchie, who is thinking of leaving the city and going to the country to make a living, "Nothing happens; they just farm and listen to the satellite. Anyhow, you're apt to run into the old race prejudice against Negroes, out in the country; they've reverted to the old patterns . . . It's one of the greatest myths that ever existed, the superiority of the country.

I know you'd be back here in a week" (154). Similarly, the dystopian post-holocaust society gives a physically disadvantaged person like Hoppy Harrington ample opportunity to advance; however, Hoppy takes cruel advantage of the improved social circumstances, suggesting that utopian impulses do not eliminate all negative human behavior. The tone of the novel tends to bear out this criticism.

As Baccolini argues, critical dystopia is a special measure of resistance to hegemonic norms. Therefore, it is easy to see how Dr. Bloodmoney might take its resistance so far and no further. In Moylan's sense, Dr. Bloodmoney is a critical dystopia in that it does present both the original society and the dystopian society, and the dystopian society does mark in some ways an improvement over the society it replaces. The Man in the High Castle is also a dystopian novel and as such we may compare it to Dr. Bloodmoney as a way of articulating the formal qualities of Dick's work that both permit and exclude a reading of gender. Robinson notes that The Man in the High Castle is different from Dick's other earlier dystopias "for the very important reason that the dystopia in this novel is not overthrown" (40). In the earlier dystopias, like Vulcan's Hammer and The Penultimate Truth, there is a little protagonist who achieves the overthrow of the dystopian regime. Robinson suggests that there is still a little protagonist in High Castle, namely Frank Frink, but I suggest that like Dr. Bloodmoney the typical Dick character structure is subverted such that there are no less than five main characters in High Castle. Significantly, those five main characters include a woman—Mr. Tagomi, Mr. Baynes, Robert Childan, Frank Frink, and Juliana Frink. This is quite different from the quadrate characterology in Bloodmoney. There, the four main characters are, as we

have seen, all male. Robinson sees High Castle as an immensely depressing dystopia from which there is no escape. There is no hope of redemption or salvation: “here the best that can be accomplished by the protagonists is the holding action of keeping things from getting immeasurably worse” (40).

High Castle has, however, its utopian moments. For instance, Mr. Tagomi stands up to Herr Reiss, who excuses his own actions as being controlled by the larger German regime; Mr. Tagomi calls Herr Reiss “Chickenshit.” Robinson sees this as dystopian because no American resists the hegemony—a Japanese official articulates this resistance instead. I argue alternatively that this scene is a utopian moment, if for no other reason than *somebody* does indeed speak out against the repressive German regime. The fact that Mr. Tagomi is the character to utter this resistance is merely a feature of the critical quality of Dick’s dystopia. In fact, this scene is invested with a reversal of otherness, such that American readers may feel the heavy oppression of an imperialist administration that America itself has engendered in *this* world for many years. Mr. Tagomi’s appropriation of the American term “chickenshit” only serves to drive the point home.

Similarly, there is a utopian moment when Juliana Frink saves Hawthorne Abendsen’s life, a point that Robinson does not make. Hawthorne Abendsen is the author of the novel, The Grasshopper Lies Heavy, within High Castle that many of the characters are reading. Abendsen’s novel is an “alternative history” to the history that is retold in High Castle; in The Grasshopper Lies Heavy the Allies win the war. Juliana gets involved with a man named Joe Cinnadella, a German hit man who is assigned to kill Abendsen. Juliana does not realize she has been drawn into this plot until she is stuck in a

motel room with Joe on the way to Abendsen's house in Cheyenne. Once she does realize Joe's intentions, she slices his throat and leaves for Cheyenne to warn Abendsen. Here, Juliana marks significant and effective resistance to the German regime, even if highly localized and fairly small. Abendsen symbolizes literary resistance to both the Japanese and the German hegemony, although the Japanese are fairly permissive of the book. In killing Abendsen's assassin, Juliana signifies opposition to hegemonic censorship and Nazism.

Juliana is also at the center of the final scene of the novel. There, she discusses with Abendsen how the novel came to be. She presses him until he admits that the I Ching wrote the entire novel. She then asks if she can consult the oracle and discover the reason why the I Ching chose to write this novel, a request to which Abendsen only reluctantly assents. When asked, the I Ching reveals that it wrote the novel because the contents of it are true, that indeed the Allies did win World War II and Japan and Germany lost. Abendsen and his wife are upset at discovering this, but Juliana takes the news rather easily. She leaves the Abendsen house and the novel closes. Robinson and others have taken this scene as "weak" and as a "marring" of an otherwise brilliant novel. Robinson says, "Now [the news that the contents of the novel are true] is something that the reader already knows, so it does us no good to be told it again" (48). Robinson compares the relative weakness of this scene to the scene where Tagomi has a vision of our San Francisco. In it, Tagomi briefly walks down our 1962 San Francisco streets, and he envisages the Embarcadero Freeway, which does not exist in the novel's world. He is

horrified. Robinson argues that this scene is much more effective in connecting the novel's world to ours.

I argue first that there are two entirely different critical strategies going on in the Tagomi scene and the Juliana scene and, second, it is the Juliana scene that grounds and explains the Tagomi scene. The Tagomi scene occurs within the terms of the novel—that is, for some unexplained reason, Tagomi has been teleported to the actual world. His disbelief is of course appropriate to the experience. This scene must, however, be grounded somehow by a more literal explanation. The Juliana scene provides that explanation. The final scene of the novel is something on the order of the shattering of the fourth wall in theater, where the distinction between the stage and the audience is no longer clear. Dick shatters the fourth wall of the novel so that Juliana may emerge as a fully realist character—in other words, one of us. Likewise, the reader emerges into the space of the novel in a way that the Tagomi scene can never achieve. Tagomi is not hallucinating, but we don't know at that point what the conditions are that cause the experience, and in any case the fourth wall is not shattered in the Tagomi scene—the scene still acquiesces to the terms of the novel. At the end of the novel, we can look back and see that Tagomi actually traversed the boundary between parallel worlds and *how* exactly he does so. The Juliana scene is a much more radical tear in the sacrosanct narrative, a radicalization that Dick seems (always) urgent to make.

It is interesting that Robinson does not notice the important and privileged role that Juliana plays in the narrative. Here, unlike the later Dr. Bloodmoney, a woman functions fully as a heroic character. Of the five main characters, only Tagomi, Baynes,

and Juliana really do anything heroic. The two white American males, Robert Childan and Frank Frink, represent moral bankruptcy and cowardice, respectively. Only Tagomi, a Japanese official, Baynes, a German national, and Juliana, an American woman, all represent heroism of a kind. In fact, Juliana is the only American who shows any real will to action. Compared with Juliana, Frank is ineffectual. Indeed, Frank Frink recalls his early feelings of resistance that had simply eroded with time: “Hating the Japs as he did, he had vowed revenge; he had buried his Service weapons ten feet underground, in a basement, well-wrapped and oiled, for the day he and his buddies arose. However, time was the great healer, a fact he had not taken into account . . . Since 1947 he had probably seen or talked to six hundred thousand Japanese, and the desire to do violence to any or all of them had simply never materialized, after the first few months. It just was not relevant any more” (9). In Frank’s last scene in the novel he sets himself before his jeweler’s bench and begins working his piece. His resistance will materialize more slowly and in a much less dramatic way than Juliana’s. That Robinson reads the final scene as a “mistake” is less a commentary on Dick’s novelistic skill and more a commentary on Robinson’s inability to manifest a reading toward gender.

In any case, all of these moments of utopia in High Castle add up to the fact that the novel is not as oppressively dystopian as Robinson suggests. There are moments of varying degrees of resistance. I would classify High Castle as a critical dystopia, in the manner in which Baccolini configures it, following Tom Moylan. As I noted above, the critical dystopia is a representation of an alternative society as decidedly dystopian that nonetheless “maintain[s] the utopian impulse *within* the work” (18, Baccolini’s

emphasis). Because High Castle is a critical dystopia, the possibilities for resistance within the novel are great and, I would argue, so are the possibilities for a reading toward gender. In Dr. Bloodmoney, the resistance to reification of the atomic blast creates a formal situation in which Dick establishes a quadrangle of masculine characters that are all in varying stages of crisis as the result of compromised male bodies. In High Castle, by contrast, there are five main characters, one of which is a woman who exhibits a heroic will to action. None of these characters in High Castle trades in male bodies, as we have seen in Dr. Bloodmoney, except perhaps the fact that Joe Cinnadella's body is traded for Hawthorne Abendsen's. However, neither Joe nor Abendsen work as central characters in the novel, since at no time is the story ever told from their points of view. I maintain that it is a feature of the critical dystopia as genre of resistance that permits the emergence of a heroine in Dick's work.

Having explored the aspects of Dick's work that may be identified as critical dystopia, we can also understand better why gender does not function for Dick as a critical category. There is no sense in which we may think of High Castle, or nearly any of Dick's work, as fully self-aware about gender. There are a number of ways we may recognize a text as self-aware, the most obvious of which is to look at the content itself to see what it asserts as problematic. Dick never asserts gender explicitly as a problem to be solved or explored. At best, Dick occasionally situates race overtly as problematic, as he does in a minor way in Dr. Bloodmoney; to the degree that we may understand both gender and race as categories of otherness may we understand Dick's particular relation to resistance. Race and gender are not equivalent categories, but resistance to their

oppression begins in much the same way in either case. Stuart McConchie is black, and his business partner Hardy warns Stuart of the nascent racism in the rural areas. Beyond that, Dick does not develop Stuart's identity as a black man or explore in any detail what it might entail. Similarly, in High Castle, Dick addresses race briefly. He situates the American South, which appears to be essentially the same South that we know in terms of racism, as largely independent but connected very closely with the Reich. Frank Frink, when considering his options after losing his job, reflects on the possibility of moving to the American South: "What about the South? His body recoiled. Ugh. Not that. As a white man he would have plenty of place, in fact more than he had here in the PSA. But . . . he did not want that kind of place" (9). Interestingly, Dick makes whiteness visible here in a rare and radical way, and he explicitly characterizes Frank as non-racist. In any case, however, the primary focus of High Castle is not the inhumanity of the American South's racist hegemony, but rather the vast inhumanity of the German Reich. Dick does show an awareness of race oppression, but he never shows a commensurate awareness of gender oppression. Dick's work with gender must be explored at the level of form. His focus is always on resistance to American capitalist hegemony; it is this impulse to resist that occasionally brings with it a deconstruction of gender and not any particular interest on his part in the tyranny of gender.

In this sense, Marxist criticism has not taken gender seriously as a category. In Dick we can see that a critique of capitalism, such as in Dr. Bloodmoney and The Man in the High Castle, formally brings with it a complication of gender even when it is not explicitly trying. This, however, fails to be enough. While the study of gender is in itself

an academic cottage industry, the danger in this lies in the reification of gender as a mode of inquiry. Jameson's critique is an example of this kind of prejudice. Jameson is quite aware of gender as a category, but he does not see it as integral to a critique of American capitalist hegemony. Gender should be explored as a category in *all* inquiries into capitalist oppression.

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#### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Five for a full discussion of The X Files.

<sup>2</sup> For a full exploration of the possibilities of total destruction, see Jonathan Schell's The Fate of the Earth, Stanford UP, 2000.

**Chapter Five**  
**X Marks the Spot**  
**The Crucible of Conspiracy and Gender in *The X Files***

The Fox television series The X Files, which ran from 1991 to 2001, narrates the paradigmatic conspiracy in the United States after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Not coincidentally, the series began very soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This dissertation assumes fundamentally that the period of perpetual war in the United States—a period in which the military has not once demobilized—since the onset of World War II is coterminous with the masculine subject in crisis, and that this crisis has manifested itself in, among other ways, the appearance of the conspiracy theorist as we now know him.

In every sense, the study of gender, evolving as it has from feminism, has been a historical materialist undertaking. The phenomenological quality of feminism—its starting point always in lived experience—has at all times been profoundly evident. No matter what question a feminist analytic attempts to answer, it always returns to the question, “What is the condition of women?” It is not, however, a structural necessity of feminism to consider the economic imperatives of late capitalism. Certainly, a number of feminists do practice historical materialist feminism; that this is so does not imply a necessity. I argue that it is absolutely essential for any theorist, as a matter of responsibility, to work assiduously to make a historical materialist feminist dialectic an inevitability. Marxists tend in the main to treat feminism and gender studies as a nicety but not a necessity in their studies of late capitalism; feminists tend to bristle at the idea that women’s and gender studies ought to be integrated with other theoretical paradigms. But this conventional separatist attitude is enormously counterproductive in any political

agenda. But a historical materialist feminism is not enough. Psychoanalysis has taught us much about the ways that humans develop, and the ways that we organize socially. Any meaningful political dialogue will account for these insights. Terry Eagleton has shown in After Theory that cultural theory is in danger of trivializing itself out of practical existence. His point here is precisely why I argue that we must take a rigorously dialectic approach to theory. And while he indicates that poststructuralism is passé, I would argue that gender studies is the way in which we will revitalize the absolutely essential and not at all passé theories of Marxism and psychoanalysis. By looking at The X Files, we can see the ways in which, in the light of feminism, gender works to foreclose on meaningful and productive political discussion. The point precisely is that this foreclosure is *after* second- and third-wave feminism. How insidious is gender oppression, then, when we can't put our finger now on outmoded or oppressive representations?

At first glance, The X Files appears to be subversive: its fundamental storyline articulates elaborately the inner workings of government conspiracy in the United States. And in many ways the series is subversive, but less for its exploration of government conspiracy and much more for its remarkable tenacity in holding conventional gender ideology at bay for so many years, a point to which I will turn in detail shortly. Herbert Marcuse's notion of repressive tolerance best expresses both the phenomenon of the X-Files franchise in the American market and the diegetic condition of the two main characters, Fox Mulder and Dana Scully. The X files themselves are the unsolved cases that the FBI will not close—they *can* close them if they wish; they choose not to. Powerful officials have kept the X files open in order to keep Fox Mulder both busy *and* inside the FBI, where he may be safely controlled. For Marcuse, tolerance that augments

repression is not tolerance at all—it is, in fact, typical in democratic societies for “the people [to] tolerate the government, which in turn tolerates opposition within the framework determined by the constituted authorities” (83). The FBI tolerates Fox Mulder, not as a condition of Mulder’s freedom but rather precisely the opposite—to limit what he can and will do but specifically *under the pretense* of permitting his free acquisition of knowledge. Mulder is of course aware of his positioning in the agency; he is in this way Žižek’s ironist, in that he knows he is situated inside of a particular cultural, political, and bureaucratic structure with no possibility of acting outside of it *and* fully accepts this positioning even as it reifies his own fictionality. Žižek draws a distinction between the cynic and the ironist in their relation to the symbolic order:

from the right premise that "the big Other doesn't exist", i.e. that the symbolic order is a fiction, the cynicist draws the wrong conclusion that the big Other doesn't "function", that its role can simply be discounted — due to his failure to notice how the symbolic fiction nonetheless regulates his relationship to the real of enjoyment, he remains all the more enslaved to the symbolic context that defines his access to the Thing-Enjoyment, caught in the symbolic ritual he publicly mocks. This, precisely, is what Lacan has in mind with his *les non-dupes errent*: those who are not duped by the symbolic fiction are most deeply in error. The ironist's apparently "softer" approach, on the other hand, far more effectively unbinds the nodal points that hold together the symbolic universe, i.e. it is the ironist who effectively assumes the non-existence of the Other (“From Joyce-the-Symptom”).

Mulder is acutely aware of the way in which he is ideologically constructed and is (mainly) content to work within that construction—he knows, in Žižek’s terms, that the big Other, or the symbolic order, functions even though it doesn’t exist. Mulder, thus, spends the entirety of the series working to use the repressive tolerance employed to prevent his subversive acts as precisely the means by which he will subvert the system.

While Mulder is emblematic of the institutional use of repressive tolerance, the appearance of the series is itself a case of repressive tolerance. That is, the series represents the American government generally and the FBI specifically in a very negative way; this representation is in every sense *permitted* by the hegemonic structure. Media representations are controlled and suppressed routinely for a variety of reasons, most often national security and interests, but not always. The cancellation of the CBS broadcast of the television film The Reagans is just one case in point. Thus, in a stunning inversion, The X Files is a case of repressive tolerance in action, in which it actually *represents* the systematic use of repressive tolerance by the American government *precisely* in order to perpetuate a policy of repressive tolerance with regard to theories of government conspiracy.

Marcuse's idea of repressive tolerance, however, is less pessimistic in its construction than an Althusserian view of ideology. Althusser views ideology, as he gives it in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," as being consummate, a structure outside of which no individual may exist. This is best seen in his notion of the Subject with a capital S: the Subject is the position of "subject" which ideology allows individual subjects to fill.<sup>1</sup> Marcuse, by contrast, suggests that we can resist the hegemony by exceeding ideology. In some way The X Files attempts to demonstrate this hope. The classic slogans of the series, "The Truth is Out There" and "I Want to Believe," illustrate the possibility of stepping outside of cultural ideology. Mulder's persistent actions to reappropriate his structured positioning for the purpose of discovery and subversion speak to this hope. Marcuse's point is precisely that some things ought *not* be tolerated, even in the name of "democracy," including but not limited to hateful speech and

oppressive regimes of labor. Mulder consistently refuses to accept FBI explanations and cover-ups, and he consistently accepts his repressed positioning as a means to discover and profess the truth about government conspiracy. Mulder discovers many truths in his double journey as FBI investigator and investigator of the FBI; and if he doesn't succeed in proclaiming these truths to the American public, he does nonetheless succeed in uncovering a variety of plots to deceive them. Similarly, while The X Files is a franchise designed to capitalize on the generalized culture of conspiracy in the United States, and thus a permitted phenomenon, it does nonetheless trace the logical, occasionally plausible contours of a bureaucracy that is not of the people, for the people, or by the people.

This perpetual contradiction between repression and permission is the hallmark of capitalism: rather than couching the phenomenon in Marcuse's term "repressive tolerance," it is more appropriate in this context to call it *necessary subversion*. This conundrum is characteristic of capitalism. Ellen Wood in her 2003 study of global capital, Empire of Capital, notes that it is the peculiar circumstance of the United States that it must both maintain the singularly and overwhelmingly dominant military force in the world in order to preserve the stability and order necessary for global capital to thrive and at the same time is obligated, in the interest of preserving markets, not to use that power or at least not use it excessively. The 2001 war in Afghanistan was not so much a step in the "war on terror" but rather a show of force for non-compliant countries like North Korea. The necessity of preserving global markets is precisely analogous to the phenomenon of necessary subversion. It is less that the hegemonic power is intelligently and deceptively tolerating subversion as an intentionally repressive gesture and more that it is limited as to what it can do to repress subversion while still preserving its

dominance. Subversion is, in this sense, an unpleasant event that must, by the virtue of capitalist imperatives, be tolerated. Of course, the hegemonic power may at any time decide to use direct force to quell subversion; to dwell on this fact is, however, to miss the hope involved in a theory of necessary subversion. Ellen Wood notes that “Capitalism is uniquely driven by economic imperatives: on the one hand, the propertylessness of producers, which compels them to sell their labour power for a wage, and, on the other, the subjection of appropriators to the compulsions of the market, which oblige them to compete and accumulate” (89). However much the hegemony might want it otherwise, capitalist imperatives drive the need for tolerance because the market demands it. Permission to subvert is granted, not by virtue of “democratic” imperatives, but only by virtue of the imperative of capital accumulation.

Indeed, these imperatives may be seen in the occasion of The X Files itself. The series ran for nine seasons, during which time it grounded Fox Network as a viable competitor in the broadcast market. David Duchovny, who played Fox Mulder, said once that The X Files is not *on* Fox Network—it *is* the network. By around seasons six and seven, that remark was arguably true. Even now, three years after the series left the broadcast airwaves, it is still the longest running series that Fox has had to date. The series spoke directly to the culture of conspiracy that has characterized the American post-World War II period and as such it was an enormous market success. Its tendency to challenge the legitimacy of the American government and its bureaucracies was hardly a high price to pay in the face of the huge market shares that it promised and indeed returned. Ironically, but not at all surprising, Fox’s news bureau is notoriously the most reactionary and conservative of the major news sources. No doubt the success of the

“subversive” X Files series contributed to the capital base that made Fox News Network possible.

The X Files embodies the dialectical tension of capitalism in a myriad of ways. The series premiered three years after the Soviet Union collapsed. Before the end of the Cold War, the economic condition of the globe was characterized by the standoff between two major powers. After the Cold War, the United States asserted fully its global supremacy; this global condition changed significantly the discourse of conspiracy in the United States. Without the oppositional structure of Cold War politics, the substance of conspiracy narrative shifted to represent the centerlessness of the American power structure. Often, Mulder and Scully fail to draw any narratively satisfying answers, even though they are able with a reasonable degree of certainty to assure themselves that somewhere in the deep recesses of American government is a vast countersubversive movement. Even in the less conspiratorial and more paranormal plot arcs they are often unable to provide an empirical explanation for the phenomena they find.

The end of the Cold War in 1989 marked a very special crisis in the United States: economically, the energy for perpetual mobilization had been sapped. Ideologically, as Michael Rogin has shown in his Ronald Reagan: The Movie, the Cold War produced and sustained the demonized opposition necessary to make perpetual war not only justifiable but also desirable. The opposition is similar to propping two playing cards up against one another in an A-frame to build a house of cards. The opposition forms a structure; the resistance at the apex keeps the structure standing. Remove one of the cards, and the structure collapses. While the fall of the Berlin Wall was a time for rejoicing, it was also a potential cultural, ideological, political, and economic concern for the United States.

Without the Soviet Union as a threat, the infrastructure of the United States military and economic apparatus was at least mildly destabilized. Reagan's revitalization of the Cold War in the 80s breathed new life into American *raison d'être*. The case for perpetual mobilization is quite easily made nonetheless and indeed the occasional war as well, and so Operation Desert Storm was undertaken in 1991-92 very shortly after the Cold War ended. However, the ideological and cultural implications of the end of the Cold War still resonate. The X Files is symptomatic and emblematic of these cultural changes in the post-Cold War period.

More importantly, however, The X Files marks an important shift in conspiracy culture from the dialectic of Cold War politics to the dialectic of *gender*. Indeed, the series in many ways articulates the theoretical problematic of Marxism and gender ideology with which this dissertation is ultimately concerned. On the one hand, the series works successfully and at the same time fails to demonstrate a politics of necessary subversion. On the other hand, the show constructs a narrative that is for the entire nine seasons driven by the romantic tension between Mulder and Scully—even though the possibility of their becoming romantically involved is not seriously presented until around the sixth and seventh seasons, at the time of the film release. But even more than romantic tension is the gender construction of each character: Mulder is the intuitive conspiracy theorist who is often portrayed as hysterical (in both the conventional sense and the sense that I have outlined in Chapter One—I will turn to this detail shortly). Mulder majored in psychology at Oxford, a profession not exclusively the province of women but by no means totally dominated by men. Scully is the scientist; she is a trained medical doctor and takes the primacy of empirical evidence very seriously. She is

assigned by the powers that be in the pilot episode as Mulder's partner, for the express purpose of "debunking" his theories as so much conspiracy hysteria. For all practical purposes, Scully is intended to be the husband to the madwoman. Right from the beginning, the series shifts the tension of necessary subversion onto the tension of gender politics. The true crisis, as I have argued in previous chapters, is one of masculinity: Mulder embodies this crisis. For the majority of the nine years, the dialectic of gender both sustains and deflects the implications of the show's subversiveness. It does so in part by reversing the conventional gender roles of the two main characters. The hysterical male lost in the centerless vacuum of American government, however, does not make for good narrative, simply because the crucible of gender and conspiracy would run too hot. The narrative needs a woman, finally, so that the symbolic order may be (re)asserted.

In Chapter One I showed the way in which the post-World War II crisis of masculinity, conspiracy theory, and gender politics all intersect at the point the symbolic order is reinstated. The film Conspiracy Theory demonstrates the patterns of this cultural moment. In that film there is a hysterical male and a professional female who interact such that romantic tension is always implicit but never finally realized. Even further, that romantic tension must *never* be resolved, because to do so would be to collapse the supremacy of the symbolic order. This pattern is visible in The X Files as well; the structural components of this historically situated psychodrama are evident from the pilot episode (air date September 10, 1993). The pilot is especially significant in the development of Mulder and Scully's relationship, because it is there that the conditions of their work relationship are established; these conditions will remain for essentially the

entire series, even in later seasons where Scully finally gives up her titular role as “debunker” of Mulder’s work.

The pilot opens with scenes from the Oregon case that Scully and Mulder will investigate: recently graduated high school students are mysteriously dying in the Oregon forest, with evidence of paranormal activity being the cause. Scully appears first in the pilot: her first dialogue is with two unnamed administrative figures in the FBI chain of command. Also present at this meeting is the Smoking Man, as he will come to be known (although he does far less smoking in this episode than in later ones—no doubt he smokes more and more in order to deserve the title of “The Smoking Man”). While the Smoking Man’s identity and official capacity are unclear, by the end of the pilot episode we know that he is associated in some vague way with the Pentagon. During this meeting, Scully is given her assignment to work on the X Files, to “assist” Mulder and observe the “validity” of the work. To this charge Scully replies, “Am I to understand that you want me to debunk the X Files project, sir?” The senior FBI official answers, “Agent Scully, we trust you’ll make the proper scientific analysis.” With this exchange the series sets up the structure of its dual political premises: first, that science is to be dubiously set against other, less “valid” kinds of knowledge, and second, that a woman will escort this more “valid” knowledge into the plot line. These two premises are structurally dependent on one another; as such, it is important to understand the implications of the former premise in order to understand how the latter premise obtains.

The Smoking Man’s presence at this meeting, we come to discover, signifies the Pentagon’s interest in deflecting Mulder’s claims to truth. Indeed, it is precisely the Smoking Man’s presence at this meeting that signifies the challenge to the power of

science to access objective truth. After all, why would the Pentagon be interested in “Spooky” Mulder if he were just a lunatic? It is not that the Smoking Man and other senior FBI officials don’t believe Mulder’s claims; it is rather that they *exactly* believe them, because they know Mulder is right. The Pentagon and the FBI have called Scully forward to debunk Mulder’s work and present “reports” that present scientific explanations for his theories, in order to obfuscate the truth. Scully’s assignment, to the Pentagon and the FBI, is not to find objective truth; it is to find a narrative that *looks like* objective truth. The X Files is in this regard a fully postmodern cultural artifact. In The Postmodern Condition, Lyotard points out that all knowledge comes in the form of narrative, that is, in the form of language; he thus remakes epistemology into a study of linguistics. This narrative view of truth seems to suggest that only localized “truths” may be found—there is no “truth out there,” as the series’ slogan says. However, Jameson points out in the foreword to the 1984 edition of The Postmodern Condition that “this seeming contradiction [between local narratives and the generalized function of narrative] can be resolved, I believe, by taking a further step that Lyotard seems unwilling to do in the present text, namely to posit, not the disappearance of the great master-narratives, but their passage underground as it were, their continuing but now *unconscious* effectivity as a way of ‘thinking about’ and acting in our current situation” (xii Jameson’s emphasis). There is indeed a master narrative in The X Files, and both Mulder and Scully pursue it regularly. That each of them represents an instance of a particular localized narrative does nothing to undermine the existence of the extraterrestrial conspiracy of which they find much evidence. The impossibility of either Scully or Mulder’s narrative to trump the other makes The X Files an exemplary case of Lyotard’s postmodern knowledge. The

positing of conspiracy in The X Files, and the nature of that positing, is fundamentally the work of Jameson's submerged political narratives. This master narrative, that the truth is "out there," directs all of Scully and Mulder's activities.

The sense that the series makes of the condition of knowledge in the postmodern period depends on the radical problematization of the symbolic order. The series destabilizes traditional knowledge in a Lyotardian sense, but only to the degree that the series, at least in the early seasons, defers the resolution of Mulder's Oedipal conflict. In this way, a critique of The X Files, or of any cultural artifact, is useful only to the degree that it moves dialectically from theoretical paradigm to theoretical paradigm. So far, I have shown that with adjustments Marcuse's notion of repressive tolerance is useful in understanding The X Files both diegetically and materially; Lyotard's and Jameson's model of human knowledge helps explain the epistemological implications of Marcuse's politics; we must then turn to Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalysis to explain how gender functions as the fulcrum upon which human knowledge pivots. None of these theoretical paradigms in this context is useful without the others. I have no doubt that a dialectical critique of gender is not the last word in any theoretical paradigm; surely some other theoretical paradigm is required to further this political cultural critique, and this dissertation suggests that a critical apparatus must be developed to avoid the degradation of critical theory into irrelevance, as Terry Eagleton has argued in After Theory. It is my contention that Marxist theorists such as Jameson have all too often elided the material reality of gender, and often a critique of capital fails to register the ways in which gender is integral to every phase of capitalist accumulation. That is, the capitalist subject, such as he often appears in Marxist critique, is rarely categorized by gender. In fact, however, the

capitalist subject *is* gendered, and that gender categorization has an effect on the way in which the capitalist subject moves around in capitalist society. The gender of the capitalist subject is inexorably a feature of the capitalist subject's identity.

Mulder represents the masculine capitalist subject in crisis. He is wary, sardonic, and suspicious of everyone—in fact, he is often told by his counter-counterinsurgent sources to “trust no one.” He is resolutely hysterical and paranoid, in the sense that he is resolved to quilt together a meaningful narrative of the conspiracy that he suspects. While the series does not represent in any direct way the effects or symptoms of globalized capital, Mulder nonetheless represents the anxiety caused by the decomposition of the polarized global economy of the Cold War. The enemy, such as it is, is far less recognizable; to the degree that the capitalist subject identifies himself by his opposition, in Sartre's and Fanon's terms, does the condition of globalized capital cause subjective crisis. Mulder is an absolutely critical element of the series' success. Indeed, actor David Duchovny is so closely identified with the character (and the condition of the character) of Mulder that when his contract negotiations failed late in the series run, his replacement, actor Robert Patrick, could not sustain either the story as it was originally constructed or the fan base. Mulder's replacement, Agent Doggett, was not sufficiently hysterical to work as a meaningful mirror image for the masculine capitalist subject; he failed to quilt together the evidence of conspiracy the way in which Mulder did, leaving much of that work to the by then eminently convinced Scully. Mulder, and Duchovny, were love objects into which the paranoid conspiracy theorist viewer, that the series constructs, invested his libido. Doggett and Patrick, by contrast, were rejected. But by himself, Mulder cannot sustain the diegesis; the series plot line must provide some sort of

stabilizing resolution to the interrelated crises of knowledge, globalized economy, and human subjectivity. It is to this purpose that the character of Scully is directed.

Scully embodies all that is good about empirical doubt. She questions Mulder's every conclusion in the pilot episode (and for many seasons after that); what is more interesting is the degree to which, and the manner in which, she *considers* his conclusions. The Oregon high school graduates who have either died or receded into various states of living decay all show one common feature as the result of whatever events they have suffered—they all have two distinguishable marks on their lower right hips, marks that look much like a snake bite, but more pronounced. Scully doubts Mulder's conclusion that these marks are evidence of extraterrestrial abduction, and she gives him ample possibilities as alternatives. One evening in her hotel room Scully discovers two or three of these marks on her lower right hip; she runs noticeably shaken to Mulder's hotel room to have him look at them. She slips off her robe to reveal to Mulder that she is in only her panties and bra (unnecessarily enough); Mulder is momentarily distracted by her nearly nude body, but when she looks back at him to see what he is doing, he shakes his interest in her body and squats down to examine the marks closely. After a moment he declares that they are nothing more than mosquito bites. In spite of this good news, Scully is still visibly shaken and falls into Mulder's arms in relief. He is stunned; they have only met just days ago, and this case is their first together. Scully's ingenuous show of intimacy is all but entirely out of place. And yet Mulder is receptive; when she says she must sit down for a moment, he says, "Sure," and sits down humbly and quietly with her at the table in order to help calm her down.

This scene sets up a primary assumption about Mulder and Scully's relationship that will never substantially change throughout nine seasons. First, Scully is clearly afraid that she has fallen victim to whatever killed or harmed the high school graduates. Whether she believes that what caused these marks is extraterrestrial is at this stage unclear. But since Scully, even in the first episode, displays an unprepossessing confidence, her anxiety in this scene is remarkably uncharacteristic. It is possible, though not necessarily likely, that Scully is afraid that a paranormal event has happened to her. Her rigorous empiricism is called into question in this scene at least topically; this tendency to dismiss paranormal events will become the hallmark of Scully's nine-season career. Even further, because the viewer is set up to understand that the marks are indeed extraterrestrial, the viewer then becomes more concerned for Scully's victimization by aliens than perhaps Scully is concerned for herself. In this way, Scully is structurally situated as the woman for whom the male viewer is paternally concerned. Neither Dana Scully nor Gillian Anderson, the actress who plays Scully, are constructed explicitly as sexual objects. They are both meant to be consumed by the male viewer, but only to the degree that their condition sets up a reinstitution of the symbolic order, specifically by positing the male viewer as the father. Similarly, this scene sets up the element of Mulder and Scully's relationship that is decidedly paternal. That is, Mulder demonstrates a fondness and a fatherly concern for Scully in this first episode that will only deepen with subsequent seasons. He is initially sexually interested in Scully's body in this scene, but this interest is quickly diverted once she turns to him for support and comfort. Even when creator Chris Carter finally acquiesced to the idea that Scully and Mulder ought to be

romantically involved, Mulder never loses this paternal concern for Scully. Indeed this paternal concern trumps every other imaginable possibility for interaction.

Scully's positioning should not, however, be understood as an infantilization. Scully is a trained medical doctor; as such, she is more educated than Mulder. When she speaks medically, Mulder listens and respects her opinion—he in fact takes it to be the unproblematic truth. More importantly, however, Scully takes care of Mulder at least as much as Mulder protects her. Scully is for Mulder at moments the maternal plenitude of the presymbolic. For instance, in the second episode, entitled “Deep Throat,” Mulder and Scully discover unusual testing activities at a military air base in Idaho; in order to discover more, Mulder trespasses onto the base. Eventually he sees an aircraft that is able to change direction quickly, hover indefinitely, and travel silently. This aircraft is a military experiment derived from, according to Mulder, the wreckage of a UFO more than 40 years earlier. After Mulder sees the aircraft, he is apprehended by military personnel, restrained, drugged, and subjected to a memory eradication procedure. Scully, for her part, works assiduously to save Mulder from the grasp of the military; she takes a military official hostage at gunpoint and orders him to take her to Mulder. He does, and the military uneventfully releases Mulder into Scully's custody at the base gate. He is disoriented, confused, and almost childlike. It is only Scully who can pull him out of the military's grasp and protect him in his bewildered state.

This scene marks the collision of two powerful branches of government. Scully and Mulder bear the authority of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Nonetheless, the military summarily trumps this power by roughing Mulder and Scully up (in an earlier scene) and then abducting Mulder and performing medical procedures on him to which

he obviously does not consent. The military destroys the evidence they have obtained, and they return to Washington bereft of any proof of the military's dangerous experiments. Their superiors frown upon their conclusions. When the military and the FBI clash, the symbolic order is devastated; there is no law to which Scully and Mulder may appeal, no higher authority to which they may turn to sort out this conflict. Their own authority as agents of the FBI is simply irrelevant. The State in this case fails to represent order in the global capitalized structure of the production of war materiel. The only event that will reinsert order into the real of this scene is the reenactment of the infant's earliest experience of the maternal in the presymbolic. We can see the ways in which the Lacanian categories of the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic work transindividually in the mode of military production. In the movement of the phallus between the regulatory FBI and the productive military Mulder cathects to the mother in order to quell the anxiety.

But if Mulder is by turns the father and Scully the mother, this is not to suggest that the series concretizes them into these categories. The fluidity of the two characters allows the series to examine the United States governmental infrastructure with a view to psychoanalytic and capitalist categories, at least for about seven seasons. The series does lapse into a finalizing enactment of the symbolic order in the final three seasons when Scully and Mulder struggle to and eventually form a sort of nuclear family. This shift in the series' focus coincides with the production of the film, The X Files: Fight the Future. Chris Carter admits freely that the film production occurred during the regular production schedule of the television series and as such was incredibly intense and stressful. Just as importantly, the X Files' production team shifted the mode of production from television

to film and then back again. The technical parameters of film mandate a different set of plot paradigms—most obviously, much has to be resolved in two hours. Moreover, film demands more spectacle. The creators could not rely on the patient tenacity of regular weekly viewers to drive the film's success. Indeed, much of the television series' success was the result of its ability to both resolve and confound at the same time, over a protracted period of time. The film was not allowed this luxury. No doubt someone saw the potential profit in a film version of The X Files, and so the beginning of the series' demise was put into play. There was no way that the series could return comfortably to its original premise after the film. While the creators worked hard to make the film a standalone phenomenon, it was not possible to do so in a milieu where long-term plotline was so eminently important. In this way it is easy to see how market imperatives effectively warped the plot development of an otherwise successful television franchise. It is the nature of capitalism to destroy that which engenders its success; the capitalist dialectic was fully at work in the production history of The X Files. The point for the present discussion is especially that the capitalist dialectic of production forced the hand of the creators to enact in the series a final entry into the symbolic order for Mulder and Scully.

The pre-release hype around the movie focused a good bit of attention on the matter of whether Scully and Mulder would finally kiss. For the fan base at least, it seemed that the omnipresent tension between deeply committed, professional, non-sexual friendship and sexual desire was of eminent importance. The urge to resolve this tension was not necessarily universal, but the concern with it was nonetheless captivating. That tension, after all, sustained and nurtured the success of the series for the first six seasons.

One of the trailers for the film gives a clip from the scene where Scully and Mulder *almost* kiss to rouse this curiosity. Regular viewers would appreciate the tease, if non-viewers did not entirely grasp the significance of the clip. Before the film was released on June 19, 1998, the question of the desublimation of Scully and Mulder's sexual attraction, or even whether it was present to be sublimated in the first place, was fully visible. Much pressure, therefore, was on the writers, Chris Carter and Frank Spotnitz, to satisfy this viewer desire. There was no time like the film production to play dangerously with the nature of Scully and Mulder's relationship. A close-up, two-head shot of an impending kiss was absolutely required. The trouble was that series creator Carter knew that sexual involvement between Mulder and Scully was counterproductive to the television series' success. In interviews he has stated clearly that he never intended for the two main characters to become romantically involved as it would have interfered with the show's ability to elaborate on conspiracy theories. He was thus caught between two substantially different modes of plot production with two entirely different sets of market imperatives: on the one hand, the television series had to maintain its successful market franchise by sustaining a significant viewer base over time. On the other hand, the film had to bring both regular viewers and non-viewers into the theater for a very short period of time. In this shift in the mode of production of The X Files for the sake of market (not to mention media) imperatives was a reassertion of the symbolic order based on gender categories. Subsequent to the film, the series attempted to undo or unassert the symbolic order for the sake of the series' success but ultimately failed.

The film also promised to explain more clearly the exact nature of the conspiracy that Carter had been developing for six seasons and in that regard was fairly successful.

In essence, an alien race has been residing on earth in a dormant state for millions of years, while waiting, presumably, for a suitable host to emerge so that they might dwell comfortably and ultimately dominate the terran landscape. In the late 1940s and early 1950s government officials, not necessarily exclusively American, were contacted by these aliens and forced to employ a kind of diplomacy under pressure. The aliens wanted to colonize, and they wanted world leaders to cooperate. This group of officials, not always at the highest levels of government but always the most powerful and secretive, agreed to assist in the colonization program in order to buy time to find a cure for the alien infection (transmitted by the now-famous “black oil” that traverses under human skin) that causes the host process to begin. The aliens professed a desire to create a human-alien hybrid that would thrive and dominate. The officials cooperated, setting up operations where humans are abducted and put into a state of suspended animation so that the aliens might use them as hosts. In the meantime, the government officials have secretly developed a weak vaccine as defense. But in 1998, at the time of the film, the aliens began to use humans to gestate, rather than simply as hosts for hybridization. The unnamed group of officials became painfully aware that they had been duped by the aliens into thinking this was a cooperative effort; in fact, the aliens have planned all along to dominate the planet. This scenario is the substance of the conspiracy against the American people that Mulder and Scully seek desperately to uncover. The film begins when the secret group discovers that an alien has gestated in four human beings in a small community in North Texas.

Mulder and Scully first appear in the film during a bomb threat investigation in Dallas, Texas. Mulder discovers the bomb in the building across the street from the

federal building, where the bomb threat was actually called in. Mulder finds himself locked in the canteen with the bomb that is set in the vending machine. He has fifteen minutes to get out, and shortly Scully rescues him; that each of them takes turns rescuing the other is consistent with the regular storyline of the television series. The ordinary gender structure of the series does not prioritize the dominance of the one over the other. What Scully and Mulder only realize later is that the bombing in Dallas is directly related to the conspiracy involving the aliens. That is, the bodies of the four human beings who had been used for alien gestation in North Texas were in a FEMA office in that building. As Mulder and Scully slowly come to discover that the bombing was a cover-up for the conspiracy, it gives Mulder a chance to say things like, "This all goes back to Dallas." This is often the line that JFK assassination conspiracy theorists often give to explain the connections that they see.

The division of labor in the film largely remains the same as in the television series.<sup>2</sup> Mulder, because he is seen by FBI and government administration as irresponsible is left out of the committee hearings established to investigate the bombing in Dallas. Scully is the voice for the pair in these hearings. Likewise, Scully continues to be the voice of rational, scientific, empiricist inquiry and Mulder consistently defers to her opinion on forensic matters. Mulder for his part continues to be the voice of intuition, pursuing esoteric leads and discovering unempirical truths, meeting with obscure sources in dark alleys. There is, however, a barely perceptible but nonetheless very clear shift in the balance of mutual care in the film. That is, where about 9 minutes of film time is spent on Scully's rescue of Mulder from the bomb site, fully the last 30 minutes of the film is spent on Mulder's rescue of Scully from the alien/government project site in

Antarctica. In the television series, these rescue efforts are ordinarily fairly balanced; but in the film, they are disproportionate, and not only is Mulder's rescue of Scully bigger and more profound, it serves to close the film, which gives it a privileged position in the trajectory of the plot. It is in a way something of the final word. Indeed, the last scene of the film indicates that this struggle between secret government operations and the FBI is ultimately Mulder's alone.

The Smoking Man brings a message to Conrad Strughold, one of the key figures in the government collusion with the aliens (played by Armin Mueller-Stahl), indicating that the X Files are being reopened by the committee investigating the Dallas Bombing and the Attorney General's office. During that conversation, the Smoking Man tells Strughold that Mulder is determined now, to which Strughold replies, "He is but one man. One man alone cannot fight the future." There is a sense in which the X-Files have always been Mulder's and not Scully's, but in the context of Mulder's profound, film-sized rescue of Scully, this scene resonates profoundly with the message that Scully is in the service of Mulder as a narrative device. In Mulder and Scully's final scene in the film, Scully recommits herself to Mulder's cause. After the committee orders her reassignment to Salt Lake City, Utah (presumably a damnation), before she is abducted by the government, Scully announces to Mulder that she is quitting the FBI to practice medicine, that it is time for her to start living her life for herself. In this context, Scully's decision to remain with the X Files looks more and more like service to Mulder and not to the administrators who had asked her years before to "debunk" Mulder's work. A substantive shift in Scully's motivation occurs in the film in this moment, one that will change the direction of the series seasons that follow. Before the film she was committed

both to the protocol and directives of the FBI and at the same time to a sincere regard for Mulder's work; after the film she is committed to nothing other than Mulder qua conspiracy theorist, friend, and eventually pseudo-husband. If there was a tension between Scully's internal motivations initially, after the film those tensions are gone. In this way we can clearly see the seamlessness between material market imperatives and gender construction. The shift in the mode of story construction forced the hand of the creators to accede to the reenactment of the entry into the symbolic order. To point out that The X Files is a fictional construction is to entirely miss the point that it is a market *product* and as such is the result of a mode of production.

Scully experiences a change of symbolic order and the film does everything to represent and empower that change. The pivotal scene that makes this change possible is not surprisingly the scene where Mulder and Scully almost kiss. Scully visits Mulder at his apartment to tell him that she has been reassigned to Salt Lake City and that she is therefore quitting the FBI. Mulder protests doggedly; he follows her out into the hallway where they have an exchange befitting two people who care deeply for one another. He tells her that he needs her, and that he owes her everything and she owes him nothing. Scully's hand firmly clasps Mulder's neck, and Mulder takes Scully's face in his hands. Mulder leans in slowly to kiss her, but he is interrupted when Scully jumps suddenly from a sting on the back of the neck by an Africanized bee. The significance of this interruption is even more pronounced when one considers that this bee is part of the government-developed transit system for spreading the alien virus. Just the night before Scully and Mulder had been investigating a large, conspicuously misplaced corn crop in the middle of the Texas desert. At the center of that corn crop is a gigantic beekeeping

facility (two domed tents that look like, as Mulder put it, “Jiffy Pop poppers”) where Scully picks up that Africanized bee. It stays under her collar for nearly 24 hours before stinging her at just the moment she and Mulder nearly succumb to sexual desire.

Therefore, the thing that interrupts Scully and Mulder’s sexual encounter is also the thing that will set the events leading up to the final rescue scene into motion. As I have argued, the final rescue scene is disproportionate and imbalanced, and is the event that signals a change in Scully’s symbolic order. It follows, then, that the bee sting and subsequent alien infection are only appropriate as a sort of coitus interruptus. Instead of participating in a romantic encounter, Scully immediately goes into paralysis and Mulder eases her limp body onto the floor of the hallway. Scully must be utterly paralyzed in order for the film to make this subtle turn toward the assertion of Mulder as the law of the father.

Shifting Scully’s motivation in the film wasn’t enough to assert Mulder’s dominance as the law of the father; David Duchovny, the actor who plays Mulder, began to heave his success around in the seventh season. The series was dependent on Duchovny as Mulder for its success; as such, Duchovny began to take advantage of this dependency by demanding more creative control. He wrote several scripts and directed some episodes. His dissatisfaction, however, continued to grow. He demanded that the shooting location be changed from Canada to Los Angeles so that he could be closer to his new wife, Tea Leoni—a move that proved to be devastating to the show’s production, because production costs in Los Angeles are much higher than in Canada. Finally, his contract negotiations failed and by the end of the eighth season he was all but absent from the series.<sup>3</sup> He made guest appearances in the final season, but that was it. Duchovny’s absence left the creators with a serious problem: Duchovny’s Mulder attracted a huge fan

base, and as such transferring this devotion to another character would prove to be difficult. Reactions to his replacement, Robert Patrick, were mixed. More importantly, though, for the present discussion, Mulder's absence made it difficult to carry Scully's motivation to its logical conclusion. Mulder's absence, and its concomitant disturbance to the symbolic order, was corrected by giving Scully a pregnancy in the eighth season, in the final episode of which she gives birth to her son William. The phallus moved for Scully from the law of the FBI, to the law of Mulder as father, to finally the assertion of baby as phallus.

All of Scully's prenatal and post-natal decisions refer exclusively to her concerns for her baby. Her interest in government malfeasance is governed only by this concern: if she has nothing to gain from involving herself in investigations, she does not do it. In the ninth season, when she becomes concerned that baby William is the result of a government project to create supersoldiers, she reluctantly becomes involved in Agent Doggett's investigation surrounding that project. Early in the ninth season, she is shown more in her apartment in domestic solitude with her child than she is anywhere else. She receives more guests there in the first three episodes of season nine than she does in the entire series run up to that point. Duchovny's absence from the series functions wholly as an absence of the phallus, which must be replaced in order to fulfill the primal scene that was set in motion in the film. The character of Mulder remained fully a part of the plot construction of the eighth and ninth seasons, even if Duchovny wasn't there to represent him. As such, the other characters refer often to the absent Mulder, wondering where he is, or attempting to get Scully to reveal where he is. He becomes finally a mystified enigma, creating a lack where otherwise none was before.

Speculation is plentiful on fan sites and series reviews about whether the series would have survived if Duchovny had not wrangled with the production. Certainly key plot developments, namely Scully's new exclusive commitment to Mulder in the film, assisted in hastening the series to its conclusion, before Duchovny ever began to complain. In season nine, Scully gives up her baby for adoption in order to protect him from danger. In this move she gives up the phallus that she gained in season eight. This abandonment of the phallus is not, however, in itself a resolution. David Duchovny appears in the final episode of the series; in that episode he and Scully become fugitives from both military and civilian justice. The series' final scene is of Mulder and Scully in a hotel room in New Mexico on the bed in a tender embrace. In Conspiracy Theory Alice and Jerry cannot end up together because Jerry is still operating from within the order of government counterinsurgency; he is in the custody of American government officials in order to be protected. He acquiesces to staying away from Alice because that is the best way to protect her from the people who would kill her. As I showed in Chapter One, Jerry's acquiescence is on the order of the law of the father. He is Alice's protector. Scully and Mulder on the other hand are fugitives. They have abandoned duty to the law in order to be together. While the conclusions to each story are different in particularity, they are structurally the same. In either case, the signifying phallus, the thing that gives order to human experience, is present—in Jerry and Alice's case it is the custody of the American government. In Scully and Mulder's case, it is Mulder himself. In the absence of Scully's baby, Mulder returns to take the position as phallus and as the organizing principle of both Scully's world and The X Files as a whole.

In each case gender roles determine what will happen to each conspiracy theorist. All through the nine-year run, The X Files was constructed such that it was to be understood as Mulder's story—the X Files were themselves Mulder's pet project, to which Scully was assigned in order to spy on Mulder. Later, the pursuit of the truth was less Scully's cause than Mulder's—in fact, much of Scully's cause was Mulder himself. In truth, however, The X Files demonstrates an elaborate tale of gender, and an intricate replay of the primal scene. In this sense, because the feminine role is so vital to the dominance of the phallus, The X Files is in a demonstrative way the development of the story of gender. In many ways, it is Scully's story. In both Conspiracy Theory and The X Files, the conspiracy theorist turns out to be unproblematically right; he also is understood by nearly everyone, except the important female figure, to be completely insane. He is perpetually caught in the epistemological abyss. And in both cases it is the presence of a female that serves to ground his knowledge in a way that no other element of human experience can. It is only against the woman that the conspiracy theorist may assert the order of the phallus. Otherwise, he is caught in the damning real of his exemplary knowledge.

The X Files is indeed Scully's story—not in any overt way, however. In a cultural artifact that looks for all the world like a fully self-conscious postmodern examination, The X Files is unambiguously a demonstration of the fact that we are still in the historical moment of psychoanalysis. The psychoanalytic subject emerged roughly at the same time as the capitalist subject. That is, capital accumulation in Venice and the first use of manufactured mirrors both appeared in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The emergence of a product which enabled humans to apprehend their own form more clearly than ever before marks

the beginning of the Lacanian category of the mirror stage. We have not yet emerged from that period of human subjective development and experience. The X Files is to be commended for its rigorous exploration of the condition of human knowledge at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>. But Scully's positioning is fully instructive of the way in which the psychoanalytic category of gender remains underquestioned, in spite of the fact that the series appears to be self-conscious about the condition of women. Scully is a scientist, and as such is the sentinel of empirical certainty and rational doubt. This is a reversal of traditional gender roles if there ever was one. But simple reversals will not solve the problem of gender oppression. If the conspiracy theorist is emblematic of the postmodern age in his perpetual quest for and failure to find the truth, his unwavering distrust of the scripted and received story, his faith in unempirical knowledge, and even his neuroses about the globalized reach of late capitalism, our representations of him still necessitate the reenactment of the primal scene of the infant in conflict with the phallus.

Scully's function in The X Files, at the surface, is to play foil to Mulder's theories and provide a referent for tension. More importantly for any political and theoretical discussion, Scully's function is to mark the necessity of theory to turn its attention repeatedly to the concerns which feminism originally brought to our attention. At its broadest, feminism asks us, "What is the condition of women?" We cannot return, however, to the second or even the third wave of feminism, or even worse assert that we are now "post-feminist." As theorists we must find a way to move dialectically from theoretical paradigm to theoretical paradigm. In every case, we must ask of any work of art, any cultural artifact, any economic system, "What is the function of gender here?" In

the case of The X Files, as well as Conspiracy Theory, gender serves as a means by which the radical representation of the condition of human knowledge, in the form of the conspiracy theorist, may be summarily foreclosed. A materialist analysis of The X Files shows us that even in an economic sense, gender trumps the form when the forces of market imperatives act on a cultural phenomenon. When the mode of production of The X Files shifted from television to film, the resonant effect was for psychoanalytic categories of gender to dominate the plot direction. Without question, The X Files earmarks the way in which these three material *and* theoretical paradigms—historical materialism, psychoanalysis, and gender—intersect profoundly. Accordingly, any theoretical analysis of cultural artifacts such as The X Files must account for at least these human social and political categories.

Both Alice in Conspiracy Theory and Scully in The X Files are professional, intelligent, independent women. We have succeeded in revolutionizing representations of women; this has done only so much to revolutionize the category of gender itself. This is why theory must change with the historical moments that theory itself worked so tirelessly to transform. If, as I have argued, where there is a shift in mode of production there is a relegation to the primal psychoanalytic scene with its concomitant gender oppression, then it is more imperative than ever to examine this phenomenon in the period of late capitalism, which is above all a shift in production from, in the United States, a manufacturing society to an information one. How might gender be used to foreclose on meaningful political discussion during this shift? Will things necessarily be better for women once capitalism ends? This dissertation suggests the urgency of this question.

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### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> This unexceedability of ideological Subjecthood is not actually consummate. In “Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon,” Althusser suggests that science is the one privileged category: “Marx founded a new science: the science of history. Let me use an image. The sciences we are familiar with have been installed in a number of great ‘continents’. Before Marx, two such continents had been opened up to scientific knowledge: the continent of Mathematics and the continent of Physics. The first by the Greeks (Thales), the second by Galileo. Marx opened up a third continent to scientific knowledge: the continent of History . . . Transformations of philosophy are always rebounds from great scientific discoveries” (18-19).

<sup>2</sup> Because the film is moving from the paradigm of the television form and attempting to set up a smooth return to that paradigm, the film does not neatly match the pattern of conspiracy film that I identify in the film Conspiracy Theory in Chapter 1. Nonetheless, the theoretical application still finally applies.

<sup>3</sup> It is incumbent on me to point out that since Duchovny’s departure from The X Files, he has appeared in several poorly rated films, proving both his inability to act and the ultimate total dependence *he* had on the series. His megalomaniacal restlessness proved, in un-paranoid fashion, to be his downfall. Moreover, like capitalism, it was in his nature to destroy, in an attempt to increase profit, that which engendered his success.

**Coda**  
***Pattern Recognition:***  
**Tracking Conspiracy from the Cold War to Globalization**

This dissertation examines texts that were either produced during the Cold War or deal directly in their content with periods during the Cold War, with the exception of The X Files. Gender plays a significant role in the construction of conspiracy narratives during the Cold War; The X Files demonstrates the way in which gender continues to play an integral role in the production of conspiracy narratives even after the Cold War. The next significant period after the Cold War has been identified by critics and thinkers as the period of globalization; the question now is whether gender plays or will play a significant role in the discourse of globalization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. My analysis of The X Files shows that gender does continue to constitute a significant proportion of the infrastructure of conspiracy narratives. Fredric Jameson has argued that globalization replaces the need for conspiracy narratives: “[W]e no longer need Pynchon’s staples of paranoia and conspiracy to wrap it all up for us, since global capitalism is there to do it more efficiently; or so we are told” (“Fear and Loathing”). The question is also, then, whether we are still in a period of conspiracy, or whether the relative spread of capitalism across the globe has eliminated the need for narratives of conspiracy. The X Files is on the border between the Cold War and globalization, situated as it is in the liminal space of the 90s, between the Cold War and the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Therefore, while The X Files marks the intersection of conspiracy and gender, we will look at a text of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that deals with both conspiracy and narrative to test whether conspiracy narrative and gender’s integral role in it are a thing of the past. Jameson considers William Gibson’s novel Pattern Recognition to be an example of a “new” literature that exceeds both

Gibson's science fictional roots and Pynchon's paradigm conspiracy narrative. I will evaluate Jameson's take on Pattern Recognition and suggest what I see to be the case for 21<sup>st</sup>-century conspiracy narrative and globalization. I will show that we still have conspiracy narratives, and gender continues to shape the contours of those narratives. Gibson's placement of a woman at the center of the conspiracy does nothing to mitigate or change the (re)assertion of the symbolic order in the end.

Published in 2003, Pattern Recognition is told in the present tense by a young woman named Cayce Pollard. She is a "coolhunter," a person who consults with marketing firms to determine what image or logo will be the next fad or craze. Her talent, however, results not from training or specialized knowledge of the field but rather an innate telepathic, perhaps clairvoyant, reaction to bad logos. She reacts physically to images like the Michelin Man, suffering bouts of nausea and disorientation. If she does not have a bad reaction to an image, then she knows the image has marketing power. With this skill, Cayce tries "to recognize a pattern before anyone else does . . . [and then] I point a commodifier at it" (PR 86). It is not clear whether Cayce's talent is grounded in realism or whether it is a science fictional element; for this reason Gibson's novel stretches the border of the genre for which he is known—the special category of SF known as cyberpunk. Jameson sees Cayce as "an industrial spy of times to come"; and while the novel is set very nearly in the exact present or at best about five minutes into the future, Jameson's characterization seems apt ("Fear and Loathing" 112).

At the center of Pattern Recognition lies the story of a series of pieces of film footage that mysteriously turn up on the internet. An entire subculture of fans develops around this strange, untraceable, and unidentifiable cultural event. The bits of footage

contain no real visual cues to identify the period or the artist, and the subculture is devoted to finding out who is responsible for this “unmarked” text and what it might mean. Cayce is herself deeply concerned with the footage. As Jameson points out, the footage is for Cayce “an epoch of rest, an escape from the noisy commodities themselves, which turn out, as Marx always thought they would, to be living entities preying on the humans who have to coexist with them” (“Fear and Loathing” 114). Jameson sees this footage as the link between Pattern Recognition and the paradigm novel of conspiracy, The Crying of Lot 49: “For the post-horns and the other tell-tale graffiti [of Lot 49] have here been replaced by something like a ‘work of art’: the clues point, not to some unimaginable reality in the social world, but to an (as yet) unimaginable aesthetic” (“Fear and Loathing” 110). The footage, for Jameson, signifies a pronounced contradiction between the overdetermined world of commodifiers and logos that dominates Cayce’s experience and the unmarked world of the footage that is entirely absent of cultural signifiers.

Cayce’s obsession with the footage drives her finally to the center of a global marketing conspiracy. Her contractual employer, Hubertus Bigend, is fascinated with the footage and wants to track it and find out who is doing it so he can use it for a major marketing scheme. And while Cayce is suspicious of her employer and his motives, she nonetheless accepts his offer to bankroll her investigation into the origin of the footage. Jameson downplays the conspiratorial quality of this enterprise, arguing instead that “the footage is not the central issue of this novel, even though it supplies the narrative framework” (“Fear and Loathing” 111). Yet it is Cayce’s pursuit of the footage that leads her finally to Russia where it becomes clear in the final moments of the novel that she has

been caught in a global capitalist battle over the footage between Hubertus Bigend and Russian mogul Andrei Volkov. For Jameson, “the truth of emergent globalization” has as much to do with global entrepreneurship as with Pynchonian paranoia (“Fear and Loathing” 105). Jameson downplays the conspiratorial developments in Pattern Recognition in favor of extolling its exploration of the commodity world and global capitalism. However, Cayce *is* paranoid: when her professional rival Dorotea breaks into her apartment and rearranges a few things, Cayce resorts to James-Bond-like detection strategies, such as pasting a hair on the crack of the front door and putting face powder on the underside of the doorknob. The footage shows that Pynchonian conspiracy has morphed into its late capitalist, 21<sup>st</sup> century analog, the global capital conspiracy.

Gibson has placed a woman in the position of protagonist in this novel, and her name is exactly homonymous with the hero of Gibson’s earlier novel Neuromancer (1984). This element marks a significant shift from the conventional conspiratorial narrative of the Cold War, where most of the time the paranoid subject is male. Perhaps Cayce is the 21<sup>st</sup> century Oedipa for whom, as Jameson argues, the signs of the conspiracy are in fact effaced in the form of the footage. There is significant difference between Oedipa and Cayce: Cayce is availed of an epistemological advantage over Oedipa, in that she can divine commodity trends. In other words, Cayce can decode the noise of objects and images. Rather than pair Cayce off with Oedipa, however, it is more instructive to compare her to Case, the lead character of Neuromancer, in order to see how gender informs the conspiracy narratives of the period of globalization.

Chapter 38 of Pattern Recognition is entitled “Puppenkopf,” which is the German term for “doll’s head.” In this chapter Cayce is assaulted by her unwanted rival Dorotea,

who slips Rohypnol into her drink. During her unconsciousness, she is transported to a Russian prison; also during this time, all of the other characters, all male, fall into position and the conspiracy is, for all intents and purposes, resolved. Mainly, Hubertus Bigend and Andrei Volkov reach an agreement over the footage. Cayce's friend Parkaboy, for whom Cayce had just recently provided a ticket to Russia and gotten him involved, knows more about the events that transpired during Cayce's unconsciousness than Cayce herself, who up until that time had been at the center of events. In other words, at some point this narrative requires the unconsciousness of the leading female character in order for events to proceed. In fact, the doll's head of this chapter is indeed Cayce's head, which is summarily emptied of all knowledge and, more importantly, all agency. This sadistic narrative device is not in any way new, so Jameson's claim that Gibson's novel is a "new" literature ought at least to be qualified. We may see the accomplishments of a work of art when gender is part of the critical strategy. In Pattern Recognition and in Jameson's critique, we have an exploration of capitalist global paradigms. And yet both discourses fail still to see the ways in which the psychoanalytic category of the symbolic order structures historical events.

Jameson claims that the gender change from Neuromancer to Pattern Recognition "suggests all kinds of other stereotypical shifts of register, from active to passive, for example (from male hacker to female future-shopper)" ("Fear and Loathing" 114). However, Jameson oversimplifies the way in which activity and passivity play out in each novel. In Pattern Recognition, Cayce goes from an active and engaged consultant and then investigator to, in the final pages of the novel, a passive and recently hospitalized woman shuffling in slippers to a major meeting where Bigend and Volkov

are making arrangements. In Neuromancer, however, Case goes from being passive to active. Case spends a good deal of time in the “sensorium,” a technology whereby the person on the “deck,” or computer, can experience the exact sensations of another person into whom they are jacked. He experiences Molly’s sensations as she goes about the tasks of obtaining information, killing people, and finally being captured. Case does nothing; he only receives. In the end, though, he must save Molly, who is otherwise an entirely capable and independent woman, so he becomes active. It is interesting to note how Jameson classifies what is “masculine” and “feminine.” For him, sitting behind a deck and hacking is considered active, whereas shopping—that act of actively seeking out commodities and obtaining them—is passive. The activity/passivity distinction is not at all the way in which Jameson characterizes it in these two novels. Rather than going from active (Neuromancer’s Case) to passive (Pattern Recognition’s Cayce), the women protagonists in both novels go from active to passive. In an attempt to rewrite the gender coding of global culture, Gibson has succeeded merely in reintroducing it.

If Pattern Recognition is a new literature, it is only because it reaches into the future by way of commodity fortune-telling and not because of any especial bending of the genre of science fiction or cyberpunk, as Jameson suggests. Many writers are experimenting with the bending of the SF genre, such as Octavia Butler’s Kindred, which is a historical science fictional novel where the main female character’s “special” skill is unexplained and may not be SF at all. Nalo Hopkinson’s Brown Girl in the Ring is a blend of magical realism and science fiction. Rather, there is much in Pattern Recognition that is quite the same as what came before it—women who must, if not die, become passive at key points in the work, while men set about to orchestrating all the significant

events. There is indeed a pattern in Pattern Recognition, and in spite of the fact that the novel works to give phrase to the new globalized economy, much remains the same. The shift from the male protagonist in Neuromancer to the female protagonist in Pattern Recognition serves to mark the effect of critiques of representation, but not a shift in the narrative structures that serve to confine women. In Neuromancer, Molly must be captured and saved by Case; in Pattern Recognition, Cayce must become unconscious and subsequently be saved by Parkaboy and Bigend. By virtue of the fact that we still see an assertion of the symbolic order in a narrative of conspiracy, we may conclude that nothing has been shown by Gibson to resolve the masculine subject in crisis. It is even more disconcerting to note that the inclusion of a woman protagonist serves to draw attention away from the existence of the masculine subject who (re)asserts the symbolic order in his own interest.

While decidedly post-Cold War, Pattern Recognition is a conspiracy novel that has put a woman in the position of protagonist and still ends in a reassertion of the symbolic order. In this case, events are ordered according to the mandates of capitalism, regardless of whether it is global or not. This novel is instructive, for while it may seem that conspiracy narratives are a thing of the past, as Jameson seems to suggest, they in fact persist into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What Pattern Recognition also shows us is that regardless of what stage of capitalism we are in, as long as it persists it will be necessary for women to be passive and step aside while men arrange the global deals. While I had hoped to see a shift in the role of gender in conspiracy narratives after the Cold War, this is sadly not the case. In the spectrum of texts covered in this dissertation, Philip K. Dick is the only artist who actively if not self-consciously works to subvert gender paradigms.

We continue to have narratives of conspiracy in the period of globalization, even as they shift to accommodate the global market. And these narratives continue to shape and be shaped by the cultural hegemony of gender.

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## **Vita**

Valerie Rose Holliday was born on November 5, 1967 in New Orleans, Louisiana, to Rose and John Holliday. She was raised in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and has lived here all her life. She entered Louisiana State University in 1986 as an undergraduate in English literature and completed her baccalaureate degree in August of 1990. A deep interest in literary theory compelled her to study philosophy at the master's level at Louisiana State University from 1990 to 1992, taking a Master of Arts in May of 1992. She worked as a food stamp and eligibility worker for a number of years with the Louisiana Department of Social Services, eventually taking a position as supervisor with that agency. She entered the doctoral program in English at Louisiana State University in August 1997 as a part time student. In September of 2000 she left the Department of Social Services and committed herself full time to doctoral study in January of 2001. She now teaches philosophy and English at Baton Rouge Community College.