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Suture

We are now much better prepared than we were in Chapter 1 to explore Emile Benveniste's claim that "the foundation of 'subjectivity' . . . is determined by the linguistic status of 'person',"¹ and to witness the extension of that claim to the subject positions generated by classic cinema. The intervening chapters have indicated in a variety of ways that the terms "subject" and "signification" are at all points interdependent, and that psychoanalysis must consequently be understood as a branch of semiotics.

We have learned, for instance, that all signifying formations are the product of a facilitation between two psychic processes (the primary and the secondary), and that the sets metaphor and metonymy and paradigm and syntagm can no more be divorced from subjectivity than can condensation and displacement. We have discovered that the discourse within which the subject finds its identity is always the discourse of the Other—of a symbolic order which transcends the subject, and which orchestrates its entire history. The preceding chapters have also alerted us to the conspicuous part played by sexual difference within that order, making us aware of the phallogentricity of our current signifying practices. Finally, we have looked at those discursive instances which inaugurate subjectivity, and which mediate even the earliest of the subject's identifications: the alignment of the subject with the binary signifier, and its subordination to the Name-of-the-Father.

It would now seem to be the moment to examine some of the textual strategies whereby subjectivity is constantly *reactivated*. We have chosen cinema as our example because its combination of images and linguistic sounds renders particularly vivid the dual parts played in that reactivation by the imaginary and symbolic registers.

"Suture" is the name given to the procedures by means of which cinematic texts confer subjectivity upon their viewers. These procedures have been exhaustively theorized by a number of writers on film, each of whom has modified and expanded upon the psychoanalytic definition of suture originally offered by Jacques-Alain Miller. Before we turn to this theoretical complex, however, some restatement of Benveniste's notions about discourse and subjectivity would seem appropriate.

A) DISCOURSE AND SUBJECTIVITY

We noted earlier in this study that Saussure leaves unexplored the relation of subject to signifying chain; his semiotics includes the subject only as a generator of *paroles* (speech acts). He consequently perceives the relationship between signifiers and signifieds as stable and predictable, unaffected by individual speakers. While insisting upon the vital role played both by paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships in determining the value of all signifying elements, he nevertheless argues for the possibility of anchoring particular signifiers to particular signifieds in order to form linguistic signs.

Lacan has suggested that there can be no such anchoring of particular signifiers to particular signifieds—that meaning emerges only through discourse, as the consequence of displacements along a signifying chain. Moreover, like Peirce, Derrida, and Barthes, he insists upon the commutability of the signified, upon its capacity to function in turn as a signifier. Finally, by defining the signifier as that which "represents the subject for another signifier," Lacan indicates that signification cannot be considered apart from the subject.

Benveniste verifies all three of these assertions at once when he draws our attention to a group of words which has no meaning at the level of the abstract system or *langue*. The group in

question includes "I," "you," "here," "there," "then," "when," and conjugated verbs, whose tenses always function indexically. These signifiers have no stable signifieds, are activated only within discourse, and assume meaning only in relation to a subject. Moreover, they are not predictable, but vary from discursive instance to discursive instance, and even within the same signifying chain. "I" and "you," and "here" and "there" are endlessly reversible signifiers; the signifier "you" addressed by one person to another immediately translates in the mind of the second person into "I," and "here" and "there" function in much the same way.

We must emphasize that these signifiers do not connect up with real persons and objects any more than do other signifiers; the term "I" has no reference to the organic reality of the subject who uses it, nor does "there" coincide with a physical place. They are fully contained within a closed system of signification; "I" derives its value from "you," and "here" from "there," just as "black" refers to "white," or "male" to "female."

Benveniste in no way qualifies the distinction between being and signification which is so central to the Lacanian scheme. Not only does he carry over that distinction into his own more specifically linguistic discussion, but he formulates it with greater precision. We recall that the gap which separates being from signification manifests itself in Benveniste's writings as the division between the speaking subject (*le sujet de l'énonciation*) and the subject of the utterance or speech (*le sujet de l'énoncé*):

I signifies "the person who is uttering the present instance of the discourse containing *I*." . . . *I* can only be identified by the instance of discourse that contains it and by that alone. It has no value except . . . in the act of speaking in which it is uttered. There is thus a combined double instance in this process: the instance of *I* as referent and the instance of the discourse containing *I* as the referee. The definition can now be stated precisely as: *I* is "the individual who utters the present instance of discourse containing the linguistic instance *I*." [218]

The speaking subject belongs to what Lacan would call the domain of the real, but it can attain subjectivity or self-apprehension only through the intervention of signification. Since signi-

fiction results in an aphanisis of the real, the speaking subject and its discursive representative—i.e. the subject of the speech—remain perpetually dissimultaneous, at odds.

The reason that the signifiers isolated by Benveniste are activated only within discourse is that they require both a subject who will fill them up conceptually (i.e. supply them with a signified) and one who will identify with the most important of them: the “I.” (The first-person pronoun acquires its privileged status from the fact that it determines the meaning of the signifiers “here,” “there,” “then,” “when,” as well as the tenses of all verbs in a given syntagmatic cluster. The notions of space and time implied by these various terms are keyed to the subject of the speech.)

In ordinary conversational situations, the speaking subject performs both of these actions; that subject automatically connects up the pronouns “I” and “you” with those mental images by means of which it recognizes both itself and the person to whom it speaks, and it identifies with the former of these. However, when a subject reads a novel or views a film it performs only one of these actions, that of identification. The representations within which we recognize ourselves are clearly manufactured elsewhere, at the point of the discourse’s origin. In the case of cinema, that point of origin must be understood as both broadly cultural (i.e. as the symbolic field) and as specifically technological (i.e. as encompassing the camera, the tape-recorder, the lighting equipment, the editing room, the script, etc.).²

Benveniste shows himself fully cognizant of the fact that discourse involves the “match” of the linguistic signifiers “I” and “you” to ideal representations, and that it is through those representations that the subject finds itself. In “Language in Freudian Theory” he describes discourse in precisely these terms:

All through Freudian analysis it can be seen that the subject makes use of the act of speech and discourse in order to “represent himself” to himself as he wishes to see himself and as he calls upon the “other” to observe him. His discourse is appeal and recourse: a sometimes vehement solicitation of the

other through the discourse in which he figures himself desperately, and an often mendacious recourse to the other in order to individualize himself in his own eyes. Through the sole fact of addressing another, the one who is speaking of himself installs the other in himself and thereby apprehends himself, confronts himself, and establishes himself as he aspires to be, and finally historicizes himself in this incomplete or falsified history. Language ("*langage*") is thus used here as the act of speech ("*parole*"), converted into that expression of instantaneous and elusive subjectivity which forms the condition of dialogue. The subject's language ("*langue*") provides the instrument of a discourse in which his personality is released and creates itself, reaches out to the other and makes itself be recognized by him. [67]

Benveniste here emphasizes that the signifier "I" is activated not through its reference to an actual speaker, but through its alignment with the ideal image in which that speaker sees him or herself. "You" functions in an analogous way, referring not so much to another person as to an image of that person. Benveniste finds it necessary to posit only two discursive subjects: the speaking subject and the subject of the speech. This is because he focuses so exclusively on the conversational situation; as we noted above, the speaker in a conversational situation is closely associated both with the production of the signified, and the operation of identification, and that dual association serves to blur the differences between those activities.

However, even in our preliminary discussion of cinematic texts we were obliged to add a third subject—what we decided to call the "spoken subject" or projected viewer. Cinema clarifies for us, in a way which the conversational model cannot, the distance which separates the speaking subject from the spoken subject, since it locates the first of these "behind" the discourse, and the second "in front" of the discourse. In other words, the speaking subject of the cinematic text is always situated at the site of production, while the spoken subject of that same text is most exemplarily found instead at the site of consumption.³ The cinematic model also helps us to understand that it is the spoken subject who activates those signifiers isolated by Benveniste, since it is this subject who "agrees" to be signified by them.

It is the spoken subject who, by identifying with the subject of the speech, permits the signifier "I" to represent a subject to another signifier (i.e. "you").

As we shall see, some of the theoreticians of suture concentrate their attention on the relationship between the spoken subject and the subject of the speech, while others focus instead on that between the speaking subject and the subject of the speech. In other words, some address the connections between the viewer and the fictional character with whom that viewer identifies, while others explore the connections between the level of the enunciation and that of the fiction.

Although it constitutes itself through speaking, the Lacanian subject is always simultaneously spoken. It inherits its language and its desires from the Other, and its identity and history are culturally written before it is even born. Despite his conflation of the speaking and spoken subjects, Benveniste never loses sight of the fact that subjectivity is constructed within discourse; for him, as for Lacan, the subject cannot be distinguished from signification.

Indeed, the subject has an even more provisional status in Benveniste's writings than it does in Lacan's, since it has no existence outside of the specific discursive moments in which it emerges. The subject must be constantly reconstructed through discourse—through conversation, literature, film, television, painting, photography, etc.

Curiously, this very transience results in a much less totalized view of subjectivity than that advanced by Lacan. Benveniste's discontinuous subject may depend for its emergence upon already defined discursive positions, but it has the capacity to occupy multiple and even contradictory sites. This descriptive model thus enables us to understand the subject in more culturally and historically specific ways than that provided by Lacan—i.e. in terms of a range of discursive positions available at a given time, which reflect all sorts of economic, political, sexual, artistic, and other determinants, instead of in terms of a monolithic symbolic order. It also holds open the possibility of change, since the generation of new discursive positions implies a new subjectivity as well.⁴

The concept of suture attempts to account for the means by

which subjects emerge within discourse. As I have already indicated, although that concept has been most intensely theorized in relation to cinematic texts, its initial formulation comes from Jacques-Alain Miller, one of Lacan's disciples. We will look briefly at that formulation before turning to the cinematic one.

Miller defines suture as that moment when the subject inserts itself into the symbolic register in the guise of a signifier, and in so doing gains meaning at the expense of being. In "Suture (elements of the logic of the signifier)," he writes:

Suture names the relation of the subject to the chain of its discourse . . . it figures there as the element which is lacking, in the form of a stand-in. For, while there lacking, it is not purely and simply absent. Suture, by extension—the general relation of lack to the structure of which it is an element, inasmuch as it implies the position of a taking-the-place-of.⁵

Miller's account of suture locates the emphasis in orthodox Lacanian places; the key terms in his definition of it are "lack" and "absence." Indeed, as Miller describes it, suture closely resembles the subject's inauguration into language, illustrated by Lacan with the "*fort*"/"*da*" game. A given signifier (a pronoun, a personal name) grants the subject access to the symbolic order, but alienates it not only from its own needs but from its drives. That signifier stands in for the absent subject (i.e. absent in being) whose lack it can never stop signifying.

The French theoretician Jean-Pierre Oudart subsequently transported the concept of suture into film studies, where it has been used to probe the precise nature of cinematic signification—to answer the frequently pondered questions "What is the cinematic equivalent for language in the literary text?" and "What is cinematic syntax?" These formal speculations have not pre-empted those about subjectivity but have been integrated into them. The theory of suture has been rendered more complex with each new statement about it, so that it now embraces a set of assumptions not only about cinematic signification, but about the viewing subject and the operations of ideology. Rather than retracing each argument in turn, we will here attempt to provide a synthesis of the contributions made by Jean-Pierre

Oudart, Daniel Dayan, Stephen Heath, Laura Mulvey, and Jacqueline Rose. We will conclude with a discussion of the ideological underpinnings of the theory of suture.

B) SUTURE: THE CINEMATIC MODEL

Theoreticians of cinematic suture agree that films are articulated and the viewing subject spoken by means of interlocking shots. They are thus in fundamental accord with Noel Burch's remark that "Although camera movements, entrances into and exits from frame, composition and so on can all function as devices aiding in the organization of the film object . . . the shot transition [remains] the basic element [of that organization]." ⁶ Shot relationships are seen as the equivalent of syntactic ones in linguistic discourse, as the agency whereby meaning emerges and a subject-position is constructed for the viewer.

However, some theoreticians conceptualize those relationships differently from others. Whereas Oudart and Dayan find the shot/reverse shot formation to be virtually synonymous with the operations of suture, Heath suggests that it is only one element in a much larger system, and emphasizes features of the editing process which are common to all shot transitions. We will begin by discussing the shot/reverse shot formation, and then extend the theory of suture in the directions indicated by Heath.

The shot/reverse shot formation is a cinematic set in which the second shot shows the field from which the first shot is assumed to have been taken. The logic of this set is closely tied to certain "rules" of cinematic expression, in particular the 180° rule, which dictates that the camera not cover more than 180° in a single shot. This stricture means that the camera always leaves unexplored the other 180° of an implicit circle—the half of the circle which it in fact occupies. The 180° rule is predicated on the assumption that a complete camera revolution would be "unrealistic," defining a space larger than the "naked eye" would normally cover. Thus it derives from the imperative that the camera deny its own existence as much as possible, fostering the illusion that what is shown has an autonomous

existence, independent of any technological interference, or any coercive gaze.

However, the viewing subject, unable to sustain for long its belief in the autonomy of the cinematic image, demands to know whose gaze controls what it sees. The shot/reverse shot formation is calculated to answer that question in such a manner that the cinematic illusion remains intact: Shot 1 shows a space which may or may not contain a human figure (e.g. the wall of a building, a view of the ocean, a room full of people), being careful not to violate the 180° rule. Shot 2 locates a spectator in the other 180° of the same circular field, thereby implying that the preceding shot was seen through the eyes of a figure in the cinematic narrative.* As a result, the level of enunciation remains veiled from the viewing subject's scrutiny, which is entirely absorbed within the level of the fiction; the subject of the speech seems to be the speaking subject, or to state it differently, the gaze which directs our look seems to belong to a fictional character rather than to the camera.

Theoretically, the filmmaker would be obliged to achieve an exact match between the two parts of the shot/reverse shot formation (i.e. shot 1 would delineate precisely half of a circle, and shot 2 the other half; moreover, in shot 1 the camera would take up a position identical with that of the spectator in shot 2). In practice, however, such precision is rarely observed. A simple display of a fictional character looking in shot 2 usually proves sufficient to maintain the illusion that shot 1 visually "belongs" to that character. The camera may even adopt an oblique position, slightly to one side of the actor, rather than directly facing him or her.

Filmmakers are generally no more literal with shot 1 of the shot/reverse shot formation. Often we are shown the shoulders or head of the character through whose eyes we are ostensibly looking. In fact, mathematical exactitude provides a much less successful approximation of "reality" than does the loose application of the shot/reverse shot convention.

In "Notes on Suture" Stephen Heath cautions against too restrictive an identification of suture with the shot/reverse shot

*This paradigm may be reversed.

formation, which statistical studies have shown to be symptomatic of only about one-third of the shots in a classical Hollywood film.⁷ Actually, the suture argument relies much less centrally on the notion of syntagmatic progression, and the question of whether it is achieved through the shot/reverse shot formation or by some other means, than on the process of cinematic signification, and its relationship to the viewing subject.

Consequently, the shot/reverse shot formation derives its real importance and interest for many of the theoreticians of suture because it demonstrates so lucidly the way in which cinema operates to reduplicate the history of the subject. The viewer of the cinematic spectacle experiences shot 1 as an imaginary plenitude, unbounded by any gaze, and unmarked by difference. Shot 1 is thus the site of a *jouissance* akin to that of the mirror stage prior to the child's discovery of its separation from the ideal image which it has discovered in the reflecting glass.

However, almost immediately the viewing subject becomes aware of the limitations on what it sees—aware, that is, of an absent field. At this point shot 1 becomes a signifier of that absent field, and *jouissance* gives way to unpleasure. Daniel Dayan offers a very clear summary of this transition in “The Tutor Code of Classical Cinema”:

When the viewer discovers the frame—the first step in reading the film—the triumph of his former *possession* of the image fades out. The viewer discovers that the camera is hiding things, and therefore distrusts it and the frame itself which he now understands to be arbitrary. He wonders why the frame is what it is. This radically transforms his mode of participation—the unreal space between characters and/or objects is no longer perceived as pleasurable. It is now the space which separates the camera from the characters. The latter have lost their quality of presence. The spectator discovers that his possession of space was only partial, illusory. He feels dispossessed of what he is prevented from seeing. He discovers that he is only authorized to see what happens to be in the axis of the gaze of another spectator, who is ghostly or absent.⁸

Jean-Pierre Oudart refers to the spectator who occupies the missing field as the “Absent One.” The Absent One, also known

as the Other, has all the attributes of the mythically potent symbolic father: potency, knowledge, transcendental vision, self-sufficiency, and discursive power. It is of course the speaking subject of the cinematic text, a subject which as we have already indicated finds its locus in a cluster of technological apparatuses (the camera, the tape-recorder, etc.). We will see that this speaking subject often finds its fictional correlative in an ideal paternal representation.

The speaking subject has everything which the viewing subject, suddenly cognizant of the limitations on its vision, understands itself to be lacking. This sense of lack inspires in that subject the desire for "something else," a desire to see more.

However, it is equally important that the presence of the speaking subject be hidden from the viewer. Oudart insists that the classic film text must at all costs conceal from the viewing subject the passivity of that subject's position, and this necessitates denying the fact that there is any reality outside of the fiction.

The shot/reverse shot formation is ideally suited for this dual purpose, since it alerts the spectator to that other field whose absence is experienced as unpleasurable while at the same time linking it to the gaze of a fictional character. Thus a gaze within the fiction serves to conceal the controlling gaze outside the fiction; a benign other steps in and obscures the presence of the coercive and castrating Other. In other words, the subject of the speech passes itself off as the speaking subject.

For Oudart, cinematic signification depends entirely upon the moment of unpleasure in which the viewing subject perceives that it is lacking something, i.e. that there is an absent field. Only then, with the disruption of imaginary plenitude, does the shot become a signifier, speaking first and foremost of that thing about which the Lacanian signifier never stops speaking: castration. A complex signifying chain is introduced in place of the lack which can never be made good, suturing over the wound of castration with narrative. However, it is only by inflicting the wound to begin with that the viewing subject can be made to want the restorative of meaning and narrative.

Stephen Heath emphasizes the process of negation which

occurs concurrently with a film's positive assertions—its structuring absences and losses. In "Narrative Space," he writes:

Film is the production not just of a negation but equally, simultaneously, of a negativity, the excessive foundation of the process itself, of the very movement of the spectator as subject in the film; which movement is stopped in the negation and its centring positions, the constant phasing in of subject vision ("this but not that" as the sense of the image in flow).⁹

The unseen apparatuses of enunciation represent one of these structuring losses, but there are others which are equally important. The classic cinematic organization depends upon the subject's willingness to become absent to itself by permitting a fictional character to "stand in" for it, or by allowing a particular point of view to define what it sees. The operation of suture is successful at the moment that the viewing subject says, "Yes, that's me," or "That's what I see."

Equally important to the cinematic organization are the operations of cutting and excluding. It is not merely that the camera is incapable of showing us everything at once, but that it does not wish to do so. We must be shown only enough to know that there is more, and to want that "more" to be disclosed. A prime agency of disclosure is the cut, which divides one shot from the next. The cut guarantees that both the preceding and the subsequent shots will function as structuring absences to the present shot. These absences make possible a signifying ensemble, convert one shot into a signifier of the next one, and the signified of the preceding one.

Thus cinematic coherence and plenitude emerge through multiple cuts and negations. Each image is defined through its differences from those that surround it syntagmatically and those it paradigmatically implies ("this but not that"), as well as through its denial of any discourse but its own. Each positive cinematic assertion represents an imaginary conversion of a whole series of negative ones. This castrating coherence, this definition of a discursive position for the viewing subject which necessitates not only its loss of being, but the repudiation of

alternative discourses, is one of the chief aims of the system of suture.

Most classic cinematic texts go to great lengths to cover over these "cuts." Hitchcock's *Psycho*, on the other hand, deliberately exposes the negations upon which filmic plenitude is predicated. It unabashedly foregrounds the voyeuristic dimensions of the cinematic experience, making constant references to the speaking subject, and forcing the viewer into oblique and uncomfortable positions both *vis-à-vis* the cinematic apparatuses and the spectacle which they produce.

Psycho not only ruptures the Oedipal formation which provides the basis of the present symbolic order, but declines to put it back together at the end. The final shot of Norman/mother, which conspicuously lacks a reverse shot, makes clear that the coherence of that order proceeds from the institution of sexual difference, and the denial of bi-sexuality.

Finally, *Psycho* obliges the viewing subject to make abrupt shifts in identification. These identifications are often in binary opposition to each other; thus the viewing subject finds itself inscribed into the cinematic discourse at one juncture as victim, and at the next juncture as victimizer. These abrupt shifts would seem to thwart the process of identification, as would all the other strategies just enumerated. However, quite the reverse holds true. The more intense the threat of castration and loss, the more intense the viewing subject's desire for narrative closure.

Psycho's opening few shots take in the exterior of a group of city buildings, without a single reverse shot to anchor that spectacle to a fictional gaze. The transition from urban skyline to the interior of a hotel room is achieved by means of a trick shot: the camera appears to penetrate the space left at the bottom of a window whose venetian blind is three-quarters closed. The viewing subject is made acutely aware of the impossibility of this shot—not just the technical but the "moral" impossibility, since the shot in question effects a startling breach of privacy.

Our sense of intruding is accentuated by the first shot inside the hotel room, which shows us a woman (Marion), still in bed, and her lover (Sam) standing beside the bed, half-undressed,

with a towel in his hands. His face is cropped by the frame, so that he preserves a certain anonymity denied to Marion, who will be the object of numerous coercive gazes during the film. From the very outset, the viewer is not permitted to forget that he or she participates in that visual coercion.

Marion and Sam exchange a series of embraces before leaving the hotel room. Their love-making is interrupted by a discussion about Sam's marital status, and the strain imposed by their clandestine meetings. Marion expresses an intense desire to have their relationship "normalized"—to be inserted through marriage into an acceptable discursive position. Sam comments bitterly on the economic obstacles in the way of such a union. Later in the same day when Marion is entrusted with \$40,000 which is intended to buy someone else's marital bliss, and when the man who gives it to her announces that he never carries more money than he can afford to lose, Marion decides to achieve her culturally induced ambitions through culturally taboo means.

The sequence which follows is an extremely interesting one in terms of suture. In the first shot of that scene Marion stands in the doorway of her bedroom closet, her right side toward the camera, wearing a black brassiere and half-slip. A bed separates the camera from her, and in the left far corner there is a vanity-table and mirror. Suddenly the camera moves backward to reveal a corner of the bed not previously exposed, on which lies the envelope of stolen money. It zooms in on the money, then pans to the left and provides a close-up of an open suitcase, full of clothing. During all of this time, Marion is facing the closet, unable to see what we see.

There is a cut to Marion, who turns and looks toward the bed. Once again the camera pulls back to reveal the packet of money. In the next shot, Marion adjusts her hair and clothes in front of the vanity-table and mirror. She turns to look at the bed, and we are given a reverse shot of the stolen envelope. This particular shot/reverse shot formation is repeated. Finally, Marion sits down on the bed, puts the money in her purse, picks up the suitcase, and leaves.

This sequence achieves a number of things: It establishes the fascination of the money, not only for Marion but for us

(we can't help looking at it, even when Marion's back is turned). It delimits a claustal transactional area, an area from which all mediating objects (i.e. the bed) are eventually removed, from which Marion can no longer emerge. The film resorts more and more obsessively to shot/reverse shots in the following episodes, suggesting Marion's absolute entrapment within the position of a thief. Finally, it associates the money with a transcendental gaze, a gaze which exceeds Marion's, and that can see her without ever being seen—one which knows her better than she knows herself.

The privileged object in the shot/reverse shot formations which punctuate the second half of this episode is the packet of money, not Marion. Indeed, the entire spatial field is defined in relation to that spot on the bed where the \$40,000 lies; positioned in front of it, we look for a long time at the contents of the room before its human inhabitant ever casts a significant glance at anything. By privileging the point of view of an inanimate object, Hitchcock makes us acutely aware of what Oudart would call the "Absent One"—i.e. of the speaking subject. Our relationship with the camera remains unmediated, "unsoftened" by the intervention of a human gaze.

Far from attempting to erase our perception of the cinematic apparatus, the film exploits it, playing on the viewing subject's own paranoia and guilt. We enjoy our visual superiority to Marion, but at the same time we understand that the gaze of the camera—that gaze in which we participate—exceeds us, threatening not only Marion but anyone exposed to the film's spectacle.

It would appear that the system of suture cannot be too closely identified with that shot/reverse shot formation in which the function of looking is firmly associated with a fictional character, since by violating that convention Hitchcock throws a much wider net over his audience. He thereby forces the viewing subject to take up residence not only within one of the film's discursive positions (that of victim), but a second (that of sadistic and legalistic voyeur). The whole operation of suture can be made *more* rather than less irresistible when the field of the speaking subject is continually implied. Two other episodes in *Psycho* demonstrate the same point.

The earlier of these inscribes the law into the fictional level of the film through the figure of a highway patrolman. An opening long-shot shows Marion's car pulled over to the side of a deserted road. A police car pulls into frame and parks behind it. In the next shot the patrolman climbs out of his car, walks over to the driver's side of Marion's automobile, and looks through the window. A third shot shows us what he sees—a sleeping Marion. A succession of almost identical shot/reverse shot formations follow, by means of which the superiority of the legal point of view is dramatized. The patrolman knocks on Marion's window and at last she wakes up. We are now provided with a shot/reverse shot exchange between the two characters, but although Marion does in fact look back at the person who has intruded upon her, his eyes are concealed by a pair of dark glasses.

The policeman interrogates Marion about her reasons for sleeping in her car, and she explains that she pulled over because of fatigue. She asks: "Have I broken a law?" The conversation is as oblique as the exchange of looks—rather than answering her question, the patrolman asks: "Is there anything wrong?" His question is neither casual nor solicitous; it is a threat, backed up by a series of quick shot/reverse shots which expose Marion yet further to the scrutiny of a law which it seems impossible to evade, and impossible to decipher.

The police officer asks to see Marion's license. Again the question is far from innocent; "license" has as broadly existential a meaning as the word "wrong" in the earlier question. After she gives him her driver's license, the patrolman walks around to the front of the car to write down the license plate number. We see him through the windshield, still protected by his dark glasses from any personal recognition. The reverse shot discloses not Marion, but the license plate which seems to speak for her with greater authority, and to do so through a legal discourse which renders her even more passive.

The policeman permits Marion to resume her journey, but he tails her for several miles. Her paranoia during this period is conveyed through a group of alternating frontal shots of her driving, and reverse shots of her rear-view mirror. The patrol car is clearly visible in both—Marion is now doubly inscribed.

Several sequences later, as Marion continues on her journey in the rain and darkness, the voices of her boss, of the man whose money she has stolen, and of a female friend are superimposed on the sound track, speaking about Marion and defining her even more fully. This device is the acoustic equivalent of all those shots which we have seen, but which Marion has been unable to see because her back was turned, because she was looking in another direction, or because she was asleep. It serves, like those shots, to reinforce the viewing subject's consciousness of an Other whose transcendent and castrating gaze can never be returned, and which always sees one thing: guilt.

The famous shower sequence not only further disassociates the film's spectacle from any of its characters but suggests how much larger the system of suture is than any shot formation. The scene begins with Marion undressing in a motel bedroom, watched through a peephole by Norman, her eventual killer. She goes into the bathroom and flushes down the torn pieces of paper on which she has just taken stock of her financial situation (she has decided to return the stolen money, and wants to calculate how much of it she has spent). Marion then closes the bathroom door, effectively eliminating the possibility of Norman or anyone else within the fiction watching her while she showers. Once again the camera insists on the primacy of its own point of view.

Marion steps inside the bath, and we see her outline through the half-transparent curtain. Then, in a shot which parallels the earlier one in which we seem to slip through the bottom of the hotel window, we penetrate the curtain and find ourselves inside the shower with Marion. The film flaunts these trick shots, as if to suggest the futility of resisting the gaze of the speaking subject.

There are nine shots inside the shower before Marion's killer attacks. They are remarkable for their brevity, and for their violation of the 30° rule (the rule that at least 30° of space must separate the position of the camera in one shot from that which follows it in order to justify the intervening cut). Some of the theoreticians of suture argue that the narrative text attempts to conceal its discontinuities and ruptures, but the shower sequence repeatedly draws our attention to the fact of the cine-

matic cut. This episode also includes a number of obtrusive and disorienting shots—shots taken from the point of view of the shower head at which Marion looks. When the stabbing begins, there is a cinematic cut with almost every thrust of the knife. The implied equation is too striking to ignore: the cinematic machine is lethal; it too murders and dissects. The shower sequence would seem to validate Heath's point that the coherence and plenitude of narrative film are created through negation and loss.

We have no choice but to identify with Marion in the shower, to insert ourselves into the position of the wayward subject who has strayed from the highway of cultural acceptability, but who now wants to make amends. The vulnerability of her naked and surprisingly small body leaves us without anything to deflect that transaction. Marion's encounter with the warm water inside the shower not only suggests a ritual purification, but a contact so basic and primitive as to break down even such dividing lines as class or sexual difference. Finally, the whole process of identification is formally insisted upon by the brevity of the shots; the point of view shifts constantly within the extremely confined space of the shower, making Marion the only stable object, that thing to which we necessarily cling.

That identification is not even disrupted when the cutting activity is mirrored at the level of the fiction, and a bleeding, stumbling Marion struggles to avoid the next knife wound. It is sustained up until the moment when Marion is definitively dead, an inanimate eye now closed to all visual exchanges. At this point we find ourselves in the equally appalling position of the gaze which has negotiated Marion's murder, and the shading of the corners of the frame so as to simulate the perspective of a peep-hole insists that we acknowledge our own voyeuristic implication.

Relief comes with the resumption of narrative, a resumption which is effected through a tracking shot from the bathroom into the bedroom. That tracking shot comes to rest first upon the packet of money, then upon an open window through which Norman's house can be seen, and finally upon the figure of Norman himself, running toward the motel. When Norman emerges from his house, adjacent to the motel, the full extent

of our complicity becomes evident, since we then realize that for the past five or ten minutes we have shared not his point of view, but that of a more potent and castrating Other. But the envelope of money rescues us from too prolonged a consideration of that fact.

The \$40,000 assures us that there is more to follow, and that even though we have just lost our heroine, and our own discursive position, we can afford to finance others. What sutures us at this juncture is the fear of being cut off from narrative. Our investment in the fiction is made manifest through the packet of money which provides an imaginary bridge from Marion to the next protagonist.

Psycho is relentless in its treatment of the viewing subject, forcing upon it next an identification with Norman, who with sober face and professional skill disposes of the now affect-less body of Marion, cleans the motel room, and sinks the incriminating car in quicksand. Marion is subsequently replaced in the narrative by her look-alike sister, and Norman's schizophrenia dramatizes the same vacillation from the position of victim to that of victimizer which the viewing subject is obliged to make in the shower sequence and elsewhere. *Psycho* runs through a whole series of culturally overdetermined narratives, showing the same cool willingness to substitute one for another that it adopts with its characters. Moreover, the manifest context of these narratives yields all too quickly to the latent, undergoing in the process a disquieting vulgarization. We understand perfectly the bourgeois inspiration of Marion's marital dreams, and the spuriousness of the redemptive scenario she hopes to enact by returning the money. Similarly, Norman's Oedipal crisis is played more as farce than melodrama, replete with stuffed birds and hackneyed quarrels in which he plays both parts.

The film terrorizes the viewing subject, refusing ever to let it off the hook. That hook is the system of suture, which is held up to our scrutiny even as we find ourselves thoroughly ensnared by it. What *Psycho* obliges us to understand is that we want suture so badly that we'll take it at any price, even with the fullest knowledge of what it entails—passive insertions into pre-existing discursive positions (both mythically potent and

mythically impotent); threatened losses and false recoveries; and subordination to the castrating gaze of a symbolic Other.

In fact, the more the operations of enunciation are revealed to the viewing subject, the more tenacious is its desire for the comfort and closure of narrative—the more anxious it will be to seek refuge within the film's fiction. In so doing, the viewing subject submits to cinematic signification, permits itself to be spoken by the film's discourse. For the theoreticians of suture, the viewing subject thereby re-enacts its entry into the symbolic order.

We have seen how central a role narrative plays in determining the viewer's relationship to *Psycho*, but we have not yet attempted a general formulation of the ways in which suture overlaps with story. It is once again Stephen Heath to whom we must turn for such a formulation.

Heath argues that narrative not only makes good the losses and negations which result from classic cinema's editing operations, but that its coherence is made possible through them. He points out that fragmentation is the basis of diegetic unity—that narrative integration is predicated not so much on long takes and invisible cuts as on short takes which somehow foreground their own partial and incomplete status. The narrative moves forward and acts upon the viewer only through the constant intimation of something which has not yet been fully seen, understood, revealed; in short, it relies upon the inscription of lack:

. . . the work of classical continuity is not to hide or ignore off-screen space but, on the contrary, to contain it, to regularise its fluctuation in a constant movement of reappropriation. It is this movement that defines the rules of continuity and the fiction of space they serve to construct, the whole functioning according to a kind of metonymic lock in which off-screen space becomes on-screen space and is replaced in turn by the space it holds off, each joining over the next. The join is conventional and ruthlessly selective (it generally leaves out of account, for example, the space that might be supposed to be masked at the top and bottom of the frame, concentrating much more on the space at the sides of the frame or on that

“in front”, “behind the camera,” as in variations of field/reverse field), and demands that the off-screen space recaptured must be “called for,” must be “logically consequential,” must arrive as “answer,” “fulfilment of promise” or whatever (and not as difference or contradiction)—must be narrativised.¹⁰

Heath here suggests that the shot/reverse shot formation is merely one device among many for encoding anticipation into a film, and for regularizing the difference which might otherwise emerge as contradiction. Camera movement, movement within the frame, off-screen sound, and framing can all function in a similar indexical fashion to a fictional gaze, directing our attention and our desire beyond the limits of one shot to the next. Narrative, however, represents a much more indispensable part of the system of suture. It transforms cinematic space into dramatic place, thereby providing the viewer not just with a vantage but a subject position.

Cinematic suture is thus largely synonymous with the operations of classic narrative, operations which include a wide variety of editing, lighting, compositional and other formal elements, but within which the values of absence and lack always play a central role. Those values not only activate the viewer's desire and transform one shot into a signifier for the next, but serve to deflect attention away from the level of enunciation to that of the fiction, even when as in *Psycho* the cinematic apparatus is constantly implied. As Heath observes,

The suturing operation is in the process, the give and take of presence and absence, the play of negativity and negation, flow and bind. Narrativisation, with its continuity, closes, and is that movement of closure that shifts the spectator as subject in its terms. . . .¹¹

A closely adjacent passage from “Narrative Space” emphasizes the never ending nature of the suture process, the fact that the subject's “construction-reconstruction has always to be renewed.” What seems to us a stable world is actually nothing more than the effect of this constant renewal, of the ceaselessness of the discursive activities which provide us with our sub-

jectivity. As we will see in a moment, those discursive activities serve a very important ideological function.

C) SUTURE AND IDEOLOGY

The Israeli theoretician Daniel Dayan was the first writer on film to attempt to use the suture argument as a means of examining ideological coercion. For him suture effects this coercion by persuading the viewer to accept certain cinematic images as an accurate reflection of his or her subjectivity, and because it does this *transparently* (i.e. it conceals the apparatuses of enunciation). These two processes are connected, since if the viewer were aware of the film as discourse, he or she would presumably be less willing to be spoken by it. Like Oudart, Dayan isolates shot-to-shot relationships as the strategy whereby both of these tasks are accomplished:

What happens in systematic terms is this: the absent one of shot one is an element of the code that is attracted into the message by means of shot two. When shot two replaces shot one, the absent one is transferred from the level of enunciation to the level of fiction. As a result of this, the code effectively disappears and the ideological effect of the film is thereby secured. The code, which *produces* an imaginary, ideological effect, is hidden by the message. Unable to see the workings of the code, the spectator is at its mercy. His imaginary is sealed into the film; the spectator thus absorbs an ideological effect without being aware of it. . . . [449]

Dayan's notion of ideology is very close to that advanced by Louis Althusser in the famous essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," particularly in its deployment of the term "imaginary," and in its emphasis on invisibility. We will consequently turn to Althusser for a fuller exposition of the definition of ideology which informs the theory of suture.

Althusser defines ideology as a system of representations which promotes on the part of the subject an "imaginary" relation to the "real" conditions of its existence:

. . . all ideology represents in its necessarily imaginary distortion not the existing relations of production (and the other

relations that derive from them), but above all the (imaginary) relationship of individuals to the relations of production and the relations that derive from them. What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live.¹²

Althusser here uses two terms which are central to the Lacanian argument—"real" and "imaginary"—while implying a third—"symbolic." However, he attributes to each a slightly different meaning, and these differences are critical to our understanding of his ideological model.

Whereas within the Lacanian scheme "real" signifies the phenomenal world and the subject's organic being, in the Althusserian one it refers instead to the complex of economic "facts" which obtain at any given moment of history—to "the relations of production and to class relations" (166–67). Although he does not say so, Althusser would presumably include the apparatuses of cinematic enunciation in the category "means of production," and would agree with the theoreticians of suture that the viewer is encouraged to establish a relationship not with those apparatuses themselves, but with their fictional representation—i.e. that the viewer's real relation to the cinema is concealed by an imaginary one.¹³

The term "imaginary" occupies a much more ambiguous place within Althusser's writings. While designating the operations of identification associated with it by Lacan, it also refers to activities which the latter attributes to the symbolic. In other words, when Althusser uses the term "imaginary" he means identifications which have been culturally initiated. This important point requires a fuller exposition.

We recall that for Lacan the subject's first identification occurs prior to its entry into the symbolic order, during what he calls the "mirror stage." Although he describes this identification as involving the subject's confusion of itself with an ideal image—and although he claims that it in this respect anticipates the Oedipus complex—Lacan nevertheless insists that the mirror stage is spontaneous.

Althusser denies that identifications ever occur sponta-

neously or outside of the symbolic order. He argues that the subject is from the very outset within culture. To be more precise, Althusser states that the subject has "always-already" been inside ideology, has from the very beginning of its existence defined itself by means of historically specific ideal images. A passage from "Brecht and Bertolazzi," which relies heavily upon the metaphor of a mirror, helps to clarify the connection established by Althusser between the imaginary and the ideological:

. . . what . . . is . . . ideology if not simply the "familiar," "well known," transparent myths in which a society or an age can recognize itself (but not know itself), the mirror it looks into for self-recognition, precisely the mirror it must break if it is to know itself? What is the ideology of a society or a period if it is not that society's or period's consciousness of itself, that is, an immediate material which spontaneously implies, looks for and naturally finds its forms in the image of a consciousness of self living the totality of its world in the transparency of its own myths? [144]

What Althusser describes in this passage is the process whereby the subject constantly rediscovers itself in the same ideological representations by means of which it first knew itself. Thus Emma Bovary reconfirms her masochistic subjectivity with each repetition of the romantic scenario whose confines she first made hers at the convent, and the male viewer aligns himself once again with the paternal position when he identifies with the protagonist of *Rebel Without a Cause*. They do so transparently, without any consciousness that the images and narratives with which they identify are historically and culturally specific.

When Althusser talks about breaking the mirror within which the subject finds a prefabricated identity, he does not mean to suggest that the subject thereby transcends ideology, but rather becomes aware of its operations. Not only does he argue that there is no moment during the early life of the subject when it is outside of ideology, but that there will be no such moment in the future. As he observes in "Marxism and Humanism," to posit such a moment would be to affirm an "essence" of man:

. . . *ideology is as such an organic part of every social totality. It is as if human societies could not survive without these specific formations, these systems of representations (at various levels), their ideologies. Human societies secrete ideology as the very element and atmosphere indispensable to their historical respiration and life. Only an ideological world outlook could have imagined societies without ideology and accepted the utopian idea of a world in which ideology (not just one of its historical forms) would disappear without trace. . . . historical materialism cannot conceive that even a communist society could ever do without ideology.*

. . .¹⁴

Althusser thus eliminates both the notion of a pre-cultural alienation which anticipates later cultural alienations of the subject from being, and that of a revolutionary culture within which subjects at last know themselves in an unmediated way.

A final meaning which comes into play when Althusser uses the word “imaginary”—i.e. “illusory”—must presumably be understood as pertaining only to existing bourgeois ideologies. Since for Althusser the relations of production and class relations constitute the real, any ideology which clearly permitted us to conceptualize our own position within those relations would no longer function to conceal the real from us; that ideology would still promote a system of identification, still provide us with mirrors within which we would find ourselves, but they would more accurately reflect the material conditions of our lives. (It is important to note that although Althusser’s definition of the real is congruent with Marxism, it is also by no means incompatible with our own semiotic argument, in that like the symbolic order it is a field of relationships.)

As we observed in Chapter 1, Althusser describes the operation whereby individuals are compelled to identify with the representations which their culture supplies as “interpellation.” This concept is central not only to his discussion of ideology but to the whole system of textual identification:

. . . ideology “acts” or “functions” in such a way that it “recruits” subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or “transforms” the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpel-*

lation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most common everyday police (or other) hailing: "Hey, you there!"

Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was "really" addressed to him, and that "it was *really him* who was hailed." . . .

Naturally for the convenience and clarity of my little theoretical theatre I have had to present things in the form of a temporal succession. . . . But in reality these things happen without any succession. The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing.¹⁵

Interpellation designates the conjunction of imaginary and symbolic transactions which results in the subject's insertion into an already existing discourse. The individual who is culturally "hailed" or "called" simultaneously identifies with the subject of the speech and takes his or her place in the syntax which defines that subjective position. The first of these operations is imaginary, the second symbolic. The concept of interpellation would thus seem to be intimately related to that of suture.

Althusser distinguishes between what he calls concrete individuals and concrete subjects, but he admits that the distinction is purely theoretical. We are concrete individuals until we have been culturally interpellated as subjects, but each of us was from the beginning "always-already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which [we were] 'expected' once [we had] been conceived."¹⁶ This formulation would suggest that the family plays as central a role within the Althusserian scheme as it does in the Freudian or Lacanian ones. It remains to determine whether that role is seen as ideological or as transcultural, as it is in the other two models. Needless to say, this is a critical determination since it includes the all-important issue of sexual difference.

By making the phallus the central cultural signifier, and by universalizing the Oedipal experience (in short, by making it

synonymous with culture), Freud and Lacan effectively eliminate the category of the ideological. Culture is seen as the product of the incest taboo, and is therefore necessarily patriarchal. It becomes quite simply impossible for the subject to transcend the Oedipal limitations; any attempt to do so results in illness or regression.

In the body of his essay "Lacan and Freud," Althusser accedes to the claims made by Freud and Lacan for the universality of the Oedipal experience, but in a footnote halfway through that essay he argues that while there may be a transcendent "Law of Culture," it expresses itself through specific ideological paradigms, "in which the persons inscribed in (real kinship) structures live their functions":

It is not enough to know that the Western family is patriarchal and exogamic . . . we must also work out the ideological formations that govern paternity, maternity, conjugality and childhood: what are "husband-and-wife-being," "father-being," "mother-being" and "child-being" in the modern world? A mass of research remains to be done on these ideological formations. This is a task for *historical materialism*.¹⁷

In other words, Althusser perceives familial relations as elaborately mediated by ideological representations. At the conclusion of "Lacan and Freud," Althusser also proposes that the functions served by the structures of kinship vary historically, and that these variations will always be ideologically articulated (199). Indeed, in the essay with which we began this discussion, Althusser describes the family as an ideological state apparatus—as an agency for reproducing the existing cultural order by supplying it with sexually differentiated subjects.

Althusser's emphasis upon the material forms which ideology always takes provides a final link between his writings and the theory of suture. Althusser, Benveniste, and the theoreticians of suture all argue that it is only through discourse that ideological identifications occur, and that the subject emerges. They also agree that discourse can be activated only through subjects who permit themselves to be spoken by it.

We have seen that the match of subject and cinematic dis-

course occurs not just at the level of the shot, but at that of the story—that films re-interpellate the viewer into pre-established discursive positions not only by effacing the signs of their own production, but through the lure of narrative. The standard format of the classic cinematic text duplicates within the fiction as a whole the paradigm of the shot/reverse shot, disrupting the existing symbolic order, dislocating the subject-positions within it, and challenging its ideals of coherence and fullness only in order subsequently to re-affirm that order, those positions, and those ideals.

Sometimes it is recognizably the same order which is restored at the end of the film. Thus *It's a Wonderful Life* calls into question the potency of George Bailey and the authenticity of the structures of the family and capitalism only so that it can re-validate them. In other cases a new order seems to replace one which has been fractured. For instance, in *Marnie* a “false” coherence (the coherence of a matriarchy) gives way to a “true” coherence (the coherence of a patriarchy). However, the new order always turns out to have been the original order, temporarily interrupted. The system of suture functions not only constantly to re-interpellate the viewing subject into the same discursive positions, thereby giving that subject the illusion of a stable and continuous identity, but to re-articulate the existing symbolic order in ideologically orthodox ways.

We observed earlier, in relation to *Psycho*, that the insertion of the viewer into the cinematic discourse is facilitated through the cuts by means of which films are articulated. That insertion also involves another cutting operation, that implied by sexual difference. It is imperative to note that the identifications and erotic investments of classic cinema—like those established during the Oedipus complex—produce a sexually differentiated subject. Not only are classic cinema's subject positions organized along sexual lines, but so is the desire it inaugurates. Indeed, the entire system of suture is inconceivable apart from sexual difference. As Claire Johnston points out in “Towards a Feminist Film Practice: Some Theses”:

As a process, a practice of signification, suture is an ideological operation with a particular function in relation to paternal ide-

ology in that out of a system of differences it establishes a position in relation to the phallus. In so doing it places the spectator in relation to that position. . . . It is this imaginary unity, the sutured coherence, the imaginary sense of identity set up by the classic film which must be challenged by a feminist film practice to achieve a different constitution of the subject in relation to ideology.¹⁸

One of the chief mechanisms by which the system of suture conceals the apparatuses of enunciation is by setting up a relay of glances between the male characters within the fiction and the male viewers in the theater audience, a relay which has the female body as its object. Similarly, one of the most effective strategies at its disposal for deflecting attention away from the passivity and lack of the viewing subject's own position is by displacing those values onto a female character within the fiction. (Needless to say, this displacement assuages the anxieties only of the male viewer; it heightens those of the female viewer.) Often the entire narrative is organized around a demonstration and an interrogation of the female character's castrated condition, a demonstration and an interrogation which have as their ultimate aim the recovery of a sense of potency and wholeness for both the male character and the male viewer. This narrative organization reflects the paradigm which suture establishes at the level of the shot; in both cases an absence is first revealed, and then covered over through a skillful displacement from the level of enunciation onto that of the fiction. We will discuss the relationship between suture and sexual difference in greater detail in the following section.

D) SUTURE AND SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

In an extremely influential essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey argues that the classic film text distinguishes sharply between the male and the female subjects, and that it does so on the basis of vision.¹⁹ The former of these is defined in terms of his capacity to look (i.e. as a voyeur) and the latter in terms of her capacity to attract the male gaze (i.e. as an exhibitionist). This opposition is entirely in keeping with

the dominant cultural roles assigned to men and women, since voyeurism is the active or "masculine" form of the scopophilic drive, while exhibitionism is the passive or "feminine" form of the same drive. As a means of emphasizing this point, Mulvey describes the male subject as the imagined source of the gaze, and the female subject as the imagined recipient of the gaze.

In fact, the only truly productive gaze in the cinema is that of the camera; that gaze produces the images with which the viewer identifies, and which he or she loves. In short, the camera "looks" the viewer as subject. However, just as a shot of a character within the fiction engaged in the activity of seeing functions to cover over the camera's coercive gaze, so the representation of the male subject in terms of vision has the effect of attributing to him qualities which in fact belong to that same apparatus—qualities of potency and authority.

The female subject of the speech or narrative—i.e. the female protagonist of the fiction—plays a crucial role in the second of these substitutions. She signifies the lack which properly belongs both to the male and the female viewers, who are spoken, not speaking, and whose gazes are controlled, not controlling. She also signifies lack within the fiction of the film, a fiction which inevitably duplicates dominant cultural values. She signifies, that is, the absence of the phallus (of control, power, privilege). As usual, her body provides the means for representing this deprivation. She simultaneously attracts the gaze—appeals to the senses—and represents castration.

The spectacle of classic cinema promotes a constant re-enactment of the primal "discovery" of the female subject's lack. As we have noted, this "discovery" helps to define the male subject as adequate, facilitates his identification with attributes which in fact belong to the apparatuses of enunciation. However, as Mulvey points out, the revelation of female lack can also have a very different effect upon the male subject, inducing in him the fear of a similar deprivation. In other words, the re-staging of the sexual division which determines subjectivity as we presently know it always threatens to trigger a castration crisis in the male viewer. A similar anxiety is often manifested at the level of the fiction, on the part of a male character, and drastic measures must be taken to exorcise it.

Mulvey suggests that there are two recurrent solutions to this problem. The first involves a demonstration that the woman's castrated condition is the result either of wrong-doing or of sickness. Thus, in Hitchcock's *Notorious*, Alicia's loss of control—a loss which finds its ultimate expression in a drugged and poisoned state verging on a coma—is attributed to her transgressive sexuality, the “promiscuity” of which Devlin is so censorious. Similarly, in *Marnie*, as we have already seen, the incapacity to which the heroine is finally reduced is shown by her husband to be the consequence of a psychic illness.

The second solution to the anxiety aroused by the spectacle of female lack involves the transformation of the female body into a fetish, substituting either one of its parts or the whole for the missing phallus. This privileged zone (legs, ankles, breasts, face, hair, general “shape”) is subjected to an overvaluation, and in this way compensates for the deficiency which is always associated with the female genital region, although it is in fact broadly cultural. The mechanisms of fetishism function to reassure the male subject that the woman to whom his identity is keyed lacks nothing, that she has not been castrated after all. Examples of this second solution include not only the song-and-dance number, but the entire star system.

Mulvey's argument bears a striking resemblance to the suture theory. Both posit a cinematic adventure in which plenitude is fractured by difference and lack, only to be sealed over once again. For the theoreticians of suture, the salvage activity is carried out by means of the movement from one shot to the next. For Mulvey, as for the many feminist film theoreticians who have worked along similar lines,²⁰ the lack which must be both dramatized and contained finds its locus in the female body. The various absences upon which classic cinema turns, from the excluded real to the hidden camera and tape-recorder, are in effect signified *through* woman. As Jacqueline Rose observes in “The Cinematic Apparatus: Problems in Current Theory,” the female subject

. . . is structured as image around this reference [to the excluded real] and . . . thereby *comes to* represent the potential

loss and difference which underpins the whole system. . . . What classical cinema performs or “puts on stage” is this image of woman as other, dark continent, and from there what escapes or is lost to the system; at the same time as sexuality is frozen into her body as spectacle, the object of phallic desire and/or identification.²¹

“Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” suggests a kind of “thematics” which complements and enriches that part of the suture argument which is more strictly concerned with the level of enunciation. It also demonstrates the impossibility of thinking about any part of the classic cinematic organization—including editing—apart from sexual difference. Indeed, the two theoretical models achieve a particularly tight join at precisely that point most stressed by Oudart and Dayan, i.e. the shot/reverse shot formation. Not only can a metaphoric connection be established between the two halves of that formation on the one hand, and the alignment of female spectacle with male vision on the other, but the former provides the ideal vehicle for the latter. Classic cinema abounds in shot/reverse shot formations in which men look at women. We will examine below some of the other ways in which cinematic articulation relies upon the female figure.

However, before doing so I would like to return to the two representational strategies isolated by Mulvey for neutralizing the anxiety aroused by female lack. The first of these, we recall, involves an interrogation calculated to establish either the female subject’s guilt or her illness, while the second negotiates her erotic over-investment. Mulvey associates the former alternative with narrative progression, and the latter with narrative interruption. In other words, whereas investigation of the guilty or sick woman always entails a diegetic coercion, fetishism of the female form sometimes serves to rupture the diegesis and so to “dis-place” the viewer. These two very different resolutions to the problem of castration anxiety warrant a careful analysis, since the second contains the potential to subvert the first. As we will see, the model described by Mulvey can give rise to at least two transgressive representations. One of these

representations, brilliantly exploited by *Lola Montes*, transfers to woman qualities which are normally the exclusive property of the phallus, most notably the capacity to transcend narrative.

Max Ophuls's highly self-conscious film can almost be read as a disquisition about the status of the female image in classic cinema. Its elaborately orchestrated narrative unfolds through the interrogation of Lola, an interrogation which establishes that she is both "fallen" and unwell. In addition the film quite literally circles around Lola-as-spectacle, and although that spectacle is nothing if not fetishized, it is nonetheless fully contained within the narrative. It thus not only dramatizes both of the solutions cited by Mulvey for neutralizing the male viewer's anxiety, but shows how they can be combined.

At the same time, *Lola Montes* gives us another series of female images which remain much more fragmented, and which threaten the coherence not only of the diegesis but of the dominant symbolic order. Ultimately those images are consolidated within the main narrative, but the strain which they exert upon it suggests that they represent an important area of resistance to traditional power-relations.

Ophuls's film moves back and forth between two temporal planes, one of which situates the viewer in a continuous present tense, and the other of which locates the viewer in a discontinuous past. The sequences from the film's present tense all take place in a circus whose one and only theme is the rise and descent of a *femme fatale*. Lola's climb to fame and fall to ignominy are dramatized in a variety of ways, ranging from pantomime to trapeze acts. The show is written, directed and produced by the ringmaster, who is in the business of selling scandals. However, it is billed as "the whole truth and nothing but the truth," the real-life story of Lola Montes told in "her own inimitable words."

Parts of that story are narrated by the ringmaster. Other parts are extracted in the form of set speeches from Lola, who particularly toward the end of the film requires frequent prompting. However, portions of her past are also conveyed to us through flashbacks, and they are connected with her much more intimately than the lines she speaks. Not only do the usual conventions governing flashbacks serve to link them with Lola's

consciousness, but they are invariably signaled by a lap dissolve of her face over a remote object or landscape.

The flashbacks differ from the circus performance in other important respects as well. Whereas Lola's movements are rigorously supervised in the latter, in the former they are characterized by an unusual freedom and spontaneity. Our first glimpse of her in the circus proves paradigmatic in this respect: she sits on a fixed base while the camera circles vertiginously around her. Later, dressed in a white wedding dress and bridal crown, Lola remains immobile in the middle of an even more dazzling display of movement; she is stationed on a rotating platform, surrounded by a second platform which rotates in the opposite direction. These two sequences underscore the fact that in the circus Lola does not so much move as submit to movement. They thus anticipate the film's final shot, in which a caged and altogether tamed Lola extends her hand through the bars to be kissed by a long line of male spectators.

This last enclosure contrasts strikingly with the carriage in which Lola travels in all but two of the flashbacks. Not only does that vehicle permit her to leave one country and enter another at will, but to break off one relationship and begin another whenever she chooses to do so; even when she travels in someone else's carriage her own follows closely behind. It is while seated in the latter that she makes her most revealing statement: "For me, life is movement."

That remark is borne out again and again in the flashback scenes. Lola repeatedly breaks away from or interrupts rituals within which she has been assigned a relatively passive place—a pre-arranged marriage, a marital union in which she is called upon to act the part of a martyr, a Spanish dance, a military procession, a royal audience. Indeed, she effects her dramatic ascent entirely through actions which defy the norm.

In each of these situations Lola makes a spectacle of herself. In other words, she invites the male gaze, draws visual attention to herself. However, it is important to note that the alignment of male look with female image does not here work in the usual way, since far from locating power on the male side that visual transaction confers it on the female side. Thus whereas in the circus episodes the scopic exchange functions to subor-

dinate Lola, in the flashback scenes it provides the agency whereby she assumes power.

The very different status of the male gaze in the film's two temporal registers can be explained by the fact that in one instance Lola's exhibitionism is passive, but in the other active. In the circus scenes she is constrained by the ringmaster's look to conform to a pre-established representation, and obliged night after night to repeat the same part. In the flashback scenes, however, Lola exercises fascination and control over numerous male gazes through an elaborate masquerade, an on-going performance in which she both scripts and constantly changes the parts she plays. Her recourse to the principle of unpredictability is as vital as the artistic control she wields, and may indeed be synonymous with it, since as we suggested above it permits her to disrupt the many narratives which would otherwise contain her.

Lola's capacity to transgress the diegetic flow is inscribed into the film's formal operations as well as its fiction. The fluctuation between the sustained story-telling efforts of the ringmaster and the fragmented and non-linear memories which proceed from Lola's consciousness introduce into the film's structure a tension which is not neutralized until her literal and metaphoric fall. Like her scandals, those memories have the quality of a "cut-out or icon" which Mulvey associates with the fetishist solution, situating the film in a "no-man's land outside its own time and space"(12). In short, they run counter to the flow of the circus narrative. However, after her jump Lola entirely succumbs to the tyranny of the ringmaster's gaze, and her memories cease to function as a point of resistance to the passivity and masochism of her present plight. The flashbacks abruptly terminate, and she takes her place inside the gilded cage.

The one flashback which the ringmaster shares with Lola proves critical in determining the ultimate assimilation of past to present. That flashback also clarifies the very different terms under which Lola will be obliged to play to the male gaze once she joins the circus. In it the ringmaster pays Lola a private visit and offers to sell her as "the most scandalous woman in the

world." Although she declines his offer, we know from certain other signs of acquiescence that she will eventually capitulate. For instance, he tells her to stop pacing and she does so—she submits, that is, to the restrictions which he verbally places on her movements, permits herself to be positioned by him. Similarly, when he informs her that she smokes too much, she throws away her cigar.

Even more significant is Lola's response to the ringmaster's assertion that men come to watch her dance only because of her beauty: she sits down in front of a mirror and regards her reflection, as if for the first time. In effect, she subordinates herself to his view of her. For the first time Lola submits to the look of another, is constituted through and dominated by the male gaze.

Lola Montes uses its governing circus metaphor as a means of foregrounding the centrality of a passive and compliant female representation to the operations of classic cinema. Not only does the ringmaster write his narrative across the surface of Lola's body, but the film shows itself to be dependent upon that same surface for its own articulation. Composition, *mise-en-scène*, lighting, camera movement and shot matches all function to display Lola, and that display in turn provides them with their formal coherence.

At the same time that Ophuls's film dramatizes the "ideal" relationship between the fetishized female image and narrative progression, it also suggests ways in which that image can be used to subvert or disrupt the diegesis. Like Sternberg's *Blonde Venus* or *Morocco*, *Lola Montes* indicates that the power relations which are inscribed into classic cinema through its scopic regime are by no means as stable as is the regime itself. In other words, the identification of the female subject with specularity and the male subject with vision does not necessarily assure the latter a dominant position. The construction of woman-as-fetish carries with it certain dangers for male subjectivity. Not only does that construction facilitate the detachment of the female image from narrative control, but it can challenge the very assumption upon which the existing symbolic order depends—the assumption, that is, that woman is castrated or lacking. In

short, the fetish can become indistinguishable from the phallus. This is of course precisely what happens in some of the flash-back sequences in *Lola Montes*.

Yet another "perverse" resolution of the castration anxiety discussed by Mulvey involves the privileging of lack and passivity over potency and aggressivity. This resolution, like the one in which the woman aspires to the position of the phallus, leaves intact the scopical regime of classic cinema. Indeed, both are only made possible by the preservation of that regime.

The famous strip sequence from Charles Vidor's 1946 film, *Gilda*, provides a particularly vivid dramatization of the second way in which the construction of woman-as-fetish can challenge the system of which it is a part. The episode in question represents the climactic moment in a plot which is notable for its masochistic excess: the title character has earlier made a toast to her own destruction, referred to herself as the "dirty laundry," married someone who frightens her, and encouraged Johnny Farrell, the man she loves, to imagine her a whore.

The strip sequence is in fact an extension of the last of these projects. It takes place after the assumed death of Gilda's first husband, and her remarriage to Johnny—a marriage which, due to Johnny's sexual jealousy, has never been consummated. Gilda goes to the casino, where he works, to assure him once again that her seeming promiscuity has only been a masquerade. When he casts renewed aspersions on her fidelity, she decides to play her assigned part to the hilt.

Like most of the other episodes of ritual self-humiliation engineered by Gilda, this one relies on the equation of female subjectivity with spectacle, and male subjectivity with the look. Here she does not play just to Johnny's gaze, but to those of the casino staff, a large group of predominantly male customers, and a detective. Initially she contents herself with singing and swaying to an erotically self-lacerating song, but when she is encouraged by the onlookers to remove her clothes she promptly complies, only stopping when she is dragged from the floor by one of Johnny's henchmen.

This song-and-dance number provides a classic example of what Mulvey calls the "fetishist" solution to the problem of female lack. However, it deviates from Mulvey's model in that the

erotic overvaluation of Gilda's body (her arms, her face, her hair, the black sheath she wears, the necklace and gloves she tosses to the crowd) does not serve to conceal her castration, but to flaunt it. It also involves a rather noisy demonstration of female guilt, in that it is intended by Gilda to provide the final, irrefutable evidence of her promiscuity. Finally, that demonstration is not orchestrated by the male subject, but is "voluntarily" supplied by the female subject; Gilda not only engages in a self-incriminating strip-tease, but sings a song about the age-old evil of woman ("Put the Blame on Mame").

The film thus superimposes the two rather contradictory strategies isolated by Mulvey as calculated to neutralize the male subject's castration anxieties. The insufficient figure loudly proclaims her guilt, and through her song, dance, and strip-tease simultaneously fosters the overvaluation of her physical attributes. Confession and fetishism do not here work to deflect attention away from female lack to male potency, but to inspire in the viewer (fictional and actual) the desire to have it fully revealed—to have it revealed, moreover, not as a repellent but as a pleasurable sight.

Perhaps most remarkably, the conjunction of castration and overvaluation results in a kind of masochistic eroticism in which Johnny participates not only as viewer, but as spectacle. When Gilda is pulled away at the end of her act she says to Johnny: "You wanted that. Now you should be happy. You wanted everyone to know that Johnny Farrell's wife is a tramp." She thereby suggests that Johnny wants not only her exposure, but his own; that his position, like hers, is a passive and masochistic one. The viewing subject is no more exempt from this passivity and masochism than is Johnny; whether that subject identifies with Gilda or Johnny, the result is at least in this respect the same.

Suture can be understood as the process whereby the inadequacy of the subject's position is exposed in order to facilitate (i.e. create the desire for) new insertions into a cultural discourse which promises to make good that lack. Since the promised compensation involves an ever greater subordination to already existing scenarios, the viewing subject's position is a supremely passive one, a fact which is carefully concealed

through cinematic sleight-of-hand. This sleight-of-hand involves attributing to a character within the fiction qualities which in fact belong to the machinery of enunciation: the ability to generate narrative, the omnipotent and coercive gaze, the castrating authority of the law.

The shot/reverse shot formation merely constitutes one device for achieving this transfer. As Mulvey suggests, others include spying on the woman, diagnosing her illness, forcing her to confess, or better yet (as in *Lola Montes*) writing a narrative by means of which she is defined. It is no accident that in the films described by Mulvey the woman is *made* to confess by a male character.

Gilda threatens to reveal this cinematic sleight-of-hand when she freely "confesses" to the crimes and natural disasters caused by women throughout history. Perhaps even more disruptive is the fact that she renders so transparent the degree to which her guilt is culturally inherited and written. However, most remarkable is the way in which the film acknowledges and dwells upon the lures of castration. Gilda exercises fascination precisely by virtue of those things she lacks—money, legal authority, power, the omnipotent and coercive gaze. She insists upon her inadequacy, repeats words ("decent?") which might be used to put her beyond the pale, drinks to her own downfall, invites men to undress her, and sings lyrics which underscore female guilt.

Vidor's film thus poses a temptation which suture is intended to overcome: the temptation to refuse cultural re-integration, to skid off-course, out-of-control, to prefer castration to false plenitude. That danger, like the one suggested by *Lola Montes*, is implicit in classic cinema's scopic regime. It represents a point of female resistance within the very system which defines woman as powerless and lacking.

In "Paranoia and the Film System," Jacqueline Rose addresses yet another way in which suture can be seen as containing the potential for its own disruption. She describes the system as inherently paranoid, both because it subordinates the viewing subject to the cinematic apparatus, obliging that subject to define itself in relation to a symbolic Other, and because it promotes an aggressive dialectic similar to that first experi-

enced at the mirror stage. The second of these paranoid inscriptions, which Rose finds potentially subversive, warrants our close attention.

Rose points out that the system of suture, particularly insofar as it relies upon the shot/reverse shot formation, engages the viewer in a series of irreducibly binary identifications—identifications which are characteristic not of the symbolic but of the imaginary register:

The code occults the position of the camera by setting up an opposition between two terms: the observer and the observed. What is seen is the subject himself and what he sees. The opposition is however a lure *in its very structure*. Firstly, the camera has to identify not only with the subject . . . in order to show what he sees, but also with the object of vision in order to show the subject. The series can therefore only be structured by a partial activation of the potentially aggressive reversal of its system. Secondly, the fact that the camera must identify with both terms of the opposition, and in the place of one of them cannot be assimilated to a subjectivity, reveals its presence *prior* to the point at which it disengages from that opposition, cancels the observer's centrality and subjects the observer and the observed to a [transcendent] gaze. . . . The opposition shot/countershot therefore contains its own principle of instability prior to the moment of its activation.²²

Rose here draws our attention to the fact that the second shot in a shot/reverse shot formation requires the viewer to take up a quite contrary position to that maintained in the first shot. In other words, the two shots foster irreconcilable points of view. A film like Hitchcock's *The Birds*, discussed at length by Rose in "Paranoia and the Film System," underscores the intense ambivalence encoded into the shot/reverse shot formation by situating the viewer first in Melanie's position, and then in that of the birds who attack her. This ambivalence is a feature of the imaginary register, and it speaks to a regressive potential within the system of suture. The editing procedure most closely associated with that system thus encourages a psychic operation which is at odds with its larger signifying activities.

Once again this point of resistance to symbolic structura-

tion—a point of resistance internal to the film system which promotes that structuration—finds its locus in the female subject. Rose argues that woman as she is presently constituted not only has a negative relation to the symbolic, but a positive one to the imaginary, and hence to psychic constructions like paranoia. The first of these relations—her negative association with the symbolic—is determined by the fact that she is defined in opposition to the phallus, i.e. that she can only be signified through what she lacks. The second of these relations—her privileged association with the imaginary—is in part a corollary of the first, in that she never enters as fully as does her male counterpart into the symbolic order. However, it can also be seen as one of the effects of the very different Oedipal route which she is obliged to take.

We recall that whereas the male subject is encouraged at the Oedipal juncture to invest in the same object he has previously loved as the source of warmth and nourishment (i.e. the mother), and which has provided him with his most important objects (a), the female subject is obliged instead to substitute the father. Thus a libidinal continuity smoothes the little boy's transition from imaginary to symbolic, a continuity denied the little girl. She is required to renounce her imaginary love object for one located exclusively within the symbolic, with the additional complication that this second love object will also provide the means whereby she undergoes a negative definition.

There are consequently two powerful lures recalling the female subject to the imaginary—the original love object, and the desire to return to a space unmarked by castration and phallic difference. Rose suggests that the film system dramatizes this imaginary seduction through its shot/reverse shot formations. Those formations disrupt the stability of the symbolic order by calling into question the fixity of its subject positions. They introduce into the narrative progression an aggressivity and paranoia which—like the construction of woman-as-fetish—threaten to disrupt it. In other words, the shot/reverse shot paradigm speaks to the insecurity of the female subject's position within the symbolic order, dramatizes the principle of imaginary reversibility to which she remains to some degree bound.

Hitchcock's *The Birds*, which provides Rose with her central

example, renders unusually clear both the female subject's symbolic insecurity and her imaginary reversibility. Melanie's uneasy residence within the symbolic order is indicated not only by her problematic relationship with the law, but by the fact that she is seen by the inhabitants of Bodega Bay as having brought with her the threat to their town.

"Paranoia and the Film System" urges theoreticians to take the female subject much more fully into account when discussing classic cinema's scopic regime. It points out that neither cinema's imaginary nor its symbolic can be treated in isolation from sexual difference, and that it is only by foregrounding the part played by the latter in each of the former terms that alternative film practices can be articulated:

. . . the emphasis on the imaginary in the discussion of film as a specific ideological form must address itself to the relation of woman to that register, since that relation is itself a comment on the impossibility of stabilising positions in the symbolic. It is therefore crucial when talking of the film's constant replay of loss and retrieval and the possibility of articulating that loss to transform the position of the spectator in film, to remember that the negativity in question is now only accessible through the sexual differentiation which has overlaid the primary severance. [102]

Rose's own notion of how we can best transform the position of the viewing subject involves maximizing the disruptive potential of the imaginary excess which always haunts the system of suture—and which does so most fully precisely at the shot/reverse shot juncture. She sees in that excess not only the return of a repressed "femininity," but the possibility for destabilizing the symbolic order, for throwing into jeopardy its Oedipal identifications. Rose's argument, like Mulvey's, suggests the centrality of the female subject not only to any description of the existing film system but to any alternative formulation. It also indicates that even within the former there are already ruptures and contradictions.

As the preceding discussion indicates, suture is not so much one theory as a group of overlapping theories. Whereas for some theoreticians it can be isolated in the shot/reverse shot

formation, for others it is inherent in all of the operations which constitute narrativity. However, the theoreticians of suture agree that it provides the agency whereby the subject emerges within discourse, and (at least ideally) takes up a position congruent with the existing cultural order. Feminist writers like Mulvey, Rose, and Johnston also suggest that whether suture is taken in its most specialized or its broadest sense it always implies a sexual differentiation. Moreover, they suggest that it is precisely at the point where suture joins with female subjectivity that it is most vulnerable to subversion.

The theory of suture has yet to be extended to literary discourse, although it has obvious relevance to that discourse. First-person narration and other indicators of point-of-view would seem to be the equivalents for novels and poems of the shot/reverse shot formation in cinema, and like the latter would seem both to conceal all signs of actual production, and to invite identification. The narrative organization of the classic novel even more closely conforms to that of the classic film. However, this is not the place to suggest a full-fledged theory of literary suture. We will content ourselves with these brief remarks, particularly since the next chapter will be as single-minded in its scrutiny of literary discourse as this chapter has been of cinematic discourse.

Chapter 6 is devoted to Roland Barthes's *S/Z*, a theoretical model which is ideally suited to the task of revealing the disembodied cultural voices which speak not only the books we read and the films we view, but our own subjectivity and the world in which we live.