BACHELOR MACHINERY AND *BALLETs MÉCANIQUE* UNCANNY GENDER TECHNOLOGIES IN TIM BURTON'S CAMP-SURREAL

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Dick Kennedy

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Department of __THEATRE AND FILM__

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Bachelor Machinery and *Ballets Mécanique*:
Uncanny Gender Technologies
in Tim Burton's Camp-Surreal

Abstract

Tim Burton is steadfastly concerned with the visual imbrication of the patriarchal unconscious in the real. Insofar as he inscribes this problem into contemporary cinema in a programmatic way, surrealism (particularly its critique of representation) comes into razor-sharp focus as a point of reference for his films. Often advanced through allegorical appropriations, especially of media images, Burton's oeuvre recalls surrealism's historical critique because it likewise involves the unsettling of identity by sexuality, and the unsettling of reality by means of the simulacrum. Insofar as <u>Pee-wee's Big Adventure</u> (1985), <u>Edward Scissorhands</u> (1990), <u>Batman</u> (1989) and <u>Batman Returns</u> (1992), have to do with events in which repressed material returns in ways that play havoc with unitary identity, aesthetic norms, and social order, they resonate with Burton's penetrating comprehension of the historicity of the *uncanny*.

In <u>Pee-wee's Big Adventure</u>, Burton's camp deployment of psychosexual disorder to disturb conventional pictorial space, object relations and (masculine) gender identity models the outmoded cultural artifact as an enigmatic vestige of a traumatic encounter or fantasy, equivocal in its restorative and incendiary effects. Setting the text's syntax of symbolic castration against the back projection of postmodern patriarchy's putative loss of a referent or an authentic domain of being, <u>Edward Scissorhands</u> brings into focus the ideological alignment of sexual and cultural disavowal. In <u>Batman</u> and <u>Batman Returns</u>, the makeover of traumatic scenes into artistic origin myths is campily performed. While

surrealist fixations double as modernist tropes of setting up an origin in order to institute a self and/or a style, surrealist primal fantasies wreak havoc on such origins; the modernist search for roots produces rootless scenes.

No doubt inheriting a few optical cataracts from surrealist sexual politics and insights into the hookups between psychic energy, landscape, architectural form, and social mythology, Burton undertakes an archaeology of patriarchal subjectivity as fossilized in (post)modern spaces. Unless our (de)realizing postmodern dreamscapes (i.e., landscapes, cityscapes, and cinemascapes) are considered a postmodern fulfillment of the surreal, Burton's camp-surreal is far from defunct.

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Preface: Theoretical Stakes Through the Art
of Tim Burton's *corp[us] morcélé*

The first Neapolitan theater was opened by Menotti Cattaneo... a nomadic social type...
he began to present a show wherein, for a few pennies,.. neighborhood flaneurs *could watch him*
take apart and reconstruct a wax model of a human body, including its internal organs...
this kind of performance--the exhibition of corps *morcélé--could be well complemented by*
film screenings... the spectacle of the anatomy lesson is the predecessor of the cinema.
-Bruno Giulianna- [1]

"Bachelor Machine"...From about 1850 to 1925 numerous artists, writers and scientists
imaginatively or in reality constructed anthropomorphized machines to represent the relation
of the body to the social, the relation of the sexes to each other, the structure of the psyche
or the workings of history... The bachelor machine is a typically closed, self sufficient system.
Its common themes include frictionless, sometimes perpetual motion, an ideal time and the magical
possibility of its reversal (the time machine is an exemplary bachelor machine), electrification,
voyeurism and masturbatory eroticism, the dream of the mechanical reproduction of art,
and artificial birth or reanimation. But no matter how complicated the machine becomes, the
control over the sum of its parts rests with a knowing producer who therefore submits
to a fantasy of closure, perfectibility, and mastery.
-Constance Penley- [2]

In 1926, the artist and experimental filmmaker Fernand Leger lamented the fact
that most films waste their efforts in trying to build a recognizable world, neglecting all the while
"the powerful effect of the object... the possibility of the fragment." Leger of course created the
famous Ballet méchanique *in which everyday practical objects, like knives and spoons,*
are set against one another to produce a rhythmic pattern of perceptual forms...
these everyday objects become unimportant while at the same time
they impart to us the experience of their artfulness.
-Dudley Andrew- [3]

My aim in this thesis is to look at the films of Tim Burton through a
theoretical lens, making the textual politics of gender representation the focal
point of my reading. As my title hints, the conceptual premise of this enterprise
owes something to Teresa de Lauretis' proposition that as representation,
"gender is the product of social technologies, such as cinema, as well as
institutional discourses, epistemologies... not only academic criticism, but more
broadly social and cultural practices." [4] Since the theoretical backbone of the
project is fashioned from feminist and semiotic materials, my argument is
tailored by tracing textual patterns that accommodate ongoing critical debates
over theoretical issues and problems. Drawn from neighboring discursive

regimes, my methodological postulates--postmodern/cultural, film, and feminist studies--represent potentially antagonistic discourses intended to (re)animate theoretical debate with a corpus of Tim Burton's popular texts.

Through a kind of camp deconstruction of <u>Pee-wee's Big Adventure</u> (1985), <u>Edward Scissorhands</u> (1990), <u>Batman</u> (1989) and <u>Batman Returns</u> (1992), I shall attempt to persuade the reader that this academic stagecraft is not simply a question of transporting film theory to film, but of appreciating the way popular films feed considerable theoretical stock of their own through the sprockets of institutional scholarship. [5] Indeed, part of the seductiveness of Burton's movies is precisely that they showcase contemporary theoretical preoccupation, that they theorize on the same "high" ground as cultural criticism. His oeuvre kinetically catalogues issues and problems that intersect with current theoretical debates surrounding the postmodern politics of identity and the body: the intoxicating superfluity of postmodern vision, the piquancy and passivity of spectatorship, the delicacy and delirium of moving pictures, the appetites that feed into social constructions of subjectivity, the pornographic seductiveness of sex and violence, and so forth. To boot, the movies represent head-on confrontations with media oversaturation, discursive and semiotic excess, and convert existential encounters into modified forms of mainstream entertainment, with remodeled narrative structures and functions.

Assembled within the Hollywood style and directed at a taste market that is at once targeted and managed by the institutional system of production and distribution, the films are obviously circumscribed by arduous constraints. This means that Burton's films need to be analyzed within particular discursive formations that have inscribed them with overdetermined meanings, not the least of which is that their primary function is less to signify than to entertain. Clearly, it is essential to regard them as market commodities capable of upsetting

the balance between complicity and subversion so as to open up a space for radical critique.

There is a definite appeal to spotlighting the reality of contemporary existential problems which engender states or feelings of personal/social "powerlessness," "alienation" and "exile," "anxiety" and "homesickness, and to regarding Burton's camp-surreal repertoire as psychologically consistent characters in reference to them. Indeed, his films open onto postmodern landscapes wherein such big-time issues are organic. Critical wind and weather permitting, the reality of such topics, and of any consistently psychologized kinship with them, is noticeably leavened by the hypertextuality of the films. For all hands across the cutting board do not represent people so much as mercurial signifiers which come to life in Burton's texts.

Burton's artistic brew of camp and surrealism--peppered with (tabloid) expressionism, Gothic horror, melodrama and fantasy--overflows the cauldron of run-of-the-mill cinematic conventions. A series of camp-surreal *ballets mecanique*, his technically inventive and violently visceral films string together extraordinary collages of 3-D modeling, puppets, marionettes, trick photography, animation and live action, and so make a cat's-paw of conventional Hollywood (masculine) fantasy with their physicality, *manic* aggressions and mechanical stock in trade. Outrageously theatrical, darkened by black humor, mordant melancholy, and smacking with bad taste, Burton's films fathom surface materiality through representational forms, unsettle or exceed dominant cinematic conventions, and make the interaction of fantasy, form, and ideology available for critical analysis. If a distinction is to be made between, on the one hand, popular genres which exhibit dead secrets and shocking events along a naturalistic skeleton and, on the other hand, a modernism whose strategies of enunciation are to a body of conventions as the autopsist's prosaic dismembering

is to the human cadaver, then Burton's camp-surreal *decoupage* diagnostically represents the unrepresentable, and then ties a surgeon's knot between horror films and a (vulgar) postmodern sublime.

Because the carnal is to the cultural as the personal is to the political in Burton's oeuvre, he is insistently drawn to tropes of horror, upon which psychoanalytic meanings interpenetrate with historically specific and fluctuating gendered power relations. His cartoonish, celluloid ink-blots screen/test psychoanalytic discourses, themselves a technology of gender, concerned with producing analytical categories to account for male psychosexual development. [6] But they also suggest ways in which contemporary cultural theory is capable of politicizing psychoanalytic film criticism, of showing how unconscious processes are (in)securely "implanted" in patriarchal discourses, specifically, how categories of difference are distributed across the narrative operations, how they are embedded within the filmic demarcations of diegetic order and disorder, and how sexual difference potentially interchanges with other categories of difference. Feminist psychoanalytic film analysis is oppositional only insofar as its excavation of patriarchal meanings constitutes a resistive reading strategy, one that works to highlight textual/social operations. Such practices (as Burton's films or this thesis) no doubt run the risk of becoming entombed with the very meanings intended for deconstruction. This is a significant deterrent to feminists who avoid such entanglements by concentrating on alternative forms of representation that go beyond critique.

These limitations aside, psychoanalysis possesses a great deal of explanatory power in the case of the horror genre. Indeed, a psychoanalytic framework of analysis seems indispensable where psychoanalytic themes and imagery overlap with historically specific cultural myths. Burton's camp "reissuing" of surrealist traditions unearths questions regarding the blood ties

between art and fantasy, not only the unconscious phantasies which cloud ordinary perception, but the setting of one's sights on the cleavage between artistic representation and mimesis, on a mode of trauma through pictures and plastics allied to symbolic means of communication. In his oeuvre, gendered fantasies stand in an unmistakable consanguinity to the historical body of cultural ideas, beliefs, and mythologies in which they come alive.

Notes

[1]Giuliana, Bruno. "Spectatorial Embodiments: Anatomies of the Visible and the Female Bodyscape." Camera Obscura, no. 28 (January 1992), p. 241.

[2]Constance Penley, "Feminism, Film Theory, and Bachelor Machines," The Future of an Illusion: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,1989), pp. 57-58.

[3]Dudley Andrew, "Bela Balazs and the Tradition of Formalism," The Major Film Theories: An Introduction (London and New York: Oxford UP, 1976), pp. 80-81.

[4]Teresa de Lauretis, Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) , pp. ix-x.

[5]Burton's other films include Vincent (1983), Frankenweenie (1985), Beetlejuice (1988), and Ed Wood (1994) which Burton directed, and The Nightmare Before Christmas (1993), which Burton executive-produced.

[6]See Noel Carrol, Mystifying Movies: Fads and Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), and D. N. Rodowick, The Difficulty of Difference: Psychoanalysis, Sexual Difference & Film Theory (New York: Routledge, 1991).

Introduction: Semiotic Ghosts and the Postmodern Unhomely

Surrealism appears a critical double of fascism,
which it anticipates, partially collaborates with, and mostly contests.
If fascism exploits the uncanny in order to lock both present and future into a tragic repetition
of the atavistic social and psychic structures, a repetition governed by the death drive,
surrealism exploits the uncanny so as to disrupt the present and to open up the future--
if not to turn the compulsive return of the repressed into comedic resolution
that might somehow free the subject from defusion and death, then at least to divert its forces
in a critical intervention into the social and the political.
-Hal Foster- [1]

Men's fascination with [the] eternal feminine is nothing but fascination with their own double,
and the feeling of uncanniness, Unheimlichkeit, *that men experience is the same as what one feels*
in the face of any double, any ghost, in the face of the abrupt reappearance
of what one thought had been overcome or lost forever.
-Sarah Koffman- [2]

Only ambiguously critical of dominant masculinity, Tim Burton is steadfastly concerned with the visual imbrication of the patriarchal unconscious in the real; and insofar as he inscribes this problem into contemporary cinema in a programmatic way, surrealism (particularly its critique of representation) comes into razor-sharp focus as a point of reference for his films. Often advanced through allegorical appropriations, especially of media images, Burton's oeuvre recalls surrealism's historical critique because it likewise involves the unsettling of identity by sexuality, and the unsettling of reality by means of the simulacrum. Insofar as his films have to do with events in which repressed material returns in ways that play havoc with unitary identity, aesthetic norms, and social order, they resonate with Burton's penetrating comprehension of the historicity of the *uncanny*.

The estrangement of the familiar that is indispensable to the uncanny resides in the etymology of the German terms *heimlich*, meaning "homely," and *unheimlich*, meaning "unhomely" or "uncanny." The return of familiar phenomena rendered unfamiliar by repression is what the uncanny entails. This

"return of the repressed" creates anxiety around the subject and ambiguity around the object, and this anxious ambiguity instigates the uncanny's principal effects: a derangement of the real and the imagined, of the animate and the inanimate, and an annexation of the referent by the sign or of physical reality by psychic reality. In Burton's oeuvre, the surreal (theatrically embodied by a surrealist repertoire of grotesquely disfigured puppets, dolls, mannequins, automatons, and live-action figures) is encountered as an overshadowing of the referential by the symbolic, or as an enslavement of a subject to a sign or a symptom; and its upshot is the (male) anxiety associated with the uncanny. [3]

The peculiar import of surrealism in his films rests in its doubly-exposed enterprise of excavating historical as well as psychic repression; not simply in its symbolic recuperation of outmoded yet "haunted" spaces/objects/images, but more importantly, in its conscious and (potentially) critical deployment of the disruptions of the uncanny within the popular framework of postmodern cultural production. In Barbara Creed's recent book, <u>The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis</u>, she annotates Freud's three main categories of things considered uncanny, that is, things which pertain to what is frightening to what awakens dread and horror; and they are worth transplanting here for her shorthand and inadvertent knotting of the blood-ties between the "abject" and the "simulacrum" in terms of their uncanniness. They include:

> (i) -things which relate to the notion of the double; a cyborg; twin, doppelganger; a mutilated object; a ghost or spirit; an involuntary repetition of an act.

> (ii) -castration anxieties expressed as a fear of female genitals or of dismembered limbs, a severed head or hand, loss of the eyes, fear of going blind

> (iii) -a feeling associated with a familiar/unfamiliar place, losing one's way, womb fantasies, a haunted house. [4]

Burton's camp-surreal horror films painstakingly playact and poke fun at the above check-list of fears. Indeed, allowing for a good deal of anatomical slippage

through these three fractured fingers as they pick the brains of the patriarchal unconscious, we can graft them--like transplanted organs from foreign bodies-- onto the three chapters which make up the mid-section of my critical skeleton. The horror which licks these categories into shape smacks of a lapse of tight- lipped boundaries. The double unfastens the psychic/social tourniquets which rough-cast each hu*man* screen figure into a hard-edged silhouette; castration fear plays on a caving-in of gender boundaries, and the uncanny feeling of being plugged into a familiar/ unfamiliar place worries the boundary which stakes out the known and the unknown. Indeed, the subject resides in the simulacrum as in the fantasy.

The fantasy and the simulacrum alike are made up of a double register which denies the priority of the original over the copy. If the simulacrum is similarly manufactured out of a suspended action, an internalized difference that contravenes in the Platonic representational order, then this difference not only makes the fantasmatic cartography of surrealism simulacral, but sets up the surrealist image as an historical expression of a traumatic fantasy and involuntary memory. If history is a living force outfitted for lacerating the the not-so-leathery skin of the dominant fiction, and so for cutting off its eternal economy, then the trauma which it produces can be grasped as the unforeseen cleavage in an order which strives to erect a kind of stone wall of self-possession by a force aimed at derangement and decomposition. If the contemporary genre of horror and the cultural phenomenon of postmodernism are both anxious cultural expressions about categorical instabilities, the former animating the insecurities of the latter, then the postmodern simulacrum holds joint transgressive features with the uncanny (as well as the abject, the semiotic, the sublime), for it likewise throws (patriarchal) identity and (patriarchal) order for a loss.

Absent and unrepresentable, history can never be hemmed in; it is only accessible through texts. If the eruption of horror cycles coincides with instances of social/historical trauma, the genre is a screen onto which historical anxieties are projected. What can be discursively *man*aged is the trauma which it engenders within the ordained systems of representation and signification, a trauma which is felt by the subjects who look to these systems for their sense of identity. [5] The melodramatic dimension of Burton's camp-surreal makes visible the (male) anxiety/hysteria produced by a frightening cultural order in which traditional social caulking seems to have lost its adhesive properties. Kitsching up a lot of dust along the road of apparent optimism, Burton's camp-surreal brand of melodrama is a (vulgar) sublime vehicle which breaks the ground of camp surfaces and undertakes an archeology of dominant cultural fictions in postmodernity. By grafting repression onto dominant patriarchal fictions at the representational camp site of the family and the phallus, and the "return of the repressed" onto ironic, spectacular anatomies of the invisible-made-visible, he illustrates complex historical blood-ties among 1) a genealogy of horror and melodrama as formal geographies, 2) a cultural anatomy of the present sex/gender system and its ideological contradictions, and 3) a spectatorial architecture that is superintended by a corporeal visuality.

Accordingly, structures that have converted particular social or historical complexions into representation within formal and generic frameworks require an interpretive model that accords to the figures of fantastic discourse, thus concentrating on instabilities, excesses and intensities. By cementing a union between ambivalent textual mechanisms, the flaccidity of borders and the heterogeneity of identity on the one hand, and a materialist concern with particular social/historical constructions of monstrous figures on the other, we can comprehend the uncanny in terms of fantasy's double operation, whereby

that which is frightening transports us back to that which was once familiar but has been estranged through repression, with the result that anxiety is conjured up and put in check. [6]

Where modern experience is progressively mediated and abstracted within the stages of late capitalism, "authentic" experience is putatively rendered intangible and figurative as it is cast outside the sphere of lived existence. The perception of that outside as a genuine and authoritative background of which the object is only a trace is ratified by the seriality of mechanical reproduction. In the putative absence of a referential authority outside the simulacrum, the traditional (male) subject's desire for a social contract or real identity is negated, and the horror of semantic cancellation comically engenders the hysteric and untold manufacture of systems of absent prepotency. Burton ironically allegorizes Pee-wee's, Edward's, and Batman's quest for meaning and value in a postmodern consumer landscape, campily reassessing the nature of mimesis and simulation (and, by extension, the significance of genre and formula in popular cultural practice).

Burton theatricalizes how in postmodernity, the hysterical patriarchal subject *man*ufactures itself in identical signs designed to represent, allude and appeal to reality. With the real allegedly off the subject's hands, the inability to access it only engenders an increase in the attempts to stake it out for keeps. Burton thus offers an ironic account of today's over*man*aged hysteria of production and overproduction of the real. Campily impersonating posthum[or]ous patriarchal culture, each of Burton's male protagonists parodically root for the reincarnation of the real that evades them through superfluous overproduction. Hence, Burton's ironic account of the hysteric overproduction of signs of the real, whereby the aggressive renegotiation of "monstrous" threats to personal/sexual masculine identity and authority are

compulsively staged by inventing the physiognomy of structure as fixed entity, objectifying internal difference and projecting it as an external supplement, is at once a visible indemnity for what the structure lacks and its menacing excess. [7]

At the same time, however, Burton ambivalently exploits the very effects of advanced capitalism--artisanal and industrial objects alike rendered outmoded--against its own system of commodity exchange. Hence the terrorizing of the bourgeois order by ghosts of its repressed past (the outmoded, the *depayses*) as well as its exploited (primitive, exotic, and even industrial) outside. This is the basic structural tension in Burton's work: even as he ironically renders in epic complexity the manslaughter of the referent and the real, he executes this *man*euver without lopping off all ties to reality reference, and subjective intervention. At the end of the day, things, signs, and actions--compulsively reincarnated when cut loose from their respective ideas, essences, and origins-- do not automatically forfeit the inheritance of their content. Less like a shadowless man consigned to madness or death, as certain postmodern coroners would have us believe, outmoded images/objects, may call to account the late-capitalist product with past images/objects either deadened or outside its purview, as when an object or space remindful, or having an aura of a different formative mode, social configuration, or feeling is disinterred, in apostasy.

Burton physicalizes the return of repressed social desires not simply in terms of straight forward monstrous equations, but as a textual symptom, as an intense or "abnormal" property of style or mise-en-scene in film bodies. If Burton's images are literally unheimlich--temporally distanced and spatially dislocated by collage at the very level of representation, then the historically outmoded is related to the psychically repressed. His fascination with the uncanny, with the postmodern poltergeist of familiar images rendered alien by repression, concerns the (subjective) regeneration of discarded cultural forms in

the staccato development of productive modes and social formations.

If feminist film criticism essays to reorder social relations of power and difference, then (post)modern recycling and its aesthetic undercarriage, nostalgia, must undergo inspection to see how these representational strategies actually succeed in reordering such relations. [8] Indeed, the utopic dimension of nostalgia accords to the dynamics of fantasy insofar as it is prelapsarian, conflating lived and mediated experience in a genesis where authenticity and transcendence are thought to be ubiquitous. If authenticity overspreads both word and world of this gendered utopia, it is because the crisis of the sign, developing out of the cleavage between signifier and signified, between the material properties of the former and the abstract and historical character of the latter, is disavowed or withheld.

Allegations of consensus, authority or identity such as the cross-cultural fantasy of dominant masculine gender identity, the standardized aesthetic ideals of beauty or the politics of antiquarianism/utopianism--comprise a terrifying, totalitarian framework. As much a product of spectatorship as the text, Burton fosters an uncanny relationship to representation, a suspension bridge over postmodernism's apparent divide between the aesthetic and the historical-political. He implies that to fashion a politics around the perfection and approximation of idealized identities is not only misguided but also a form of totalitarianism. Thus, his "cheesy" special effects often express a pragmatic modesty, a camp consciousness of the materiality and limits of representation, and of their fated shortcomings where ideas of aesthetic and/or political totality are concerned. In Burton's filmic imaginary, as in cultural history, the closed body of a finished text is a kind of fascist state. He flings the semiotic sheet off the cadaver of the Hollywood mainstream, gets under the tactile "skin" of textual surfaces, and enables the spectator to re/member *the act of seeing with one's own eyes* as it were.

If the apparent fixity of gendered subject-positions conventionally operates as a "phantasm" that forecloses polyvalent identificatory possibilities, declines its own potentialities as fantasy through its obstinate attachment to the real, then Burton's subversive dismantling of generic architecture accords with transgression or disarrangement of character. Since the phantasmatic is additionally that which *haunts* and joins issue with the boundaries which hedge round the construction of stable identities, his political aesthetics advocate an inferential leeway between representation, its meanings and its effects. [9] Envisaged as a popular aesthetic, Burton's camp-surreal perspective, shares with the vulgar sublime a carnivalesque release from social regulation, structural inversions of hierarchical power relations, and guerrilla transgressions of aesthetic boundaries and decorum. Change occurs at the indiscriminate border between complicity and resistance. Hence, the critical import of horror and liminality, and the historicity of the uncanny in Burton's films are central.

In today's monstrous mediascape, melodrama's "home" is where the electronic hearth is, and Burton's camp-surreal cinema-of-the-absurd invites us to stare into this uncanny fun-house mirror, to come face-to-face with the apparition of something at once unpresentable and familiar. In his analysis of contemporary fairy tales for children, Jack Zipes aligns the art of subversion with the "liberating potential of the fantastic" and provides a model of critical approach in his approximation of "the uncanny" as an aesthetically motivated construct. Zipes argues that "the very act of reading a fairy tale is an uncanny experience in that it separates the reader from the restrictions of reality from the onset and makes the repressed unfamiliar familiar once again." [10] The concept of "home" becomes synonymous with the concept of liberation-- a means and a destination that ceases to be bound by its own goal because "the real return home or the recurrence of the uncanny is a move forward to what has been repressed

and never fulfilled." [11] His theory makes a case for potentially oppositional desire in audience engagement where, as in the "'counter-cultural' fairy-tale," where the intention "is to make readers perceive the actual limits and possibilities of their deep personal wishes in a social context." [12]

The uncanniness of the inanimate made animate gets sidetracked in Hollywood fantasy and children's fairy-tales alike through capriciousness and unambiguous fantasy scenarios, yet Burton deploys anarchic wit and vertiginous technical style to underscore the hard-fisted properties of the comic, the ironic, the grotesque and carnivalesque via his hybrid of surrealism and camp. Provoking the vertigo associated with the terror of the sublime, Burton's brand of Gothic horror likewise pertains to the uncanny themes of death and the supernatural, adding to the formula--through the comicality and excess of a camp-surreal alloy--a radical relationship to representation. But can uncanny effects be apprehended within the space of representation? Or are the feelings and anxious ambiguities which are instigated by it undermined, made over, canceled out by camp irony?

One could argue that Burton's films, which consistently stir up a mishmash of horror and humor, would be better placed in the context of morality tale, caricature or melodramatic kitsch. And with dead certainty, one could quiz the likelihood of any uncanny effect in the long shadows of formal/technical conventions and grotesque/comic effects. In postmodernity, where surrealist dynamics inform--and frequently disable the distinction between--high and low cultural production alike, does Burton effectively mimic the historical eviction of the surrealist, outmoded by camp taste, for the *demodé*? And if so, in the present historical and cultural context, does this *maneuver* similarly forfeit the capacity to generate an uncanny turning inside out of the present via a comedy-of-past-errors, that is, to produce a cultural cataclysm allied

to discontinuous modes of production?

To be sure, there is general feeling in the academy that the real has turned into the surreal in the postmodern geographies of advanced capitalism, and that this is not so much "troubling" in its uncanniness as tranquilizing in its intoxication. After all, in the phantasmagoria of the postmodern city, surrealism's caving in of dream and reality, and of self and other, appears accomplished, if frequently marked by an about-face of its liberative effects. If in advanced capitalism, surrealism's critical jeopardy of self and other has become postmodernism's double indemnity of schizophrenic (a)subjectivity, then today's convulsive boring of kaleidoscopic peepholes into the opaque body-casing of the patriarchal subject--not to mention that of much totalizing postmodern discourse--has resulted in a reactive censorship, perceptible in the regimens of personal and social bodies. As a critical reflex, I will now introduce the bodies of the films themselves, broadly keeping these questions in mind: How, and to what ends, do the uncanny properties of Burton's camp-surreal

1) unmask the face of kitschy and/or tacky forms of popular cinema/culture?

2) accord to the contemporary existential schizophrenia that is related to a deterritorialization of representation within the performative space of popular cinema/culture?

3) screen the aesthetic/ideological transfusion between the contemporary playacting of "crises" of male subjectivity in the postmodern simulacrum and the historical currency of that political/psychic imaginary, common to fascism and popular horror/film *noir*, involving the aggressive renegotiation of "monstrous" historical threats to personal/sexual masculine identity and authority?

I.   Anatomy of Pee-wee Herman:
Camp Sites, Shopping, and the Semiotics of Tourism
in <u>Pee-wee's Big Adventure </u>(1985)

Burton's surrealist materiality of fantasy and symbolic figuration comes to light in the context of the dadaist/surrealist structuralist project. A camp compendium of surrealist principles, there is a traumatic uncanniness at work in <u>Pee-wee's Big Adventure</u>. The film performs uncanny mishmashings of animate and inanimate figures, ambivalent hookups of castrative and fetishistic forms, compulsive reenactments of erotic and traumatic scenes, imbroglios of sadism and masochism, of death and desire. If the quintessential surrealist pursuit is the hunt for the lost object, then Burton campily highlights the fact that this quest is as unnavigable as it is compulsive: not only is each new-fashioned object a stand-in or double for a lost one, but the lost object is itself a simulacral fantasy. It is in this regard that <u>Pee-wee's Big Adventure</u> can be interpreted as a camp-surreal "drama of dismemberment"; however, not only the practice of phallic investment but the process of reading psychoanalytically becomes the subject of camp humor. [13] Does the familiarity of "commercial" packaging and marketing alleviate the bizarreness, turbulence, and *male*volence of the primitive phantasies in which they are submerged? Tania Modleski's caution--that we refrain from valorizing characters like Pee-wee Herman as legitimate alternatives to the "he-man types" currently in fashion, along with Pee-wee's propensity to dominate in and through male *lack*--underscores a determining problem of postmodernity for feminists: even with the phallocentric subject dead, its ghost of male hysteria still runs the show. [14]

Nonetheless, the play of spectatorship which is fostered by the film becomes a political activity inasmuch as it involves the reconsideration of cultural materials, including the body. Functioning within and abtrusely against

the norms of classical narrative form to unsettle and reroute spectatorship in innovative ways, the thematics of disruptive desire in Burton's film challenge the desire for narrative consumption that it produces. In the capacity of Pee-wee's adventures to follow in the tracks of our own spectatorial interactions, the protagonist plays the part of the tourist whose exteriority vis-a-vis cultural images/artefacts is rescinded by border violations whereby the road movie scenario of "the-familiar-made-foreign" turns back, uncannily, toward scenarios of the familiar. Anne Friedberg's metaphorical alignment of *shopping* and *tourism* with contemporary spectatorship is applicable in this regard, as is her provocative notion that the side-effect of driving is the translation of landscape into (panoramic) image, into cinematic flow. [15] Indeed, in its domesticated mock-up of foreign and exotic "elsewheres," Pee-wee's Big Adventure explicitly invokes the viewer as a cinematic tourist who, like Pee-wee, is privileged with a fluid and mobile mode of visuality that affords a sense, or glimpse, of the potential convertibility of culturally dominant pastimes.

The Work of Suture in the Age of Postmodern Reproduction, or
"Snow on the Oedipal Stage" in Edward Scissorhands (1990)

As a postmodern cultural offspring of various filmic incarnations of the *Frankenstein* story, Edward Scissorhands reiterates the question of conception as one of both physical and ideological manipulation: what kind of agencies are responsible for the social and artistic construction, animation, and regulation of human bodies? [16] Burton allegorizes Edward's endeavor to discover meaning and value in a decadent landscape of postmodern consumerism. Hence, the dystopic projection of contemporary social relations is brought into a dialectical interaction with the utopic hope for spiritual salvation and redemption through an 'alien messiah'.

If contemporary horror presents itself as an indicator of the present historical and social topography, then Edward's figurative inscription in the cultural landscape brings to the surface cultural anxieties relating to the ideological "pinch" of capitalist patriarchy and the sense of the apocalyptic engendered by postmodernism. With history thought to be abandoned and the myths produced from that history destroyed, the simulacrum fills in for the allegedly forsaken territory of the real. If the postmodern appears ghostwritten by the nostalgic repercussions in the horror film's intertextuality, then the weakening of the security afforded by such a tendency is physicalized in the categorical breakdowns and bodily corruption that holds fast the excessive iconography of individual assailability in both the horror genre and the postmodern text.

In Burton's ironic and self-reflexive political myth, with the inevitability of violence engendered through language and representation, it is no accident that this process bears a striking resemblance to the system of suture. The narrative concretizes the abstract grammar of Lacan's psychoanalytic vocabulary while simultaneously subjecting its semic operations to a camp-surreal critique. Specifically, the film parodically theatricalizes the role played by suture theory in critical formulations (or implantations) about subjectivity, ideology and sexual difference in the context of postmodern experience, as well as spectatorship. By campily dramatizing the fact that the cut is the primary agency of cinematic disclosure, the film fosters a recognition of the indeterminacy of the operations of suture by establishing the image as a political map site for charting the bodily and social reality of the characters in the allegedly totalizing simulacrum.

III.   Posthum[or]ous Patriarchy and *Male*volent Coffins:
         Staking Out Male Masquerades and Chimeras of Otherness
         in <u>Batman</u> (1989) and <u>Batman Returns</u> (1992)

Exemplifying an operative mode of signification in a time of hysterical (male) subjects suspended in the simulacrum, Burton's <u>Batman</u> (1989) and <u>Batman Returns</u> (1992) anatomize contemporary dramaturgical "crises" of (male) subjectivity in terms of excessive and violent reactions to the apparent loss of patriarchal privilege. Character identification with subjectivities beyond the pale of traditional conceptions of dominant masculine gender identity unmask the psychological implications of classical *noir* narrative involving the compulsive renegotiation of threats to personal/sexual identity and authority.[17] Batman can be read as a camp emblem of high modernist individualism, the autonomous, self-determining subject/ego whose fault lines are none other than the hairline fractures of dominant masculinity. Burton's archeology of dead subjectivity and the thematics of male hysteria in an ironic hyperreality is conducted in terms of Batman's (dis)connection to home and origins, social capital/power, abject social Others (racialized, gendered as feminine), and textuality. The phallus is at all times the *man*ufacture of the dominant fiction, and when that fiction turns out to be unfit to bear up under the exertion of historical trauma, the male subject, cast adrift within its idealizing (simulacral) configuration, might unexpectedly find himself stranded outside it. [18] To find this shadowy land of the lost, we need only look to the horror film's sensational, *man*ic obsession with archaicism and liminality, to its play on the uncanny ambivalences of *heim* and *unheimlich* which serve to underscore the flaccidity of any identity which keeps up appearances upon the scaffold of abjection.

Burton demonstates that the double's imaginary power and resonance-- the stage upon which the traditional male subject at once plays out his alienation from and familiarity with himself--turns on its immateriality, upon the fact that the double is essentially a phantasy. If contemporary culture exorcizes this

phantasy, transubstantiates the action of the double from the Other as gaze and mirror into the blanched monotony of the same, then consciousness of the autonomous self is threatened, and the transparency of radical Otherness becomes the epicentre of terror in the so-called "normal" world, or sphere of patriarchal relations. Burton foregrounds the cleavage that exists between the mystique of male power (symbolized by the phallus) and the visible "reality" of men and masculinity; and it is this particular vacant space that is the (camp) site of horror, this uncanny space between masculinity's ungraspable ideal or symbolic and the real.

Conclusion: Animating the *Cadavre Exquis* of Hollywood's "apocalyptic adolescent"

What stakes strike at the art of Burton's camp-surreal films? These blockbusters are not simply popular ideological appliances for domesticating terror and repression through aesthetic experience, even if their humor appears to shield us from the violence arising from the endangered fantasy of dominant masculinity and the imagined sexual/cultural projections and disavowals upon which phallic identification is propped up in postmodernity. In place of "the new sincerity" thought to siphon out the irony or eclecticism in postmodern camp by putting teeth into a lost authenticity in an impossible past, today's culture/cinema could learn from Burton to model a politics less upon portrait of the people as an archaic myth of origins than upon a pragmatics of the popular as an ongoing carnival of disorderly dialogue. [19]

Notes

[1]Hal Foster, <u>Compulsive Beauty</u> (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), p. 189.

[2]Sarah Koffman, <u>The Enigma of Woman</u>, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornel UP, 1985), p. 56.

[3]For an excellent discussion of "the female uncanny," which is outside the purview of my essay, see Tania Modleski, Loving With a Veangeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women (New York: Methuen, 1984); and Patricia White, "Female Spectator, Lesbian Spectator: The Haunting," Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories, ed. Diana Fuss (New York and London: Routledge, 1991).

[4]Barbara Creed, The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 53.

[5]See Kaja Silverman, "Historical Trauma and Male Subjectivity," Psychoanalysis and the Cinema, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (London & New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 117; and Fredric Jameson, "Magical Narratives: On the Dialectical Use of Genre Criticism," The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act. (London: Methuen, 1981), pp. 103-150.

[6]Thomas Elsaesser, "Social Mobility and the Fantastic: German Silent Cinema." Wide Angle, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 14-25. Of course, the "hesitations" of the fantastic are no more automatically uncanny than the "gaps," fissures," and "ruptures" of the reflexive genre film are automatically "progressive."

[7]The vacant space of internal difference is a requisite for all the terms of the phallocentric structure, making it more a dynamic playing field between the terms than a secure entity weighted down by a master term. This consideration is absent Robin Wood's "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," Movies and Methods: An Anthology--Vol. II, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 195-220; and underestimated in Frank Krutnik's, In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity (London: Routledge, 1991).

[8]In Batman, the face-off between Batman and Joker symbolically expresses a showdown between the two varieties of Lyotard's modernist sublime annotated by James Donald. Whereas the unrepresentable is an absent content in the sublime of *nostalgia* (a forfeited presence imagined by the subject and depicted in reassuringly familiar form), the unrepresentable is manifestly present in *novatio*, which highlights the double action of pleasure and infraction, the expressive aspect of redrawing artistic/cultural frames of experience and the oppositional pleasure of sidestepping structures of hegemonic control. Theatricalizing a political as well as an aesthetic dimension of postmodernism, then, "such works of novatio... refuse art's institutional tendency to domesticate the sublime." Jean-Francois Lyotard annotated by James Donald in "The Fantastic, The Sublime and the Popular Or, What's at Stake in Vampire Films?," Fantasy and the Cinema (London: BFI, 1989), p. 244.

[9]See Judith Butler's "The Force of Fantasy: Feminism, Mapplethorpe, and Discursive Excess," Differences, vol. 2, no. 2 (1990), p. 105-125; and her Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. London and New York: Routledge, 1990.

[10]Jack Zipes, "The Liberating Potential of the Fantastic," Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization (New York: Methuen, 1989), p. 174.

[11]Ibid., p. 176.

[12]Ibid., p. 179.

[13]Rob Winning, for example, invests Pee-wee's bicycle with phallic significance, conferring upon it the status of lost object which Pee-wee sets about reclaiming. By regarding the film as an allegory about "our own culture's attachment to masculinity and the phallicism which characterizes it," Winning comes around to the question: What is Pee-wee's Big Adventure if not a symbolic tale about the fear of castration and the loss of the masculine ego-identity which accompanies it?"(58) To be sure, Winning's (Freudian) psychoanalytic approach is an effective strategy in excavating what he rightly calls the "patriarchal tenets on which our culture as a whole is formulated," (57) but although Winning remarks on the film's parodic treatment of the masculine figures whom Pee-wee encounters, he passes over the quality of ambivalence that inflects the "masculine" ethos of their identities, and thereby neglects to lay open the text in terms of its camp characteristics or homosexual subtext. He therefore sets forth a heterocentrist analysis, reclaiming the work in the name of a somewhat reconstructed but "straight" masculinity. See Rob Winning, "Pee-wee Herman Un-Mascs Our Cultural Myths About Masculinity." Journal of American Culture, vol. 11, no. 2 (Summer 1988), pp. 57-63.

[14]Tania Modleski, "The Incredible Shrinking He(r)man: Male Regression, the Male Body, and Film," Differences, vol. 2, no. 2 (1990), pp. 55-75.

[15]It has therefore been worth having a purchase on Friedberg's analogy of the *shopping mall as cinematic apparatus* whereby "the spectator-shopper--trying on identities--engages in [the] pleasures of a temporally and spatially-fluid subjectivity." Anne Friedberg, Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 184. As she rightly argues, the field of vision furnished by spectatorship theories which index spectator positions according to "gender, race, or sexual identity" underfocuses the emancipatory potential (albeit both ideological and temporary) afforded by "the borrowed subjectivity of spectatorship." This is not to discredit the political instrumentality of gendered or racial accounts of spectatorship. For a balanced and comprehensive overview of spectatorship theory, see Judith Mayne's Cinema and Spectatorship (London and New York: Routledge, 1993); E. Deidre Pribram's anthology, Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television (London: Verso, 1988), is an excellent survey of critical approaches to female spectatorship; and for provocative essays on racial spectatorship, see Black American Cinema, ed. Manthia Diawara (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), and Ed Guerrero's "Slaves , Monsters and Others: Racial Fragment, Metaphor, and Allegory on the Commercial Screen," in his Framing Blackness: The African Image in Film (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1993, pp. 41-68.

[16] The film also harks back to a pre-Romantic fairy tale about the "Man With No Hands" from an 18th century Karl Philipp Moritz novel. Lotte Eisner writes: "In a novel by Karl Philipp Moritz, an eighteenth century precursor of the Romantics, a little boy, Anton Reiser, is kept awake for hours on end by a terrifying fairy tale about the Man With No Hands who haunts the chimney on windy nights. Lying in bed, the little boy imagines with relish the decomposition of his own body after death." Lotte Eisner, The Haunted Screen (London: Secker & Warburg, 1952), p. 95. Edward Scissorhands deviates from the story of an unsocialized man and his inauguration into the symbolic realm of language and culture--a parable with notable incarnations in cinema history-- and addresses the complex relationship between not only the individual and society, but of narrative and subjectivity. Some examples: James Whale's Frankenstein (1931), Francois Truffaut's Wild Child (1970), Werner Herzog's The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser (1974), Hal Ashby's Being There (1979), and Susan Seidelman's Making Mr. Right (1987).

[17]See Frank Krutnik's book-length elaboration of this topic in his In a Lonely Street: *Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* (London: Routledge, 1991).

[18]Kaja Silverman, "Historical Trauma and Male Subjectivity," <u>Psychoanalysis and the Cinema</u>, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (London & New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 117. The ascendency of dominant masculinity is imagined because its psychic metabolism has no real or abstract subsistence apart from discursive operations. The so-called patriarchal unconscious--a cross-cultural fantasy of immutable phallic identity that is predicated on potency and authority--stipulates that sex-gender relations are underwritten by the psychic residue of phallic consolidation and empowerment.

[19]Jim Collins, "Genericity in the Nineties: Eclectic Irony and the New Sincerity," <u>Film Theory Goes to the Movies</u>, eds. Jim Collins, Hilary Radner, and Ava Preacher Collins (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 242-263.

I.   **Anatomy of Pee-wee Herman:**
      Camp Sites, Shopping, and the Semiotics of Tourism
      in Pee-wee's Big Adventure (1985)

To study the cinema...
By breaking the toy one loses it, and that is the position of semiotic discourse;
it feeds on this loss, it puts in its place the hoped for advance of knowledge...
-Christian Metz, The Imaginary Signifier-

The sense of the unattainable that can be evoked by photographs feeds directly
into the erotic feelings for whom desirability is enhanced by distance ... talismatic
uses of photography express a feeling both sentimental and implicitly magical:
they are attempts to lay claim to another reality.
-Susan Sontag, On Photography-

"Why don't you take a picture? It'll last longer."
-Pee-wee Herman in *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* -

Introduction: "breaking the toy"

Burton critically exploits the uncanniness of surrealist beauty--associated with the return of the repressed and the compulsion to repeat--for disruptive purposes; and out of this psychic ambivalence and convulsive physical effect, he produces a tantalizing ambiguity in representational and cultural politics. In addition, his films perform the camp liberation of history's waste--past objects and discourses--from obsolescence. Camp, *not* unlike the surrealist "outmoded" and postmodern "recycling" in its political forms, *can* be a value-problematizing, de-naturalizing form of acknowledging the history of representations. If Burton parodies the image as a collaging of primal phantasy, and the commodity as an ersatz recovery of a lost object, then his ongoing camp deployment of psychosexual disorder to disturb conventional pictorial space, artistic identity, and object relations constitutes a camp-surreal aesthetic which parodically models the outmoded cultural artefact as an enigmatic vestige of a traumatic encounter and/or fantasy, equivocal in its restorative and incendiary effects. Is

there a connection between the violent fantasies figured in his camp-surreal tableaux and our postmodern cultural imaginary?

Pee-wee's Big Adventure narrativizes pleasurable and empowering negotiations in which a mobile and fragmented subjectivity directs a *coup d'oeil* at images whose power to position the spectator is suspended, negotiations importuned and shouldered by particular social, industrial and technological circumstances of contemporary spectatorship as an abstraction performed around the activity of the viewer. Pee-wee's touristic excursions, his exaggerated exhibition of the consumerist values of metaconsumption are a camp celebration of the spectatorial practice of bricolage, the playful remodelling of signifiers from various styles of cultural and historical contexts. Materially overdetermined in imagistic and narrative terms, the film respects the spectator's "performance" of the textual "composition".

Consequently, Pee-wee's Big Adventure lays bare the claim of identity as a strategic claim, as a process which enables identities--if not the realm of the symbolic itself--to be called into question and refashioned, and as a means of articulating the heterogenous composite of the personal, the cultural, the historical and the political. If contemporary spectatorship now refers to the continual process of reinventing one's identity, of recharting one's temporal, spatial and social location, of appropriating and occupying seemingly disparate images, then the film evokes an affirmation of the utopian impulse through stories, even while it promotes a heightened awareness capable of dismantling heterogeneous frames, economies, and logics. Thus, Burton ironically interrogates the way in which hegemonic constructions, considered as emblems of incontrovertible social consciousness, contribute to the fiction of stable identities through the activities of cultural and textual consumption.

If the erasure of the transcendent spectator resembles the erasure of the

transcendent human subject in poststructuralist critical practice, then Burton's film ambivalently adopts and exacerbates dominant discursive practices insofar as they lay claim to the process of self-construction and the demystification of essentialism and phallocentrism by alternatively addressing the audience in terms of its marginality, fragmentation and heterogeneity. In sidestepping totalizing moral systems, unified interpretations, and textual and/or authorial control, Pee-wee slides through multiple representations in order to avoid being pent up by images and discourses that only reproduce a ready made subjectivity. In this escape from the violent discursive mechanisms through which modern Western culture subjectivizes through representation, Pee-wee's schizophrenic subjectivity exhibits an ambiguously critical dimension. How does this relate to Burton's spectacles of deconstruction and the politics of spectatorship which they engender? If hierarchical oppositions continually resettle in different territories, like Pee-wee's hysterical trajectories, then the action of deconstruction is obliged to play fast and loose in an interminable labyrinth. Is Pee-wee shaking his fist at phallocentrism or clutching at irreducible differences inside the male self while holding off the feminine/ feminized as Other outside? Does Burton's camp-surreal deployment of cross generic combinations problematize the plentitudes of history which much contemporary commercial cinema offers, and which potentially elide contradictions and assuage anxieties that threaten belief in dominant fictions?

In considering the subject of cultural narcissism and hysteric production against the backcloth of current social conditions, such as the compromised status of heterosexual patriarchy and the dramatic impact of new technologies on representation and subjectivity, I will flesh out these questions by planting footlights around textual enactments of the complexities of identity, and suggest how they bring into focus alternative spectator-text relations.

Cinematic Flanerie and "l'homme des foules"

Just as Pee-wee's ecstasy comes from overstepping the bounds of
social/cultural regulation, so the 'fun' of spectatorial play is bound up with the
pleasure of transgressive reading, with the feeling or impression of unrestricted
play with the film's material. It is for this reason that the debris and excess that
put constructions on unmotivated characters and incongruous environments
emerge as important motifs in the film, and are significant as textual signposts
to another filmic action involving the instrumentality of the film text as
material for the audience. Camp is a typically gay way of negotiating the products,
images and values of the prevailing culture, and Pee-wee's imposture promotes
a spectatorial practice which similarly makes a game of textual authority and
systematic coherence, and temporarily hangs in effigy the very terms of the
textual game taken up.

The play of spectatorship which is fostered by the text (the resistance to
patriarchal dominance over cultural space, the activity of breaking up the text
and the subsequent accrual of related meanings around textual fragments, the
conversion of narrative content into material for shared jokes and privileged
humor, the melding of intertextual associations between ostensibly mismatched
texts, the distortion of modal transactions to bring about proximity or distance
from the material represented) becomes a political activity insomuch as it
involves the reconsideration of the significance of cultural materials, including
the body. In this respect at least, camp is more than a derelativized, free play of
cultural signifiers (which would erase cultural differences and devalue the
specificity of subcultural experience). For it is precisely through experimentation
with heterogeneous social roles, through "toying" with alternative rules for

alternative kinds of experience that culturally preferred meanings are subject to displacement by alternative preferences.

To be sure, Pee-wee can be read as a kind of nexus for the (sub)cultural confusion concerning the cleavage between the social (and narrative) necessity or requirement of controlled behavior and the expression of personal desires and impulses. The tensions produced by his eccentricity enable alienated consumers to identify the contradictions that characterize their experience. Not unlike Pee-wee, the "spectator-shopper tries on identities with a limited risk and a policy of easy return," casting off the garment upon exiting the auditorium, but replaying the afterimage of having been suited in the outfit, or been (un)suitably outfitted by it. [1] Indeed, Pee-wee is an emblem of increased social mobility, an individual with choices concerning roles and styles. [2]

Pee-wee's spirited ambition and extravagant behavior, his impassioned and irrepressible camp sensibility, his seemingly inappropriate intensities of character and histrionics frequently involve the displacement of textual and cultural regulation, the transgression of cultural categories and social norms. In this regard, the correspondences between play and shopping are of crucial importance to definitions of both genre and spectatorship. Not only does Burton's film narratively illustrate the cultural contexts for acts of looking as a significant aspect of cultural consumption--the social practices dealing with the consideration of merchandise on display (shopping) and the encounter of unfamiliar spaces (tourism); it also puts forward the activity of window-shopping as a fitting paradigm for cinematic spectatorship, the shop window being analogous to the cinema screen. At Mario's Magic Shop, for instance, Pee-wee demonstrates that to shop is to engage in a process of selection, to experience an empowering association of looking and possessing, to discriminate between purchases in a contemplative operation that amalgamates entertainment, self-

fulfillment, physical recreation and *savoir-faire*. As window-shopping entails a transaction with the *mise-en-scene* of the display space without the obligation to patronize the store or complete a purchase, so the cinema drives a trade that looks to the framed and remote tableau of the screen. [3]

However, to say that Burton dramatizes for us what Friedberg calls "the imaginary flanerie of cinema spectatorship," a mode of viewing which tenders "a spatially mobilized visuality" as well as "a temporal mobility" is not necessarily to lay claim to a radical aesthetic practice. [4] For while Pee-wee's social mobility--recalling that of the Baudelarian flaneur described by Friedberg--is superseded by the virtual mobilities brought about by photographic reproduction, the locomotive machinery which transports him through the film's settings (bicycle, car, truck, train, motorcycle, and so forth) metaphorically express the locomotive capacities of film spectatorship in general, its capacity to alter the spectator's relation to bodily transport, to the practice of looking, to the seriality of history, and to the measurement of memory. Together with his memory loss, Pee-wee's constant vacillation in and out of roles comically indexes the cultural memory loss that is a byproduct of what Friedberg calls "the detemporalized, derealized subjectivity produced by cinematic and televisual spectatorship." [5] Cruising through a spectacularized social landscape where images mediate all social encounters--besieged by billboards, storefronts and film/television screens with their heteroglossic surfaces--Pee-wee dramatizes the dominance of our own spatially and temporally soluble mode of visuality. If Burton's excessive recycling of the past symptomatizes a period of mega-nostalgia, it more critically (albeit ambivalently) countenances a cultural impulse to (imaginary) mastery in the face of disappearing conventional relationships--existential and narrative--between time, space, and causality. By making Pee-wee a freedom-seeking transgressor in one way and oppressors (of women, like Dottie) in another,

Burton questions our assumptions about freedom, agency, and (gendered) character autonomy as they relate to the ambivalent requirements of teleological form, especially that of the road-movie with its journey structure, and its patterns of interruptions and slippages. Hence, the film's physicality, its *manic* aggressions, its mechanical stock in trade for executing coldblooded plots, and its surrealist sensibility driven through with camp.

On The Road (Again): The Trafficking of Genre, History and Hysteria

The narrative of <u>Pee-wee's Big Adventure</u> parodies a road quest and its search for a restoration of origins. The structural differentiation--also at the heart of the tourist experience--which had been the asphalt for the road film is now parodically collapsed into a convertible landscape in which the compression of time and space is tantamount to the subject's caving into the ubiquitous and allegedly indiscriminate images of consumer culture. If road movies have become a signpost of both how contemporary genre mirrors the "his/[s]tory-cal" present, then Burton's film functions as a camp commentary on the "hystrionic" splintering of male subjectivity, perfectly encapsulating the generic paradox whereby the cultural dismantling of dominant masculinity at once incites its hysterical (re)presentation and renders that representation problematic. In <u>Pee-wee's Big Adventure</u>, the need for a verifiable referent parallels the personal and cultural pilgrimage toward an authentic domain of being. As the nexus of travel and vision personifies the fluid mobility (and subjectivity) afforded by cinematic spectatorship, so the act of *sightseeing* symbolically expresses the historical relationship between subject and world. With the camera perspective frequently approximating the mechanical fueling of images that defines the apparatus, travel time on both road and screen is converted into figurative space, and the

"road" genre's buddy (or transmission) system can be read as a chip off the old engine block: a historically patriarchal medium whose voyeuristic machinery drives a "male" perspective that is powered by heterosexual desire. Because in the mechanics of its narrative course and pursuits, Pee-wee's Big Adventure forks both into and away from oedipal pathways and thoroughfares of cinematic realism, as a vista and valance, the film incarnates the seemingly boundless potentialities of oncoming space, and a past that falls back at every turn.

If the film is centrally concerned with the unlocalizable precinct of heterosexual/ patriarchal desire, the film stations the spectator in the elliptical perceptions of that disordered desire as if on a joyride, a freewheeling independence from "legal channels" (to use Mickey's phrase) such as heterosexual romance, the family and the annals of time, as it literally loses sight of a setting or background for symbolic action that would direct a meaningful bearing between real and imaginary surroundings. When Pee-wee is abandoned by Mickey after their accident, he shouts, "I'm in the middle of nowhere," and an extended blackout comically physicalizes generic histrionics in the road film; if the dissolving views of well-travelled narrative roadways, geographic and conceptual borders, has landed the characters in unplotted space, then Burton pokes fun at the patriarchal subject for whom the anxious projection of the simulacrum translates into the absence of history and the unmooring of any real referents.

Pee-wee's schizophrenic propensity for staccato inscription and a textuality of surfaces initially appears to problematize the development of typical surrealist themes--(expressed in the form of camp-surreal, archetypal recurrences/ recenterings/re-memberings, uncanny mishmashings of animate and inanimate figures, ambivalent hookups of castrative and fetishistic forms, compulsive reenactments of erotic and traumatic scenes, imbroglios of sadism and

masochism, of death and desire) and he exhibits an ongoing fascination with the logic of the simulacrum, with informational, physical networks and circuitry (as in the highway as narrative/semiotic system), with the spaces, sights, and sounds of the road, with the body as site or projection screen, with dispersions, dispossessions and becomings.

Burton's narrative strategies theatricalize for us the way(s) in which the personal and social loss of history and memory--doubly denoted by Pee-wee's temporary amnesia at the Texas rodeo--is compensated for by transforming culture into a domain that is susceptible to (imaginary) control and transcendence. The process whereby the protagonist's identity in the road film is displaced onto the mechanized vehicle and becomes a transcendent entity is humorously literalized by Pee-wee's donning of "headlight glasses," which satirize the way in which the perspective of the road movie, that ground gone over by the central characters, comes into sight as a function of those vehicles. In Pee-wee's Big Adventure, as in a culture of mechanical reproduction, the vehicle of transport turns into the test model of self. If the vehicle is humorously held out as an extension of the body in the film, then its deconstruction raises the curtain on the generic histrionics of personal injury, on the empowering lack arrived at through the deconstruction of self. In the simulacrum, the lost fetish object is the real, and its ritual *man*slaughter mimicks its definition.

Hence, Pee-wee's camp impressions of paranoia, xenophobia, and hysteria; his nightmares, delusions, and projections make plain the fact that in American popular culture (as in classical narrative film theory), the apparent loss of locomotive possession is underwritten by the anxiety of lost masculinity, the rugged-individualized sense of male selfhood reified into a disposable commodity. The merging of road, vehicle, character, and perception gradually comes into sight as a convoy of mass-produced images, until the gadabout Pee-

wee ironically appears as dislocated from any sense of place as he appears from any sense of his own subjectivity. Ever under (de)construction, Burton's is a two-way street; even as he renders the wreckage of the real, the referent and the subject with comic complexity, his camp rhetoric takes the idea of their possibility in tow. With Pee-wee at the wheel, and with the familiar swerving toward the unfamiliar, the solicitations of heterosexual romance and family are (figuratively) traded in for those of foreign frontiers.

In this respect, the film reinflects the ethos of the road flick or buddy movie in which, as Robin Wood points out, American cultural heroes knock about outside the normative bounds of the American hegemony, and where heroism is measured by transgressing the laws of normalcy, as well as criminality. [6] Notably, Wood's concept of "normality," which he aligns with the ideologically dominant concept of home in its personification of "the heterosexual romance, monogamy, the family, the perpetuation of the status quo, the Law of the Father," is analogous to Kaja Silverman's ideological paradigm of the "dominant fiction," whose core elements are similarly constituted by the family and the phallus, with traditional masculinity serving as the site of *vraisemblance*. [7] If each of the film's respective settings illustrates the thesis that the imag[i]nation of community gains expression through culturally specific representations and narratives, through an array of historically determined textual strategies, then Burton makes it apparent that the body politic as an imagined community functions, conventionally, to compensate for the gaps and fissures it engenders for the periphery by converting loss into metaphoric representations, narrative operations which serve to endow the 'centre' with authority and control.

It is important to remember that the phallus is not outside the realm of history and the specificities of differing social formations; rather, it is invariably

the outcome of dominant representational practices, activities that are susceptible to interference and alteration. Burton playfully satirizes the notion that in the postmodern simulacrum, in the absence of a true object of desire, there are merely a string of simulations which stand in for the original lack of the subject (humorously personified by Volcano the bull, the motorcycle, and so forth). These so-called "lost objects and mistaken subjects," to adopt Silverman's eloquent phrasing, like the overall structure of the film, humorously demarcate a subject position trying desperately to recover itself (or make itself over) as a stamping ground for self-definition. Pee-wee's camp humor is consistently aimed at the fact that the phallus is made to seem "larger" and more "palpable" by the ongoing discursive reinforcement which patriarchal culture confers on that signifier: an ongoing paragon of paternal pictures. The film's phallic imagery might similarly be regarded as excess debris or inexhaustible "junk" that testifies not so much to the petering out of the real as to its addendum, not so much to its appendage as its appendix. Thus Burton parodies the way(s) in which this manufacturing of phallic imagery holds out the penis as the handiest representation of the phallus because that manufacture is continually put forward in/by heterosexual patriarchy. In this respect, the nothingness which intercedes between consciousness and its object is none other than the postmodern simulacrum, the perceived void of the subject's (or spectator's) present world haunted by absent images.

Playfully partaking of the return of the repressed, and of the compulsion to repeat, Burton's uncanny camp-surreal involves convulsive physical effects and compulsive psychological dynamics. In its capacity to illustrate contemporary genre trouble, Pee-wee's Big Adventure thematises both the historical factors contributing to the destabilization of interpretive viewing, and the crisis of dominant masculine gender identity, an uncontrolled generic

intersection within the historically specific, high-traffic area of male hysteria. If "generic hysteria" refers to a historical corpus meeting with difficulty in its representation of itself and its historical situation, then as a cockeyed road movie, Burton's camp-surreal film renders generic and gender hysteria as a see-through vision of the engine-trouble of traditional male subjectivity. Because Pee-wee's obsessive and narcissistic behavior theatricalizes the liability within genre's repetitive compulsion to dramatize the malfunctioning of its containment mechanisms, a number of episodes serve as ironic, historical monograms of gender/genre hysteria, that is, the somatizing of unrepressed excess. For example, Pee-wee's uncontrolled physical movements trigger a domino effect which levels a row of bicycles and motorcycles respectively in a set of parallel scenes; he humorously overturns his bike while showing off in front of other boys; he becomes an honorary member of the motorcycle gang--an explicit gay reference to Kenneth Anger's Scorpio Rising (1964)--and proceeds to crash his motorcycle, not unlike the cross-dressing cyclist in Bunuel's Un Chien andalou, the wipeout signalling cultural apocalypse in the former and the collapse of semiotic coherence in the latter. The complication of film genre as a mode of production, its compulsion to repeat specific signifying operations as a reflex to the renitency of cultural history, is humorously personified by the excessively redundant, assembly-line machinery in Pee-wee's kitchen. Indeed, Burton parodically illustrates how hysteric *manu*facture is a search for referentiality that is doomed to malfunctions, to breakdowns, and to dead failure, because the lost object of this hunt is like a phantom limb brought into being by the patriarchal subject's sweet tooth for the *real*. As in Beetlejuice (Burton, 1988) where the fugitive, supplementary materiality of the monster's unburied cadaver haunts the material structure of the family home (and its miniature model), the competition of generic forms in Pee-wee's Big Adventure makes

visible the histrionics of the (male) figure which haunts the idealizing procedures of hysterical generic reproduction as they essay to reconcile themselves to other historical pressures.

If <u>Easy Rider</u> (Hopper, 1969) lays bare the crisis of authenticity beneath the democratic veneer of mainstream America, employing the road to transcend temporal and cultural artificiality, only to map out the commodification of (the psychedelic) experience, <u>Pee-wee's Big Adventure</u> narrativizes its hysterical relation with history, implying that (road) signs possess no metaphysical essentialism, but are more properly the cultural products of advanced capitalism. Burton gives assent to contemporary culture's accrual of counterfeit, obsolete and alienated productions, continually crashing through generic and conceptual boundaries and leaving conventional signposts in the dust, yet he carries this out not in the name of any utopian transcendence of the real, but in the qualified acceptance of the congested postmodern traffic/subjectivity, which enables us to size up the distinctions between presence and absence, past and present, without lopping off all ties to reality, reference, and subjective intervention. Hence the symbolic importance of the outsider or cultural "rebel."

If <u>Pee-wee's Big Adventure</u> ironically situates desire as a metaphorical space at its discursive center, Burton overturns the conventional quest for the object of desire, exploring instead a series of figural correspondences which return us to the untotalizable yet occurrent subject, to the structure of desire as it functions for the subject, as opposed to its own enigmatic object. Although the continuity of experience is refuted by paroxysmal and apocalyptic theories of history and personality, antiquarianism presents us with a philosophy of history apprised by an aesthetics of the souvenir. [8] Burton lays bare the functional ambivalence of antiquarianism, alternately illustrating the nostalgic solicitude of romanticism and the political requirement of authentication that is its

destination. Moreover, in the tradition of the road film, he theatricalizes the concept of narrative itself as a structure of desire, a construction that dually invents and steers clear of its object and thereby repeatedly inscribes the site of symbolic engenderment, the cleavage between signifier and signified. Hence, the subject of personal and cultural nostalgia in Burton's film is considered in terms of the relations of narrative to origin and object, and further, of the faculty of narrative to produce meaningful objects and so to engender a significant other. If the premodern heritage site or artefact, modern souvenir and postcard complement photography's function of authentication--its putative re-establishment of the relation between origin and trace--then the diverse narratives of origins which these figural representations of the past generate are not stories of the artefacts themselves so much as of the individual or collective subjects who possess them, endeavoring to recover (real or imagined) past experiences. It is worth keeping in mind how surrealism anticipates the postmodern assertion that the hyperreal "body-snatches" reality for its own sake, for the sake of fetishizing the lost object--not the object of representation but the rapture of disavowal and of its ritual sacrifice.

Toying With (Post)Modernity: Childhood, The Souvenir and the Self

Pee-wee's Big Adventure reveals how mass produced perspectives on culturally articulated sites such as the Alamo are converted from public into private experience, and the past is constructed from a set of presently existing fragments. [9] In both anthropological and hermeneutic terms, then, the paradox of *tradition* is similar to that of *tourism*: its concepts and practices--the form(s) taken by the sacrilization of the past--indicate that even the most "authentic" traditions are subject to recontextualization and reinvention, and to stylized

effects of simulation. Disintering the primitive phantasies buried in overt cultural fantasies, Burton's draws out our feelings about seemingly ordinary or outmoded objects in the world--food, utensils, toys, domestic interiors, architecture, landscapes, machines, commodities--through a camp inquiry into their capacity to bear up primitive phantasies, but also those of dominant masculine/national identities.

The underground locations in the film (real and imagined basements, and so forth) are yoked to the temporality of the past, and they scramble the past into a vertiginous order which memory is solicited to retool and remarshal. If the film is a camp-surreal fable about existential encounters which collide head-on with the void, apocalypse, or pseudo-events of (post)modern experience, Burton explores the personal and cultural instrumentality of the historical artefact or souvenir in its evocation of voluntary childhood recollections, a motif that is articulated through keepsakes of the individual life history or in the more expansive antiquarian treatise of the genesis of the nation. In the same way that authenticity and interiority are stored in the far off past, the surrealist outmoded holds forth an authenticity of experience relating to the concept of the primitive, the exotic or the cultural ruin as child, that is, as an antecedent of modern world production modes and social relations. In <u>Pee-wee's Big Adventure</u>, generational separation gives rise to nostalgic forms of conspicuously displayed lawn art which metonymically express their abandoned use value, and attest to the industrialization of the domestic inhabitants (Pee-wee now a tourist of ancestral lifestyles).

While eclecticism rather than unalloyed seriality personifies the heterogenous organization of the self in the film, Burton makes it clear that it is a self capable of transcending the casualties and dispersions of historical reality. The numerous evidentiary sources and materials with which Pee-wee presents

us during his hysterical monologue in the basement ironically parody the nostalgia exhibited by narrative in general, the need for the absent object of desire (its original locality), and the willful compensation for the perceived inadequacy of present experience. Pee-wee's photographs and momentos-- humorously recalling to mind the gift shops at both the Prehistoric Museum and The Alamo--negotiate distance as if pixilated in time and space, convert distance into proximity with the self, and collapse the world in order to distend the personal. Though ironically indistinguishable from the pennants, (taxidermic) trophies, and assorted momentos in Francis' den which refer to events that are reportable because they are not repeatable, Burton's film is available less on the level of individual biography, as Francis' souvenirs are grasped, and more on the level of collective identity, as Pee-wee's kitsch objects are grasped.

An emblem of an age and not a self, <u>Pee-wee's Big Adventure</u> physicalizes the paradoxical *man*euver by which late capitalist culture infantilizes the consumer, even as it advocates the ideal of individual autonomy. Clearly, Pee-wee's behavior theatricalizes, simulates, and perhaps accommodates the (hypothetical) spectator's own tactics of evasion and reinterpretation of the institutional apparatus as private toy. However, the audience viewpoint is not so much aligned with the figurative child of Pee-wee's imaginary world as it is modified into a fluctuating and provisional dominant which lays claim to representations, even as it relinquishes its perspective to them. Indeed, Pee-wee's ambivalent mode of spectatorship sets the cinematic vehicle reeling back and forth between past and present, phenomenal and phantasmatic, between what Metz describes as "the ambivalent coexistence of... anachronistic affection [and] the sadism of the connoisseur who wants to break open the toy and see into the guts of the machine." [10]

Unlike popular film, narrative is not a property of the toy per se; rather,

the toy is the material personification of the fiction: it is a mechanism for fantasy, that is, for narrative inauguration. The toy broaches an interior world, consigning itself to fantasy and seclusion in a manner that social playing-fields do not. Roland Barthes, always sensitive to the ideological production of signs taken for real, asserts that "toys are usually based on imitation, they are meant to produce children who are users, not creators." [11] Clearly, however, to play with something, as Pee-wee consistently demonstrates, is to mix and match it with outfits of non-determinative contexts, and to put on trial the correlation between substance and signification. Even while film and commodity contribute to the ideological construction of the spectator/consumer's operations of taste and desire, both sexual and commodity fetish require a supplementary narrative, thus leaving open the potential for inventive interference and interruption. In other words, the commodity fetish exceeds assessment as merely impacting on the economic features of textual production, by *incar*nating a particular style of textual appropriation involving the transformation of identity and reception.

Indeed, Pee-wee's Big Adventure is an example of camp in the *collector mode*, which involves the camp liberation of history's waste--past objects and discourses--from obsolescence. Thus, Pee-wee's house is a camp shrine for disposable commodities, including outdated Halloween decorations, outmoded appliances, pre-electronic toys, replicas and skeletons of extinct or prehistoric animals, kitsch objects, novelty items such as an antique fortune telling scale (an ironic measure of postmodern contradictions in general). In surrealism, physical objects and settings have psychic metabolisms. The resonance of objects in the fantasy and the simulacrum alike is not simply the by-product of phantasies projected onto them, but the emotional and intellectual dexterity involved in determining which phantasies correspond to those objects in view of their cultural associations, but also their physical/material properties. In a somewhat

different vein, perhaps, camp "involves a celebration, on the part of the cognoscenti, of the alienation, distance, and incongruity reflected in the very process by which hitherto unexpected value can be located in some obscure or exorbitant object." [12] Camp, in this regard, reappraises the exchange value of forsaken forms of cultural activity. Importantly, Burton's camp-surreal film underscores the cultural and political ambivalence of past artefacts associated with commodities in general, and everyday vernacular in particular; the aura of the unique object corresponding to past production modes and social formations on the one hand, and the upshot of camp's mode of cultural production on the other: when the products of preceding such modes forfeit the authority to regulate cultural meanings, they are made available for the reassignment of meanings according to present operations of taste. Significantly, the camp passion for "things-being-what-they-are-not" (to borrow Sontag's phrase) is exemplified by Pee-wee's favorite taunt: "I know you are but what am I?"

That Obtuse Object of Desire

According to Pee-wee's Big Adventure's camp-surreal itinerary of desire-- parodied by its ironic drama of dismemberment--spectatorial binds are fastened by the play of images whose actual absence make their fallacious presence more captivating. Double-exposed in the sense that it can be fruitfully comprehended in terms of its obsessively single-lane focus, its metaphoric topography, and parodic invocation of psychoanalytic discourse, on the one hand, and its episodic, ethnographic and metonymic structural correspondences on the other, the film's mock fascination with Americana serves to critique the assimilation and reconstitution of the subject by the comprehensive narrational telos of contemporary theme parks with their implosive architecture and centralized

technocracy.

In the same way that the traditional amusement park parodies urban experience, converting its heterogenous subjectivities into bodily performances, Pee-wee's enacts the protocols of gender conduct, turning them into parodic and exhibitionist spectacles. Yet far from an essentially "feminized" spectator, we might consider Pee-wee (the surrogate spectator/shopper/tourist) as temporarily undone, uncoded, a subject whose sexual orientation vis-a-vis spectatorship is provisionally debunked, put into crisis, hystericized. On this level, perhaps, the film is involved in the stopgap undoing of sexual difference, of a set of chains for identity that is comically transported in an age of hysterical/hyperreal reproduction. For even as the film captures the ethos of the traditional amusement park, satirically depicting historical epoch and events, tactically evading any predictable route or coherent sequence from which to purview the diarama-like tableaux, it ambivalently participates in the very structures and processes it sets out to dismantle. As the story achieves only a temporary release from the developmental logic of narrative, requiring symmetrical correlations and ending to counterbalance the beginning, so Pee-wee's approximation of multiple identities, like the multiple identifications of the spectator, afford only a momentary (and necessary) reprieve from the (il)logic of identity. While the film's drive toward narrative resolution, made possible by the denaturalization of causal actions, lays bare the conventions that give an impulse to closure without interference in classical narrative cinema, Pee-wee's repossession of his bicycle ironically demonstrates that the restoration of order and coherence that (classical) narrative logic stipulates occasions an amplification of pleasure that is commensurate with the potential for loss.[13]

Pee-wee's Big Adventure consistently solicits us into a pseudo-diegesis whose (in)discreet charm engenders a pattern of displacement. Both protagonist

and audience are liberated from the constraints of conventional causal logic through tangents and trajectories, extrapolative fantasies such as Pee-wee's symbolic victory over the field of cyclists in his dream of "Le Tour de France," persecution fantasies and nightmares which manifest the residue of the journey through condensation and displacement, unexpected stopovers such as the evening spent with Simone at the "Prehistoric Museum," and tangential episodes and vignettes like the scenes at the rodeo or the biker club. The journey narrative's digressions unfasten the chain of causality (literalized by the theft of Pee-wee's bike) and create a space for alternative developments which unsettle the trajectory of the main plot. Miscarried journeys, such as that of Pee-wee and Mickey's car crash and subsequent breakup of the film's buddy structure, or Pee-wee's motorcycle crash (recalling the fallen cross-dressing cyclist in Bunuel's Un Chien andalou), serve as ironic reminders of the film's intransitivity.

The straightforward spatial trajectory of the journey pattern during the first half of the film indicates a clear-cut goal orientation--the Alamo--and is therefore capable of sustaining offroad excursions replete with apparent freeplay. The existence of chance as a locomotive force in the fictional world (normally contributing to the illusion of freeplay in classical narrative representation) is ironically parodied when Pee-wee throws himself from a moving train to escape the monotony of Jack's American folk songs, and lands beneath a sign that marks his intended destination. Burton drives the mechanisms of freeplay to the curbstone in the second half of the film; it is unhitched from the concept of spatial advancement toward a destination, serving less as a traversal of space to get to a journey's end than a maneuvering through space for its own sake. Indeed, if the desire for "adventure" or hazardous road conditions in narrative is at once a yearning for narrative fulfillment and a desire to protract and intensify desire through the mechanisms of freeplay which foster narrative

nonfulfillment, the subject compensates for its own incompletion at the same time as it postpones the body blow of reaching the terminally satisfying finish-line. The act of suspension thereby accomplishes an affirmative outcome, that is, the provisional upholding of the fiction of the completion (or "final crowning," as it were, the interruption of which is comically literalized in the opening sequence).

Burton satirically maps/clocks the spatial and temporal dislocations which clear the cultural ground for nostalgia's ingress, but also for postmodern recycling in politicized forms which recall critical import of the outmoded for surrealism. The inefficiency of the sign in apprehending its signified, of narrative in being commensurate with its object, and of apparatuses of hysterical *man*ufacture in approximating lived social intercourse parodically instigate an extensive desire for a natural source, for ancestry, and for the unmediated experience that is at the root of nostalgic desire; however, if the outmoded and the postmodern are problematic because they are caught up in a single lane of historical development, then this is also the mainspring of power for both terms, for it is the congestion of productive modes/meanings that the postmodern can run over. And just as heterogeneous spaces and times can be critically (re)aligned in the present, so too can these discriminations be phobically sized up. To be sure, the lost object of fetishism is itself simulacral is and the putative forfeiture and subsequent inaccessibility of the real are campily accompanied by a pronounced increase in (critical) attempts to (re)define, and hence, to stake a claim to it. By reading the loss of Pee-wee's bicycle in terms of male lack, and by bringing into focus the ideological alignment of sexual and cultural disavowal, an incisive generic and cultural analysis is afforded by the setting of the text's syntax of symbolic castration against the back projection of the postmodern (or pothum[or]ous patriarchy's putative loss of a referent or an authentic domain of

being).

Nostalgia/Authenticity/Masculinity

Pee-wee's Big Adventure ironically documents nostalgic narratives of decline from use-value to commodity, from universality to instrumentality, from the observing flaneu(r/se) to the possessive shopper-tourist, from the world encountered as being (a fact of experience or consciousness) to the world as encountered as simulacrum. In so doing, the film functions ironically as a hermeneutic scavenger hunt for a compendium of culturally authoritative representations--maps, brochures, advertisements, heritage industry sites: officially sanctioned constructions of the Other which are conventionally (re)possessed for personal/cultural use in the historical world. An experience which turns on a process of structural differentiation, this version of tourism (and its corresponding version of modernity) capitalizes on the historical forfeiture of structural solidarity exemplified by traditional (or in the road film, "folk") cultures. Because Pee-wee campily expresses a distinct lack of interest in the culturally authentic, the ideality of the commercialized tourist experience, its form and function--no less than that of dominant masculinity--is devoid of any "transcendental anchorage"; rather, it is an effect of ubiquitous signifying practices and of their technological conditions, the uncanny annexation of the referent by the sign.

Nostalgia is melancholy without an object (an operation that is ironically illustrated by the loss of Pee-wee's bike), a melancholy which produces a yearning that is unauthoritative since it is anterior to, and therefore dislocated from, lived experience. If myth unfolds from history and simulation unfolds from myth, then the scene at the Alamo--a shrine whose interior is haunted by

anterior, "puppet" references-- playfully satirizes the alleged historical erasure of social or psychological expression under "heritage" sites, and concomitantly, beneath the surface of people, places and things. Burton offers an ironic account of postmodernity's hysteria of superfluous overproduction of the real that is supposed to evade it. As a form of abstraction, the Mexican tableau (and traditionally gendered wax figures of Pedro and Inez) index the (American) nation's necessity for representational labour to figure in its founding ambivalence, the deficiency of self presence at its foundation or in its essence. As with narrative in general, nostalgia is invariably ideological: the past it solicits-- like the alleged basement at the Alamo--has no real or abstract existence save narrative, and so at every turn, that absent past portends to transcribe itself as a profound lack. If such coherence through contradiction functions as the modern seduction, then the nation itself, like phallic masculinity, depends on this visual realm of simulated experience: it exists to be seen, and so it is seen to exist. In contrast, Burton's mating of mannequin and ruin emphasizes the dialectical relation of the hyperreal-commodified and the outmoded: the former breeds the latter through displacement, and as a rejoinder, the outmoded delimits the centrality of the hyperreal-commodified, and can therefore symbollically pitch into it.

Quite another state-of-the-union-address, masculinity is an imagined social body that is continually hunting for the ideal order and coherence of the centre in order to transcend the fulmination of difference from the periphery.[14] But even while dominant masculine gender identity shares with modern conceptions of nationhood the metaphoric impetus (and momentum) toward supremacy, neither fiction exists in the abstract apart from discursive indications such as sounds, images and narratives. The scene ironically indexes the localization of national and masculine power through images, tableaux,

narratives, monuments and sites: spectacular "identity tags" that circulate through individual and cultural consciousness. That the Alamo is the site where national identity is figured in relation to a narrative of masculine generation and power underscores the comic correlation which the film draws between personal and national fantasy. Indeed, if prevailing fictions are revivified at the site of representation and signification, then Burton raises the ideological curtain on cultural exhibition sites and "authentic" traditions, establishing them as sites of contestation.

With its self conscious strategem and its mounting misgivings about desire and postponement, spectacle is laid bare as a technique for seduction in Pee-wee's Big Adventure, fashioned from campily coded posturings of gay male fantasy. Pee-wee's camp reprisal of masculine associations lay them bare as cultural constructions, his suppressed (sexual) desire to play with 'boy toys' is campily cast in the context of culturally sanctioned children's action figures in his bathroom, with their exaggerated physical sexuality, and is projected into lived experience as when he slides down the fireman's pole in his home, embraces Mickey during their crash, sets a world record for rodeo riding a bull named Volcano, and makes gestural references to sodomy during his dance performance at the biker clubhouse. Functioning ironically as an allegory of homosexual initiation at the same time as it critiques the social construction of cultural identities, such as dominant masculinity, Burton's (re)stages the excessive spectacle of masculinity, delivers masculine embodiment as a spectacle, and fetishistically apprehends the protuberance of its make-up. Not unlike the (other) dolls, puppets and automatons in Burton's repertoire, Pee-wee epitomizes surrealism's paradoxical "erotic object" because he insinuates the dissolution of boundaries.

To be sure, Pee-wee calls into question the cultural 'make-up' of the

traditional male, the ideological underpinnings which hold fast this social construction. Although it is a traditionally male costume, it is outdated and ill-fitted, not unlike his camp penchant for the star glamour of *Hollywoodiana*-- itself "a tailored fantasy, which never 'fits' the real, [that] is worn in order to suggest an imaginary control over circumstances." [15] In fact, it seems as though Pee-wee has literally *outgrown* his costume, that it has become as constrictive as the social assumptions associated with it. The roles of the "parent culture" which Pee-wee adopts is not authentic, extraordinary identities, but a compendium of extrinsically defined and regulated stereotypes. In this regard, his own agency and destiny are campily motored by the (libidinal) course of narrative events: simulations, seductions, transfigurations of the image. Indeed, the engenderment and empowerment of dominant masculinity, its assumption as an image as well as its visuality is the product of projections that Burton ironically parallels with Hollywood techniques.

Regarded as forms of metafashion, the collection of kitsch and camp elements in Burton's film make-up a discourse on the ongoing reinvention of novelty within consumer culture; and thereby advocate an ideology which might rearrange class relations, and might supplant a labour of ongoing production with one of consumption, a potentially radical and transformative style of cross-border (i. e., historical, sexual) shopping. Rather than simply presenting his reality, Pee-wee self-consciously fabricates it. He immures the myth of the authentic self underneath a hysterical proliferation of voluntarily excessive, offbeat personalities, and thereby proliferates the effects of subjective identity through intentional camp re-enactments of the procedures by which personal identity is culturally (and cinematically) manufactured and regulated.

At the same time, however, Burton ambivalently exploits the very effects of advanced capitalism--artisanal and industrial objects alike rendered

outmoded--against its own system of commodity exchange. Hence the terrorizing of the bourgeois order by ghosts of its repressed past (the outmoded, the *depayses*) as well as its exploited (primitive, exotic, and even industrial) outside. The conclusion consolidates the problematic people, places, and events that beat a path to the film-within-a-film; it reinstalls them as the sum and substance of the movie, exhibits them as self-conscious leftovers or signs of its playing havoc with narrative desire. With the textual enigma solved and the generic patterning exhausted, the finale returns us to these anterior episodes, as in Fellini's *8 1/2* with its allegory of the fantastic rondo, where the forsaking of the film restores Guido to his life (read: to the *real* ?), and where he surveys all those who have inhabited it in front of him. But Pee-wee, unlike Guido, does not direct the audience of his memories, though he similarly abandons the film, pulling out of the drive-in movie in favor of "lived experience." Importantly, Burton thus parodies the spectator's response to the contemporary spectacle film, the ultimate impression of presence and immediacy, the end-of-the-road for the philosophy of realist individuation because spectacle claims to show everything there is, and exiles to non-existence that which purportedly exists outside the world that it frames. In the end, things, signs, and actions--compulsively reincarnated when cut loose from their respective ideas, essences, and origins--do not automatically forfeit the inheritance of their content. Less like a shadowless man consigned to madness or death, as certain postmodern coroners would have us believe, outmoded images/objects, may call to account the late-capitalist product with past images/objects either deadened or outside its purview, as when an object or space remindful, or having an aura of a different formative mode, social configuration, or feeling is disinterred, in apostasy.

Conclusion: Allusion Travels By Street/car or Fandom of Liberty

Instead of submitting to the limits palmed off on it by fetishistic representations, Burton ambivalently editorializes the operations by which dominant culture predicates itself and makes over difference and otherness in its own image. Significantly, he lays bare the rationale of tourism as that of an inexorable expansion of commodity relations and the resultant imbalance of power between centre and periphery. Undertaking a cataclysm of modernity, it institutes structural underdevelopment (the parallel to both the simulacrum and castration should be clear) because it is precisely the shortage of development which designates an area as tourist attraction. Hence, the paradox of the impracticable acquisition of the Other, repeated with an economic retribution: a squaring of the circle that protracts, since any location (especially the allegedly unchartable territories of the feminine and the postmodern) can potentially operate as tourism's cultural Other. If the protagonist of the road film is antagonistic toward women, not unlike the way in which some postfeminist critics rival the category of woman (even, in both cases, with the purpose of moving beyond it to as yet unpaved roads), then gender dissonance in which difference is erased is a potential vehicle for time travel of the sort which returns us to the time of unisex, that is, patriarchal social relations. On the other hand, the exodus of traditional male subjectivity under the encumbrance of its hysterical kinship with its own history might indicate the prospect of alternate thoroughfares to the past being mapped across landscapes and borders of contemporary culture.

Notes

[1]Anne Friedberg, <u>Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern</u> (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 121. In this regard, Pee-wee personifies Baudelaire's "perfect spectator,"

the overwrought observer who nomadically takes up residence among crowds, in the midst of activity and metastasis. And like the Baudelarian observer (or modern spectator-tourist), he feels at home away from home, projects himself into the moving landscape even as he remains sheltered from it; indeed, Pee-wee fully embodies the observer which Baudelaire describes as a *"prince who always rejoices in his incognito,"* a self-governing, mercurial, and passionate spirit. [See: Charles Baudelaire, "Crowds," in Paris Spleen (1869), translated by Louise Varese (New York: New Directions, 1947), pp. 20-21; quoted in Friedberg, pp. 29-30]. Like the "ideal" cinematic spectator, Pee-wee experiences physical mobility through the landscape, enjoying a gendered privilege that Friedberg colours as "a fluidity of social position and a mutable subjectivity" available not to any man, but, in Baudelaire's words, to *"l'homme* des foules," to the man with a penchant for migration, masks and masquerade.

[2]To be sure, the social relevance that audiences potentially attribute to a text (whether it be souvenir, photograph, toy or film) is never completely independent of its structural organization. For even while textual structures do not unilaterally govern spectatorial activities, neither are they dislocated from these processes. Importantly, previous spectatorial encounters facilitate a variable degree of practical competency in deciphering textual signals, and the considerable influence exerted by texts on spectators is not invalidated by the acknowledgement that audiences actively participate in the construction of textual meanings. Nonetheless, as numerous commentators in the eighties were eager to point out, Pee-wee presides over a postmodern camp/site that militates against traditional patriarchal definitions and dismantles the normative boundaries of gender, race, age and species that dominate symbolic social relations (though this hyperreal, deconstructive freeplay is not without real problems relating to women's actual social experience within patriarchy). What critics have overlooked is the extent to which American history is replete with populists and wayfarers, self-fashioned traditionalists and self-fashioned iconoclasts who have endeavoured to overpass the depthless closure of such categorizations in order to fathom the problems and pressures which lie at the base of the make-up of the American character. American populism and the road diverge in Pee-wee's Big Adventure, especially in the twin suspension of heritage and invention, roots and tabula rasas, community and individualism. Whether intersecting with, or turning off the route of American populism, Pee-wee frequently aligns himself with groups along the way (truckers, bikers and so forth), figures and icons as central to the road movie narrative as they are to the American psyche; and it is for this reason that Pee-wee is not so much a countercultural figure in any broad sense, as a necessary fixture of American mythology with all its uncertainty and contradiction, a vehicle for the juxtaposition of themes, images and characters whose raison d'etre involves the (re)definition of what qualifies as American and un-American. Clearly, the ability of Pee-wee's Big Adventure to implant facets of the counterculture so steadfastly within American mythology underscores an overwhelming tendency on the part of postmodern scholars and mainstream media alike to frame the film as exotic, postmodern, subversive, virtually 'unAmerican'. For sample articles, see: Constance Penley and Sharon Willis, eds., Male Trouble (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). Herein lies a potential problem: even a deconstructive practice that avoids universalizing a "male" perspective can homogenize conceptual, theoretical levels of practice. On the one hand, Burton's deconstructive practice makes it clear that the culturally defined male position of plentitude, mastery and identity as regards the phallus is in fact a fiction; on the other hand, to sachet from a gendered recognition of universal lack to an effortless supposition of textual bisexuality can occlude the issue of sexual difference and domination prematurely.

[3]By positing the gay ritual of cruising--itself involving a discriminating form of solicitation in front of store shop windows--as a metaphor for spectatorship, R. Bruce Brassell presents an interesting challenge to the metaphor of the "gaze." Brasell reasons that if the selective nature of the viewing experience, in terms of what we *hear* as well as what we *see,* is not commensurate with the homogeneity which the gaze suggests, the concept of "glance" implies a

tentative and negotiable form of audience engagement which accommodates emotional trepidation or psychological reservation, the impulse to look away, or to "tune out." Certainly, a reading process based on active participation is in some way endemic to all forms of spectatorship, but the gay (sub)cultural practice of cruising (a form of window shopping with an ulterior political purpose), in tandem with particular discursive modes of spectator address, according to Brassell "provides a countertradition to the dominant cinema's heterosexual male positioning." (63-64) This kind of solidarity is also part of the experience of camp in the film, where Pee-wee's practice of glancing at the camera functions as if to encompass spectators as privileged insiders of a subcultural group or *cognoscenti*. See Bruce R. Brasell, "My Hustler: Gay Spectatorship as Cruising." Wide Angle, vol. 14, no. 2 (April 1992), pp. 54-64. However, like the drive-in movie scene ironically suggests, films are converted into the requisite attraction for a fragmented "glance"--outside traditional cinematic boundaries--through which spectators decamp and repitch fluid and mobile identities, overlooking and recollecting themselves in a display case of images. If, as Corrigan suggests, contemporary audiences no longer "read" movies so much as "create cults around them, tour through them," then the drive-in audience formations or "camp" sites in Pee-wee's Big Adventure, coupled with their respective vehicles of transport--emblems of affiliation and identity-- theatricalize the way in which movies are nowadays provisionally negotiated as "private, domesticated performances or spectacular backgrounds to public lives," and suggest that historically marginalized sub*cult*ural audiences have dilated across culture and been recast as the principal spectatorial practice that is solicited by contemporary cinema. See Timothy Corrigan, "Film and the Culture of Cult," A Cinema Without Walls: Movies and Culture After Vietnam (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP, 1991), pp. 80-81.

[4]Anne Friedberg, Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p. 30.

[5]Ibid., p. 182.

[6]Robin Wood, "From Buddies to Lovers," Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan (New York: Columbia UP, 1986), p. 223. The film's structural and thematic conventions are a wink at 70s "buddy" movies as described by Wood, including a journey (i.e., the illusory nature of its ostensible goal), a somewhat recontextualized marginalization of women, a "French leave" from home, a male love story, and "the presence of an explicitly homosexual character," perhaps ambivalently shoring up patriarchal interests through the straight-laced delineation of sexual orientation (228-29).

[7]Wood, p. 229; Kaja Silverman, "Ideology and Masculinity: The Dominant Fiction," Male Subjectivity at the Margins (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 15-51. Kaja Silverman and Thomas DiPiero have respectively shown how phallic designation need not be bound up with essentialist definitions of male identity, but is instead tied to fluctuating social and political determinants. See also: Thomas DiPiero, "The Patriarch is Not (Just) a Man." Camera Obscura, nos. 25-6 (January-May 1991), pp. 101-24.

[8]Susan Stewart, On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1984).

[9]There is no contiguous identity between these artefacts and their referents; rather, the act of memory establishes their correspondence. Nostalgic desire springs from within this fault line between similitude and identity. Pee-wee's temporary forfeiture of his bicycle suggests that it is less a case of the referent captivating the nostalgic than distance itself. When he accuses Francis of stealing, he reasons, "You don't want it anymore because you already have it!" When Pee-wee

contrasts pictures of himself with and without his bicycle before a surrogate audience in his basement, we are reminded that the photograph, like the souvenir or momento, is by definition deficient. This insufficiency arises from the fact that the sign operates metonymically, that is, from object to event/experience; but also from the fact that the partiality of the souvenir makes it conducive to supplementary narrative discourse, exposition which articulates the play of desire.

[10] Christian Metz, "The Fiction Film and Its Spectator: A Metapsychological Study," trans. John Hopkins, The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p.92.

[11]Roland Barthes, "Toys," Mythologies, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957), p. 54. Of course, the acute intertextual environment of popular culture is more than a loot bag of free-floating and modifiable signifiers; it also accommodates textual transactions which solicit the attention of the (digressing) spectator in ideological terms.

[12]Andrew Ross, "Uses of Camp," No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 144.

[13]In the context of sexual difference, the question continually arises as to what extent Pee-wee's voluntary investment in feminization and hystericization may be interpreted as an endeavor to consolidate male mastery and control. To be sure, Pee-wee represents not an alternative masculinity so much as the fluctuating and provisional dominant, the gendered self of viewing spectator (which accounts for the basic consistency of his character underlying masks and roles in the film). Hence, it is important to recognize how the patriarchal appropriation of excess can reconsolidate cultural authority. For an excellent discussion of this issue, see: Tanya Modleski, "The Incredible Shrinking He(r)man: Male Regression, the Male Body, and Film," Differences, vol. 2, no. 2 (1990), pp. 55-75; also reprinted in Modleski's own Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age (Routledge: New York and London, 1991).

[14]Pee-wee's Big Adventure imparts the notion that the phallic regime of masculine identity is by no means a confirmed privilege that can be taken for granted once it is installed for the male subject. On the contrary, it has to be federated and continually safeguarded against sundry forms of aberrance and disruption; and indeed, the ambivalent creation of gaps and fissures is one of its defining features. Male masochism is frequently regarded as a kind of jailbreak from the stronghold of masculine (cultural) identity engendered by the Oedipus complex, whereby the masochist attempts to overcome the jurisdiction of paternal law and the determinacy of castration. If Pee-wee's subversive refusal of phallic identity (that is associated with accession to the symbolic via some form of dovetail into femininity) turns out to be only a temporary and deferral and pragmatic catalyst, then is the masochistic trope is laid bare as a momentary and metaphoric wounding of the male body that is to be worth one's salt on the playing field of the symbolic? The film symptomatizes generic and cultural difficulties with dominant masculinity that appear insecure or worn away. It raises the curtain on the discrepancy between the "legal channels" of masculine identity and desire requisitioned by the patriarchal cultural order on the one hand, and the psycho-sexual make-up of the male subject-hero on the other. Although this dramatic tension is worked out in different fashions, they are coordinated by a textual fixation on the incompatible drives of the individual male subject and the cultural incumbency of dominant masculine identification. Of late, the notion of dominant masculine gender identity in crisis has been doubly exposed in terms of its problematic subjective apprehension and as a historical crisis. An obvious critical problem arises from the fact that the terminal symptoms of traditional male subjectivity are diagnosed across the history of narrative cinema and other visual modes of cultural production. It is increasingly clear that any historical conception of a steadfast masculinity from which a variously related moment of crisis breaks camp is itself a cultural fantasy construction. Indeed,

fractured into "masculinities" in complex and contradictory ways, "masculinity" is playacted through differing performative stategies and staged in relation to multiform power configurations.

[15]Ross, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 158.

II.   **The Work of Suture in the Age of Hysterical Reproduction, or "Snow on the Oedipal Stage" in Edward Scissorhands (1990)**

The cult of celebrities (film stars) has a built-in social mechanism to level down everyone who stands out in any way. The stars are simply a pattern round which the world-embracing garment is cut-- a pattern to be followed by shears of legal and economic justice with which the last projecting ends of the thread are cut away.

-Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno- [1]

There was once an old man from the cape,
who made himself garments of crepe,
When asked, "Will they tear?"
he replied, "Here and there,
but they keep such a beautiful shape."

-The Inventor (Vincent Price)
in *Edward Scissorhands* - [2]

Introduction: Tearing the Fabric of the "world-embracing garment"

The ambivalent political determinations of Tim Burton's Edward Scissorhands must be ascertained with an eye to internal structure and to historical context. If contemporary horror presents itself as an indicator of the present historical and social topography, then Edward's figurative inscription in the cultural landscape brings to the surface cultural anxieties relating to the ideological "pinch" of capitalist patriarchy and the sense of the apocalyptic engendered by postmodernism. With history thought to be abandoned and the myths produced from that history destroyed, the simulacrum fills in for the allegedly forsaken territory of the real. If the postmodern appears ghostwritten by the nostalgic repercussions in the horror film's intertextuality, then the weakening of the security afforded by such a tendency is physicalized in the categorical breakdowns and bodily corruption that holds fast the excessive iconography of individual assailability in both the horror genre and the postmodern text. Because mass-mediated encounters are often implicitly

considered a kind of rape by certain male critics in postmodern debates, the so-called "promiscuous" violation of the boundaries of the self in postmodern culture would seem to function as a pretext for theoretical retaliation, much the same as rape is frequently considered as a narrative pretext for revenge in some contemporary horror films. As my invocation of the Frankfurt School analysis is meant to hold up to the light its implicit gender and discourse determinism, so Burton's film ironically projects the mystification of mass culture-as-woman-as-monster in much apocalyptic film and cultural theory, in which the scapegoating mechanism of mass culture as Other is recast in terms of simulacrum as Other.

Seeing as Burton is insistently drawn to tropes of horror, upon which psychoanalytic meanings interpenetrate with historically specific and fluctuating gendered power relations, his recycling of gothic horror ironically references its association of mass culture with woman, and real/authentic culture with men. Serving as externalized internal difference, the simulacrum, like woman-as-supplement, produces the fiction of the structured centre and is therefore the encompassing term. If internal lack is the condition of the phallocentric structure's existence as hermetic totality, this irresolvable contradiction has an analogue in patriarchy's alleged forfeiture of the real in postmodern culture. Setting the text's syntax of symbolic castration against the back projection of postmodern society's putative loss of a referent or an authentic domain of being, Edward Scissorhands brings into focus the ideological alignment of sexual and cultural disavowal.

The Work of Suture and The Phallacy of Indigent Metaphors

In particular, the film theatricalizes the role played by suture theory in critical formulations (or implantations) about subjectivity, ideology and sexual

difference in the context of postmodern experience, as well as spectatorship. In its generic form, the concept of suture endeavors to give an account of the operations by which subjects are constituted within discourse. [3] With the simulacrum filling-in for the allegedly forsaken territory of the real, and with this dystopic projection of contemporary social relations colliding with the utopic hope for spiritual redemption, Burton's political myth ironically thematises the operations of cinematic suture, the process whereby the subject's deficiency is exposed in order to cultivate the desire for entry into a discourse which promises to rectify lack; and whereby the alleged passivity of the viewing subject's position is camouflaged by a "cinematic slight-of-hand," which confers on the fictional character attributes thought to belong to the so-called bachelor machines of narrative invention, coercive vision, and castrating authority.

Burton's self-reflexive strategies critically highlight the correspondence between the faculties of surveillance and inscription which circumscribe the place of the symbolic father in Lacanian psychoanalysis, and those which are reputedly situated in the cinematic apparatus. The metaphorical transference of conception from womb to hands, from the material producer to the inventor and manufacturer, is figuratively inscribed in the mise-en-scene, and is predicated on vision. In the title sequence, the expiration of paternal surveillance--the suspension of the paternal function (epitomized by the father's heart attack)--gives way to alternative habits of looking. The notion of the symbolic father's unseen and all-seeing presence, like that of the historical jailor-surveyor of the panopticon prison, is subsequently literalized by the surveillance-security system installed by Jim's absent father. While Foucault's description of authentic subjugation "born mechanically from a fictitious relation"[4] finds an apt (spectatorial) metaphor in Edward's incarnation, indoctrination, and engenderment, the film's literalization of a

paternal/panoptic gaze--reinforced both by Kim's reference to Jim's household as a "prison state" and Edward's incarceration within this architectural/optical mechanism--coincides and collides with other modes of visual practice associated with the trope of flanerie, underscoring mobility and fluid subjectivity as opposed to subjugation and interpellated reform. Hence, the indemnity of the film spectator, thought to be underwritten by a more pronounced subjection to preexisting scenarios, is implicitly challenged. The scene at the police station playfully satirizes the generic preoccupation with psychoanalysis--Hollywood's widespread appropriation of its themes and discourse--by underlining its overdeterminations. Like the film spectator, Edward is addressed in digressing terms, the social apparatus being implicitly compared to the cinematic one in its image-making methods and capacities, its referential effect and appeal to idealist philosophy, its ideological and psychic implications. Ironically, the filmic psychoanalyst makes no effort to criticize or correct Edward's counter-cultural behavior; rather, he implies that "what we call reality" isn't necessarily synonymous with the Real:

> The years spent in isolation have not equipped him with the tools necessary to judge right from wrong. He's had no context, he's been completely without guidance. Furthermore, his work--the garden sculptures, hairstyles and so forth-- indicate that he's a highly imaginative character. It seems clear that his awareness of what we call reality is radically underdeveloped... He'll be fine.

Owing to his ostensible dislocation from the Real and the Self, which are metaphorically reflected at the outset of the film, Expressionist angst finds a postmodern correlate in Edward's existential (and spectatorial) dilemma. His remoteness from the narrative events demarcates the passive voyeur as a surrogate audience member; witnessing intimate interaction and erotic encounters but unable to participate, his seduction and separation from what he sees dilates the more covetously he looks. Like the Platonic model of the

simulacrum, the Lacanian law of separation is predicated on the inability of the subject to coincide with the self; it keeps otherness out of reach, supplants its entrancing, heart-stirring, and insufferable vicinity with a more tractable rent. Even while Edward Scissorhands satirically narrativizes this dialectical process, it is superseded as the surrogate spectators are irresistibly drawn into proximity with Edward, whose Otherness--not unlike that of film itself--proves initially resistant to either assimilation or expatriation. Edward's corporeal presence further approximates the phenomenology of the film experience, insofar as it dismantles the boundaries between the Symbolic and the Real, excites and arouses the bodies of onlookers.[5] Unsettling the boundaries between active creator and signifier of difference, his visceral and corporeal experience dramatizes for us a (spectatorial) model of subjectivity that is motored by agency and intentionality, that is concerned less with scopic domination and more with the pleasures afforded by temporarily entering into and negotiating a simulated but tactile landscape.

In suggesting that the political and ideological enunciations of Edward's cultural practices are transportable, that a practice which currently expresses prevailing (i.e., patriarchal) values might potentially become disassociated with those same values in the future, Burton's pictorial rendering of cinematic "machinery" lays open the text in terms of political potentialities. In the realm of symbolic relations, Edward's humorously unorthodox behavior at first approximates a kind of oceanic self (a psychoanalytically derived metaphor for the transcendent subject-position afforded the film spectator by the cinematic apparatus). Upon his arrival in suburbia, Peg coaxes him to "just go ahead and look" and Edward, oblivious to the car window through which the landscape is converted into panorama, bumps his head against the glass, itself a surrogate frame through which Edward's perspective approximates the mechanical feuling

of images that defines the apparatus. Soon afterwards in Kim's bedroom, Edward is frightened by the sight of his reflection in the mirror and touches it apprehensively. The metaphorical perforation of his quasi-oceanic state is comically signalled when he accidentally punctures the waterbed; and his bawdy inauguration into the symbolic is accomplished when Peg--having disentangled Edward from beneath her husband's clothing--places him before a full length mirror and declares, "You look fine. This scene approximates Lacan's account of the mirror stage (the function of the mother and the resourcelessness of the child) and projects a scenario in which the apprehension of the self is negotiated primarily in terms of its alienation, its estrangement from the image which defines it along with the space of others. Making no bones about the fact that the postmodern poltergeist of our cultural past is neither benign nor auratic, Burton also ambivalently illustrates (in the *mise-en-scene* of Kim's bedroom) that the demonic aspect of our recuperated cultural past is the sign of its repression, of its cutting off from a state of undivided nature/identity, as with a childhood toy or with the maternal body. The theme of projecting the self as a commodified other is central to Burton's cinema of the double; its relentless pursuit--personified by Peg's sleuthing about the Gothic castle--stakes out a maze of facade, mirror, image, and figure, which steers Expressionist stratification away from phantasy and phantasm into social and psychic realities. Clearly, Burton's critique of the loss of being in meaning--a doubly relevant project in the context of the postmodern simulacrum--proceeds from within existing symbolic relations which are manifest in the film's relationship to narrative.

Indeed, inherited narrative paradigms which conventionally serve to erect the adequate male subject are systematically demystified through Edward's frequent lack of comprehension, which underscores the arbitrariness of the symbolic order whose constituents signify, not because of some attachment with

the phenomenal world, but in relation to each other. Uncomfortably outfitted in the father's old clothes, Edward cuts the suspenders, divesting himself of the paternal costume, and thereby forfeiting the already receding phallic sign.[6] His obvious reluctance to wear the pants in the family is only part of a more general refusal to associate himself with any particular culturally gendered role. Edward's experimental creations signal his refusal to comply with conventional social narratives in the haircutting sequence, the iconography of his white lab-coat recalling the paternal inventor, while the nature of his occupation imparts the supposed feminization of modes of cultural production and socially constructed identities.[7] Near the end of the film, his rebellious rampage is inaugurated by the stripping off of his clothing, with its connotations of patriarchal signification. Significantly, his failure to organize his desires in relation to the father, to accord with linguistic structuration and traditional ethics, results in his enjoyment of an altogether different specular orientation which accommodates radical signifiers.

As Edward's reflex against the cultural order into which he is unsuccessfully "sutured" represents an overwhelming rejection of its normative social narratives, so the filmic process of narrative subject-binding is comically physicalized by the visual emphasis on a robot's belt in the title sequence, the women's force-feeding frenzy at the barbecue, and Edward's immobilization at the beauty salon. Edward's process of socialization, coincident with his indoctrination into the Boggs' family, is visually articulated in terms of sceno-graphic space, geometrically and optically accommodating the spectator through Edward's field of vision. The precise placement or centering of a single pea metaphorically expresses the activity of spectator positioning through the text's suturing mechanisms, generally thought to represent a projected utopian ideality via the camera. The construction of a subject-position through the agency of the

cut is playfully satirized in the haircutting sequence where, prior to styling Joyce's hair, Edward sets about 'binding' her in the center of the image. If the arbitrary assignment of cultural values is fundamentally related to sign patterns taken for real, then Burton highlights the referential mechanisms at the basis of these patterns.

MAN/i/CURE: The Taming of the Shrub

Edward's iconography and narrative instrumentality correspond in an exaggerated and farcical way with the imagery evoked by the above description of suture. His various occupations demonstrate that film is neither inert nor insulated, but rather a series of negotiations with the spectator it images plays and positions as subject of its movement. Indeed, he is a comic depiction of the mythical male subject, whose function is generally thought to be usurped by the operations of narrative, now the active cartographer of (sexual) differences. As the landscape of social representations solicits the individual as subject in the process of hegemony, so the contours of the narrative discourse place the spectator in certain territories of plot space. And as the film process accommodates certain terms of excess (manifest in its subject openings, its energetic adjustments) so Edward's rousing, personal, artistic style is a visible manifestation of such controlled excess, not unlike the versions of process that are specific to genres.

Edward's clients stand-in for female victims in the slasher genre and thereby unsettle the boundaries between out-of-control ecstasy and abject terror (both gendered as feminine in our culture), and underscore the correspondence of genres of excess, specifically, horror and melodrama.[8] Suggesting the inevitability of violence engendered through language and representation,

Burton's mythical machine-man--not unlike Georges Melies, or Calvani's blade-wielding Reader/(post)modern Oedipus--invites critical thinking about gender, genre and excess, the cultural instrumentality of ostensibly gratuitous excesses which constitute the sensational spectacle of the terror-stricken female body. Joyce calls the hairdressing encounter "the single most thrilling experience of [her] whole life." The rhapsodic violin music mixes with her sexual moaning as Edward frantically cuts below the frame, his handiwork seemingly directed at the cinema audience literally positioned beneath the boundary of the screen. The scene exacerbates the notorious cliche of woman as passive receptacle within the sex-gender system, exaggerating her readiness to receive, to be consumed with/by meanings. In this context, the cliche acts not as a hegemonic agent, but unmasks the "otherness" of the dominant ideology and italicizes the rhetorical violence--the subject of which is inevitably 'masculine'--necessary to accommodate it into representation.

In physical terms, Edward's vocations as dog groomer, hairstylist, sculptor, and topiarist humorously serve as visual analogies to the "cinematic slight of hand" that is divined to effect the suture process. Significantly, while topiary refers to the cutting or pruning of nature, thus made ornamental by trimming or training, it aptly describes the position of the gendered subject within the system of suture, and further corresponds to alleged ornamentalizing of identity in the simulacrum. Additionally, it alerts us to the social practice of domesticating, and thereby inoculating, the foreign, the exotic, the Other. By putting nature on display, the cultural instrumentality of topiary performs a man/i/cure, that is, an ostensible suturing of the cleavage between nature and culture; an imaginary remedy, but one that impacts violently on the lives of real women. Since for Burton, the carnal is to the cultural as the personal is to the political, Edward's apparent disfigurement is made tantamount to the female body as demarcated by

the classic psychoanalytic account of the sexually differentiated female subject within classic cinema. Because sexual difference at the level of filmic enunciation is considered a nodal point in the construction of erotic forms of looking for suture theorists, and because the order and meaning conferred on the world rely upon the dramatization of lack at the site of the female body, the image of the castrated woman then comes to be synonymous with the absences around which classic cinema revolves.

Although the narrative operations of Edward's flashbacks function as a kind of interrogation of his "castrated condition," they do not calculate his guilt or pathology, as in Mulvey's account of narrative pleasure, but serve instead as an indictment of the social and narrative machinery engineered through patriarchal practices. The seductiveness of Edward's erotic aura--itself a simulacral double--is affirmed and intensified by its inaccessibility. If the mute body of Frankenstein's monster is idealized in its passivity, fetishized as an incarnation of phallic impassivity, it is this perceived vacuity that allows the supposed monstrous body--much the same as the simulacrum--to act as a focal point and support for erotic investment and psychic projection. Edward's emergence as a central identification figure highlights the discrepancy between the collective gaze of the characters and the body which has been coerced into the role of spectacle. A number of visual elements, such as the windows through which the neighbors spy, the collective stare of the guests at the barbecue, the institutional gaze of the children in the classroom, and the morbid fascination of the television studio audience function to consolidate his Otherness on a cultural level. Our visual impression of Edward, who is rendered voiceless by the inventor's gaze, gesture and voice in the flashbacks, is one of paralysis and immobility; his physical and social stationing is clearly assigned and supervised by the symbolic father; however, as in the case of early film versions of

Frankenstein, we are presented with a mute monster whose unresponsiveness can be read as a discounting or repudiation of verbal authority. To be sure, rhetorical (or potential) power rests alternatively in the spectacular image of a silent body.

Central to the concept of simulacrum as patriarchy's mirror is Linda Williams' critical revelation of "a surprising (and at times subversive) affinity between monster and woman," what she describes as "the sense in which her look at the monster recognizes their similar status within patriarchal structures of seeing."[9] She rightly argues that "the woman's look at the monster is more than simply a... distortion of her own image in the mirror that patriarchy holds up to her; it is also a recognition of their similar status as potent threats to a vulnerable male power." The textual evidence supporting such a view is considerable. Peg's initial sighting of the monster's castle is in the side mirror of her car. That the Avon Lady is not only subjugated to patriarchy's mirror but becomes an agent of its enforcement is blatantly evident in the fact that Peg seems not to have noticed the castle before. The phallic dominance symbolized by its edifice makes a satirical point about how the phallocentricity of western (male) culture is overlooked or rendered invisible through its manifestation of discourse in something other than itself.

The Lacanian notion that the social/cultural inscription of identity involves a bodily inscription is comically exaggerated by the extent to which Edward's own body bears the mark of paternal inscription, cultural wounds which are unhealed during the makeover sequence. Indeed, the affinity between monster and woman is suggested by the Avon Lady's readiness and resourcefulness in covering up Edward's scars, looking directly into the camera and applying cosmetics around the border of the frame. The system of suture is physicalized in a double sense through a shot/reverse format as Peg intimates

that "Blending is the secret;" however, her botched attempts to "cover up the scars " renders concealment problematic on the level of both fiction and film. Subsequently, male "lack" is exhibited so explicitly that its disturbing potential gives way to the accumulation and expression of excess that is somatized by outlandish topographical distortions of corporeal and social space. In particular, the street--with the haunted, "repressed Other" and the patriarchal agency of the law at opposite ends--indexes the narrative's symbolic mapping of differences, and acts as a kind of (phallic) barometer of the sociopolitical disruptions arising from Edward's "surrealist beauty" that is associated with the return of the repressed (the outmoded, the auratic) and the compulsion to repeat; and out of this psychic ambivalence and convulsive physical effect, Burton critically *man*ifests hysterical masculinity as a compulsive transformation of everything (women, history, the real) into a camp site of signs.

Technologies of Gender and Bodily Animation

A postmodern version of the *Frankenstein* story, the film reiterates the question of conception as one of both physical and ideological manipulation. Above Edward's manger-like bed in the castle is a photo collage, the caption MODERN couched between the headline, "Boy born without hands: he feels heat of the wounds" and a picture of a madonna-and-child in which the mother--here a symbol of denatured reproduction--clasps the child with her hands. The significance of the MODERN caption lies in the religious resonance of Edward's tabloid-expressionist icons and supermarket headlines that resonate comically with themes of traumatic loss (I'll Never Diet Again) and improbable natural reproduction (Newlyweds, 90 & To Have Baby). The notion of implants and substitutes takes on metaphorical significance in terms of subject-positioning as

it relates to both ideological and cinematic models of suture theory, *technologies of gender* with the capacity to manufacture and *implant* gender representations. The surrogate female spectators that make up the television studio audience are knowledgeable in their recommendations of medical procedures involving corrective surgery or prosthetics. The standardization of the laboratory robots' assembly line process is reduplicated in the orderly and synchronized deployment of the husbands leaving for and returning from work, an inverted reference to The Stepford Wives (1975) in which the male characters enthusiastically substitute electronic robots for their flesh and blood wives.

In the context of the historical and ideological configurations which underscore the transfusion of new blood into the genre, the complication of film genre as a mode of production, its compulsion to repeat specific signifying operations as a reflex to the renitency of cultural history, is humorously personified by the assembly-line machinery in the inventors' Factory. Where Fordism personifies a new model of social organization in Modern Times (1936), in which Chaplin runs amok, compulsively repeating his mechanical action after quitting the assembly line, the simulacrum in which Edward malfunctions makes visible the hysterical (male) figure which haunts the idealizing procedures of mechanical and generic reproduction as they essay to reconcile themselves to other historical pressures. Original trauma and historical trauma are ironically paralleled when a war veteran discloses his " infirmity" to Edward, signifying impotence and disempowerment; the flashbacks to the inventor's "body shop" invite us to read Edward's trauma, like war trauma, in connection with prior privation which it functions both to reanimate and to compound. Edward's obsessive patterns ironically index the compulsion to repeat as a kind of double indemnity for the perceived emptiness of quotidian (and filmic) experience. They personify the willfulness of the contemporary existential

poltergeist, which takes as its victim the grounds for squarely apprehending the real in front of us. Where nothingness intervenes between consciousness and its goal, the putative void of the subject's present is supplemented with absent images (and so is vulnerable to the convulsive return of the repressed past, or real).

As the lost object of fetishism in the simulacrum is the real, with its ritual massacre hammering out its definition, so the film's subjects ironically contract signs as a disavowal of the nothingness at the centre of postmodern discursive practices. In the "show and tell" scene, after Kevin informs his class that "one chop to a guy's body and it's all over," Edward slashes at a folded piece of paper, then unfolds it to exhibit a paper string of uniform devils. Indeed, Burton makes fun of the male anxiety that is produced by the postmodernity's putative *man*slaughter of the real and subsequent *man*ufacture of the (patriarchal) subject in identical signs designed to represent, allude and appeal to reality. With the real off one's hands, the inability to access it campily engenders an increase in hysteric attempts to stake it out for keeps. In the hairdressing scene, in which Burton provides a monogram for the operations of suture in the close-up of a hairstyle with a gap cut into the middle, Edward rises comically from beneath the frame, as if from the audience, his eyes filling the gap, his scissors repeatedly cutting in the space between our gaze and his own. Even as Edward's rigid body can be read as an exaggerated fetish form, a decidedly campy substitute for the maternal phallus that is symbolized by his Medusean head of snake-like hair, the film marks pitfalls for male subjectivity that attend the cultural and cinematic construction of woman-as-fetish, as with Joyce's storeroom striptease, where the conflation of spectacle, art and sexuality mark the onset of hysteric production.[10] Just as a fundamentally reversible pattern is created when the slasher film executes formalist variations on the theme of slashing, the putative

ornamentalizing of identity in the simulacrum is projected in terms of Fordism's manufacturing process: a set of formal procedures performed on senseless parts, or, more precisely, a set of signs. As the abstract movements of the Tiller Girls approximate the movements of machines for Kracauer in his essay, "The Mass Ornament," so Edward parodically renders the contemporary translation of the erotic/auratic to a set of formal operations, the alienated organization of the Fordist assembly method humorously brought home by the parallel between the inventor's Factory and the beauty salon.[11]

Burton's foregrounding of the relations of looking and subjectivity is concretely expressed by Joyce's announcement of her plan to erect a row of new mirrors; and by the mannikins in the mise-en-scene which distract Edward from her exhibitionism by providing a visual counterpoint to her excessive spectacle. She arrests his attention, physically wrenching him away from the mannikin parts on the shelf and declaring, "This is what I really want to show you." But our own attention is not so easily deflected from the materialist underpinnings of (female) gendered subjectivity, especially given the metonymic relationship of the disassembled dummies and the assembly of machine parts in the laboratory. [12] Having forcibly relegated Edward to the position of spectator, Joyce (her Nosferatu-like fingernails humorously foregrounded) choreographs the "modelling" episode in which the mannikin parts in the mise-en-scene alert us at once to the cultural construction of sexual identities, to the parallel lack of the mechanically assembled, gendered subjects, and to the discursive limitations that are placed on the body and its meanings. Directly acknowledging the look of the audience (the inventor's creation staring back?), Joyce drapes a veil in front of the camera and points up the spectator's fetishistic desire to approximate or apprehend her image (radically undermined by Edward's obvious incapability of acting out the lyrics of the Tom Jones song, "With These Hands [I will cling to

you].") Burton thus dramatizes how woman is thought not to be a subject within the simulacrum, but instead stands in for the unreachable object of the real. Parodically dramatizing the visual conflation of fetish and phallus, Joyce mounts Edward (the surrogate spectator)--overturning conventional structures of looking as well as his chair--and is compositionally framed by mannikins, visually anchored by an artificial, 'amputated' hand in the foreground of the image. Eclipsing his body with the notable exception of his "scissorhands," which protrude as if from the sides of *her* body, Joyce ironically physicalizes both the manufacture and implant of gender representations within the space of spectacle, and the way in which the representation of femininity is constrained to precisely such a position--negatively straddling the phallic model of desire and signification--within a psychoanalytic framework of analysis.

Underlining the correspondence between the male eye and the mechanical eye of the camera, then, Burton documents the construction of the female-as-object, as a technological artefact that is automatically animated through instances of male vision inscribed into the narrative. Analogously, the second flashback dramatizes the ideological construction of Edward's subjectivity and identity through the thematic concerns of technical reproduction and animation which are indigenous to both the institution of cinema and the *Frankenstein* myth/story. The scene begins with a medium shot of a robot at a table which we might mistake to be Edward at an earlier stage of his development. As the inventor enumerates questions and problems of social decorum, the camera documents the material construction of identity, panning across an easel upon which is displayed a set of sketches/blueprints of the robot.[13] The pages begin turning (harking back to the stroboscopic experiments which preempted cinema's mechanical means of recording the natural world) and the "pixillating" diagrams "animate" the physical transformation of the

invention from androgynous to (male) gendered subject.

As the offscreen narrator puzzles over cultural questions of codified behavior, the fabrication of gendered subjectivity is further suggested by the continuation of the pan across a model skeleton and a workbench strewn with scientific materials [harking back to the artificial body parts at the beauty parlour, Peg's considerable supply of cosmetics, and Kim's bedroom vanity with the frame of its mirror bordered by a collage of eyes--an inverted reference to Lang's Metropolis (1926)--from 'women's' magazines.[14] If there is a cultural basis to the real behind the gaze of these literal cut-and-paste constructions, these eyes are plainly reflections of the spectacle that produced them]. The camera pans to the inventor dictating to Edward, zooming in slightly as if to emphasize the presence of an amputated leg twitching on the table. Burton cuts to a medium shot of the inventor--the leg spanning the horizontal axis of the image at the bottom of the frame--as he assures Edward that "etiquette tells us just what is expected of us and guards us from all humiliation and discomfort." The extroversion of Edward's physical 'lack'--symbolically reinforced by the spectacle of dismemberment upon which the shot/reverse shot format literally turns in this instance--converges structurally with the inventor's recitation of poetry, whose rhetoric (contained in the epigraph) symbolically inscribes the totalizing discourse of difference so relevant in to postmodernity. Indeed, symbolic amputations repeatedly suggest the cutting off of attempts at meaning production, and thereby make explicit the transfer of ontological desire onto the (maternal) image of woman, and the subsequent denuding of that image. In addition to recalling the beauty parlour, the technological *mise-en-scene* behind the inventor is emblematic of the cinematic apparatus; and illustrates not only how the representation of gender is manufactured by given technologies, but also how it is subjectively "worn" by every individual to whom it is addressed.

Burton thereby humorously counteracts the "maleness" of the cinematic apparatus and its theories, not by reintroducing the feminine body into existing paradigms, but by physicalizing the tension of sexual difference as a biological devolution on the one hand, and as a socially and historically signified of patriarchal discourses and practices on the other. (In a metaphorical sense, Constance Penley's critical project of "evicting the cinematic apparatus from its well-appointed bachelor residence," is enacted for us when Peg liberates Edward at the start of the film.)[15]

Malled to Death: The Politics of [Commodified] Experience

This architectural metaphor is not incidental in view of the fact that Edward's castle figuratively refers to historical models of leisure, entertainment, and cultural production; its grounds hark back to the 19th century public exhibition buildings which, "like the winter-garden, offered to the visitor a timeless (or seasonless) public space" by constructing "a 'theatre of nature' where nature itself became a commodity."[16] Certainly, with its historically informed inclosure setting a precedent for merchandising other artificial milieu, Edward's winter-garden is a symbolic precursor to the industry of popular entertainment. The collection of lawn sculptures outside the Gothic castle represents in condensed form the residential sculptures that Edward is commissioned to design in suburbia, thereby approximating with uncanny precision the form and function of the winter-garden, under whose glass enclosure were collected all the recreations which had formerly been (dis)located along a thoroughfare. With postmodern identity campily referring to a project in which capitalist subjects approximate idealized sign-constructs that are intended to be identical with those subjects, and to the loss of the territory of subjectivity and its substitution as a

niche in the simulational map, the film also harks back, ironically, to Rene Clair's silent film, <u>Paris qui dort</u> (The Crazy Ray, 1923), whose frozen populace--paralysed by the mechanical ray of a mad scientist in the midst of everyday activities--inhabit the streets like human statues. No less satirical, Burton's film narrativizes the cultural transitions effected by the orchestration of the look as a function of consumption, and the progressive admission of the commodified experience into everyday social practice.

Certainly, the assembly line manufacturing of cookie-cutter-patterns--hearts, stars, animal and human forms--explicitly mocks that brand of cultural theory which makes the mass production and distribution of standardized art tantamount to the standardization of the art consumer. The identicality of the inventor's assembly-line produced images--like Warhol's serial parody of Hollywood--performs the metonymic exhibition of the multiple, ambivalently critiquing and sanctioning the profusion and multiplication of postmodern culture. If Warhol's parody of the film factory is often interpreted as a cogent ratification of the Frankfurt School analysis of mass culture, Burton's uncanny Warholian factory playfully satirizes the notion of film production as a paradigmatic mode of the culture industry. Since, in its capacity to exaggerate the values of consumer culture, Burton's ironic mise-en-scene of the feminine personifies the picayune, the facsimile, the counterfeit, and the impersonation, the laboratory of the inventor and the beauty parlour function as parallel sites for the cultural construction of gendered identities, the feminine-as-imposter impersonating the discourse of male productivity, jurisdiction, and predication. The figurability of social and historical manufacturing of subjectivity takes on resonant meaning where the row of salon chairs with hairdryers visually echoes the bulbous heads of the robots in the laboratory. Ironically, Joyce's proposal to call the beauty parlour "Shear Heaven" indicates the approximation of a utopian

ideal through the cinematic agency of the cut; and further connotes the supplanting of religious rites and rituals by consumer ones.[17] Indeed, the fluid subjectivity produced by the ironically Dantesque ("Southgate") shopping-mall culture supersedes the timelessness of the Gothic Factory as the temporality associated with the cinematic apparatus.

Insomuch as the commissioning of ornamental lawn sculptures by the characters humorously literalizes the discursive component of ideology (which has the overdetermined effect of transforming concrete individuals into concrete subjects), Burton ironically demonstrates how identity is putatively solicited in the association of the body with an identical, hyperreal version of the subject in the simulacrum, much as the consumer of capitalist merchandise--especially film--has been theorized as the subject of a transaction whereby her own commodification is terminally the object. It is precisely in this respect that Carol J. Clover's slasher synopsis brings to light the text's critical inflections of existing genre conventions in terms of postmodern consumer culture:

> Where pornography (the argument goes) resolves [female] lack through a process of fetishization that allows a breast or leg or whole body to stand in for the missing member, the slasher film resolves it either through eliminating the woman (earlier victims) or reconstituting her as masculine (Final Girl). The moment at which the final girl is effectively phallicized is the moment that the plot halts and horror ceases. Day breaks, and the community returns to its normal order.[18]

Clearly, Burton implies a link between the representational fragmentation in pornography and the ideological fragmentation upon which advertising depends. The extent to which the tautology of the Frankfurt School's mass society critique underwrites influential models of cultural analysis is reflected in film theory by Mary Ann Doane's grave determination that "the cinematic image for woman is both shop window and mirror, the one simply a means of access to the other."[19] As "the mirror/window takes on then the aspect of a trap whereby her subjectivity becomes synonymous with her objectification," so advertising

appellates its subject as unique, allegedly binding women into the receiving-space constituted by the ad.[20] Considering that Kim is the only female character not to be *made over* by Edward (and noting also the makeover and striptease sequences with their imagery of "slashing" and body parts) we can read her in terms of Clover's "Final Girl," and the film's other female consumers as the "earlier victims" in the above schema: subjects whose "selves" have allegedly been expunged in the receiving space of ad culture. [21]

If the final girl is, as Clover suggests, a congenial double for the adolescent male, then Kim's upholding of the ersatz phallus is an explicit instance of drag or gender performance which pokes fun at cinematic conventions of symbolic representation.[22] Burton thus puts into view the conceptual complicity of castration and simulacrum, their cultural correspondence as patriarchal signifiers of loss and lack, as when Kim holds up a set of amputated scissorhands, supposed evidence of the "handicapped" monster's symbolic castration and eradication, and the signifier which stands in for Edward, the absent subject. The visibility of the paternal signifier (as spare part) may be read as a bogus restorative of the status quo or "dominant fiction." Kim implores them/us to "see for yourselves," (an investment in vision as knowledge, of the accessibility of the real vis-a-vis mechanical recording, which contrasts with the desire of the child to hear Kim's oral history at the beginning of the film). But questions remain regarding the ideological implication of the "false suture" on the level of the fiction, namely because the absence of a reverse shot of Edward in this particular scene implies that the coherence of the established order proceeds from a disavowal of his condition in the realm of symbolic relations. In this context, the imaginary (in the sense of make-believe) ending is far from a paradigmatic example of escapist fantasy; rather it imparts the message that in the case of Edward's ostensible lack, as with the image of female genitals or the

sense of the apocalyptic, we are dealing with an imaginary inscription which subpoenas our belief.[23] Perhaps the ambivalent operation of disavowal, so central in the construction of "to-be-looked-at-ness," would hardly apply to a society of spectacle were it not so insistently cast by male theorists in terms of the petering out of the real. If the construction of both woman and monster represents a conversion of the mythic to the real, then, indeed, the social coupling of sexual and cultural disavowal in Edward Scissorhands props up that signifier for traditional masculinity which is itself exposed as a fetish, a mechanized simulation effecting an ideologically induced and pathological fiction. Burton's film thereby lays bare and controverts narrative operations-- literalized by its female narrator--which solicit the female subject in the erection of the male subject via his phallic identification, by looking at him in imaginative instead of literal terms.

Clearly, the symbolic import of Peg's "Avon Lady" sales pitch-- "everything you need to accent and highlight your changing *look* "--addresses both the purchasers of cosmetics within the diegesis and the film spectator. This implicit acknowledgement that cinematic spectatorship finds an appropriate metaphor in the fashion makeover is not meant to endorse Silverman's contention, that "the operation of suture is successful at the moment when the viewing subject says, 'Yes, that's me,' or 'That's what I see.'"[24] Quite the opposite: it reinvokes for us Anne Friedberg's arguably rhetorical question, "Isn't cinema spectatorship pleasurable precisely because new identities can be 'worn' and discarded?"[25] In terms of the subject-position(s) available to the historical spectator, the imaginary "mobility" afforded by what Friedberg calls "borrowed subjectivity" does not prevent women (or men, for that matter) from discovering the slippage between this virtual "body" and the real; between false suture and the slippage or excess which necessarily attends it; between narrative

subject-binding and the fluid subjectivity afforded by postmodern spectatorship. If spectatorship affords an oscillation in and out of gender as ideological representation, a fluid mobility not in and out of one's own body, but between the ideological space of constructed subject-positions and that indeterminate space that is discursively indicated by the excess of hegemonic discourses (the ideological "shavings" and not the "angel") that attest to a beyond, then the elderly Kim's intimation to her granddaughter that "sometimes you can still catch me dancing in it," references the spectator's own fluid (albeit ideological) movement from the territory that is mapped in/by the story discourse or filmic representation to the space that, while not immediately visible to her, is intimated, imagined, deeply felt and experienced as the uncanny space of the real outside the simulacrum.[26]

This is not to cultivate an image of the body as image (as some postmodernists have done), thereby circumventing the contingencies of time and history, in much the same way as Edward is represented at the end of the film. Edward's hypothetical avoidance of death--not unlike the autonomous work of modern art--might confer on him the status of immortal tragic hero, of pure sign, and signal the maintenance of a typical myth-generating narrative. After all, he is positioned as an *alien messiah*, acting out the production of history-as-sign, indefinitely exiled to the rarefied atmosphere of the (paternal) linguistic signifier; and the correlation of nostalgia and sexual difference is highlighted by the fact that within patriarchy, Kim's aging body must register the encumbrance of time that Edward's imperishable adolescence would bypass.[27] Yet even while taking place within the space of spectacle, the film's action critically parodies hysteric attempts to ground meaning, to locate a visible centre for artistic and sexual discourses, to institute the potentiality of reference by palming off meaning on a symbol. And in the case of the automaton/would-be partner

who uncannily embodies the mechanized, auratic attraction from *outside* the simulacrum, his being is clearly not made tantamount to the sign itself. As Edward takes up residence in the father's (or "master's") now empty house, so Burton resides within the remodelled framework of Hollywood formula. And as the closing images ironically reinstall the spectacle of simulated existence, so Edward is presented not as history but as spectacle; social experience looks to be forfeited in (dis)favour of aestheticized representation. Importantly, however, while Burton can ironically render in epic complexity the manslaughter of the referent, the real, and the artist-subject, he cannot execute this without keeping his hands in the melodramatic or "fairy-tale" rhetoric which emotionally expresses their potentiality via a kind of refractory humanism designed to put the superficies and superfluity of postmodernity under a cloud. [28]

Conclusion: Snow on the Oedipal Stage

Having shown how Burton's film interacts with the postmodern aesthetics of simulation, spectacle, masquerade and self reflexive excess, and raises the curtain on the cure-all tendency of male critics to convert the ideological machinery of mass culture into the monstrous "Other," I would also argue, with Teresa deLauretis, that if the deconstruction of gender plays upon its construction, then "gender, like the real, is not only the effect of representation but also its excess, what remains outside discourse as potential trauma which can rupture or destabilize, if not contained, any representation."[29] It is for this reason that subversiveness or transgression on a textual plane can no more be subordinated to the conservative operation of (re)containment than can the (gendered) identity of the consumer to that of the product, the (gendered) identity of the spectator to that of the film, or the (gendered) identity of the

subject in postmodern culture. As the snow in which Kim dances emanates from Edward's castle, so it could be argued that the excess which I have ascribed to Burton's film remains the "property" of the masculine imagination and discourse. But to take up this position is arguably to accede to the tautological reasoning that is "symptomatized" by "suture" theory, and by the negative postmodern logic which posits the impossibility of agency and effective political action--too often described as impotency--in the simulacrum.[30]

In <u>Edward Scissorhands</u> , the modern mannequin (a crossbreeding of the human and the non-human), and the romantic ruin (a hybrid of the historical and the natural) figure two uncanny high capitalist innovations which historically fashioned bodies and objects. As the mannequin keeps in view the refashioning of the body as commodity, its surrealist counterpart, the automaton, keeps in view the refabrication of the body as machine. The romantic ruin recalls to mind how outmoded capitalist forms are unhoused by the tenantry of technological production and commodity consumption. Burton's mating of mannequin and ruin emphasizes the dialectical relation of the hyperreal-commodified and the outmoded: the former breeds the latter through displacement, and as a rejoinder, the outmoded delimits the centrality of the hyperreal-commodified, and can therefore symbollically pitch into it. It is little wonder that psychoanalytic models of cultural inheritance have so much explanatory power in the case of postmodernism, as the latter commonly turns upon the traumatic loss of the referent (which frequently results in the dismembering of ideological analysis from representational politics). If the drive to erect a subject/object for cultural studies appears to be a talisman to ward off the monstrous textualization of culture, then Edward's deliverance from and mandatory return to (the repressed) site of the "MODERN" ruin references not the pressures bearing upon feminist theory to retreat from its present *post,* but

the courtship of feminist and postmodernist aesthetics, and the ideological

convergences of sexual and cultural disavowal. Clearly, with regard to Edward's

parodic practice of man/i/curing nature, the subjectivity alluded to by the small

"i" that mitigates the space between "man" and "cure" engenders neither the "I"

nor the "eye" of the female subject, but the subject of feminism.

Notes

[1]Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno,"Mass Society," Dialectic of Enlightenment, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 236.

[2]The inventor's poem resonates in the context of Burton's postmodern aesthetic, which self-consciously contemplates "a gradual and indistinct epistemological *tear* in the fabric of modernity, a change produced by the increasing cultural centrality of an integral feature of both cinematic and televisual apparatuses: a mobilized "virtual" gaze," (Anne Friedberg) whose gender implications I will explore below in terms of male-centered models of social/cinematic subjectivity. See Anne Friedberg, Window Shopping : Cinema and the Postmodern (Berkeley: University of California Press), p. 2.

[3]Devised by Lacanian disciple Jacques-Alain Miller, the term itself refers to a process that is analogous to the subject's indoctrination into language as set forth by Lacan: access to the symbolic order is permitted to the subject by a given signifier which, at the same time, brings about alienation from its own needs and drives. The signifier substitutes for the absent subject--in this film, absent originator/inventor/father--and ceaselessly signifies its lack. The transfer of suture to film theory is owing to Jean-Pierre Oudart, whose basic implantation of the concept in reference to shot/reverse shot has expanded to encompass "a set of assumptions not only about cinematic signification, but about the viewing subject and the operations of ideology." Kaja Silverman, The Subject of Semiotics (New York: Oxford UP, 1993), p. 220.

[4]Michel Foucault as cited by Friedberg, op. cit., p. 17.

[5]Just as consciousness is in effect superseded by cinema's postmodern collapse of presence and absence, past and present, the visceral, tactile potential of the perspectival image that is suggested by the implicit reference to the fairytale, "The Princess and the Pea," thematically underlines the viewer's bodily affliction through the collapsing of distance, as when Edward's transactions at the dinner table--his repeated attempts to secure the pea--graphically imply the substitution of tactile appropriation for aesthetic contemplation (the former negotiated less by attention than by habit). To the seemingly insubstantial and evanescent images of film and video, he discloses an intrinsic materiality, dismantles the polarity between the prosaic insistence of bodies and the inviolability of simulacra. Take the television talk show sequence, for example, in which the subject *and* the object of the gaze capitulate to the engrossing, derealizing play of the image. The connotation of a physical attraction is similar to that of Nina and the vampire in Murnau's Nosferatu (1922), which also employs crosscutting and definitive eyeline matches to imply the arousal of the female character. The shot/reverse shot format, as well as Burton's aerial tracking shot which marries the window of the woman and that of the monster has an antecedent in Murnau's graphic collapsing of the space between the vampire's castle and the Harker's home.

[6]Bill wears a photo identification tag on his shirt at the dinner table (a double assertion of

identity in the face of its alleged disappearance). Burton's admittedly romantic theme of alienation functions, additionally, as a fable of existential choice confronting the putative void of everyday life in the modern world, with its out-of-focus boundaries. As communion with authentic masculinity is symbolically dismembered in the film, so the ideological apparatuses with with it is associated are handily deconstructed through the Expressionist topoi of robotic outcasts and people as out-of-control machines. Denying the monster a social contract, the unfeeling bank official terminates Edward's loan application and decrees, "no social security number, you might as well not even exist." "According to Edschmid," Lotte Eisner explains, "Expressionist Man is to such an extent the Absolute Being, and capable of so may direct feelings, that he seems to 'wear his heart on his chest'." Humorously, Bill's loss of Being in meaning corresponds not to the externalization of interior emotions, but to the surface materiality of postmodern subjectivity. See Lotte Eisner, The Haunted Screen (London: Secker and Warburg, 1983), p. 141.

[7]Thus, Burton satirically concretizes Horkheimer and Adorno's complaint that modern fascist bosses "look like hairdressers... actors playing the part of leaders." Indeed, Edward's Chaplinesque wanness and gait make a mockery of how, for the Frankfurt critics, "Chaplin's Great Dictator touched on the core of the problem [i.e., emasculinization] by showing the similarity between the ghetto barber and the dictator." Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno," Mass Society," op. cit., pp. 236-37.

[8]Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre and Excess," Film Quarterly, vol. 44, no. 4 (Summer 1991), p. 3.

[9]Linda Williams, "When the Woman Looks," RE-VISION: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism, eds. Doane, M. A., Mellencamp, P. and Williams, L. AFI Monograph Series, vol. 3 (Frederick, MD.: University Publications of America, 1984), p. 85.

[10]Silverman argues persuasively that the formal inscription of female consciousness as a (dis)organizing principle, as well as active (voluntary) exhibitionism [related to erotic overvaluation] avail unpredictability and excess as potential means of resistance to static (male) conceptions of the scopic regime; however, she might overstate the possibility of self-representation affecting the social construction of gender at a macropolitical level where the nature of the spectacle, as it were, is manifestly self-serving to the male gendered subject. See, Silverman, op. cit., pp. 230-35; It could also be argued, while remaining within a psychoanalytic framework, that the scene reflexively highlights Barbara Creed's suggestion that "the monster as fetish object is not there to meet the desires of the male fetishist, but rather to signify the monstrousness of women's desire to have the phallus." See, for example, Barbara Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection," Screen, vol. 27, no. 1 (Jan-Feb 1986), p. 68. The various overdetermined readings available lay bare the arbitrary and reductive equivalencies which impair historically and politically informed (psycho)analysis.

[11]Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," New German Critique, no. 5 (Spring 1975).

[12]This iconographic reference is humorously underlined in the storeroom when Edward places his 'hand' into an electrical box that reads high voltage, recalling to mind The Bride of Frankenstein (James Whale, 1935) and its attendant themes of myth, magic, totemism, bodily animation and, of course, apocalyptic destruction, themselves technologies of gender. Notably, in the figure of the mannequin, the commodity fetish is overdetermined by the sexual fetish, producing an inorganic, uncanny allure; and in the bachelor machine, the human body (body, sexuality, unconscious) is translated in mechanical terms (hookups, facsimilies, malfunctions), producing another set of fetishistic overdeterminations.

sexuality, unconscious) is translated in mechanical terms (hookups, facsimilies, malfunctions), producing another set of fetishistic overdeterminations.

[13]Burton's illustrations of the inventor's creation closely resemble a diagram on the wall of the rabbi's laboratory in The Golem (Paul Wegener, 1920). A still photo appears in Eisner op. cit., p. 62. Whereas Freud misguidedly encloses desire in a theater and subjects it to a representational model, Burton farsightedly envisages the unconscious as a "factory," or site where desire operates through an interface or hookup with "outside" forces and materials.

[14]Notably, Anthony Michael Hall, the actor who plays Jim, also plays one of the lead adolescent characters in Weird Science (John Hughes, 1985), a conventional rite of passage film which harks back to Metropolis with its artificial creation of woman for the purpose of male fantasy. His character is responsible for computer-generated life fashioned from fragmented images of body parts compiled from Playboy magazines.

[15]Constance Penley, The Future of an Illusion: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), p. 62.

[16]Georg Kohlmaier and Barna von Sartory, Houses of Glass: A Nineteenth Century Building Type (London and Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), pp. 1-2 (as cited by Friedberg, Ibid., pp. 63-64).

[17]Notably, Edward's appearance on "The John Davidson Show" harks back to the theatrical staging of the monster in King Kong (Merian C. Cooper, 1935): both creatures are commodified, put on display in a luminous and bourgeois exhibition space which counterpoints the chiaroscuro setting of their original surroundings; and both films translate horror's emphasis on religious cults and practices in terms of consumerism and commodity fetishism. Concerned less about how authenticity and interiority are thought to be stored in the far off past--how the exotic holds forth an authenticity of experience relating to the concept of the primitive as a prelapsarian antecedent of the modern world--and more about the (self)creation of subjects as commodities, Burton's narrative brings psychoanalytic paradigms into collision with the surface materiality of things, suggesting (if somewhat ambivalently) that as a mode of desire, commodity fetishism is instigated, proliferated and certified by artificial stock in trade and not repression.

[18]Carol J. Clover, Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1992), pp. 50.

[19]Mary Ann Doane, The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 33.

[20]Judith Williamson, Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising (London and Boston: Marion Boyars, 1978), p. 53.

[21]For the surrealists, the hypperreal-commodified (e.g., the mannequin, belonging to a demonic register) and the outmoded (e.g., the ruin, belonging to an auratic register) are particularly uncanny. Drawing forth an uncanny confusion between life and death, original and copy, the machine and the commodity are campily cast as demonic, "vampirish," and destructive of traditional social (and representational) practices. Though he is similarly fascinated by the hyperreal confusion and (non)human character of the doll, the mannequin, the automaton--all uncanny stock players and spare parts in his surrealist portfolio--Burton clearly breaks camp with the surrealist intuition of the mechanical-commodified-as-death, nowadays updated as the

postmodern-simulacrum-as death. In the historical context of "culture in the age of cybernetic reproduction" (to recycle Bill Nichols' phrase), the outmoded may be uncanny in a different fashion, in terms of images and objects unhitched from their (sign)posts by historical repression, and as *heimisch* artefacts reanimated as *unheimlich* artefacts.

[22]<u>Ibid.</u>, p. 51. Clover's approach, particularly her consideration of the cross-gendered and masochistic pleasures of horror spectatorship, is part of a widespread and laudable reluctance in contemporary theory to yield to castration and the father a dead center position; a general questioning and overstepping of the critical maxim that masculine subjectivity is necessarily about consolidating a phallic identity on sure patriarchal ground.

[23]But then Edward, whatever his personification, is morphologically male, and as Modleski points out, the postfeminist play with gender runs the risk of ushering us back to a uni-sex sphere of social experience. (Does Edward implicate the widespread scholarly practice of male critics who demarcate feminist concerns, thereby acting out a paradoxical application of male authority? After all, the female characters empower themselves through their alignment with a male character who is ambivalently associated with women's experience.) See Tania Modleski, <u>op. cit.</u>, pp. 162-63. Modleski further cautions that while "male alignment with femininity is not the same thing as--could even be diametrically opposed to--male alignment with *feminism*, it is at least conceivable that a man adopting a position typically associated with femininity is driving a wedge into the sex/gender system, whereas for women to continue to assume the position, as it were, is to shore up this system." (150). We might also ask: Is Edward emblematic of those *masculinities* which nowadays adopt a recalcitrant stance against growth and maturity?

[24]Silverman, <u>The Subject of Semiotics</u>, p. 222.

[25]Anne Friedberg, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 184-5; 184. Notably, Friedberg's concept of "fluid" or "borrowed subjectivity" corresponds in certain respects with Noel Carroll's notion of the "occurrent subject," particularly in its emphasis on the existence of a relatively "unified" or "stable" subject which undergoes construction on a "moment-to-moment basis." See: Noel Carroll, <u>Mystifying Movies: Fads and Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory</u> (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 74.

[26]Lottie Eisner explains that the surviving fragmentary images of the lost wartime *"Marchenfilme* (films on legendary or magical subjects), include, from <u>Der Ratten fangervon Hameln</u> (Paul Wegener, 1918), "one of a girl dancing in the silvery sunlight on a grassy flower-spangled hill." In addition to noting how "the lines of this slim 'Gothic' figure recall the bearing of those frail maidens in German Primitives," Eisner remarks on how her costume "harmonizes" with tints in the landscape "as she dances to the magic pipe of the Hamelin" while "under the spell of the music." Burton recasts the scene in the terms of snow, utilizing the Danny Elfman's enchanting musical score on the soundtrack. See, Lotte Eisner, <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 44. Notably, Burton's textual inscription of the postmodern metaphor of dance is relevant to my discussion of spectatorship. For instance, Susan Bordo writes that "the appreciation of difference requires the acknowledgement of some *limit* to the dance, beyond which the dancer cannot go. If she were able to go there, there would *be* no difference, nothing which alludes. To deny the unity and stability of identity is one thing. The epistemological fantasy of becoming multiplicity--the dream of limitless embodiments, allowing me to dance from place to place and self to self--is another... the postmodern body is no body at all... to overcome hubris, it is not sufficient to replace metaphors of spectatorship with metaphors of dance..." See Susan Bordo, "Feminism, Postmodernism and Gender Skepticism," <u>Feminism/Postmodernism</u>, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 145. Nonetheless (leaving aside the issue of textual and "critical cross-dressing"), I would argue that it is in the

(in)determinacy of the movie's ambivalent and contradictory space, in the double-edged and self-parodying narrative coherence and figural trajectories that <u>Edward Scissorhands</u> addresses the spectator; that it solicits the trying-on of gendered identities through the act of looking, and fosters a recognition of the personal-political contradictions of women's social and historical experience.

[27]In a putatively post-feminist period, Burton's film therefore represents a potential danger for feminists, insomuch as efforts to re-present, and possibly reclaim, the "traditionally" feminine potentially contribute to what Jane Flax aptly describes as the "reprisoning of a slightly reconceived 'angel'"--a critical metaphor that is literalized in the text by Edward's colossal sculpture in the Boggs' backyard. See Jane Flax, <u>Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the West</u> (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. p. 170. Edward's return to his vacant paternal inheritance need not be interpreted as an ideologically "conservative" maneuver on the film's part, for if considered in the context of melodrama (another genre associated with excess), then the film functions not as an ideological safety valve, but--like Peg's Dodge "Duster"-- as a vehicle for kicking up a lot of dust along the road (to paraphrase Mulvey), not in spite, but because of its ideological failure. Perhaps coincidentally, Peg's canary yellow "Duster" harks back to the phallic, yellow sportster owned by the impotent and nihilistic Kyle Hadley in <u>Written on the Wind</u> (Douglas Sirk, 1957). In order to understand the way(s) in which the collision of contradictory forces functions in Burton's film, we must acknowledge the "importance of melodrama." As Geoffrey Nowell-Smith argues convincingly, because melodrama "cannot accommodate its problem[s] in a real present or an ideal future, but lays them open in their shameless contradictoriness, it opens a space," which may be annexed by the spectator in the apprehension of hopeful alternatives. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, Minnelli and Melodrama," <u>Movies and Methods--Vol. II: An Anthology</u> , ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 194.

[28]The first image that we see in the film is 20th Century-Fox's familiar corporate logo, with its standard manner of presentation significantly modified: not only does it appear to have been fashioned in a style which looks forward to Edward's sculptures, but it is under the cover of snowfall, and harks back to the glass-encased, snowstorm paperweight in <u>Citizen Kane</u> (Orson Welles, 1941), invoking symbolic associations with the themes of nostalgia and loss, but more directly signalling the artificially of the film's miniature "universe." That the production company's insignia is established as a physical setting and subject to atmospheric conditions in Burton's film self-consciously encourages us to bear in mind the apparatus theory's crucial emphasis on cinema as *institution,* and therefore to regard the subsequent Fordist images of assembly-line production within the inventor's castle as a social and historical model of fantasy which ambivalently literalizes the concept of Hollywood as *dream factory* . Subsequently, Bill Boggs (the husband/father) comically literalizes the concept of "snow on the oedipal stage" when he decorates the roof of the house--the family home being the site of "the dominant fiction"--with spools of fake snow! The scene additionally recalls to mind the slowmotion pillowfight in Jean Vigo's <u>Zero de Conduit</u> (1933), the snow-like feathers falling about the children, who stage and experience temporarily liberating revolts in their institutional dormitory; and further, the diamonds that symbolically constitute the cinema screen/shop window at the beginning of <u>Imitation of Life</u> (Douglas Sirk, 1958).

[29]Teresa de Lauretis, <u>Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction</u> (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 3.

[30]Such reasoning is problematically rooted in totalising conceptions of ideological operations: stasis through kinesis, coherence through fragmentation, solidarity through alienation. In film, the paradox is stated as transcendence, positioning or binding in through movement; and coherence through multiplication and projection. The Althussarian-Lacanian

concept of interpellation invests these models of subject-construction with a common vision of process: not only are they available to terms of excess, but they are defined by their efficiency in accommodating these terms. Such an adaptable and yet inflexible framework of ideological understanding renders the possibility of radical disturbance problematic.

III. Posthum[or]ous Patriarchy and *Male*volent Coffins: Staking Out Male Masquerades and Chimeras of Otherness in <u>Batman </u>(1989) and <u>Batman Returns </u>(1992)

The power/sex nexus which has grounded patriarchy is dissolving, and hysteria--
thought in the middle ages to result from a floating womb--
now symptomatizes the floating Phallus,
the once transcendental signifier wandering the simulacrum.

-Frank Burke- [1]

The vampire as a walking phallus can only parade in front of us--
out there on the catwalk.

From the fact that the vampire's whole being resided in his heart,
we now gather that all the rest, his whole body,
was only a disguise, a mask.

-Roger Dadoun- [2]

In order for representation to be possible, then,
a stake is essential.

Mary Ann Doane [3]

And what about surrealism today, exploited as it is by academic and cultural
industries alike? When the minotaur returns as Batman, what remains of the
surreal?
And what about the uncanny--does it have a historicity too?

-Hal Foster- [4]

Introduction: (E)the/*real* Technologies of Folklore

If the sanitization of the abject--accomplished by taking a header down the basement stairs of the symbolic construct--is the ideological groundwork of the popular horror film, then in <u>Batman</u> and <u>Batman Returns</u>, Burton ushers us behind the (primal) scenes, lays bare the performative spaces on which it conventionally stages confrontations with the abject, and campily turns inside-out its ultimate purpose of evicting the abject and (re) -surveying/-drafting the property line between hu*man* and *non*-hu*man* territories. He campily makes a cat's paw out of *man*ifold *man*/u/f[r]<u>actur</u>ings of the "feminine" as imaginary Other, the horror film's modern clean-up operation which ambivalently

segregates all that litters on the man/i/cured ground of the symbolic.[5] His camp-surreal exhibition of the abject--remindful of the surrealism's exhibition of the erotic object--bares a subjective and/or cultural grave in which symbolicity and paternal repression each have one foot, because it *man*ifests uncertainty about difference, and hence a "crisis" in boundaries and exclusions. Because it challenges the rational discourse of the symbolic order and the apparent stability of the rational subject, Burton's ironic deployment of the abject is to the uncanny camp-surreal what the "semiotic" is to non-rational discourses such as art, advertising, poetry or rap music, and popular horror fiction.[6]

At the core of Burton's imagery, which illustrates the complexities of sadism and masochism, of desire, dissolution and death, lurks the critical correspondence between surrealism and fascism, manifest in the interplay of erotic and traumatic scenes. On the one hand, Burton's grotesque and surreal figures evince an injured ego hunting for a sense of corporeal stability in the armoring of the male body, and in an aggressive malevolence directed towards other bodies associated with the (feminine/feminized) masses. On the other hand, disfigurement and abjection evoke a damaged ego and corporeal instability which fulminate against the fascist armoring of the male body and psyche alike (particularly in the "Batman" films), utilizing sexual and unconscious forces, indexed as feminine and demonic in this fascist qua surreal imaginary.

Burton anatomizes the various ways in which gendered and racial Otherness operates within popular films as a means of discriminating between human (totally embodied subject) and non-human (incomplete or disembodied subject). Abjection--like "phantasy", "simualcrum", "semiotic", and "electronic textuality"-- disregards borders, stations, regulations and throws identity, system and order for a temporary loss. If popular narrative rituals/revivals are a means for contemporary American culture to face-off with the abject or simulacral

constituent and then to exclude that constituent, Burton records the potentially radical and transformative effects of its uncanny return, even as the borderlands of the human and the non-human are redrafted by this ritual process of postmodern reincarnation. The abject, the semiotic, the phantasy, and the simulacrum are those things that look daggers into the flaccidity of the law, that come alive on the other side of the symbolic fence which segregates the fully constituted subject from those social forces which threaten its annihilation. At the same time, however, these *doppelgangers* are not auxiliary terms of which the subject can ever be stripped; they are always there, soliciting the self to tenant the place of the Other, that transgressive precinct where dominant cultural/historical meanings such as the fictions and fantasies of masculine omnipotence cave in on themselves. [7]

Paradoxically projected as the fantasized double of man, the gendered body and the postmodern simulacrum are supplementary doubles, at once a lack and an excess bearing upon surrealism's imaginary. More than an image of man's fantasmatic double, both are an unbetokened reminder that the phallocentric structure jettisons one of its elements to become whole. The predication of its existence is this internal lack, and the contradiction at the foundation of its genesis can never be determined. Nevertheless, fundamental questions about the origins of sexuality, identity, and difference constitute the manifest content of staged fantasies. Like the primal phantasies (birth, seduction, castration) on which physical settings of <u>Batman</u> and <u>Batman Returns</u> are modeled, the narratives "home in" on the origins of the subject, of desire, and of sexual difference, and *man*iacally stage these fantasies in a camp-surreal *mise-en-scene* of abjection qua hyperreality. Evoked by scenes of death or trauma, the uncanny puts the subject in play. The makeover of traumatic scenes into artistic origin myths is campily performed; and surrealist fixations double as modernist tropes

of setting up an origin in order to institute a self and/or a style. However, surrealist primal fantasies wreak havoc on such origins; the modernist search for roots produces rootless scenes. Consequently, male hysteria is campily symptomatized by the nomadic phallus (by the malfunctioning of its high-tech, automotive "shields"), and the Batman symbolically motors this transcendental yet transportable signifier, hysterically touring--like the mythical minotaur--the only campily simulacral labyrinth of Gotham City.

The Pale/ontology of Identity: "homing in on the signal's origin"

In retreating in sanctuary from the exterior, Batman territorializes the interior as an analog for his own unconscious, even--or perhaps especially--as it remains coded feminine, and Burton gives us a look under the hood of such appropriation. Batman's cave signifies the blackness of annihilation associated with the archaic mother, a menacing borderland directed toward reembodying what it once gave birth to through death. This desire for non-differentiation arises from what Batman/Bruce Wayne calls his "two irreconcilable truths." Since nostalgia's predominant motif is the erasure of the gap between nature and culture, and hence, a recurrence of the unworldly amalgamation of badge and biology within the partitioned recess of the maternal, Batman's gender politics are metaphorically signaled by his compulsive (metaphorical) return to the mother/womb/cave. Authenticity as a need for an undisputed origin is quarry to the *man*ic fear of severing the existential umbilical cord. Batman nostalgically yearns for a logic of being, abhors obstructions, interruptions, dispersions, and instead advances seriality and coherence to create an illusion of continuity as a safeguard against the division of self. A transparent origin affords a conduit

through time, like Batman's Victorian/"intra-uterine" passage which ironically leads to the (not-so-)inveterate bedrock of the self/batcave.

If this transcendence is paradoxically experienced as a form of psychic death because it endangers or extinguishes sense of the autonomous self, then Batman's appetite for fatal confrontations concerns the terror of self-disintegration, of forfeiting one's self or ego, but also the renegotiation of boundaries between self and Other. Batman's womb-like cave symbolically expresses how nostalgia is the recurrence that appears to deplore the inauthenticity of (generic) repetition/ simulation, that *appears* to refuse its aptitude for inventing identity, even as the cultural process of consolidating the masculine order of culture is paradoxically predicated on such compulsive reenactments of nostalgic fantasy through hysteric sign production. Campily vacillating between the uncanny phantasies of paternal punishment and maternal plenitude, between the chimera of space-time prior to bodily division and its associated trauma of psychic loss, the Oedipal tug-o-war that structures the surrealist imaginary is architecturally inscribed in the Batman films.

In <u>Batman Returns</u>, the auratic space--projected onto nature and evoked in architectural forms and urban *derives*--is affiliated with the fantasy of maternal borderland, of intrauterine existence, of an ambiguous (life/death) maternal reunion represented as subterranean.[8] This topography--reminiscent of the underground city in Fritz Lang's <u>Metropolis</u> (1926)--symbolically charts intra-uterine settings which consist of dark, narrow, winding passages leading to a kind of anatomical amphitheatre; indeed, like the cinema, it can be read as a symbolic place of birth. Gotham's (semiotic) sewers are a full-blooded male symbol of the "female principle"--a "womb" designed to recuperate the very origin that is out of reach in Batman's simulacral vault of heaven. Inside the sewers/womb, where desire is for the unknowable terrifying other, the vaginal

imagery is only comically grotesque; and knowledge of sexual difference parodically invokes fear of castration and death. The womb is represented not so much as a place of grounding as one of exile (making the "other" a full-blooded threat), and this is related to connotations of sexual/racial alterity.

The status of the feminine/feminized/racialized Other as hysterical production is clearly signaled by the terror and violence consistently projected upon it. Because fear of the archaic mother is yoked to dread of her generative power, patriarchal discourses represent the womb as horrifying, and designate the female body as belonging to the animal/natural world. Alternatively, the archaic mother--conventionally demonically associated with death as a desire for the trespass of boundaries, for the monstrous defacement of the self--is parodically inscribed in the text's hybrid mise-en-scene of fantasmatic geography and camp-surreal, carnival imagery. Insofar as the monstrous womb is assigned to Penguin, a feminized, abject creature who produces a comical brood of missile-packing creatures, Burton drives home the impracticability of male grounding and the desperate, self destructive discourse that pulls up stakes around home as male hysteria reels toward misogyny, racism, and homophobia. [9]

Indeed, the "Batman" films objectify the feminine subject through the analogy of the hysterical symptom and the surrealist image. Because the masculine subject is literally unmasked by the hysterical beauty of this feminine object, he is in effect rendered hysterical too, as his axes of identification and desire are mixed up. As gender polarities are rezoned, so are the social-spatial-psychic "districts" to which they correspond: breaking camp with oppositions such as (city) center and margin, unconscious phantasy and reality, high art and mass culture, Burton campily scandalizes, rubs out, and detonates the same great divides that surrealism obscures. It is to the psychic underpinnings of Burton's psychic apprehension of space that the films' showdowns, crossfires,

counterplots, face-offs, and so forth symbolically refer. In <u>Batman Returns</u>, terminally, it is the films' "Arctic World" (i.e., the Penguin's place of exile beneath the now outmoded, derelict zoo) of uncanny signs that is the essential subject of Burton's dramaturgy; the world of aura overcast with anxiety, and of the maternal body estranged through paternal interdiction.

"MAN OR MYTH OR SOMETHING WORSE?":
Mythic Masculinity and Simulation

The above title appears as a newspaper caption in <u>Batman Returns</u>. Because Batman faces the light of day via the mythic and not the historic, he trades in simulational representations. For Batman, the "phantom limb" or reference of the hyperreal is myth; history is the myth which (set the fashion/paved the way) for *it*. Along this stretch, myth (a customized vehicle-- like the Batmobile--for transporting abstract cultural values) becomes reality; or rather, hyperreality's "phantom limb". This is the world that is ironically envisaged (and programmatically unsettled by uncanny effects) in Burton's <u>Batman</u> and <u>Batman Returns</u>. It is a world wherein Batman encounters only chaos, confusion, anxiety, and undertakes the hysteric *man*ufacture of personal/social/narrative/narrative tourniquets. In the generic moment of transubstantiation when the vampire absorbs his (or her) victim by kissing him (or her), both become one and the same. [10] Analogously, Batman's self-referential, narcissistic image play stage-*man*ages an identical/identity Batman out of signs, and puts teeth into anything outside his own signifying activity. Batman's hysteric manufacture ironically raises the curtain on a search for referentiality that is doomed to malfunctions, to breakdowns, and to dead failure, because the lost object of this hunt--phallic empowerment, patriarchal privilege,

transcendent masculinity--is like a phantom limb brought into being by the patriarchal subject's sweet tooth for what is mistakenly thought to be the real. It is the "legacy" of a power plant that Max Shreck desires to bequeath, the aristocratic privilege that Bruce Wayne enjoys, and the "birthright" which the Penguin seeks to reclaim, making cultural history a kind of genealogy. But as the Penguin says about his bogus search for origins, it "serves an entirely other purpose."

To be sure, it is through the traditional, myth-based narratives of <u>Batman</u> and <u>Batman Returns</u> that Burton illustrates the problematic imposition of a monstrous politics of myth in modernity. If Batman claims his legitimacy from a mythic national tradition and distant origin, from a submission to tradition, to realist aesthetics, and so to the archaic "we," then he secures his cultural authority through these same basic tropes of phallic empowerment associated with dominant masculine gender identity. Insofar as phallocentric dramaturgy (late-capitalist and fascist alike) align the subject with Man and the alienated Other with Woman (the feminine), only to re-embody the Other/Woman into the Self/Man, making him whole, complete, seamless, undiminished, a hermetic text functions as a kind of fascist body or state. Burton illustrates that in order to uphold its fictional self as a whole, coherent, self-identical, master of itself and of "objective" reality, the fascist male subject must erect the fiction of clear and distinct boundaries between self (subject) and other (object), inside and outside, consciousness and the unconscious. [11]

Just as Batman enlists women or "the feminine" as a means of restoring origins, he depends on them to (re)found his sense of potency in a postmodern neck of the woods in which authority and the "Father" fail to come up with it. Unable to double-park himself face-to-face with home/womb/mother/origin,

Batman fares no better in relation to the traditional realm of paternal power or the father. His automotive phallus signifies a double displacement onto the desire of the Father and the unadulterated functionality of the machine/organ. The patriarchal privileges and aristocratic agencies associated with Bruce Wayne/ Batman--eternally plagued as he is by the fantasmatic dissolution of his body (and public) image--have less to do with subject-binding than with patriarchal investment in the fortification of body and psyche (an armor having as much to do with self-defense as self-definition). If it is such a threat of double exposure that forces the hand of the fascist male to attack his social Others (because all darken his door as semblance of this dreaded dissolution), then what Batman likewise sets before himself is his own sexuality and unconscious, re-envisioned as social Others, as fractional, flowing, "feminine."[12]

Of course, fascist armoring is physical as well as psychic; indeed, it is concretized in fascist aesthetics. Burton parodically crosses the hardbodied male figures of renown Nazi sculptors such as Arno Breker and Josef Thorak with the phallically pumped up modernist figures referenced by Peter Wollen:

> *Batman Returns* centers its city on a monstrous Ferris-style rendering of the Rockefeller Center, adorned by massive caricatures of Paul Manship and Gaston Lachaise's heroic modern sculptures, whose pretensions to being the classical agora of the metropolis are reduced to the kitschy glitter of the Christmas tree. [13]

Nazi art's foremost aesthetic is at cross purposes with the modernist fragmentations of cubism, expressionism, dadaism, and surrealism. Immoderate in action, fascist aesthetics serve--like today's ubiquitous sculpted bodies against virulent genetic and social threats) as a stopgap for modernisms, for the mutilated bodies of war (now "blips" in the sanitized media coverage of the Gulf War) and for the "feminine" forces of sexuality and death (now hyperbolized by

faltering immunological defenses). The showdown between surrealism and fascism is campily put across in <u>Batman Returns</u> when a couple of night watch/men witness Catwoman--clad in a kitschy S & M costume--sadistically break display cases and decapitate mannequins with her whip. One of the emasculated security guards confesses, "I don't know whether to open fire or fall in love." Catwoman sarcastically retorts, "You poor guys, always confusing your pistols with your privates."

As the work of a self-declared, "fully functioning homicidal artist," the Joker's collage is clearly anathema fascist aesthetics; it represents but disfigures the body, cuts a passage through its image to its heterogeneous sources of power, imprints its form with "feminine" forces of sexuality and death, and finally, draws correspondences between these forces and the selfsame social figures that look daggers at the fascist male and civic body. As opposed to erecting physical and psychic diaphragms, the social Others represent a physical unconscious; they express an emancipation from the outline of the self (while compulsively cutting and pasting a photo collage, the Joker quips "It's hard to stay inside the lines.")

Women and Wise Guise

The narratives of the films involve a hook-up and a substitution process as home turns into woman turns into Batman's ongoing retrieval and loss or standing up of women. Woman is ironically presentable not only as aestheticized representation, but as representative of the unattainable goal of the real, and so holds a (camp) candle to myth, the aftereffect of the real from Batman's perspective. His sexual exploits are a kind of ontological hunt, with women serving as origin figures (as when he blackens the screen with his cape, and strips Vicky Veil of the film negatives of himself). <u>Batman</u> campily harks

back to <u>Experiment Perilous</u> (Tourneur, 1944) in which the film's artistically illiterate protagonist visits a museum to view the portrait of a woman described as a "work of art." Enamored with the painting--much as the Joker is with a "stylish" photograph of Vicky Veil--the hero visits the woman's home in order to test the representation against the model, and subsequently affirms the illusionistic aesthetic. The fact that Alecia is made over into a work of art campily combines woman's role as embodiment of origins with the turning of art itself into a portal to the real.

If the Vogue fashion images in <u>Batman</u> represent the consummate woman-as-signifier-of-male-desire, then Joker's girlfriend Alecia, whose tortured flesh recalls surrealism's grotesquely disfigured dolls, challenges such symbols of perfection, but also implies that the boundary between male and female wears well as a historically/hysterically patrolled border crossing; even in the face of new technologized ways to rewrite the flesh, it keeps body and soul together, as it were. In this respect, she represents woman as art object fashioned for the male gaze. A kind of token burning a hole in the pockets of a mercantile economy and semiotics of male power. Vicky asks, "Why is she wearing a mask?" to which Joker replies, "Well, she's just a sketch really. Alecia's been made over in line with my new philosophies." Indeed, Burton demonstrates how the technological gaze refashions the material body into a sign of culture, reconstructs it in keeping with culturally determined ideals of feminine beauty.

For both Batman and Joker, women are like mechanical dolls, reduced to signifiers in a male system of symbolic exchange with gender and otherness effectively erased. But more important is the strangely mechanical way that the male characters respond to them, as if feelings are automatic, mechanically produced. With Alecia, the Joker literally sets up a blank screen from which he only receives his blank image. To be sure, a slippage takes place whereby the

female body is turned into an absolute tabula rasa on which anything and everything can be written.

Drag Racing in the Simulacrum

The coffin used to bury the innocent notion of the essential Black subject was nailed shut with the termination of the Black male monopoly on the construction of the Black subject.

-Cornel West- [14]

Burton critically foregrounds the feminist discernment that the face-off between masculine and feminine operates as a metaphor for the others; and how, for better or for worse, theses antinomies stand shoulder to shoulder to brace the social and symbolic order. The *manhandling* of social difference within representations is rudimental to cultural domination and ideological reproduction; popular artifacts are prone to occlude individual differences and their specific meanings, palming them off as random and inconsequential, by making them appear in a gamut of aleatory differences. Insofar as the theme of terror in <u>Batman</u> and <u>Batman Returns</u> is born out of the terror of the splitting of both the individual and the civic body, and out of the desire to patch it up, the expressionist *doppelganger* of self and Other is explicitly recast in sociopolitical terms. While it is possible to argue, as Andrew Ross does, that in <u>Batman</u>, the menace of black monstrosity is a consequence of its allegorical, rather than socialist realist frame, I believe that <u>Batman</u> and <u>Batman Returns</u> actually interrogate the psychosocial dynamics of difference, accounting for how "invisibility" of gendered and racial otherness is historically inscribed in various fields of visual production. [15]

Burton is as intent on tracing the function of mimicry in the representations of dominant masculine/national identity (Batman), as those of

marginal identities (Joker, Penguin and Catwoman), the way in which white heterosexual patriarchy disavows--at once owns up to and disclaims--difference on the plane of the body through the practice of *minstrelsy* . As a fetishistic operation, minstrelsy undertakes a restoration of the imagined plenitude browbeaten by the sight of difference, however the fact of impersonation keeps alive the likeli/hood of an untenanted or counterfeit presence/identity behind the mask. [16] In <u>Batman</u>, surgical/medical and technological apparatus are paralleled; imaging devices and surgical techniques reconstruct female and racial bodies as a signifier of ideal feminine beauty, thus executing the principle of assembly line difference whereby difference is remodeled by "cover girls." The ubiquitous mirrors and Vogue images inside Alecia's apartment are juxtaposed with public relations/campaign images Harvey Dent, the black police chief, suggesting that the technological gaze remodels the material body, and--in keeping with cultural ideals of the beautiful or "proper" body--makes it "easier on the eyes" by flattening and dispersing surface and interiority.

Harvey Dent purports to be "man of few words," and avows that "these words will count, and so will [his] actions." But in the finale of <u>Batman</u>, he is exiled to a kind of prison house of words/language/ rhetoric not his own as he reads the public statement issued by Batman: "Please inform the citizens of Gotham that Gotham City has earned a rest from crime, but if the forces of evil should rise again to cast a shadow on the *heart* of the city, call me." Taking "heart" to mean empty simulacrum or absent, internalized difference, which is the lifeblood of the phallocentric structure, we can appreciate the ideological fetish function served by patriarchal projections of gender and racial difference.

Bombarded from all angles by questions, allegations, and flashbulbs, Harvey Dent appears overexposed and unable to deflect the glare of technology, images and information which construct him, fix him in political sightlines; and

he appears doomed in consequence to serve as an accomplice in the aseptic "whitewashing" of press conferences, public relations, cultural memory and social bodies. The metaphorical significance of the Joker's uncanny social reincarnation likewise arises from the notion that violence, history, and information is "whitewashed" (to borrow Baudrillard's term) as part of an extensive undertaking of cosmetic surgery which, when the social bandages are removed, reveal an involuntary rictus grin which censors the expression of negativity. In these circumstances, the identity of the Other, banished from sight, is submerged into a realm of radical incertitude and compulsive simulation. [17]

The Joker's media critique literally defaces The Action News team, that is, lays open faces as masks, aesthetic surfaces on which cultural preoccupations are inscribed. Batman and politicians alike exhibit a kind of surgical enforcement of ideal social forms that seeks to edit out negative social complexions and to synthetically remodel the face of things with anthems, flags, banners, slogans). The virulence unleashed upon Gotham City by the Joker spreads by means of a chain reaction, by random, haphazard and senseless proliferation, resulting in metastasis or death. The main symptom: the face of the victim is transfigured into the face of the Joker by an aestheticizing process. This "joker brand" of self-reproduction or body-snatching via the contamination of beauty products constitutes a particular form of terrorism whereby aesthetic difference is reduced to an "epidemic commutability of terms (with gender and racial implications). Indeed, in re/dressing patriarchal efforts to elide sexual and racial difference within the performative spaces of popular cultural narratives, Burton campily illustrates the looping projection of patriarchal thought whereby darkness personifies femininity and femininity darkness. [18]

Film Rap

Joker appropriates aspects of the postmodern rap (microcomputation, multitrack recording, video imaging, and the innovative vocalizations and choreography) of black urban youth; and it is a form of "product tampering" (to borrow a metaphor from the film) which produces an aggressively intertextual, open-ended, and hybrid cultural form based on collage or archiving of sound and styles that communicates a deconstructive, nonauthoritative, metropolitan hybrid. If the Gotham City keeps itself on track through the linear, vacant space of homogeneity, then the heterogeneous performance of poetry disturbs this linear space. [19] If the space is a place of reciting the line accurately, as when Harvey Dent dutifully reads Batman's note aloud at the finale, then poetry stands as a site of experimentation, as when Joker ironically recites, "I'm only laughing on the outside,/my smile is just skin deep./If you could see inside (I feel like crying),/you might join me for a weep."

In Both <u>Batman</u> and <u>Batman Returns</u>, the terroristic kitsch associated with the authoritarian populism of election campaigns, civic birthday celebrations, commercial holiday festivals and so forth reflect the imposition of a common, unifying identity, a kind of civil engineering. Burton's carnival imagery concretely expresses the ambiguity between normativity and heterogeneity embodied by political (not to mention critical) rhetoric in its deployment of the popular. In staging face-offs between homogeneity and heterogeneity, Burton theatricalizes the notion that nationalist or post-revolutionary discourse is invariably that of a divided subject. Gotham is constructed through the homogeneity of re/membering (such as anthems, press releases, American flags, and unifying slogans, anniversary festivals, parades) together with an amnesia of heterogeneity. If the performance art of poetry/rap is disruptive expression of the "homesickness" of the people's injury by and in the face of the carving out of

the state line, then poetry/rap can be described as an audible or sounding space of opposition. The joker's rap/poetry exemplifies a contemporary battle cry that is out of synch with the anthems, hymns or slogans of white patriarchal hegemony. [20]

Facing-off with a hard-line and humorless Ideal, Burton's Joker is sentenced to an interminably creative grimace, an aesthetic symptom which broadcasts the scission that animates and generates it. The figure of the Joker campily embodies the theological perspective that laughter is a satanic sign, a fall from a unified state of being into the divided and conflictual human condition. In the face of his literally "unnerving" and comic misfortune--like Baudelaire's poet or Freud's joker, and in contrast to the prosaic Batman-- the camp Joker profits from a double vision, plays creative games with double talk, and deploys layers of meaning that resonate with puns, metaphors, and double entendres. [21] If joking is the paradigmatic aesthetic activity, a process focused less on the attainment of an end than the pleasure of the aesthetic activity itself, Burton's Joker makes manifest the lacerated interval between the desiring self and unattainable object of desire.

Experiment Perilous: the politics of plague and pixillation

Batman's audio-visual control panel and imaging strategies illustrate Anne Friedberg's thesis that the contemporary pastime of remote channel-hopping modifies the nature of montage, converting each television viewer into "a ready-made montagiste, cutting and pasting images from a video repertoire of sources at the push of a button." By juxtaposing the Joker's camp-surreal photo-collages and TV commercials with Batman's video archive, Burton literalizes Friedberg's observation that montage, formerly an analog for dialectical thought

and surrealism's stock-in-trade, now also signifies a form of consumer choice with the controls in the hands of a new virtual shopper."[22] Indeed, both the Joker's rhetoric and Batman's technology clear the decks for ungrounded play with social institutions; simulating them, supplanting them, remodeling them, and hijacking them from the turf of literal meaning that makes them accountable to authority; however, it is only the Joker's uncanny embodiment of technology which physicalizes the possibility of reconstruction that would put the corporeal stability of conservative social institutions into question.

The Joker makes a cat's paw out of the contemporary axiom that photography is to modernism as electronic media is to postmodernism. Issues devolving on the simulacrum (authenticity versus artificiality), the stereotype, and the social and sexual positioning of viewing subjects are central to the production and function of advertising and other mass-media forms, and his hijacking of communication technologies represents a (progressive) cross-current resistance (with its roots in Surrealism, Pop art, performance art, and photography). Its focus is on a critique of representation with its emphasis on the media's public systems of communication such as commercial advertising using photography, electronic media, and performance mixed media. The Joker's reincarnation testifies to the Burton's camp-surreal reincarnation of Pop. A once nonpolitical subjectivity which refashioned and abstracted images, effectively dislocating them from the context of their social relations, Pop's reincarnation is socially conscious and employs incompatible and out-of-context imagery to make its point. The Joker's new material apes the dynamism and directness of commercial advertising, television--that once radical (anti-) and now seductive artistic utopia of transaesthetic simulation--and magazine styles, but with a different agenda.[23]

If Burton envisages the unconscious as a "factory," or site where desire operates through an interface or hookup with "outside" forces and materials, then the Joker's random homicidal "accidents"--"Gotham's Cosmetic Scare"-- campily recollect the surrealist game of *cadavre exquis*, whereby portions of a picture or poem were produced by donors mindless of what others had worked out. Terroristic/virulent combinations of tainted beauty products not only escape the conscious control of the individual artist, but they additionally deface the rationalized, totalizable order of postmodern production. The Joker's existential dislocation from prevailing cultural fictions is symbolically expressed by the physical severing of nerves, that is, of sensations from perceptions. Comically referencing the "creative geography" of Kuleshov's famous experiment, his guerrilla television broadcast satirizes the impression of geographical unity of the images. What Gerald Mast jokingly names Kuleshov's "creative anatomy"-- the impression of a single actress by splicing together images of body parts from different women[24]--is ironically parodied in the Joker's TV commercial for products whose cosmetic combinations are lethal. The cardboard stand-ins of fashion model-victims Candy Walker and Amanda Keeler physicalize Mulvey's famous account of how "one part of a fragmented body destroys... the illusion of depth demanded by the narrative, it gives flatness, the quality of a cut-out or icon rather than verisimilitude to the screen,"[25] with the uncanny accuracy of Burton's camp-surreal dolls, mannequins, and automatons.

The literally constructivist Joker comically epitomizes how modern art carves out a space for the unconscious custody of "the body" and its accumulated phantasies. His terroristic action comically suggests that what has made this necessary is the prosaic dismembering of the human cadaver, the cutting and pasting of (women's) bodies in the cultural imagery of advertising, film, and other mass media. The Joker's *male*volent performance art and abstract art (with

its phantasies of materiality) dually register a polarity in the reflex against this editing out or taking over of the body in mass cultural forms. Plague-like symptoms of fragmentation are condemned as shocking, monstrous, horrific, yet the *man*iacal break up of objects and figures appears to be nothing but a comic *and uncanny* exaggeration of advertising's aggressive disembodiment of fashion models. Conceiving of his video art as sculptural installation and performance, the Joker, in a sense, continues the formalist tradition of kinetic sculpture through his closed-circuit experiments.

Batman figures intersecting aspects of power which delineate certain spatial trajectories along the axes of art and culture, connoisseurship, economics, sexualized violence and aggression. His cultural capital, reflected in his museum-like mansion, with its network of recording equipment, is fortified by his commitment to and mastery of technologies of image and sound reproduction. For Batman, as for film realists, film liberates us from technology by technology; it records, preserves, and redeems a physical reality (and, by extension, a concrete past). To the Joker, as to anti-realists, prosaic endeavors to record and reveal physical reality represent an inauthentic attempt to assuage man's anxiety about the reality of existing social relations. For Batman, orchestrating the components of a scene and the camera's relationship to them so as to preserve their physical reality is a more "natural" technique than montage. In terms of socially defined/culturally constructed space, such a faithfulness to the notion of transcendent reality flies in the face of Joker's more "formative" silly symphonies, ironic "creations" which recall the "accidental" methods of Man Ray's dadaist films, collages of visual shapes and patterns often (mistakenly?) interpreted--like Leger's *Ballet mécanique*-- as strictly deformative and devoid of any meaning other than purely formal interest.[26]

Batman's car-voyages reflect a popular postmodern pastime for those now alienated from community in the monotonous sprawl of rear-projected landscapes. Burton's uncanny arresting of textual/social space pulls back the semiotic sheet from a body of urban experience turning increasingly secondhand, from a landscape increasingly more opaque as (panoramic) image. In this regard, it could be argued that his is a conservative deconstruction that goes hand in hand with a narcotizing depoliticization of class and gender relations and conflicts. After all, when what we see is spectacularized, taken apart and put back together with freakishness and pastiche (like the Batmobile in the sequel), then the curbstones of patriarchal roadways appear to retire from sight. But if mobility is characteristic of fantasy, and if primal fantasies are less ontological determinations than riddles, then the surrealist subject is more multiform than its heterosexist models suggest.

If there is a pervasive plasticity to the films, the appearance of nothing underneath, behind or beyond the sheer "sucking, storing, stockpiling of (phallic) signs to serve as motivation, origin, or context, then Burton performs a kind of plastic surgery, a form of cultural signification which enables us to probe the hysterical *and material* (re)production of idealized sign-constructs. Everything is caved into a two dimensional plane which, like the Joker products, appears to erase difference. But where Joker's imaging strategies bring into focus fragmented body parts and pieces, his cut-and-paste surgical procedures trope Batman's visualization technologies by trespassing the flesh, making it over as culture, and staking out corpo*real* geography to be *man*ipulated. As the vampiric subject's penetrating look displaces the phallic sign, so his war of sounds and images stands in for a war of objects. In a technician's rendition of an all-seeing deity, editing out accident and surprise, the narrative is motored by a drive for a system of surveillance that consists in appropriating the immateriality of

perceptual fields, that will render sequential perception both origin and end of the apprehension of reality. [27]

Burton's camp-surreal fairy tales are texts which manifest textual schisms between realism and fantasy, the sacred and the profane, inner and outer life, normal and abnormal, and so forth. It is the inability of a patriarchal subject like Batman--who purports to have "difficulty with duality," to have trouble reconciling "two truths" (as he explains to Selina/Catwoman in <u>Batman Returns</u>)--to *man*age such cleavages which is the measure of personal effacement and/or male hysteria that is emblematic of contemporary culture. Hence, to the contemporary epidemic of culture collecting, of deploying the images and figures of primitive and outmoded modern artifacts, the Penguin's political pre-campaign slogan, "You flush it, I'll flaunt it!" represents a historical *detournement* of the late-capitalist cultural economy, of the projected totality of (post)modern production and consumption, of the technologization and/or commodification of the (hu)man body and the object world alike.

Burton's films are full of private and public collections (theme parks, heritage sites, shopping malls, galleries, and so forth) because he is fascinated by the relation of the collection to its surroundings. Once collected, cultural artifacts are transformed into part of an inventory, and the value of the articles on display is certified by the public fascination, by the money shelled out to see them and the promotional products which they turn out. Seamus Deane's thoughts on Brian Moore's <u>The Great Victorian Collection</u> (1975) are notable in this regard. He writes:

> The text is culture, the context is money, the metacommentary is provided by the advertising slogans which competitively proclaim higher and higher degrees of rarity, authenticity, eccentricity, freakishness, with such repetitiveness and success that the ultimate freakishness becomes the truest and most lucrative originality. At this point, the distinction between "high art" and kitsch disappears." [28]

Deane's insight is brilliantly physicalized by Burton's camp-surreal repertoire of "freaks." The Joker is outraged at the fact that a "side-show phony" like Batman steals his press with newspaper headlines like "Winged Freak Terrorizes Gangland." At the end of <u>Batman Returns,</u> at the theme park-zoo (in whose ruin we see cultural progress captured by natural entropy), the Penguin shrieks at Batman, "You're just jealous because I'm a *genuine freak* and you have to wear a mask." At Max Shreck's costume ball, held in his department store, a sign above his assembly of guests reads " Shreck Collection." As the Rick James song, "Super Freak" plays in the background, the Penguin (associated with the detritus of past cultural moments) terroristically crashes through the floor in a hydraulic rubber duck/time machine. A violent historical monogram, the scene suggests that what is thought to be culturally dead and buried can make an uncanny return, not only as some archaic or nostalgic relic of the past, but occasionally, with a potential to drive a "semiotic" stake into the very heart of our state-of-the-art but vulnerable systems, which it will convulse.

In <u>Batman,</u> the otherness and exoticism of pre-industrial, prelapsarian artifacts converts the private home into a public museum; these auratic objects share none of the commodity's homogeneity, and thus establish a metonymic connection with their originary history. For the reporters, whose "sightseeing" activity approximates our own spectatorial process of historical reflection, this narrative of authenticity and origins says something about the proprietor who recuperates the fantasy moment of the past through the talisman. To be sure, Bruce Wayne/Batman's recovery of prelapsarian/ outmoded military regimentals is a patriarchal rejoinder to a private desire. Yet at the same time, it symbolically takes stock of the dominant system of commodity exchange by resurrecting a relic or token of the antiquated (precapitalist and outmoded modern) order of artisanal and industrial relations. On the one hand, it could be

argued that these bygone "moments" are romanticized so as to foster a (critical)/curative present, to establish an umbilical passage. On the other hand, it could be argued that their profane retrieval catalogues and spotlights an uncanny haunting of historically repressed modes of production, social formations, and anatomies of feeling. Indeed, these museum settings entomb to uncanny effect the historical costumes of the dominant masculinity--in substituting for the male body, they--like the Bat suit--underscore that the referent is imaginary rather than the biological body.

Arguably, Burton's images operate in a similar fashion. For example, he catalogues and updates the critiques of various historical figures which reference the dada-inspired mechanistic grotesques that surrealism re-envisioned in order meet the modern cult of the machine hand to hand. The juxtaposition of Vicky Veil's fashion and war photographs exhume the memory of the post W.W.I tendency for the mutilated and/or shocked soldier to physicalize the mechanizing of the commodified body; the spectacle of Jack Napier (Jack Nicholson) overthrowing the control of the industrial machinery in the Axis Chemical plant harks back to Fritz Lang's Metropolis (1926), updating the Expressionist (and Chaplinesque) critique of the worker becoming the epitome of Taylorist and Fordist disciplines in terms of the technologized body; and the figure of Batman flashing across the screen/memory evokes the 1930s Jungerian worker-soldier, the armored body doubling as a machine weapon.

Indeed, the context constructing masculinity is crucial. Burton frames the male body as spectacle, fabricating masculinity as image, as body-to-be-looked-at, an inversion of classical cinematic codings of sexual difference. _Batman_ and _Batman Returns_ are haunted and galvanized by homoerotic subtexts, sexual ambivalence, and threat of feminization. Significantly, the narrative scenes of (sado-masochistic) seduction are incidental to the powerfully seductive ambits of

these films, which are consumed with seduction and simulation. This fascination focuses intensely on displacements and disbandments of boundaries, between the "real" and its simulacral double, between production and consumption, between high art and mass culture, and between "authentic" and counterfeit artifacts, experiences, and identities. The fabrication of the body as spectacle in these films hangs on its expression as part of a captivating consumer space. Questions of discrimination are catalogued in spaces coded to represent "high culture," "classical art," and "refined taste," which are set up in relation to the carnivalesque threats of the popular, the mass, and the underclass. These ambivalent cinematic constructions of sexual and racial difference fall together with aesthetic ambivalence, with inconstancy of value in the circulation of objects and the mapping of space.

While hysterical sign production might be read as postmodernity's repudiation of the dominant phallus, the "Batman" films parody the hysterical resurrection of monuments to and safeguards for masculinity. At the same time, Batman's (imaginary) visual omnipotence and psychic transformations might index the fluid and mobile visuality afforded by cinematic spectatorship, implicitly eulogizing male lack as postmodernity's New Plenitude--at once invisible and ubiquitous, a retrofitted, but perhaps nevertheless transcendental signifier of omnipotent masculinity.[29] Burton illustrates how Catwoman, Joker and Penguin function as supplements which Batman partitions outside in order to prop himself up as self-identical, and how the supplement, as externalized internal difference, actually fabricates the dominant fiction of the centered structure and is therefore--like Batman flying circuits around Gotham's towers of technocracy--the encircling term. In short, male hysteria is campily symptomatized by the nomadic phallus (by the malfunctioning of its high-tech, automotive "shields"), and the hysterical Batman symbolically motors this

transcendental yet transportable signifier, touring--like the mythical minotaur--
the simulacral labyrinth of Gotham City. And yet, in a fashion parallel to the
Joker's guerrilla assault of bourgeois aesthetics and subjectivity when he defaces
an Old Masters collection in the "Fluggelheim" Museum, the representational
and narrative conventions of fantasy, science fiction and horror films
ambivalently fly in the face of dominant cinema's naturalized, realist practices,
and can therefore accommodate subversive politics and uncanny effects.

Notes

[1]Frank Burke, "*Fellini's Casanova*: Male Hystrionics and Phallackcentrism," ed.
Christopher Sharret, <u>Crisis Cinema: The Apocalyptic Idea in the Postmodern Narrative Film</u>
(PostModernPositions, Vol. 6). Washington, D. C.: Maisonneuve Press, 1993, p. 154.

[2]Roger Dadoun, "Fetishism in the Horror Film." <u>Fantasy and the Cinema</u>, ed. James
Donald. London: BFI, 1989, p. 55; 57.

[3]Mary Ann Doane, "Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body." <u>October,</u> no. 17 (Summer
1981), p. 29.

[4]Hal Foster, <u>Compulsive Beauty</u> (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), p. 209.

[5]Barbara Creed, <u>The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis</u> (London and
New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 14.

[6]I would argue that the potential to fly in the teeth of the rational subject with the aim of
loosening a few of them is not undermined simply because, insofar as the standoff between the
semiotic/feminine and the symbolic/masculine is open to cross-gendered identification involving
permeable boundaries of individual subjectivity, the generic inscription of deviance for the purpose
of *man*aging and containing projected threats of difference and disorder represents a narrative
strategy for consolidating and protecting the phallic regime of masculine identity against various
forms of disruption.

[7]As a foil to the chimeras of knowledge and coherence which haunt realism (no less than
the dominant fictions of omnipotent masculinity and/or nationhood), works of the fantastic put
teeth in hallucinatory the nature of perception, thereby producing an an aura of uncanny
ambivalence. Quoting Todorov, James Donald explains that "the fantastic... plays upon the
insecurity of the boundaries between the 'I' and the 'not-I', between the real and the unreal." What
are the gendered implications of such a split? If, as Donald puts it, "the sublime... indicate[s] a
tension between the joy of having a feeling of the totality and the inseparable sorrow of not being
able to present an object equal to the Idea of that totality," then the sublime pertains to the
uncanny space in which the imagined postmodern totality faces-off with its ungraspable ideal in
the context of historically specific problems of identity construction. See James Donald, "The
Fantastic, The Sublime and the Popular Or, What's at Stake in Vampire Films?," <u>Fantasy and the
Cinema</u> (London: BFI, 1989), p. 238; 245.

[8]For the Joker in Batman, as for most of Burton's male characters, feminine attributes are what figures negative pleasure--a feeling (of the death drive) in the bones of the patriarchal subject as at once the lure of ecstasy and the threat of its annihilation. However metamorphosed their topographies in Burton's films, the ground of this surrealist sublime--traditional beauty and contemporary glamour culture alike--remains the female body.

[9]Indeed, the construction of masculinity as male hysteria in the Batman films is fashioned as if to ward off feminization, but it unmasks the homoerotics of mimetic rivalry which regularly organizes classic Hollywood narratives of selfsame adversaries. Insofar as erotic sexual attractions are doubled by homoerotic ones sexual difference is redeployed. Homoerotic violence disinters a subterranean current of homophobia, racism and sexism, a dread of displacements or redistributions of power and difference. Burton's campy cliches make visible the operation whereby the mastery that "postmodern" texts no longer engender in accomplishing closure or eliciting narcissistic identification is conventionally reaffirmed insofar as the experience of submission and vulnerability is projected onto the gendered or racialized body or Other.

[10]An alternate argument: By juxtaposing Bruce Wayne's living space, casino, and "armoury", and transcendent control room, Burton implies that in masculinist economies, as in capitalist ones, there is no longer any corresponding territory save the deterritorialized body of masculinity itself, the capital on which the flux of desire is inscribed. Moreover, in its decoding and deteritorializing, in its becoming an aphorism for all values in the exchange process, masculinity, like capitalism, radiates new physical and social energies and fleshes out productive capacity beyond all previous limits. However, in order to control and regulate this energy and productive potential, masculinity, like capitalism--as campily personified by that (in Marx's famous formulation) "capitalist vampire" Max Shreck--must defer and displace its own limits and reinscribe them in repressive channels, structures, and inhibitions. Put otherwise, masculinity, like capitalism, not only dismantles traditional values, identities, and social structures, but also has to reinstall and refortify them in man-made reterritorializations in order to work. No longer a material and productive variable, energy (like capital and government) has now become a vampiristic process feeding upon itself (which is why there is no real risk of its depletion). In this regard, the film is an allusion to Chinatown, whose critique of the socio-pathology of political and financial corruption similarly invokes mythic connotations of the life-blood being sucked from the civic body. Like Dracula, Batman is a saver, an ascetic. In fact, he has no body; it exists, but it is incorporeal, like the hyperreal commodity thought impossible as a physical fact. In a sense, the body as alienated labour, as a social relation, physically estranges the man from "himself". Like the capital with which he is associated, the vampire social product which is seen to exist without a body, which has exchange value without use value. Whether in terms of money (Marx) or the real (Baurdrillard), Batman's cultural capital, like phallic masculinity, is symbolically buried and exists as a "resurrection effect"; it is dead labour whose promiscuous seductions and productions are monopolistic, solitary and despotic.

[11]Peter Wollen, "Delerious Projections," Sight and Sound, vol. 2, no. 4 (1992), p. 25.

[12]Not unlike the biological body (according to a genetic model), the social body (according to a fascist model) loses its "natural" defences and becomes susceptible to perverse effects and unpredictable malfunctions in ratio to the increasing dexterity of its prostheses, that is to say, overprotection, overcoding and overmanagement. Burton physicalizes the postmodern coroner's report that virulence has taken over the work of the unconscious, that immunodeficiency now accounts for all afflictions, and that terrorism now accounts for all violence. And in so doing, he lights into fascist ideology from within its own manufacture of masculine subjectivity--lights into it with precisely what this subjectivity blacks out. In the context of AIDS culture, insomuch the

characters are less able to pin faith on their own antibodies, they are increasingly in need of protection from outside. At both the level of the individual body and the civic body, the artificial santization of environments indemnifies faltering immunological defences. Not unlike the vapire's coffin, Batman's opaque body casing in which he retreats renders him benumbed/bereaved yet overprotected, condemned to artificial immunity, compulsive transfusions in order to combat death at the slightest contact with the outside world.

[13]Peter Wollen, "Delerious Projections." Sight and Sound, vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 24-27.

[14]Cornell West, "The New Politics of Difference." October, no. 53 (1990), pp. 105.

[15] Andrew Ross describes Batman as a "film where the racial problematic is highly coded to the point of public invisibility," and interprets it as "a veiled commentary on race relations in the eighties." (29) He underlines a principal concern in Batman, yet dismisses its expression as a "feeble, almost parodic gesture towards white liberal guilt in its attempt to present both characters in a cycle of dependency." He writes: Hoodlem and vigilante--one helped to create the other, and vice versa; now each helps to define the other, vengeance feeding off its victim's intimidation of the avenger. This is the nearest the film gets to acknowledging how deviance is constructed by the powerful; how deviant categories, especially those marked with a racial component, are the product, and thus the sole responsibility of those whose interests are further served by portraying themselves and their protectorate as being threatened by deviance." (32) Ross argues that Batman "embarks on a narrative whose full range of identifications depends upon a wholly occluded racial subtext... a veiled commentary on race relations in the late eighties," but asks "how indirect is this commentary when many elements for a simple allegorical reading of racism are so clearly present in the film?" (30-31) See Andrew Ross, "Ballots, Bullets or Batmen: can cultural studies do the right thing?" Screen, vol. 31, no. 1 (Spring 1990). In "Colonialism, Racism, and Representation," Robert Stam and Louise Spence argue persuasively for an alternative model of approach: "A comprehensive methodology must pay attention to the mediations which intervene between 'reality' and representation. Its emphasis should be on narrative structure, genre conventions, and cinematic style rather than on perfect correctness of representation or fidelity to an original 'real' model or prototype. We must beware of mistakes in which the criteria appropriate to one genre are applied to another... Satirical or parodic films... may be less concerned with constructing positive images than with challenging the stereotypical expectations an audience may bring to a film." Robert Stam and Louise Spence, "Colonialism, Racism, and Representation: An Introduction," Movies and Methods-- Vol. II: An Introduction, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 641.

[16]Homi K. Bhaba, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," October, no. 28 (Spring 1984), p. 128. Of course, it is not just the Black who is labelled as Other in dominant discourses; the above scenario is drawn from feminist psychoanalytic theory, which pinpoints the fetish as the mechanism whereby a partitioned belief bears up under, and bears out, discrepant stereotypes which accumulate around the fetishized body. If colonialist discourse involves operations of mimicry which correspond psychoanalytically to the mechanism of fetishization (its dialectic of presence and absence, as in Homi Bhaba's theoretical account), then Batman and Batman Returns render the ambivalent position of both blacks and women in relation to dominant culture and its representations as a reflexively visible structuring principle of the text.

[17]Burton's eccentric, camp-surreal films playfully furnish the real--the surfaces and textures of everyday life in the postmodern world--with an uncanniness, an aura outside the pale. Recognizing how cinematic expressions of race and gender relations become sedimented into contemporary film narratives and genres, Burton italicizes the cinematic construction and representation of racial and gendered Otherness as ongoing symbolic expressions, specifically, in

fantasy and horror's racialized metaphors and allegories. The combined factors of generic and narrative dependence on monstrous difference, increased technological possibilities for rendering the alien Other in terms of simulacra, and the apparent inexhaustability of fantastic narrative projections, diagrammatically render socially (and textually) pent-up sexual and racial discourses. Burton's fantasic narratives redefine the double as a consequence, not an origin. Just as the Platonic tradition partitions legitimate and illegitimate claimants to the idea, segragates good iconic copies that take after the idea and bad fantasmatic simulacra that simulate it, sexual adversaries Batman and Joker stand for good and bad masculinities; just as the Platonic tradition put the simulacrum under restraint not just as a retrograde copy minus an original, but because it controverted the principle of identity, the order of original and copy, of idea and representation, so the Joker--defined in terms of fantasmatic the simulcrum--assumes a Plutonic, uncanny quality that is analogous to that of surrealist fantasy.

[18]If the traditional hero's function is to rope off acceptable social positions and dramatize the relationship of the individual to the social order, then this conservative function clearly has political and ideological significance. Burton's "Batman" films transparently reveal how the cinematic rhetoric and style of the traditional hero stipulates a social positioning in which disempowered groups such as blacks and women are consistently defined in a subordinate status. Arguing that aspects of pleasurable looking turn on the annexation of the black male body through symbolic domination and control recalls classical feminist arguments concerning the relationship of the (male) spectator to the female image. By approximating the spectacular black body iconographically, Batman's body armour literally incorporates a kind of racist romanticism of the excessive physicality and sexual potency of the black male. Similarly, traditional cinema *man*ufactures a structure of seeing within which the black body is constituted as the object of the look, thus reproducing traditional relations in society. But although Batman represents a popular archetype in a popular cultural form, and ambivalently underwrites the reproduction of established social relations, popular conceptions of heroism arguably become unmoored from traditional expectations because familiar rituals of heroic power, problematically accomplished in narrative terms, are not presented as functional for social regeneration.

[19]See Houston A. Baker Jr.,"Hybridity, the Rap Race, and Pedagogy for the 1990s," in Technoculture, eds. Constance Penley and Andrew Ross. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991, pp. 205.

[20]See Baker Jr., Houston A. "Hybridity, the Rap Race, and Pedagogy for the 1990s," Technoculture, eds. Constance Penley and Andrew Ross (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 1991, pp. 197-209.

[21]Jerry Aline Flieger, "Baudelaire and Freud: The Poet as Joker." Psychoanalytic Approaches to Literature and Film, eds. Maurice Charney and Joseph Reppen. London: Associated UP, 1987, pp. 266-281.

[22]Anne Friedberg, Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, pp. 141-42. Burton's film suggests that in view of the ambiguous determination of new technological models of social intercourse (complexly structured social practices embossed in cultural codes of communication), the historical instrumentality of ethereal imaging stategies deserve at least as much attention in our culture as their more palpable materialist determinants because they have implications for the rehearsal of notions of gender within the performative space of contemporary culture, wherein visual fascination is superceded by control over simulated interactions.

[23]Moreover, the Joker's peformative strategies point up the prevalence of the trendy media promotion artists (like Burton?) who have exploited their prominance as "art star" impressarios. Burton thus parodies the politics of public attention given the popularization and democratization of media culture whereby crass commercialization becomes a communication structure for interacting with the public.

[24]Gerald Mast, "Soviet Montage," A Short History of the Movies, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976), p. 184.

[25]Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Movies and Methods-- Vol. II: An Introduction, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 309.

[26]In his discussion of Batman, Jim Collins describes the main characters' "conflicting but complementary" engagement with strategies of image play in terms of hijacking/deformation(Joker) and appropriation/retrieval (Batman). See Jim Collins, "Genericity in the Nineties: Eclectic Irony and the New Sincerity." Film Theory Goes to the Movies, eds. Jim Collins, Hilary Radner and Ava Preacher Collins (New York: Routledge, 1993,) pp. 253-254.

[27]According to this "ideology of spectacle," whereby knowledge is impossible outside of vision, a supply of images is tantamount to an amunition supply. By staging a sucession of face-offs between personal/social identity and the popular cultural fantasy of omnipotent masculinity in the context of new communication technologies, Burton makes explicit the sense that the heroic manhood, conventionally determined by the spectacular male body in American culture, is now negotiated domestically by consumers via electronic home-theatre marketing scenerios of multisensory interfacing and masculine fascination and control; hence the integral connentions between bodily malfunction, faulty programming and virulence.

[28]See Seamus Deane, "The Real Thing: Brian Moore in Disneyland," Irish University Review, vol. 18, no. 1 (Spring 1988), p. 77.

[29]See Frank Burk, "Fellini's Casanova: Male Hystrionics and Phallackcentrism," ed. Christopher Sharret, Crisis Cinema: The Apocalyptic Idea in the Postmodern Narrative Film (PostModernPositions, Vol. 6). Washington, D. C.: Maisonneuve Press, 1993, p. 154.

Conclusion: Animating the *Cadavre Exquis*
of Hollywood's "apocalyptic adolescent"[1]

Perhaps the contemporary artist continues to be subversive by being non-adversarial
in the modernist sense, and has retained our pop cultural past partly in order to explore
the site where pleasure was last observed, before it was stoned by the gentry and mob alike,
and re-created as monster.

-Tania Modleski-[2]

... isn't it possible to argue, with the surrealists, that bad taste
should take its place alongside the fantastic, the uncanny and the sublime
in a carnival of resistance to the hegemony of the beautiful?

-James Donald- [3]

Movies of recent times have treated dystopian themes,
leaning heavily towards the vision of chaos.
But they have amended dystopian narratives in postmodern terms,
often imbuing a negative vision of the future with comic or campy motifs.
They intermingle the dark and the comic, as if we are at once to take the threat of dystopia
seriously and then again not... it might be useful to try and make some political sense
out of these vaying dytopian images and themes in the movies,
since they offer us evidence of how popular art
imagines our political future.

-James Combs- [4]

Burton's collections of cinematic ephemera can be seen as anticollections in their repudiation of nostalgic estimations of the "classic" as a transcendent form. But his particular generic and imagistic collections involve more than this denial. Indeed, the stockpiling and organization of Burton's collections of cinematic ephemera serve to hyperbolize dominant features of the exchange economy--its seriality, abstraction, fads and fashions--and thereby constitute an extreme form of consumerism which ambivalently authorizes mode and fashion to flare simultaneously towards the past and the future.[5]

Of course, an inventory of Burton's camp-surreal principles does not paint an unclouded picture of how the outmoded can be radical, the auratic convulsive or the culturally down-and-out redeployed as insurgent anarchy. The outmoded as archaic smacks of the traditional, the reactionary; the demodé

nothing but parodic, affirmative at the last; aura and apoplexy look to be at odds. I have argued, however, that by capitalizing on the tension between cultural capital and cultural currency, between fashion modes and production modes, Burton casts the cultural detritus of past moments left over in capitalism-- artisanal relics, outworn fashions, time-honored images--dead against the *amour-propre* of its present moment. Indeed, to the contemporary epidemic of culture collecting, of deploying the images and figures of primitive and outmoded modern artifacts, the Penguin's political pre-campaign slogan, "What you put in your toilet, I put on my mantle," represents a historical *detournement* of the late-capitalist cultural economy, of the projected totality of (post)modern production and consumption. In Burton's ouevre, outmoded images may call to account the late-capitalist product with past images either deadened or outside its purview, as when an object or space remindful, or having an aura of a different formative mode, social configuration, or anatomy of feeling is disinterred, in apostasy.

If Burton's aesthetic deployment of the outworn, the archaic, and the auratic opens onto surrealism, then this door is darkened by fascism's shadow. Still, technological and generic invention/reproduction can only be dialectical, critical, when conversant with the past. Much of the dominant and seductive discourse on postmodern art has made light of this dialectic, especially in its absolute embodiment of the textual and the anti-auratic. To be sure, the postmodernist architecture of Burton's films is built upon a modernist burial ground of images; and his reanimation of pseudo-auratic creatures--puppets, dolls, mannequins, automatons--parodies that of the marketplace and academy alike, where the auratic is exiled and the threadbare is outstripped. If the outmoded and the postmodern are problematic because they are caught up in a

single lane of historical development, then this is also the mainspring of power for both terms, for it is the congestion of productive modes/meanings that the postmodern can run over. And just as heterogeneous spaces and times can be critically (re)aligned in the present, so too can these discriminations be phobically sized up. It is in exactly this regard that the historically outmoded antagonism between surrealism and fascism has made the scene again: "uncannily." [6]

The overwhelming popularity of political "monsters" like Penguin and Max Shreck, and even Batman, provide an example of how, during certain historical periods, people may desire a political power structure--even fascism--which doesn't necessarily serve their interests. In response to our present social and historical conjuncture, Burton pays a lot of attention to how subjects are fashioned as a result of the production and investment of desire on the playing field of the social. In Beetlejuice (1988), for instance, the characters exhume the (dead) patriarchal subject and disinter a surrealist diorama beneath the house, a phantasmatic showcase that closely approximates both the multiplex cinema and shopping mall which (in Anne Friedberg's formulation) markets the pleasures of "imaginary mobility as psychic transformation." [7] In the Reagan era, the figure of Beetlejuice campily epitomizes the Golem whose inactive clay awaits animation through the incantation of a secret password. Indeed, to some extent, the patriarchal subjects in Burton's camp-surreal repertoire at once requisition and supervise the break up of male subjectivity and the alterity of culture, and suggest what is at stake politically in rethinking the popular through the uncanny. Any campaign that amalgamates politics and aesthetics might give us the shivers, for to aestheticize politics without politicising aesthetics--and so refashioning both terms--is to motion in the direction of monstrous fascism. However, Burton's camp-surreal movies gestures in another direction, albeit more ambivalently and with more complicity than, say, Chaplin's The Great

<u>Dictator</u> (1940), towards a cultural politics and a political culture that take stock of the inevitable/desirable heterogeneity and fragmentation of personal and social identity constructions.

Burton's uncanny camp surreal aesthetic is a reflex to his vision of cultural heterogeneity, a camp-surreal photoengraving of the untotalizable field of social relations. He physicalizes the social machinery of complex power relationships in terms of discourse-as-violence, puts thresholds (and strongholds) of legibility/intelligibility through their paces, and thereby opens up a space for the imagination of aesthetic and social alternatives. Undertaking the surrealist political stategem (overlooked by certain Marxist idealisms), Burton flies in the teeth of the capitalist rationalization of the objective world via the late capitalist irrationalization of the subjective world. Rather than fetishistically fastening on the machine as object or image, Burton locates it in social processes. No disarming liberal humanism or romantic anti-capitalism, Burton scraps neither the reverie nor the reality of the body becoming machine/commodity in a conservative nostalgia for a "real," "genuine," "natural," "authentic" man (like Expressionism or contemporary advertising). On the contrary, his hybrid aesthetic of surreal camp frequently resists this selfsame mythology with camp humor and with surrealism's psychic repercussions in the context of postmodernity's own *neo-Sachlichkeit*.

Burton's live action puppet shows make plain the fact that what can be concretely expressed at any given time is reciprocally determined by the whereabouts of bodies and their possible combinations. He theatricalizes the interface of the corporal and incorporeal, thus enabling different regimes of signs to account for how bodies are incorporeally made over by statements, how the face acts as a site where signs are constantly reterritorialized, and how

fragmented and heterogeneous "becomings" are put into play by that deterritorialization. That the films bare scars of oedipal and familial reterritorialization is not up for debate. What is important is that the reterritorializations (archaisms, reversions) of Burton's moving pictures underscore how, with desire, assembly is required, and is most "authentically" made manifest in figures of "becoming-other" through profane couplings and fantastic alliances.

No doubt inheriting a few optical cataracts from surrealist sexual politics and insights into the hookups between psychic energy, landscape, architectural form, and social mythology, Burton undertakes an archaeology of patriarchal subjectivity as fossilized in (post)modern spaces. Surrealism concerns the uncanny point where contraries brush up against one another, and Burton's camp tableaux put teeth into apparently polar opposites, especially figures that ambivalently evoke an erotogenic and dismembered body, and scenes that ambivalently hint at innocuous games and sadomasochistic aggressions. Because the psychic splintering of the male subject (convulsive identity) is founded on the physical splintering of the female/(feminized) image (compulsive beauty), and because the intoxication of the one may come at the expenditure of the other, Burton ambivalently resurrects these problematic surrealist ideals.

Liberatory lookouts are overcast by mysogynistic effects, by the ambivalent exacerbation and exploitation of sexist fantasies belonging to the feminine (especially blood ties between the fluid and the fragile, the fatal and the masochistic), and by the surrealist obsession with psychosexual regression, whereby the female/ (feminized body of the Other) is violently represented. The potentially (or unavoidably) masculinist repercussions of the surreal liaison between the uncanny and castration call for critical reservations, notably, with

regard to the question of whether the uncanny--perhaps no less than camp or deconstruction--effects a "real" crisis of masculine identity, or whether it simply involves a (re)colonizing of psychic and social territories ambiguously fraternized with the feminine. More, however much the binary opposites of masculine and feminine are collapsed, the very move to cave them in (as with the surrealist valorization of the hysterical figure) possibly involves an appropriation around the masochistic position. And what of the connection between the Other's deconstructive supplementarity and the uncanny? Burton's deconstructive practice restores to his films that contradiction between lack and excess as a property of filmic discourse itself, and brings home the text as uncentered play. On the one hand, through a deconstructive supplementarity, Burton exploits the very "outside" of the surrealist uncanny, as critical edge; on the other hand, so long as the discourse of woman-as-supplement remains the property of socially marked male subjects who speak woman-as-object, Burton will ambivalently recompose (however inadvertently) the metaphysical structure of subject/object.

The resurrection of the decorative and the extravagant is nowadays diagnosed as a symptom of modernism's historical slump, but masculine parade has camped out in the shadows of modernism's chiaroscuro projections since the latter's corporeal striptease. Burton explores ways to divorce and deconstruct the spate of antinomies that fashioned modernism's identity: functional/festooned, useful/disposable, auratic/simulated, machine/organism, masculine/feminine, West/East, and so forth. In his oeuvre, deconstruction originates not so much from the disavowal as from the projection, from the side of the negative, the Other, the supplement (the ornamental, the outmoded, the popular, the feminine, the Orient, and so forth). Occasionally, the hybrid and

contradictory "nature" of Burton's catalogue of sexual/racial/artistic Others not only ambivalently reflects, but also rejects, these antinomies of modernism.

Pee-wee, Edward, The Joker, and Catwoman can be read as poststructuralist figures insofar as their textual acrobatics appear bereft of critique. Rather than signaling untrodden points of resistance around which a "critical" subject could enter Gotham's endless labyrinth of textuality and libidinal politics (stage left?), their poststructuralist *maneuvers* smash the subject and do honor to its dissolution in a gesture of transgressive, (neo)Nietzschean laughter and supercilious disdain. During a press conference at the end of <u>Batman</u>, with the Joker exterminated and the status quo seemingly affirmed, Commissioner Gorden confidently brags to a crowd of journalists that "Public safety in Gotham City is no longer a laughing matter." On the contrary, from the fantastic, transgressive and liberating adventures of Burton's camp-surreal gallery of "monsters" we can ascertain that political closure *is* a joking matter, and also that the critical potential of fractional, hybrid, and "monstrous" identities for an aspiration towards real communities that live in a state of becoming is, like comedy, a serious business.

What do we then make of Burton's allegorical stylistics, which inscribe a desire to trespass the teleological limits of narrative, but avoid jeopardizing the 'bodies' of the films themselves? One could possibly speculate that it is authorship itself that is quarantined from the contamination of history, since the discourse of gender running through the films implies that what is at stake is male mastery, and the bones of belief that the narratives pilfer from the reliquary of representation might be read as a eucharistic investment in patriarchal *real* estate. I would still maintain, however, that the activity of deconstruction, the project of defamiliarization, of exposing habitual meanings as cultural

inventions is by no means undermined by the uncomfortable sense that the ritual aping of white, heterosexual male privilege only evidences that the rules have changed but the game has stayed the same. Burton's stagecraft animates how dominant masculinity is made over in cultural narratives; how its representational structures impact upon the political practices of en-gendering social experience; and how its psychoanalytic myths and fantasies are historically schematized and inflected.

To be sure, a question which continually rear ups in view of the deconstructive disclaimer of male (artistic/critical) mastery is whether it puts on a performance of non-mastery in order to come home to another kind of mastery: a touch-and-go phallocracy caving-in on itself. However, Burton recognizes the persistency with which male narratives of gender are reproduced in feminist theories of cultural production, and underlines the oscillation between gender representation and what necessarily exceeds the space of representation. It is by taking apart the machinery of visual fascination internally, and by thematising his own ongoing implication with it, that Burton confronts the social and cinematic construction of (sexual) identity; for in his vision, engenderment is culturally produced as in the inventor's body shop, in the sense in which his Warholian factory produces goods or commodities, and in so doing manufactures different sets of social relations. Far from repudiating gender or slenderizing it to the level of individual performance, Burton is careful to work out the historical and political terms under which both male and female characters become gendered and embodied. To be sure, his camp-surreal critique of gender as ideologically and technically engineered produces a historical trauma of gender that throws a proverbial wrench into the postmodern gears of today's cinematic "bachelor machines."

Indeed, if we paid attention to the implications of Burton's postmodern *camp surreal* as a model, we might be obliged to reassess the procedures by which we ascribe meaning to our culture through representation. For although Andrew Ross rightfully contends that camp rarely offers "a direct relation between the conditions it speaks to--everyday life in the present--and the discourse it speaks with-- usually a bricolage of features pilfered from fantasies of the bygone,"[8] camp-surreal recycling of the past is not always nostalgic or reactionary; it can be critical as well. In my view, such ambivalence does not sabotage politics, but is a proviso for any political interference or (re)appraisal (as well as a symptomatic effect) of the horsepower of postmodernism's motorcade of images, and a possible means of hotwiring or hijacking such vehicles.

To today's overshadowing of the uncanny, Burton rejoins that unflagging repression which underwrites its homecoming. Unless our (de)realizing postmodern dreamscapes (i.e., landscapes, cityscapes, and cinemascapes) are considered a postmodern fulfillment of the surreal, Burton's camp-surreal is far from defunct. On the contrary, it campily muffles the frequently trumpeted postmodern ideologemes that capitalism no longer has an outside, that determining principles are ungraspable, that radical critiques are impossible, that liberation can only be simulated, that revolutionary acceleration along political thoroughfares is now a spinning of tires in a simulacral pothole. His body of work suggests that existential and representational dead ends are themselves narratives which hammer the body of the past out of its never-having-been and thus jeopardize elective futures not-yet-anticipated. Burton's camp-surreal endeavors to stump conservative postmodernism with its own forfeited reveries, puts to the proof its habit of taking the will for the deed, and may even intimate a way to bloodsuck the uncanny energies stored in bygone cultural forms of expression for alternative political aims in the present.

Notes

[1]A term by which the German Expressionists referred to themselves, according to Lotte Eisner, <u>The Haunted Screen</u> (London: Secker & Warburg, 1952).

[2]Tania Modleski, "The Terror of Pleasure: The Contemporary Horror Film and Postmodern Theory," <u>Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture</u> (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

[3]James Donald, "The Fantastic, the Sublime and the Popular... Or, What's at Stake in Vampire Films?" <u>Fantasy and the Cinema</u>, ed. James Donald. London: BFI, 1989, p. 247.

[4]James Combs, "Pox-Eclipse Now: The Dystopian Imagination in Contemporary Popular Movies," <u>Crisis Cinema: The Apocalyptic Idea in Postmodern Narrative Film</u>, ed. Christopher Sharrett, Postmodern Positions, Vol. 6 (Washington, D. C.: Maisonneuve, 1993), p. 27.

[5]Susan Stewart provides an excellent discussion of "ephemera proper"--collections comprised of disposable artefacts--to which my thinking about postmodern cinema is indebted. See her <u>On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection</u> (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1984).

[6]Hal Foster, <u>Compulsive Beauty</u> (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), p. 212. I am grateful to Foster for suggesting the cultural currency of this historical showdown.

[7]Friedberg, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. xi.

[8]Ross, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 159.

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