

Transforming Heroes: Hollywood and the Demonization of Women

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Among the most powerful and dynamic of modernity's cultural narratives is the American myth or metamyth of success.¹ With roots in American Puritanism and in Franklin's secularized work ethic, the success myth developed over the nineteenth century into a narrative charter for mobility ideology. Its hero, the self-made man, embodied the founding promise of America, the promise of a chance to try, restrained only by one's own capacity. Rising through talent, effort, and achievement, fictional self-made men brought an earlier dream of individual freedom into an increasingly organized society.

That dream has not come down unchanged. American success mythology has been notably open to its sociohistorical contexts, sensitive to shifts in the lived conditions that it claims to represent. In the first section of this paper, I show how representations of the self-made man have articulated with different stages of and positions toward capitalist development. I then go on to analyze contemporary, mass-mediated reworkings of the narrative tradition.

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Over the 1980s, Hollywood filmmakers turned with renewed energy to stories of individual mobility and success. The scaled-down dreams of 1970s melodramas such as *Rocky* or *Saturday Night Fever* gave way to grander, generically comic fantasies of the unrestricted triumph of desire. Only men, however, enacted the more expansive dream. Unlimited ambition in women continued to be constructed as a threat, requiring either their subordination to the appropriate men or their expulsion from the imagined community. During the Reagan era, I will argue, such representations of women were enlisted in specific ways in the fictional construction of identities. Briefly, a fantasized threat of female power, embodied in women and in feminized enemies, became instrumental to an ongoing ideological project of remasculinization. What is being remasculinized is not precisely "American culture," as Susan Jeffords has suggested (1989:169), but rather the gender identities of particular social classes.

In this paper I connect the popularity of Hollywood films about dangerous women to what Michael Rogin (1987) calls the "political demonology" of the Reagan presidency. A continuing and, according to Rogin, central feature of American political life, demonization constructs political adversaries as monsters endowed with a mysterious power to subvert the body politic. In the countersubversive rhetoric of political elites, from the cold war to the present, that threat takes a dual form. External danger from the communist menace is paired more or less explicitly with the internal dangers of demonic women and the impending collapse of the family.

Hollywood filmmakers in the 1950s made the link explicit. In his chapter "Kiss Me Deadly" (246-62), Rogin focuses on a cold-war genre of anti-Communist films that showed how weak fathers and domineering mothers produced subversive sons whose sole redemption lay in the patriarchal national-security state. Few of these films were box-office successes (262). Whereas explicitly anti-Communist films expressed the fantasies of their makers, movie attendance figures suggest that science-fiction films were more attuned to popular feelings. Transposed from the demonic mom to the strange reproductive powers of 1950s monsters, the theme of dangerous female influence appears to have tapped real social concerns. The monstrous reproduction of identical selves in science-fiction films appealed to widespread anxiety over the erosion of individual identity in mass society (262-67).

Rogin's analysis, to which I return in my conclusion, raises an important theoretical point. Mass culture, by which I intend the commercial products of the culture industry, may be viewed from the perspective of its elite producers or of its mass audiences. Over the history of the debate on mass culture, producer-centered studies have represented it as an instrument for ideological manipulation, whereas audience-centered studies find genuine expressions of collective beliefs and values. Taken in isolation, however, each of these viewpoints yields only a partial understanding of the object. What is obscured in both cases, albeit in different ways, are the cultural processes that mediate between and link elites and masses.

My critical practice is positioned between the older critique of mass culture as sheer manipulation and the pluralist model of authentic mass expression. Instead of separating manipulation from expression, the managed from the authentic, the ideological from the utopian, I attribute the appeal of mass cultural products to their dialectical interaction. From this perspective, mass culture does not directly express the socially conditioned wishes and anxieties of its audiences; rather, it selectively recognizes and actively transforms them. Mass culture, then, is that contested terrain where the contradictions of ongoing social experience are partially absorbed, reworked, and contained within dominant cultural forms. If the dominant culture is not all-powerful in shaping consciousness, neither is it without effect. In Stuart Hall's formulation:

The culture industries do have the power constantly to re-work and reshape what they represent; and, by repetition and selection, to impose and implant such definitions of ourselves as fit more easily the descriptions of the dominant or preferred cultures (1981:232-33).

That power of implantation works through "utopian" appeals. That is, no mass-mediated "definition of ourselves" will be compelling to audiences unless they can recognize the longings and fears that it re-presents.

With this model in mind, I have been tracking 1980s films about mobility and success, paying attention to their intended audiences and to their relative commercial popularity, as measured by box-office success. In this paper, I identify and analyze certain narrative patterns that appealed to movie audiences in the 1980s.

HISTORY, WORKERS AND SHAPE-CHANGERS: THE POLES OF SUCCESS MYTHOLOGY

Let me begin with a common structure, a generative matrix of narrative possibilities. If the basic opposition in success mythology is between the open and the closed, the mobile and the static, the negative forces of closure and stasis appear in antithetical forms. Aspiring self-made men are threatened from above by repressive authorities, rigid traditions, and restrictive rules that limit individual initiative and freedom. From below, however, they are vulnerable to dangers of another sort and must guard against the distracting passions that dull the mind and blunt the will. Both threats are concentrated in the city, the ultimate testing ground, which is to the success hero what the wilderness is to the frontier hero.

Poised between law and desire, the success hero has two extreme choices: to mobilize law in the control of desire or to enlist desire in the overthrow of law. As is the practice of mythic mediators, most heroes arrive at intermediary solutions, compromises of some form that tend, nevertheless, toward one or the other of the two poles, law or desire, authority or freedom, respectful submission or defiant rebellion.

As the success myth began to crystallize in the Jacksonian period, it distributed its versions between these poles. At one pole clustered the lawful descendants of Poor Richard and his Puritan antecedents. Here were honest, plain-dealing workers, bearers of the disciplinary virtues of the Protestant ethic, whose slow ascent from rags to moderate riches depended on industry and self-denial. Roguishly eyeing these sober figures from the opposite pole were an assortment of equally determined but less rugged individualists, guileful, smooth-talking men on the make who specialized in deflating pretense and subverting authority.

These distinct types of self-made men found their homes in different genres, from where they appealed to different if overlapping audiences. The older, moralistic tradition was disseminated to the middle classes through Jacksonian rhetoric in praise of useful toil, sentimental novels, and self-improvement manuals addressed to aspiring young men. Antebellum comic theater and humorous literature nourished the more exuberant heroes. From such archetypal tricksters as the Yankee peddler and the sly backwoodsman are descended generations of hustlers, hucksters, commen, and promoters, right down to J. R. Ewing and Joe Isuzu.

What needs emphasis regarding the moralistic tradition is its ambivalence toward capitalist development and its increasingly residual character. Handed down from a preindustrial agrarian past, the tradition fostered values and attitudes of declining social utility during the age of industrialization, but it provided a vantage point for criticism of the society that was emerging. When Horatio Alger reproduced the work ethic as literature for children in the Gilded Age, he became the "nostalgic spokesman of a dying order" (Weiss 1969:49).

The critique to which Alger contributed is of a certain kind. It rests on a set of ideas about work that have the effect, as Marvin Meyers remarks of the Jacksonian version, of "distinguishing the classes not by their economic position as such, but primarily by their moral orientation" (1960:31). Antebellum success traditions share a dichotomous moral economy that classifies occupational groups by their opposed modes and rates of accumulation. Wealth gradually accumulated through some manner of honest toil is regarded as a sign of virtue and marks off a composite laboring class of "industrious folk," which can include farmers, manual workers, merchants, and honest industrialists. Their opposite, the new "aristocracy" denounced in Jacksonian polemic, is a diffuse class of bankers, speculators, and financiers, all those who amass wealth rapidly, without toil, and who consume it conspicuously.

As the tradition entered the turbulent decades of the Gilded Age, anxiety over consumption intensified. The basic dilemma, as Max Weber recognized, was intrinsic to worldly asceticism, which produces the wealth that eventually undermines it. Caught up in this dilemma, middle-class success ideologists laced their praise of work and moderation with the old Puritan-republican fears of the corrupting power of riches. Their obsession with the dangers of success is reflected in ambivalent attitudes toward the city. As the place of opportunity, to which aspiring young men are summoned, the modern metropolis is also the place of temptation. Against the allure of urban fleshpots and easy wealth, hard work becomes a form of protection, thus weaving another strand into the ethic of salvation through work. Useful toil, the counterpart of shrewd speculation, appears simultaneously as virtuous in itself, as the legitimate means of social mobility, and as an instrument for control over the passions.

Within the dichotomous moral economy, concrete, productive labor is situated outside of and defined as antagonistic to what then appear as the

more abstract, negative forces of capitalism. But the dichotomy of concrete and abstract forces is a notoriously slippery operator. Specifications of the scheme in U.S. history have united groups that could be divided (for instance, small farmers with big industrialists) and divided others that could be united (blue-collar workers from "paper-pushing," white-collar employees). From the Jacksonian "laboring classes," to the populist "producing classes," to the contemporary neopopulist concepts of the "working man" and "working woman" (Halle 1984), we seem to be confronted with what Moïshe Postone (1980) identified as expressions of capitalist discontent that leave capitalism intact.

At the other pole of success mythology, a certain quality of abstractness is celebrated rather than condemned. The archetypal comic success hero is a distinctive type of common man. Less fixated and compulsive than his industrious cousin, he is a trickster who succeeds through cunning, duplicity, and the artful manipulation of images. Speech is his instrument of control, and its "smoothness" typifies the style of individualism that he practices.

With his shrewd opportunism and his disrespect for tradition, the antebellum trickster expressed a sense of new possibilities in a period of rapid social change. Emancipated from collective moral control, the comic hero of Jacksonian popular theater roved freely across the mythical spaces of opportunity known as New York and California, inviting audiences to marvel at his skill in the art of dissimulation. These transforming heroes prefigure the modern sense of the self as a construct for individuals to invent in performances. According to Donald Meyer, they taught their audience, or—to be more precise—its male members, "that all identities were masks, and that freedom grew therefore in the ability to present as many of them as possible" (1987:256).

I would add that by the time this lesson gained wide acceptance, its liberating potential had been largely absorbed and defused. If the concept of the performing self had origins in popular antebellum comedy, its future was tied to the growth of the professional and managerial classes. Over the twentieth century, an older delight in image-making would be incorporated into the bureaucratic and consumption ethics that legitimize late capitalist society.

CORPORATE SHAPE-CHANGERS

If the creation of the consumer society eroded the ethic of self-denial, the bureaucratization of work dramatically altered the social conditions of mobility and success. Beginning in the mid-1800s and gathering force in this century, bureaucratization transformed the American middle classes from small producers into white-collar employees dependent on large organizations. Within these organizations the new work force was hierarchically divided. At the top there grew up an internally stratified, overwhelmingly male class of salaried managers and professionals; at the bottom bureaucracy required an ever-increasing clerical labor force which came to be and remains dominated by women.

The cultural consequences of these massive changes in the organization of work have interested historians and sociologists for decades, and a considerable literature exists on the occupational cultures of modern bureaucratic corporations.² Central to my concern with success mythology is the position developed most fully by Robert Jackall in his important study of corporate managers (1988). Jackall shows in fine detail how bureaucracy strikes at the very core of the old work ethic by breaking the connection between work and reward. Under the semi-patrimonial conditions of corporate bureaucracies, advancement after a certain point depends less on specific skills or achievements than on a multifaceted ability to please and impress those with power (Jackall 1988:11-12; Kanter 1977:73-74). Work alone does not confer success in the bureaucratic world; one's superiors must also appreciate the work one does, and this requires adroit self-presentation. For the aspiring corporate executive, the main task is to make oneself appear as one of the elect in the regard of others, by projecting the well-staged impression at the well-timed moment.

In this distinctive version of the Protestant ethic, mastery of the techniques of image management is essential (Jackall 1988:193, 203). The persistence of egalitarian rhetoric within hierarchical organizations gives rise to a distinctive form of bureaucratic practice in which participants are required

² C. Wright Mills's 1950 classic *White Collar* is a key text for my viewpoint on bureaucratization. Subsequent studies that draw on and extend Mills's insights into the culture of corporate bureaucracies include Bensman and Vidich 1971, Kanter 1977, and Jackall 1988. On the psychological dimensions of corporate life see Maccoy 1976, Lasch 1979, and Bartz 1982.

to mask the authority relations they enact. Thus one should defer to a superior without appearing deferential, while the valued style for superiors is friendly and open, without loss of authority. External appearance and overall manner also contribute to making the right impression. Speech, dress, and bearing should convey a sense of poised ease, a quiet, relaxed self-confidence that distinguishes those at or bound for the top. In this managerial version of aristocratic style, disarming charm, cosmopolitan taste, and sophisticated wit enhance the crucial abilities to handle situations and people with agility and finesse (Jackall 1988:46-59). Whether it is a matter of smoothly shifting blame onto a co-worker or of enacting frankness at precisely the right juncture in a dialogue, mastery of the dominant social style is an indispensable asset.

Where image displaces essence, one learns to manage appearances with unflinching vigilance. What matters is how closely one can transform oneself to meet the organizational ideal, and this requires relentless self-scrutiny and a capacity for self-rationalization (Jackall 1988:59-61). Within the terms of the bureaucratic ethic, the largely implicit rules for survival and success in corporate bureaucracies, spontaneity of any sort is strictly proscribed, while an ability to mask subjective responses behind a public face is studiously cultivated and regularly rewarded.³ At the bottom of corporate hierarchies, white-collar workers in nondiscretionary positions may experience their public faces as something imposed from above, in the form of dress codes or prescribed behavioral styles. Toward the top, however, the masking ability is subjectively empowering. Jackall succinctly conveys the managerial perspective:

For them (corporate managers), the issue is not a reluctant donning of masks but rather a mastery of the social rules that prescribe which mask to wear on which occasion. (1988:46)

Earlier studies missed the self-consciousness and intentionality with which business bureaucrats adopt the various masks they wear. When these trends first came under sociological scrutiny in the 1950s, they tended to be read as indexes of the decline of individualism.⁴ Perhaps more fundamen-

³ The quasi-narcissistic corporate type that Michael MacCoby (1976) identifies as the "gamesman" would seem to represent an extreme form of a general tendency.

⁴ The best-known statements of this position are Riesman 1950 and Whyte 1956.

tally, the cultural equation of self-reliance and candor with masculinity brought the very manhood of the organization man into question. Deferential and self-effacing in the presence of superiors, obliged to rely on charm, seduction, and deceit, the dependent bureaucratic employee appeared to social critics to have assumed the feminine position.

Mass cultural representations reinforced that impression. Corporate shape-changers first appeared in movies and television as spineless, emasculated victims of bureaucratic humiliation, who served to identify masculinity with old-fashioned integrity and self-reliance. But the manly individualism of traditional paternal authorities had an increasingly nostalgic appeal. Such figures could not defuse the widely perceived crisis of middle-class masculinity in a bureaucratized society. Overdetermined by the seductive pressures of consumerism, by the therapeutic culture's assault on adult authority within the family, by the challenge to patriarchy embodied in the women's movement, and by America's loss of political hegemony, the problem of masculine identity escalated over the 1960s and 1970s.

Hollywood experimented in the 1970s with sensitive, responsive men who took on culturally feminine traits and learned to limit their ambitions. But since the return of pride in the 1980s, both the old paternal heroes and their sensitive sons have been superseded by another type. Boyish and determined, this new hero asserts his masculinity through practiced duplicity rather than manly candor or honest labor, and his ambition is unadulterated by any feminine traits that he may assume. Descended from the comic tradition of the transforming hero, proliferating variants of the type provide models of how to succeed as a man in an overorganized world.

Like his generic antecedents, the contemporary trickster combines skill at shape-changing with a playful disrespect for authority. In a common plot structure that I abstracted from a set of popular comedies about corporate success (Traube 1989), a middle-class hero rises to the top through disguise, deceit, and seductive charm. Authority is represented in the plot as either oppressive or ineffectual, and the hero's apparent project is to cast off all restraints on desire, internal as well as external ones. As the plot unfolds, however, the corporate world that will assimilate his boyish individualism is constructed as a properly empowered authority, personified in a fun-loving, benevolent parental figure. Rebellion, in short, becomes a form of accommodation to corporate society.

Embodied in blockbusters such as *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986) and *Big* (1988), and in other well-received comedies including *The Secret of My Success* (1987), this pattern governed the success stories produced at the height of the Reagan era. Political elites might celebrate the entrepreneur as frontier hero, but Hollywood tailored its products for young audiences embarked on corporate careers. With their seductive charm, verbal dexterity, and mastery over their public faces, comic tricksters provide a narrative lesson in the dominant social style. But what makes the lesson at once compelling and ambiguous is the antiauthoritarian fantasy with which it is condensed. The hyperrebellious, defiant style of the heroes also appeals to popular ambivalence toward bureaucracy, and specifically, to social anxiety over gender identity in white-collar workplaces.

Any commercially successful cultural commodity constructs multiple if not unlimited positions from which it can be meaningfully viewed, and reception is likely to vary along lines of class as well as gender. For upper-middle-class audiences, already positioned to experience image manipulation as empowering, the films construct bureaucratic seduction as a positively valued style for men, while simultaneously discouraging its cultivation by women, whose career ambitions are ritually tarred in the basic plot. On the other hand, I suspect that lower-middle-class male audiences may ignore the "pedagogical" message and seek gratification in the antiauthoritarian fantasy of masculine defiance. What this suggests is that cultural commodities produced for maximal profit take on a differential and differentiating ideological function. In this case, they educate some segments of their audience in the requirements for corporate success, while systematically miseducating others.⁵

An explicit and less successful type of pedagogy was attempted in a film that made its seductive, masculine shape-changer into a villain, Oliver Stone's *Wall Street* (1987). An intended return to the counterradition of moderate success through honest labor, *Wall Street* presents itself as an attack on the abstract from the standpoint of the concrete. Yet such appeal as the film has emanates from the supposedly negative dimension of capitalism personified in Michael Douglas's Gordon Gekko, the dazzling, dynamic corporate takeover artist who knows how to turn illusion into reality.

⁵ I am grateful to Bruce Greenwald for drawing my attention to the ways in which these films may miseducate their audiences.

Douglas's performance (which won the film's only major Oscar) overpowers the plot. It is as if a transformer from the other pole of success mythology had somehow wandered into a cautionary tale and then proceeded to wreck it, as easily as Gekko wrecks the companies he buys. Gekko's potency is marked by the very multiplicity of the forces arrayed against him. Under his magnetic influence, Bud Fox, an ambitious broker, played by Charlie Sheen, succumbs to the temptation of easy, unlimited wealth. But at every step in Bud's descent, a stern, symptomatically mixed crew calls him back to the moral ideal of productive labor. There is Bud's father (played by Martin Sheen), a hard-working, relentlessly honest airline machinist who hopes that jail will teach his son to value creativity over the easy buck. He has a counterpart at Bud's firm, a pious stockbroker played by Hal Holbrook, reprising his Abe Lincoln role. The broker lectures Bud interminably on such fundamentals as the (fetishized) danger of money (it "makes you do things you don't want to do"), the importance of "character" (it keeps man from the "abyss"), and the true role of the stock market (to create jobs by enriching industry). Finally, there is Gekko's opponent within his own sphere, a responsible speculator who buys companies to build rather than to destroy them.

One effect of these redundant dichotomies is to void even the one-sided critique of capitalism of any critical social content. The film celebrates a composite class of industrious producers who share a moral orientation toward work, which in principle is available to all occupations, including speculators such as Gekko. Still another effect of the redundancy is to reduce poor Bud Fox to an utterly abject position, hemmed in by moralizing paternal authorities. If the comic transforming heroes evoke a pleasure-ego breaking free of controls, in *Wall Street* the superego returns with a vengeance, to preach a distrust of conspicuous consumption more consistent with the Carter seventies than the Reagan eighties.

Considering the combined clout of its stars and its hot, Oscar-winning director, *Wall Street* was a disappointment at the box office. Even in the wake of the stock-market crash, audiences seem to have been largely indifferent to the film's patriarchal call for moral restraint. Subsequent productions, however, have more successfully reintroduced the theme of moral discipline into success stories. The formula turns out to be simple: identify the dangerous, uncontrolled forces loose in society with the independent, upper-middle-class, professional-managerial woman.

A JOB FOR WORKING MEN AND WOMEN

Peter Biskind and Barbara Ehrenreich (1987) connect the intensification of the middle-class masculinity crisis in the late 1970s to Hollywood's re-discovery of the working-class world as a subject for major films. In the context of intensifying corporate domination and unsettled gender roles, they argue, the patriarchal, male-bonded, ethnic, blue-collar community was constructed as a locus of defiant masculinity, which could then be evaluated in two ways. Attacked and repudiated in liberal films such as *Saturday Night Fever*, spectacular working-class masculinity was romanticized in the conservative *Rocky I and II*, and used as a standpoint for condemnation of an overpermissive society. In both cases, however, by associating working-class masculinity with ethnic neighborhoods, the films marked it as something vestigial and destined to pass away.

When working-class heroes reappeared in the 1980s, they had lost that vestigial quality. No longer confined to ethnic neighborhoods, the new working-class characters operate in the heart of middle-class society, from Beverly Hills to New York City, where the patriarchal virtues they incarnate are urgently required.

Two films in particular, both released late in 1988, found receptive audiences for their stories of working-class success. *Working Girl*, a comedy directed by Mike Nichols, stars Melanie Griffith, Sigourney Weaver, and Harrison Ford. The film opened to generally favorable reviews and, amidst sporadic grumblings over its sexism, was even nominated for several major Oscars. The film also did well at the box office. It stayed among the top ten films for over two months, and grossed over \$62 million in eighteen weeks in release. Whereas *Working Girl* was directed primarily at adult women, *Cocktail*, starring Tom Cruise, was a late-summer release for the teenage audience, primarily boys. Panned by the critics, Australian director Roger Donaldson's moral tale about the struggles of a young bartender became the ninth top-grossing film released in 1988, with a total domestic gross of \$77 million.

At first glance, these two films seem poles apart. *Working Girl* is a self-consciously liberal comedy that identifies upward mobility with personal emancipation. It politely but firmly rebukes working-class males for patriarchal oppression, while celebrating the liberated, cosmopolitan life-style that its heroine assimilates. In *Cocktail*, by contrast, urban society is depicted as

decadent and attacked in frankly sexist, neoconservative terms, while the patriarchal working-class family appears as the source of moral restraint.

Yet *Working Girl* is in some respects the closer of the two films to the conservative, moralistic tradition. Horatio Alger himself would approve of Tess McGill, the spunky, hardworking, congenitally honest secretary played by Melanie Griffith. Tess shares many qualities with Alger's boy heroes, such as compliance, obedience, and willingness to serve powerful men and submit to bourgeois norms.

What Alger would make of Cruise's Brian Flannagan is another matter. On the surface, *Cocktail* tells the story of Brian's rescue from a dissolute life-style and his domestication through marriage. Alger could only applaud the film's resolution, yet he might justifiably protest that the lad demonstrates none of the disciplinary virtues in the story that the film relates. Brian's languid struggle upward involves seductive charm, predatory sexuality, and a series of increasingly defiant rebellions against male authorities. There seems to have been a chiasmus between the poles of the myth. Thus the quality of submissiveness attaches to a comic transformer, while the industrious moral hero takes on the rebellious style.

THE SECRETARY AND THE BOSS FROM HELL

Working Girl's Tess McGill has a twofold problem. On the one hand, she must free herself from a warm and solidary but restrictive working-class community, with its norm of feminine deference to masculine desires. On the other hand, she reenacts the immigrant journey (as the establishing shots of New York harbor remind us), setting out each day on the Staten Island ferry to toil as a secretary in a Wall Street investment firm. Intelligent and industrious (she has a night-school degree in marketing and takes speech classes to upgrade her image), she is stuck at the bottom of a white-collar bureaucracy, as indifferent to mere merit as it is to hard-won, second-rate credentials.

Tess must also deal with sexual objectification at home and in the workplace. This is a film that tries, with its head if not with its heart, to treat the working-class characters with a measure of sympathy. Mick Dugan (Alec Baldwin), Tess's tattooed, blue-collar boyfriend, is not a bad fellow. We may assume that he genuinely cares for Tess in his way, which is simply as limited as his taste in lingerie. Nevertheless, when the film cuts from a bed-

room scene between Mick and Tess to a limo where Tess must fend off a sleazy manager, it connects Mick's kinky working-class sensuality to more brutal forms of sexual exploitation.

Tess demonstrates in the limo scene that she is not *that* kind of "working girl," a point that the film visually undercuts. With their elaborately teased hair, heavy eye makeup, and short, tight skirts, the secretaries are made to look like hookers, as Pauline Kael observed (1989:81). Tess, however, takes prompt revenge on the low-level steazoid pimp of a boss who had tried to set her up. The scene in which she teletypes her assessment of his manhood for all the office to read is wonderfully gratifying and endears her to audiences. It also tells us quite a lot about Tess's future in a bureaucracy. Consider how a shape-changer might have handled a similar situation. Ferris Bueller, for example, or Branley Foster of *The Secret of My Success* would easily have manipulated the computer technology in such a way as to humiliate their superiors without exposing themselves to retribution. Compared to these more advanced types, Tess is clearly a beginner in the art of defiance.

Class and gender conspire to keep her honest, even when she dabbles in disguise. *Working Girl* employs a variant of the device used in *Secret*, a parody of the bureaucratic ethic wherein reliance on hard work and achievement is exchanged for image manipulation. Tess only resorts to trickery upon discovering that her new boss, a patrician executive named Katherine Parker (Sigourney Weaver), has stolen her business idea. In retaliation, when Katherine is confined by a skiing accident, Tess takes over her office, wardrobe, and executive style.

For Tess the masquerade is an ongoing struggle against dispositions rooted in her female working-class habitus. Repeatedly in the film, she temporarily loses her confidence and poise, as when she almost faints upon hearing that the cocktail dress she is about to don cost \$6000. While there is a certain realism to Tess's uncertainty, this is after all comedy, where fluid shape-changing expresses a spirit of freedom. That spirit, as Donald Meyer reminds us (1987:559), has long excluded women, and Tess is the exception who proves the rule. Embarked on a new career as "a total imposter," she is recurrently restabilized, fixed in identities other than those she seeks to assume.

Consider the outcome of her ill-fated choice of the cocktail dress for a business party where she hopes to make professional contacts. It indeed at-

tracts the notice of Jack Trainer (Harrison Ford), the investment banker whom she wants to meet, but where Tess had anticipated a professional encounter between colleagues, she is instead converted into the object of the masculine gaze. Says the admiring Jack to Tess:

You're the first woman I've met at one of these goddam parties who dresses like a woman and not like a woman thinks a man would dress if he were a woman.

With the sure instincts of the gamesman, Jack automatically conceals his identity from Tess, the better, as he admits later, to direct their interaction away from "acquisitions and mergers" and toward "lust and tequila." To this strategy, which quite confounds her own, Tess can offer only passive resistance. Having taken some of Katherine's Valium to calm her nerves, she gets smashed on the tequila, confides to Jack that she has "a head for business and a bod for sin," and then passes out in a cab, obliging him to carry her up the stairs to his minimalist brownstone apartment and put her gently to bed.

The distance Tess will traverse is thus clearly circumscribed. Still an object to voyeuristic men, she has found in Jack a more nurturant and refined voyeur, one who sublimates his passion in aesthetic contemplation of her sleeping form and who combines masculine business skills with a quasi-maternal capacity for nurturance.

Tess's awkward attempts at self-transformation contrast with the polished performance of the true shape-changer, who is, of course, none other than Katherine herself. Katherine's smooth, manipulative style is precisely what Tess lacks, but Tess is not alone. In other workplace comedies, the negatively marked career women are extensions of powerful, high-status men on whom they depend for direction and purpose. Usually, such women are liberated by the heroes, which is to say, they shift their allegiances to more charming masters. Katherine, however, is a more predatory seductress. She is under no one's protection and is not the extension of any male ego. A free agent, she dispassionately includes sex among the resources at her disposal for controlling others, including Jack.

The device used to get Katherine out of the way interacts oddly with the character initially established. From the moment that Katherine prepares for her skiing trip, the film directs attention away from her managerial skills and onto her privileged, upper-class background. When she speaks German on the phone to an innkeeper, it is as if the film expects us to resent her cos-

mopolitanism, and the resentful, disapproving tone intensifies after the accident. Peculiarly unpleasant scenes portray Katherine in a hospital room, surrounded by lascivious doctors and festive patients, apparently reveling in her forced recruitment into the leisure class.

Onto the character of the scheming career woman these scenes superimpose another familiar type, the spoiled rich girl or society lady. Detached from the corporate workplace, where impeccable self-control is one of her prime assets, Katherine abruptly metamorphoses into a self-indulgent, decadent pleasure-seeker, languishing in the hospital while Tess and Jack busily promote an important deal.

Katherine's regression into hedonism is only temporary, but it introduces into the story the old moralistic critique of decadent leisure. Additional images of upper-class excess are provided later on, when Tess and Jack crash the lavish and oddly tasteless wedding of the daughter of a wealthy industrialist. Janet Maslin (in a generally favorable review) and Pauline Kael (in a hostile one) both criticize this scene for making the society people look unnecessarily foolish. What they do not go on to observe is that Tess and Jack proceed almost immediately from the wedding to a business meeting with the industrialist Oren Trask (Philip Bosco). Here, in Trask's offices, everything is dignified, stately, and refined. However nouveau the wedding may have appeared, walnut-paneled walls, gilt molding, oil paintings, and marble stairs bespeak old wealth and an atmosphere of quiet, sober productivity.

Upper-class society, in other words, is once more split, this time into degraded leisured women and honest industrious men. Unlike the first wave of 1980s success comedies, *Working Girl* rejects the fun-loving rich of the screwball tradition, who legitimize a spirit of release. Instead, it condemns idle play and reserves its approval for the hardworking plutocrat with a heart of gold, a type reminiscent of Frank Capra's comic fantasies (Sklar 1975:207).

Tess's alliance with Trask is anticipated in the film's title, with its allusion to the ideology of productive labor. The business deal that Tess masters reminds obliges Trask to limit his ambitions and subordinate profit to such values as stability and security. But *Working Girl* handles its economic morality more circumspectly than did *Wall Street*. Whereas *Wall Street* personifies the dichotomy between destructive and productive capitalism in

contrastive styles of masculinity, in *Working Girl* the dichotomy is displaced onto oppositions between unrestrained and restrained women.

Whatever its manifest purpose, Tess's alliance with Trask is contracted against women of the dominant class. Tess is the film's condensed, wishful substitute for Trask's empty-headed daughter and for the overambitious executive woman. Less frivolous and extravagant than the one, more docile and compliant than the other, the dutiful girl from the working class will diffuse an imagined threat of female power.

Tess remains an indifferent shape-changer to the end. Self-effacing, deferential, conscientious, and remorseful, she is limited by dispositions rooted in class, gender, and social trajectory. Although somewhat diluted as the plot unfolds, these dispositions are never shed and they position her in relation to the elite characters, with their staged self-confidence and public appearance of relaxed ease. Like Alger's heroes, Tess achieves moderate success through the intervention of a paternal protector. Whatever promise may be held out for the future, it is hard to imagine her rising to the top. The qualities attributed to her in the film qualify her for relatively low-level, low-discretionary managerial positions, the very positions which, as Rosabeth Kanter found (1977:55), women in corporate bureaucracies are more likely to occupy.

Katherine, who has the qualifications for a top-echelon position, is blocked and expelled, the manifest cause being her duplicitous professional conduct. But the film inadvertently exposes itself when it converts the corporate gameswoman into a decadent and aggressive hedonist. After the accident, Katherine's predatory sexuality ceases to be one resource among many and appears instead as her life project. With her leg perpetually rigid in its cast, she snatches at flirtatious doctors and comes close to raping a terrified Jack. Oddly, the film's only explicit reference to motherhood comes at this juncture, when Katherine alludes by way of a proposal to her biological clock. But when she makes a grab for Jack's pants, gleefully asking if "Big Jack" can "come out to play," her transformation into the castrating pre-odipal mother is complete.

"The secretary and the boss from hell" was one of the publicity slogans for *Working Girl*, and, albeit in a comic register, the film participates in the demonization of the independent woman more graphically effected in *Fatal Attraction*. Generated out of reawakened infantile fears of being under female power, the fantasy of the demonic woman splits female sexuality into

what then appear as lawful and unlawful forms, represented in *Working Girl* by Tess and Katherine. Not the least of the film's achievements is to have transposed the joyously sensual and erotic Melanie Griffith into a "good," passively sexual oedipal daughter, while turning Weaver into a version of the monstrous female sexuality that she herself defeated as the Rambette of *Aliens*.

Katherine's defeat in *Working Girl* comes in fairy-tale form, through the motif of the false bride. Tested for knowledge she does not possess, she is exposed and expelled like the witches in the tales. Witches decisively lose their shape-changing abilities at such junctures and stand revealed as what they really are, fixed in their dreadful, devouring rage. Katherine was originally to have played out her affinity with the witch. In the film script she is last seen "losing it" in the elevator, "with a mighty wail, a gnashing of teeth, cursing the fates and pounding the walls."

In the narrative logic from which that vision proceeds, Katherine personifies the danger of the early mother, against which the law of the father, personified in Trask, appears as the necessary and legitimate resolution. In fairy tales, the exposed witches are usually put in spiked barrels, which are rolled down mountain slopes or dragged through the streets by white horses. *Working Girl* settles for a more symbolic phallic punishment. It is inspired by Tess, who, in the heat of anger, makes reference to Katherine's "bony ass." Trask subsequently appropriates the insult, and his authority lends it potency. He uses it not merely to drive Katherine out, but as a metonymic transformer that first deprives her of her dangerous, seductive sexuality and then forces her to regress further to the purely destructive monster we were to have glimpsed. However the decision was made to cut this scene, its absence opens up a small space for resisting the narrative logic. Without that image to provide closure, the expulsion scene may be received as excessively cruel. Upper-middle-class women, in particular, could conceivably identify with the abused but outwardly graceful and defiant Katherine, and proceed to separate her from the projected threat.

The film's final image depends on the sense of a threat contained. It is a shot of Tess, seen through the window of her new executive office, while on the soundtrack Carly Simon and a women's choir burst into exultant song. As the camera draws back, the office is revealed as a tiny box, in the middle of a skyscraper containing row upon row of identical boxes. Debate over whether or not any irony is intended here seems to me to miss the

point. At one level, the rows of offices suggest that corporate society, like the frontier of old, provides unlimited opportunities for industrious citizens.⁶ At the same time, the shot of middle-level offices appeals, I suggest, to anxieties over unlimited ambition in women. In the image of the woman successfully contained within a corporate bureaucracy, the film offers its ideal solution to the imagined threat of female power.

THE DEFIANT ONE

Yet another version of the success myth is whipped up in *Cocktail*, a frothy blend of misogyny, homophobia, right-populist resentment, and antifeminist views of male nature. Dispensing with the pseudo-liberationist appeal of *Working Girl*, *Cocktail* claims to be about the loss and recovery of moral restraint. That, however, is not the main thrust of the story it actually tells.

The film opens on a rural highway, somewhere in the West, where a car filled with boisterous young men is in pursuit of a bus. Brian Flannagan, the film's sometimes less-than-noble young savage, has just been discharged from the army. Freed from disciplinary controls, he longs "to be wild again," the soundtrack informs us. He is heading for New York City to make his fortune, in the tradition of self-made men.

We soon learn that Brian is a local boy, born and raised in a run-down, ethnic, blue-collar neighborhood in Queens. His uncle, Pat Devine, owns a neighborhood tavern, to which Brian returns for a brief visit and some quick character establishment. It is the standard meeting between youthful vigor and senescent authority. Pat incarnates the surly, ascetic virtues that would have enabled his own ascent to the lower middle class. A miser whose strategy for accumulation is never to buy a drink, he illustrates Pierre

⁶ From this perspective the image can be inscribed in a history of attempts to adapt the ethic of success in the frontier myth to new socioeconomic conditions. This was the problem that Abraham Lincoln sought to resolve through his theory of free labor. According to Lincoln, free labor was "the just and generous, and prosperous system, which opens the way for all—gives hope to all, and energy, and progress, and improvement of condition to all. If any continue through life in the condition of the hired laborer, it is not the fault of the system, but because of either a dependent nature which prefers it, or improvidence, folly, or singular misfortune" (cited in Slotkin 1986:218). Albert Sussman's argument that success in corporate society is reduced from becoming an employer to rising to a middle-management position, the ideological necessity remains the same: to represent the system as capable of rewarding industrious individuals.

Bourdieu's definition of the petit bourgeois as "a proletarian who makes himself small to become bourgeois" (1984:338). His function in the narrative is to characterize the world that Brian wants to leave as a place antagonistic to pleasure and in need of revitalization.

The city, however, proves inhospitable to Brian's dreams. Although he is well supplied with easy self-confidence and charm, he is barred from the corporate world by unresponsive personnel officers, many of them black or female, who one by one advise him to go back to school. Intending to acquire educational capital, Brian wanders into another type of story. Set not in overbureaucratized offices but in shiny palaces of consumption, this story presents the city in its other guise, as the corrupt and corrupting place of temptation.

Brian is initiated into the ways of this other city by Doug Coughlin, head bartender in an Upper East Side nightclub where Brian takes a part-time job. Coughlin is typed from the outset as the ambitious but cynical and dissolute Irishman. His character is a blend of class resentment, misogyny, and machismo. A poor man's Gordon Gekko, Coughlin espouses the hustler's version of success without labor. New York is the center of action for both characters, but in Coughlin's scheme of things the "investors" are women and the capital to be deployed is predatory sexuality, whether his own or Brian's.

Officially, the film disapproves of Coughlin's easy way to wealth, and it will punish him severely, in due course. Nevertheless, it also shows us middle-class pleasure-seeking through his eyes. The world that turned Brian away returns to him and us transmuted by Coughlin's resentment, revealed in all its effete decadence. In this nocturnal world of the film's imagination, hostile men snarl at the bartenders and watch jealously over their female companions, whose eyes are riveted on the real men behind the bar. Women predominate among the clientele. Their lurching steps and uncontrolled bodies, repeatedly captured by the camera, accentuate the poised precision of the bartenders, who stand erect and self-contained against the flow.

The film has concocted one of Hollywood's more creative images of spectacular working-class masculinity. In what must pass as the film's high moments, Cruise and Brown display their prowess, whipping the crowds into frenzy with performances that evoke a male striptease. They toss their glasses and blender containers into the air in perfect unison, twist and shake

to the blaring music, and pivot from the customers back to face each other, proudly twirling their bottles.

The plot, however, requires our hero to struggle against the ethic of pleasure that he visually enacts. Positioned between an ascetic work ethic, represented by Uncle Pat, and the dream of easy riches that Coughlin holds out, Brian searches for a middle path. To find it proves difficult. Brian's plan for success is repeatedly revised as the film unfolds, its content becoming ever more elusive in the process.

Initially, he submits to rules imposed from above. He enrolls in a business program, intending to bring himself to the point where Tess already is when her movie begins. But Brian's good intentions are obstructed by an arrogant and domineering professor. When this petty tyrant belittles the students, Brian rebels and brings his brief college career to an end. His defiant nature drives him away from the ascetic pole of industrious work and back toward the pole of rapid success, where Coughlin is waiting.

Brian, however, does not capitulate at once. Abandoning his aspiration to a corporate career, he comes up with a new entrepreneurial scheme in which he and Coughlin will start their own business. This, of course, takes money, and here the film devises a truly ingenious, not to mention photographic version of the work ethic. Brian's brainstorm is that the two of them should go down to Jamaica, where they can live cheaply, earn vast sums as bartenders, and accumulate the capital they need within a few seasons.

For Coughlin, this is still too slow and industrious. Moreover, for reasons that remain opaque, he disapproves of Brian's new girlfriend, a well-to-do journalist. To prove that she is nothing but "an assembly line hump," he seduces her himself, and their friendship collapses. According to an outraged Brian, Coughlin has violated the sacred code of male loyalty, which in this film is reduced to one proscription, not to sleep with your buddy's woman. "Where I come from," says Brian, "you don't do things like that to your friends."

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Coughlin has violated an even more weighty taboo. His hostility toward the woman is undermotivated, unless it is read as jealous homoerotic rage. This, I submit, the film invites us to do, both through its plotline, in which Coughlin twice disrupts Brian's relationships with women, and through its visual imagery. Women interested in Brian are repeatedly seen from Coughlin's point of view, fixed in

his cold, suspicious gaze. If this interpretation of Coughlin is correct, Brian's angry departure for Jamaica should be read as a homophobic flight.

A dissolve signifies miles and years passing. Part two opens on a Jamaican beach, where Brian works in a posh outdoor bar, to the accompaniment of a lilting Caribbean soundtrack. Coughlin appears as a man of leisure. He has risen to become the husband of a wealthy woman, whom the film hastily types as a promiscuous bitch.

Despite himself, Brian is impressed. His own progress has been slow. He keeps a "how to succeed" manual behind the bar, but in this idyllic atmosphere his entrepreneurial dreams have gone on hold. The funds he had hoped to accumulate are dissipated in the pursuit of nocturnal pleasures, and Brian is increasingly afraid that he may be stuck in his bartender station.

Complicating the picture is his romance with Jordan Mooney (Elisabeth Shue), the poor, struggling artist who is really a Park Avenue princess in disguise. Their budding relationship provides the occasion for a montage of exotic island locales that contributes greatly to the film's glossy look. Plotwise, the romance serves to remind us of Brian's still-untamed nature, which recoils at Jordan's domestic chatter.

As before, Coughlin is on hand to tempt Brian away from responsibility. Coughlin taunts Brian with being a congenital worker and bets him that he can't hustle an elegant upper-class woman who is sitting at the bar. Brian wins the bet, loses the good girl, and wins the affections of the other woman. She turns out to be the owner of a successful import business in which Brian hopes to make his fortune. Freed at last from his commitment to autonomous achievement, he returns to New York as a kept man.

Narration in what David Bordwell calls the classical Hollywood film encourages specific spectatorial activities. By what Bordwell refers to as the "primacy effect," first impressions of a character provide the basis for expectations across the film. They invite us to code departures as temporary deviations and to anticipate that vagrants will return in the resolution to the path from which they have strayed (Bordwell et al. 1985:37-38). As a film in the classical style, *Cocktail* never leaves Brian's recovery in doubt. What needs specifying is the nature of the self to which he returns.

The achievement of a narrative resolution in the film has little to do with the manifest opposition between workers and hustlers. Although the surface plot requires Brian to learn the value of work and moderation, no such lesson is provided. As the plot approaches resolution, the film's economics

grow increasingly vague. In Jamaica, Brian broods over his inability to save money. Back in New York, when he finally proposes to the pregnant Jordan, he tells her that with the money he has saved plus a loan from Uncle Pat, he now has enough to start his own business. Perhaps so, but his alleged achievement of self-discipline has gone on entirely off camera.

What is revived and celebrated in the film's concluding sequences is Brian's quality of rebellious defiance. After a predictably brief stint as a managerial woman's lapdog, he recovers the wildness, purity, and natural vigor attributed to him in the film's opening, and he revolts against male representatives of the dominant classes. These include a sneering artist, who doubles for the tyrannical professor, and Brian's most formidable adversary, Mr. Mooney, Jordan's father.

Mooney is a composite of the class enemy and the persecutory oedipal father. He lives in elite surroundings, a Park Avenue penthouse, complete with hardwood floors, piano, antique settees, and original artworks. His casual clothes hint at country leisure, which would be the film's idea of upper-class taste. He treats Brian with aristocratic contempt for the fortune hunter, expressed in the cutting tone of a harsh father belittling a pretentious boy. With his imperious attitude, Mooney represents hierarchical class distinctions that appear to be collapsing. He is portrayed as an evil king who locks the princess away in a tower, guarded by ogreish doormen, whom he must repeatedly rebuke for negligence. In this world where authority is at once repressive and ineffectual, the very precautions that Mooney must take signify his inability to control his bohemian daughter.

What separates Brian from Coughlin is not their respective attitudes toward work, but their responses to authoritarian men of the dominant social classes. Brian's rebellious defiance of Mooney underlines what, in the film's terms, is wrong with Coughlin's strategy. Coughlin seeks to bypass the dominant males and obtain access to wealth and power through females. This, however, perpetuates and intensifies what the film defines as a social crisis, a crisis of patriarchal control among the upper classes.

In Jamaica, Coughlin tells Brian that, thanks to his wife, he no longer needs to "steal the key" to mobility and success. Back in New York, he discovers that he was wrong. Without that key, Coughlin is swiftly unmaned. Unable to control either his wife's money or her sexuality, bankrupt and cuckolded, the fortune hunter dies by his own hand. He pays the price

generically exacted of the fallen woman, whose narrative role he has usurped.

Coughlin's death sends Brian storming back to Mooney's apartment, to steal the key as well as the woman. He almost literally wrests Jordan out of her father's arms, thus decisively separating himself from Coughlin, and carries her away to Uncle Pat's tavern, where they celebrate their wedding. In a final scene that takes place in Brian's new establishment, a respectably festive crowd witnesses Jordan embracing her reproductive function (she has conceived twins) and a proud, domesticated Brian assuming the role of paternal provider. If he hints that he will be a disciplinarian to his daughters, we may be sure that he will also be a generous patriarch. With his last words, "Drinks are on the house," he firmly projects Uncle Pat's asceticism into the past.

What is striking is how two such different films as *Working Girl* and *Cocktail* arrive at closely related patriarchal resolutions. In both cases, however, it is an imagined threat of uncontrolled women that drives and legitimizes the authoritarian movement of the plots, but the contents of the respective patriarchal visions recognize their intended audiences in interesting ways.⁷ *Cocktail* was geared to the provincial tastes of lower-middle-class or "middle American" audiences. However, its neoconservative version of patriarchy selectively absorbs features of the consumer culture. Thus Brian, as the fully enabled paternal figure, fuses the repressive authority that Mooney no longer commands with the spirit of pleasure that Uncle Pat never had and that Coughlin had in excess. The most explicitly authoritarian of the commercially successful tales about success, even *Cocktail* dilutes its disciplinary message by associating it with the ethic of pleasure. However hardworking, sober, and chaste our redeemed hero may be, he is, after all, part of the service industry, in the business of marketing fun.

In *Working Girl*, aimed at more cosmopolitan, middle- to upper-middle-class urban tastes, the patriarchal vision receives a significant twist. In the process of exchanging Katherine for Tess, Jack progressively reveals a feminine side to his nature. As the man who claims to know better than women do just how a man would dress if he were a woman, Jack crosses dresses metaphorically throughout the film. On one occasion, he follows Tess into a women's restroom and nonchalantly uses the facilities, with no

⁷ Suggestions offered separately by Fred Pfeil and Arjun Appadurai are incorporated in the conclusion to this section.

trace of the embarrassment that she had exhibited when forced into the symmetrically transgressive position. Where Tess has no flair for transgression, Jack easily appropriates culturally female spaces and roles, in a manner reminiscent of Dustin Hoffman literally cross-dressing his way to success in *Tootsie*. Jack's "gentlemanly" treatment of Tess at their first meeting speaks a capacity for maternal nurturance which surfaces as the film unfolds. We last see him tenderly handing a child's lunch pail to Tess, to sustain her on her first day at her new job.

Janice Radway has suggested that tender, nurturing male characters in popular romances are exercises in the transformation of masculinity to conform with female standards (1984:147). While this explanation may well hold for literature marketed almost exclusively for women, the appropriation of women's roles by men is now a widely distributed theme, familiar from Vietnam films to television sitcoms about male single parenting (Jeffords 1989:168-69). Viewed as part of a broad, patriarchal resurgence, the refined, upscale, nurturant masculinity imagined in *Working Girl* evokes the ultimate refuge from female power, a world where men can divide gender identities among themselves and need no longer depend on women even for their physical selves.

CONCLUSION

The independent woman as a demonological symbol is not an invention of 1980s Hollywood movies but a recurrent theme in American history, a specter that periodically returns to haunt cultural production. Michael Rogin has traced anxiety over fantasized female power through a variety of historical settings, including Indian removal, cold-war anti-Communism, and the Reagan presidency (1987).

Focusing on the discourse of the countersubversive political leader, Rogin shows how the political appeal is rooted in a diffuse sense of vulnerability and threat. Fear, in short, is what makes the message compelling, and fear of a certain general type: fear about sexual desire and bodily integrity, about change, flux, transition, about lost identities, uncertain boundaries, shifting and unstable roles. Such socially generated regressive fears may reawaken the psychosexual fantasy of the devouring, engulfing, pre-oidal mother. Thus it is that the represented triumph over hidden enemies and restoration of social order on the part of the political leader tends

to appear at the psychosexual level as the defeat of the dangerous early mother by the protective oedipal father.

Over the course of the Reagan era, cultural elites brought a specter of female power to the surface of mass cultural productions. The demonic woman appears most dramatically in adventure and horror films, such as *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984), *Aliens* (1986), and *Fatal Attraction* (1987). She is also, I suggest, the absent presence in the 1987 blockbuster comedy *Three Men and a Cradle*, a film that invites us to imagine a world without mothers. In this paper I have focused on her insertion into stories of mobility and success. My specific problem has been to elucidate how a critique of "permissiveness" articulated by the New Right has been absorbed into commercially successful mass cultural forms.⁸

In the second half of the 1980s, Hollywood filmmakers returned to the moralistic version of the success myth, which had seemed to have been superseded. Where the first wave of comic success stories revolved around the overthrow of disciplinary controls, *Wall Street*, *Working Girl*, and *Cocktail* appeal in their various ways to fears of moral breakdown and they assert the need for moral restraint. But the rhetoric of neoconservative elites, and the tradition from which it derives, were reworked in the pursuit of contemporary mass audiences. Instead of celebrating the values of work, self-denial, and repressive patriarchal authority, the films that struck a responsive chord concentrate on attacking the negative forces of excess projected onto women. Once women are constructed as the source of social problems, their expulsion offers an imaginary solution. Demonic women also create the narrative situation in which men can legitimately appropriate such feminine qualities as seductiveness and nurturance, in a sense offering themselves as substitutes for what is (wistfully) repudiated. It may be that the most enduring legacy of these films and of the Reagan era is to have brought together under the sign of the masculine a peculiar combination of disciplinary authority with the consumerist ethic of self-indulgence.

⁸ On the tense relationship between New Right ideology and the consumer culture see Ehrenreich 1987. Her argument is twofold. On the one hand, she argues that as the source of the "permissiveness" that the New Right condemns, the consumer culture is an obstacle to the envisioned restoration of traditional values (181-83). On the other hand, she suggests that part of the success of the New Right lies in its ability to deflect the diffuse resentments aroused by consumer dependency onto peripheral targets such as the "new-class" proponents of the welfare state and its beneficiaries among the poor (183-90).

Women's vulnerability to demonization is not directly attributable to pre-oedipal fantasies, as these can attach themselves to other disadvantaged groups. In our own period, the perception of woman as demonic other is mediated by interrelated social conditions, including the women's movement, changes in family structure, and the increased participation of women in the work force. To analyze these and other factors is beyond the scope of this paper. But the disturbing implication of the analysis presented here is that antifeminism has become a privileged discourse of popular discontent.

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The Averted Gaze in Iranian Postrevolutionary Cinema

Hamid Naficy

Iran has a long history of cinema. In fact, this year it celebrates its ninety-first year as a major producer of films in the Middle East. The first Iranian documentary was filmed in 1900; the first public theater opened in 1904; and the first feature film was released much later, in 1930. Despite this late start, however, the Iranian feature-film industry caught up and in the 1960s and 1970s, during the reign of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, produced a wide variety of films, many of which won awards and recognition in international film festivals. Many now-well-known Iranian directors made their names in this period (Naficy 1979, Issari 1989).

Anticinema feelings, however, run deep in Iran. Since its introduction into the country, cinema consistently has been condemned by religious-minded people as a morally offensive and ethically corrupting Western influence (Naficy 1991a). Many clerical leaders, however, have entertained the idea of supporting cinema only if it is not "misused," that is, if it is used ethically, to teach Islamic values.¹ According to them, the "correct" use of cinema is the adoption of it as an ideological apparatus to combat the Westernized Pahlavi culture and to usher in a so-called Islamic culture. It is no surprise, therefore, to witness the emergence of a new and vital cinema twelve years after the establishment of the Islamic government. Over the

¹ "We are not opposed to cinema, to radio, or to television. . . . The cinema is a modern invention that ought to be used for the sake of educating the people, but as you know, it was used instead to corrupt our youth. It is the misuse of cinema that we are opposed to, a misuse caused by the treacherous policies of our rulers." Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in his first speech upon returning to Iran in 1979 after fifteen years of exile; quoted in Naficy 1987:448.