

Title	Corporeal prisons: dynamics of body and mise-en-scène in three films by Paul Schrader
Authors	Murphy, Ian
Publication date	2015
Original Citation	Murphy, I. 2015. Corporeal prisons: dynamics of body and mise-en-scène in three films by Paul Schrader. PhD Thesis, University College Cork.
Type of publication	Doctoral thesis
Rights	© 2015, Ian Murphy. - http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/
Download date	2026-10-29 06:54:03
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/2086

**Corporeal Prisons:
Dynamics of Body and Mise-en-Scène in Three
Films by Paul Schrader**

Dissertation submitted in candidacy for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at
the School of English, College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences,
National University of Ireland, Cork

By

Ian Murphy

Under the Supervision of Doctor Gwenda Young

Head of School: Professor Claire Connolly

January 2015

Table of Contents

Declaration	3
Abstract	4
Acknowledgements	5
INTRODUCTION	6
CHAPTER ONE	
<u>Man in a Room: Male Anxiety and Mise-en-Scène in <i>American Gigolo</i> (1980)</u>	<u>26</u>
CHAPTER TWO	
<u>Beauty in the Beast: The Monstrous-Feminine and Masculine Projection in <i>Cat People</i> (1982)</u>	<u>88</u>
CHAPTER THREE	
<u>The Closed Crystal: Autoerotic Desire and the Prison of Narcissism in <i>Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters</i> (1985)</u>	<u>145</u>
CONCLUSION	209
WORKS CITED	217

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and it has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere.

Ian Murphy

Ian Murphy

Abstract

This thesis focuses on the complex relationship between representations of the human body and the formal processes of mise-en-scène in three consecutive films by the writer-director Paul Schrader: *American Gigolo* (1980), *Cat People* (1982) and *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters* (1985). While Schrader's work has typically been critiqued under the broad category of masculinity in crisis (and often as a subset of the films of his more famous long-time collaborator, Martin Scorsese), I focus on a five-year early period of his filmography when he sought to explore his key themes of bodily crisis, fragmentation and alienation through an unusually intense focus upon the expressive potential of film form, specifically via the combined elements of colour, lighting, camerawork and production design. By approaching these three films as corporeal character studies of troubled figures whose emotional and psychosexual neurosis is experienced in and through the body, I will locate Schrader's filmmaking process and style within the thematic and aesthetic contexts of both his own early film criticism and the European and Japanese art cinemas that he claims as his primary influence. In doing so, I will establish Schrader's position as a director whose literary and theological background differentiated him from his peers of the postclassical Hollywood generation, and who thus continually sought to develop his own visual literacy through his relationship with the camera and his collaborations with more overtly style-oriented film artists. But instead of merely focusing on mise-en-scène to gain a formalist appreciation of these films, I mobilise stylistic analysis as a new critical approach towards the problematic discourses of identity and embodiment that have haunted Schrader's career from the beginning. In particular, I argue that paying closer attention to Schrader's formal choices sheds new light on how these films – which he approached as exercises in style – repeatedly deal with the volatile and unavoidably body-oriented categories of race, gender and sexuality. In the process, I argue that a formalist attentiveness to mise-en-scène can also provide valuable cultural insights into Schrader's oeuvre.

Acknowledgements

I would not have been able to complete this thesis without the generous support I received from a number of colleagues, friends and relatives during the course of my studies.

First and foremost, I want to thank my expert supervisor Gwenda Young for the time, thought and care she has given to this project. She has always supported my research interests through her rigorous engagement with my work, teaching me to develop ideas to their fullest capacity and communicate them in the most effective manner. It has been a privilege to work with her these past few years. Laura Rascaroli has also been a vital source of mentorship during my time with UCC Film Studies and particularly *Alphaville*, providing a learning experience that enriched my PhD and an opportunity for which I am very grateful. Also at UCC, Claire Connolly, Barry Monahan, Jill Murphy, Nicola Fanning, Karen Moloney and Graham Parkes were especially welcome sources of encouragement and belief in my abilities. Beyond my immediate work environment, I benefitted from contact with distinguished scholars such as Julia Lesage, Chuck Kleinhans, Douglas Morrey, Laura McMahon, Jackie Stacey and Nick Davis; whether at conferences or in an editorial capacity, their astute questions, engaged feedback and words of reassurance helped shape my project in different, important ways.

I also received all kinds of emotional, intellectual and technical support from my entire family and friends near and far. In particular, I thank those people who read or listened to parts of this project, offered valuable insights and reading suggestions, or helped me explore critical ideas at various stages of their development: Temmuz Süreyya Gürbüz, Mary Murphy, Antonio Jocson, Roy Daly, Patrice Reidy, Robert Wright, Nicola-Marie O’Riordan, Cian O’Callaghan, my niece Anna, my brother Brian. In addition to her considerable help in these areas, my sister Tina provided exceptional proofreading skills on multiple drafts.

Very special thanks to Christopher Ishii, who has helped me by kindly sharing his deep understanding of Japanese cinema, literature, culture, and much more besides.

I dedicate this thesis to my parents.

Introduction

In a 1999 interview, the writer-director Paul Schrader reflected on the kinds of characters who had increasingly come to dominate his two-decade film career: “I’ve always been interested in people, perfectly intelligent people, who seem to have some sort of grasp on life but go around acting in a self-defeating way because they are expressing some neurosis – sexual or spiritual” (Kaplan 35). The terms of this neurosis are usually so uncompromising that they have relegated both Schrader’s characters and his films to the fringes of mainstream American cinema. A quick scan of his filmography reveals a litany of protagonists, usually but not always male, who are marked by a peculiar combination of moral ambiguity, emotional dysfunction and unconscious self-sabotage. For instance, *Hardcore* (1979) focuses on a straitlaced rural minister (George C. Scott) who descends into a seedy urban night-world of prostitution and pornography in a misguided effort to find his missing teenage daughter. *Affliction* (1997) involves a harried small-town policeman (Nick Nolte) who conjures a paranoid murder conspiracy theory in an attempt to prove his heroism to his family and community – a course of action that triggers a devastating midlife breakdown. *Auto Focus* (2002) concerns the troubled private life of *Hogan’s Heroes* television star Bob Crane (Greg Kinnear), whose wholesome all-American family man image masked his self-loathing sex addiction. To varying degrees, each protagonist illuminates Schrader’s fundamental belief that contradiction is the essence of human nature:

Whenever you’re trying to make a character interesting, you’re always looking at reverse behavior: the man that is so lonely that he does things that make him lonelier still; the person who is so desperate for love and community that he does the things that cut him off from those things. (Kouvaros 137)

We can locate the prototype for the contradictory Schrader protagonist in his screenplay for a film that he did not direct himself, but which has nevertheless become the defining film of his career: Martin Scorsese’s highly controversial and celebrated *Taxi Driver* (1976). It is impossible to consider the disturbed

Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) without instantly recalling the kinds of “reverse behaviour” that mark him as a perennial outsider: the addiction to pornography that belies his puritanical attitudes towards sex; the unhealthy diet of junk food, alcohol and prescription pills that is suddenly replaced by a ritualistic military training regime; and the pathological drive to heroism that thoroughly structures his violent psychosis, crystallised in an overhead shot of him lying fetus-like in his cot accompanied by deluded voiceover narration ironically hailing himself as “somebody who stood up and did what’s right”. The schizophrenic dualism of Travis’ personality is foreshadowed during his early coffee date with Betsy (Cybill Shepherd), who compares him to the lyrics of a Kris Kristofferson song: “He’s a prophet and a pusher / Partly truth, partly fiction / A walking contradiction.” This lyric carries additional resonance when we consider Schrader’s own set of deeply personal investments in this screenplay. With the unflinching candour that has proven his trademark in interviews, he explains that rather than being motivated by professional or commercial goals, the act of writing *Taxi Driver* was primarily a cathartic exorcism of private demons, and the alter ego of Travis was troublingly close to his own experience:

At the time I wrote it I was very enamored of guns, I was very suicidal, I was drinking heavily, I was obsessed with pornography in the way a lonely person is, and all those elements are upfront in the script. Obviously some aspects are heightened – the racism of the character, the sexism. Like every kind of underdog, Travis takes out his anger on the guy below him rather than the guy above. (Jackson 117)

While these confessional statements confirm *Taxi Driver*’s status as the Scorsese film to which Schrader feels closest, there is a distinct sense in which the long-running collaboration between the two filmmakers has somewhat overshadowed Schrader’s own directorial achievements for critics and audiences alike. In addition to *Taxi Driver*, Schrader contributed a late-stage rewrite of Mardik Martin’s screenplay for *Raging Bull* (1980), and adapted original novels by Nikos Kazantzakis and Joe Connelly, respectively, into the screenplays for *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) and *Bringing Out the Dead* (1999). In the only monograph on Schrader’s career, George Kouvaros notes that Schrader has

written scripts for a number of films by other high-profile directors, including *The Yakuza* (1974, Sydney Pollack), *Obsession* (1976, Brian De Palma) and *The Mosquito Coast* (1986, Peter Weir), but that “because the most critically lauded of these scripts have been for films directed by Scorsese, there is a tendency to treat Schrader’s work as a subset of the work of his better-known and more stylistically flamboyant collaborator” (3). This ambivalent attitude is typified by Robert Kolker’s fleeting mention of Schrader in his Scorsese chapter in *A Cinema of Loneliness*, where he simply notes that Schrader’s non-Scorsese films “demonstrate varying degrees of competence and reaction” (161). Yet the Scorsese collaborations are also instructive about certain thematic interests that extend to Schrader’s own films. When questioned about the primary continuities between the troubled protagonists he scripted for Scorsese (specifically in the first three films), Schrader describes them as a series of “lonely, self-deluded, sexually inactive people” (Jackson 140). What he does not mention is the extent to which these characters’ emotional isolation, psychosexual neurosis and fundamental disconnection from themselves is invariably experienced in and through the body. In addition to Travis’ debilitating insomnia and his perverse relationship with food, alcohol and exercise, we may recall the image of him holding his tautly clenched forearm over the flame of a stove in what Kouvaros terms “a process of bodily purification” (26). In *Raging Bull*, this attempt to exorcise the body of psychic demons takes the form of the savage beatings that the self-loathing boxer Jake La Motta (De Niro) prides himself on being able to endure – a process that Schrader describes as “redemption through physical pain, like the Stations of the Cross, one torment after another” (Jackson 133). Jake’s bodily torments also include his anxiety over his fluctuating weight and the perceived effeminacy of his “little girl’s hands”, his compulsive sexual competitiveness with his brother Joey (Joe Pesci), and his paranoid, latently homoerotic jealousy about other men’s bodies being better, stronger and more desirable than his own. Interestingly, this reframing of the film’s central masculinity crisis as explicitly being a crisis of the *body* was the primary element that Schrader introduced in his rewrite of the original script (Kouvaros 46).¹ While the novel *The Last Temptation of Christ* represents its title character

¹ It is worth noting that Schrader considers *Raging Bull* primarily a star vehicle for De

as being torn between the dualistic desires of spirit and flesh, Schrader's adaptation consolidates the corporeal focus with the addition of a new scene in which Jesus (Willem Dafoe) tears out his heart before inviting his disciples to follow him on his quest for redemption. Although themes of bodily crisis are also evident in certain Scorsese films that were not scripted by Schrader, the films that Schrader has directed (whether from original screenplays or adapted from other sources) reveal an even more persistent obsession with these inextricable issues of personal identity and embodied experience. For example, the traumatic "subjective takeover" (Kouvaros 41) inflicted upon the eponymous real-life heroine of *Patty Hearst* (1988) by her terrorist kidnappers is figured through an unnerving emphasis on her physical suffering, with voiceover narration that articulates her sensory deprivation, migraines and constipation: "I sleep all the time. I have no strength. I couldn't stand even if I were free to walk away... My body's giving up". From the beginning of *Affliction*, the policeman is plagued by a toothache but reluctant to visit a dentist; in a climactic fit of self-hatred, he finally pulls the abscessed tooth out with a pair of pliers while gazing, horrified, at his mirror image. Given his relentless focus on bodies in extreme states of crisis, it should come as little surprise that Schrader felt compelled to film the life story of Yukio Mishima, the Japanese author who notoriously disemboweled himself with a samurai sword.

Schrader's obsession with the human body forms the heart of this thesis, and the thematic extremity of *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters* (1985) makes it a fitting final chapter in my analysis of Schrader's corporeal cinema. But before mapping the structure of my argument, the phase of Schrader's career that I will examine, and the precise methodology I shall employ, I must first provide an essential overview of the highly unconventional path by which Schrader entered the world of filmmaking. In considering the potential roots of his oeuvre's psychosexual intensity, critics have tended to focus heavily upon Schrader's strict upbringing in a devout Dutch Calvinist family (in Grand Rapids, Michigan) whose religious

Niro, who initially brought the story to Scorsese's attention: "I would not have done this [script] on my own, and I don't think Marty would have, either, but it was Bob's passion. Marty is fond of saying that *Taxi Driver* is my film and *Raging Bull* is De Niro's and *The Last Temptation of Christ* is his" (Jackson 133).

observance proscribed against “worldly amusements” (Kouvaros 11) such as attending the cinema or listening to pop music. Certain oft-repeated anecdotes have by now passed into cinematic folklore, such as the story about the five-year-old Schrader asking his mother about the nature of Hell, upon which she pricked his hand with a pin and told him that Hell felt a million times worse and was experienced all over the body (Ebert 25); or the familiar accounts of Schrader’s astonishment upon sneaking into a cinema at the age of seventeen to watch his first feature-length film, *The Absent-Minded Professor* (1961, Robert Stevenson). Within a few years of seeing this film, Schrader had abandoned his intentions of becoming a Calvinist minister, thoroughly educated himself on the history of “classic European and Japanese art cinema” (Jackson xiii) and, following a chance encounter with the influential film critic Pauline Kael, began to establish himself as a film critic with *Cinema* and the *L.A. Free Press*. Given that his traditional Calvinist background not only denied him the experience of watching films but also in itself lacked a “sense of visual arts” (Jackson 2) because it “believed that ideas were the province of language, and that if you had something to say you used words to say it” (Jackson 26), the rapid turn to film criticism was quite unusual. But the most striking aspect of the impressive body of critical writing that Schrader amassed in the decade before he turned to filmmaking is undoubtedly the degree to which it foregrounded issues of visual style and formal structure, or to use the established critical term, *mise-en-scène*. In his volume *Film Art: An Introduction*, the noted formalist scholar David Bordwell offers a helpful definition of this term (which I will draw upon throughout my thesis):

As a set of techniques, *mise-en-scène* helps compose the film shot in space and time. Setting, lighting, costume, and staging interact to create patterns of movement, of color and depth, line and shape, light and dark. These patterns define and develop the space of the story world and emphasize salient story information. The director’s use of *mise-en-scène* not only guides our perception from moment to moment but also helps create the overall form of the film. (184)

The two pieces of film criticism with which Schrader is most widely associated, both of which were originally published in 1972, explore issues of mise-en-scène with rigorous focus. In his book *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*, Schrader argues that three canonical filmmakers from the European and Japanese art cinema – Yasujiro Ozu, Robert Bresson and Carl Theodor Dreyer – create a cinematic form that self-consciously eschews the traditional structures of mainstream fiction filmmaking, such as psychological realism, naturalistic performance style and emotional identification with character, in order to “maximize the mystery of existence” (10). Uniting theological and art-historical approaches, Schrader considers how these disparate filmmakers subvert conventions of framing, lighting, cutting and composition in order to defer emotion before finally offering the viewer an unexpected sense of transcendent wonder. As he later explained to Kevin Jackson:

The whole of the *Transcendental Style* hypothesis is that if you reduce your sensual awareness rigorously and for long enough, the inner need will explode and it will be pure because it will not have been siphoned off by easy or exploitative identifications. (28)

Schrader’s second major piece of criticism to posit visual style as the primary arbiter of textual meaning is his essay “Notes on Film Noir”, in which he conceptualises 1940s and early 1950s Hollywood *noir* not as a genre but as a style whose emblematic tone and mood depend on the presence of certain mise-en-scène elements. For Schrader, these films’ contradictory blend of gritty urban locations with artificial studio lighting schemes influenced by 1920s German Expressionist cinema constitute a highly specific brand of stylised realism. Within this basic pattern, he notes a selection of visual effects prevalent in the genre (or style), including night lighting that emphasises low ceiling lights and floor lamps, oblique lines that mutilate the filmic space into cramped and anxious shapes, and a tendency to cloak the protagonists in the darkness of their environment (“Notes” 84-85). For these reasons, Schrader attests, “*film noir* was first of all a style, because it worked out its conflicts visually rather than thematically” (“Notes” 91). Even more significantly for the methodology I will employ in this thesis, however, is the fact that Schrader attributes the widespread

critical indifference towards *noir* (at the time he wrote his essay) to its emphasis on style – an area that most film critics tend to bypass:

The fundamental reason for *film noir*'s neglect, however, is the fact that it depends more on choreography than sociology, and American critics have always been slow on the uptake when it comes to visual style. Like its protagonists, *film noir* is more interested in style than theme; whereas American critics have been traditionally more interested in theme than style. ("Notes" 90)

In fact, this hierarchy of theme over style in film studies was not always the case. Over the course of several books that privilege issues of cinematic form, Bordwell – who is, perhaps not coincidentally, a longtime personal friend of Schrader – has traced the patterns and traditions that have historically defined scholarship on mise-en-scène. He explains that early developments within film studies outside the academy placed a surprising emphasis upon aesthetics, paying close attention to the details of visual style (*Figures* 265). In a related observation, Rosalind Galt claims that this early attentiveness to the visual betrays the roots of classical film theory in modernist discourses of art history and Western philosophical conceptions of modern aesthetics (39). For instance, Vachel Lindsay's 1915 study *The Art of the Moving Picture* draws correspondences between the emerging medium of cinema and established art forms such as painting, sculpture, poetry and architecture, while Hugo Münsterberg's *The Film, a Psychological Study* (1916) analyses the functions of colour, light and editing patterns in the spectator's emotional engagement with the image. The focus on formalist approaches continued into the 1920s: the French Impressionist movement was perhaps best exemplified by Jean Epstein's concept of *photogénie*, which posits rhythmic movement and close-up composition as avatars of cinema's medium-specificity, while the conflicting Soviet montage theories developed by filmmakers such as Lev Kuleshov, Dziga Vertov, Vsevolod Pudovkin and, most famously, Sergei Eisenstein conceptualised new relationships between editing rhythms, narrative structure and viewer perception. In 1935, Rudolf Arnheim's *Film as Art* based its theory of cinema upon traditions in modernist painting, though Arnheim also predicts

that the emergence of sound and colour will eventually limit cinema's potential to express beauty. Discussing the unusual degree of attention accorded to mise-en-scène in these groundbreaking early studies, Galt explains that while "questions of line and color, beauty and value, realism and the nature of the cinematic are scarcely limited to classical film theory... it is in this period that these aesthetic issues were produced as foundational elements of the cinematic" (39-40). These issues reached a peak in the 1940s and 50s, when André Bazin's theories of photographic realism in the films of F.W. Murnau and Jean Renoir promoted specific techniques in continuity editing, such as long takes, wide shots, mobile camerawork and compositional depth. Shortly afterwards, the critics of the seminal French film journal *Cahiers du Cinéma* championed these same techniques in the work of Hollywood genre filmmakers such as Alfred Hitchcock, Howard Hawks and Nicholas Ray, all of whom were less concerned with representing objective reality than creating "expressive artifice", a distinctive style that articulated "each director's unique conception of the world" (*Figures* 11). As Bordwell verifies, "These were *auteurs*, presenting their personal visions on film, and their chief means of doing so was something called mise-en-scène" (*Figures* 11).

To start applying these ideas to Schrader, then, it is clear that his early film criticism was a conscious attempt to locate himself within a specific history of formalist analysis that privileged the meaningful qualities of visual images. It is also clear that the themes of alienated identity and bodily crisis that emerged so fully formed in his *Taxi Driver* screenplay (which he wrote over the course of ten days in 1972) constituted the kind of "personal vision" always associated with auteurs in cinema. In making the transition from critic to screenwriter to director, the authorial element that Schrader lacked – due to a background that nurtured linguistic development and theological debate over notions of visual literacy – was a coherent personal conception of mise-en-scène. In his essay on *Taxi Driver*, Jonathan Rosenbaum describes Schrader's screenplay as "a twisted self-portrait that sorely needs the realistic inflections and star power furnished by De Niro and the seductive fantasy elements conjured up by [composer Bernard] Herrmann (emotional) and Scorsese (visual)" (298). These stylistic flourishes were notably absent in the first two films that Schrader directed. *Blue Collar*

(1978) employs the generic structure of the caper film in its story of three Detroit auto factory workers (played by Richard Pryor, Harvey Keitel and Yaphet Kotto) who, feeling alienated by economic hardships and dire working conditions, decide to rob their own union. In both theme and style, the film is firmly rooted within established traditions of gritty social realism; not only does its subject matter reflect contemporary social and political concerns, but its emphasis on static camerawork, location shooting and natural lighting suggests an adherence to semi-documentary aesthetics that led many critics to assume Schrader's directorial future lay in creating a new kind of stripped-down political cinema.² The aforementioned *Hardcore* covers narrative territory familiar from *Taxi Driver* – a male protagonist adrift in a nocturnal urban hell, torn between Puritanism and pornography while engaged in a *Searchers*-style quest for a girl who may not want his help – but it also showcases the rather awkward beginning of Schrader's transition into the formalist visual style he had championed as a critic. The film's porn houses, strip clubs and adult bookstores are all rendered with oblique camera angles, stylised décor and expressionistic red/green neon lighting schemes that evoke an uneasy mixture of prurient titillation and reactionary moral conservatism. Discussing his attempt to develop his own "distinct visual identity" around this period, Schrader acknowledges:

I played around with it in *Hardcore* but not very well. I ended up trying to use gels to create style but that's not how you do it; since then I've tried to stay away from gels. I prefer to make colour in the set and in the wardrobe, rather than rely on gels. (Jackson 158)³

² Recalling the positive critical reception of *Blue Collar*, Schrader notes that the left-leaning American film magazine *Cineaste* "heralded me as the new Marxist hope. Well, I didn't mind the praise, but I knew I wasn't going to live up to it, so I tried to show them that this wasn't where I was headed. I wasn't the new Haskell Wexler" (Jackson 148).

³ Schrader also acknowledges that with this film he "succumbed to the sort of glorified, prurient nature of the sexual underworld", and that it "has a kind of kid-in-a-candy-shop feeling that I'm uncomfortable with... Where the film becomes untrue to itself is when you feel the director's prurience and not the character's" (Jackson 151).

As a rare filmmaker who did not carry childhood memories of favourite films or inspirational directors into his chosen career path, it is significant that the primary influence on the development of Schrader's visual thinking was not a filmmaker at all. In his own words, "the greatest influence, and the reason I think I was able to become a filmmaker, was Charles Eames, the architect" (Jackson 24). In 1970, Schrader had spent a month interviewing Eames for a *Film Quarterly* article about the architect/inventor's short films; over the course of their discussions, "Eames taught me that there is a visual logic in life and that to be a poet, or a poet of ideas... doesn't mean you have to use language" (Jackson 26). In this respect, he suggests that both the emphasis on mise-en-scène in his critical writing and the search for a "distinct visual identity" in his first two films formed part of the same investigation into "the possibilities of images as ideas" (Kouvaros 44). But it was not until Schrader's third film as a director, *American Gigolo* (1980) that the search for a meaningful visual style began to mesh with his solidly established themes of bodily crisis and entrapment. In this film, which forms the first chapter of my thesis, we can see the beginning of a more fully realised, highly self-conscious exploration of the potential of cinematic form. Partly thanks to his collaboration with a new set of distinctly style-minded technical contributors such as director of photography John Bailey, production designer Ferdinando Scarfiotti and composer Giorgio Moroder, Schrader began to stake his claim for authorship at the level of mise-en-scène. The film's colour, lighting, costume, set design and music all express deeper ideas about the life of its protagonist (played by Richard Gere) than the generic narrative structure or nondescript dialogue, while as Richard Combs notes in his review of the film, the camera is "here almost deliriously liberated from its prosaic functions in *Blue Collar* and *Hardcore*" (88). For Schrader, this represented a major development in his style:

I felt that I had arrived as a director; I felt confident about moving the camera and placing the camera. I saw the movie for the first time; I saw the whole notion of visual thinking that had first been suggested to me by Eames – it now properly made sense to me. (Jackson 166)

In taking this quote as a starting point for my thesis investigations, I aim to make a fresh intervention in the existing critical discourse on Schrader's work. Kouvaros notes that, while studies of Scorsese – in particular studies of violence, masculinity crises and patriarchal dynamics in *Taxi Driver* and *Raging Bull* – represent “one of the mainstays of film publishing” (3), there has been comparatively little research published on Schrader's own output as a director. Aside from Kouvaros' monograph, issued as a volume in James Naremore's Contemporary Film Directors series, the key book-length text remains Kevin Jackson's career-spanning book of interviews, *Schrader on Schrader* (and as such, I engage in depth with both of these texts throughout my thesis). In the opening pages of his monograph, Kouvaros suggests one possible reason for the relative paucity of Schrader scholarship: his own well established standing as a critic and scholar of other directors' work, and as an effusive and articulate commentator on his own. According to Kouvaros, “He is too visible, commenting on and analyzing his films in advance of the critic, yet not visible enough – lacking in visual flamboyance or distinctive style” (4). Kouvaros' objective is thus to develop a macro-level critique that moves beyond Schrader's own pronouncements about specific films to offer broader insights on his career as a whole. In the process, he makes fruitful observations that dovetail with some of my own interests here – on Schrader's conflicted treatment of the human body, his investments in mise-en-scène, and his primary cinematic influences – while carefully framing those general observations within the broader, career-spanning structure of the traditional director monograph. My approach with this thesis differs from Kouvaros' in two primary ways. Firstly, while I agree with his assessment that Schrader's unusual tendency to critique his own work “in advance of the critic” has often tended to intimidate other scholars from entering the debate and offering alternate critical approaches, I also maintain that Schrader's specific position as a critic, a scholar and an active commentator on his own work warrants further analysis. I will therefore draw upon Schrader's own critical voice – both in terms of his writing on certain key films and directors, and his interview pronouncements on relevant aspects of his own work – as a strategy to illuminate certain problems and contradictions in his body of work. My second major departure from the existing literature is to eschew the monograph-type format in order to concentrate more closely on a

particular phase of Schrader's career in which these problems and contradictions become especially interesting. Taking the aforementioned Schrader quote about the development of a new visual literacy during the making of *American Gigolo* as my foundation, I will argue that the unprecedented formalism of that film heralded the beginning of a particularly rich five-year period in Schrader's career as a director, a phase in which he attempted to exceed his perceived limitations in visual thinking and push his engagement with cinema as a visual medium to its fullest capacity. Discussing the general evolution of Schrader's career, Alexander Horwath notes that, "with his increasingly complex, emotionally detached 'Europeanized' films, he managed to carve out a small, rather lonely (and less and less commercial) space for himself, turning into one of the few authentic auteurs that the film industry tolerates" (100). I will argue that this evolution is most visible over the course of three consecutive films – *American Gigolo*, *Cat People* (1982) and the aforementioned *Mishima* – that at once grow increasingly stylised in approach and corporeal in theme. In considering how Schrader uses the various elements of mise-en-scène to express troubling ideas about identity and embodiment, I will also address those values and attitudes in his work that have been widely deemed problematic from the beginning. In particular, any discussion of Schrader's films in terms of *either* style or theme must consider the ambiguous and unsettling ways in which he deals with unavoidably body-oriented issues of race, gender and sexuality. This points to a recurring structure within Schrader's career, whereby the act of transporting us directly into his protagonists' subjective experience of bodily crisis also betrays an anxious distrust of those cultural bodies and identity positions typically considered "different" from the heterosexual white male norm: in other words, women, homosexuals and nonwhite subjects. Some of the criticism levelled at *Taxi Driver* has focused on these issues. For instance, while Schrader defends his right to create a psychotic character like Travis Bickle on the grounds that "there's a difference between making a movie about a racist and making a racist movie" (Taubin 17), Amy Taubin feels that the film never satisfactorily integrates its issues of racism, misogyny, homophobia and eroticised gun violence into a coherent psychological character study, leaving unanswered questions about Travis' racist attitudes toward peripheral black characters and a nagging "disconnection between his implicit racist fantasies and

his explicit homicidal action” (18) – inflicted upon mostly *white* characters – that “prevents it from being a truly great film” (16). On a slightly different note, David Greven argues that while the film functions successfully as “a critique of racism [...] I believe that it’s fair to say that [Schrader] had racist attitudes at that time” (177). By far the most stringent indictment of Schrader’s attitudes towards Other cultural identities – and the process by which his protagonists’ anxieties about the relations between body, self and world are displaced onto Others – comes from Robin Wood in his volume on postclassical Hollywood cinema, *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan*. In surveying Scorsese’s career, Wood wholly attributes the political “incoherence” of *Taxi Driver* – as well as the elements he disliked in *Raging Bull* – to Schrader’s screenwriting, and he reads these tendencies across Schrader’s entire oeuvre. In fact, it is worth quoting Wood’s statement in full:

The position implicit in Paul Schrader’s work [...] can be quite simply characterized as quasi-Fascist. This may not be immediately obvious when one considers each film individually, but adding them together (including the screenplays directed by others) makes it clear. There is the put-down of unionization (*Blue Collar*), the put-down of feminism “in the Name of the Father” (*Old Boyfriends*), the denunciation of alternatives to the Family by defining them in terms of degeneracy and pornography (*Hardcore*), the implicit denigration of gays (*American Gigolo*), and, crucial in its sinister relation to all this, the glorification of the dehumanized hero as efficient killing-machine (unambiguous in *Rolling Thunder*, confused – I believe by Scorsese’s presence as director – in *Taxi Driver*)... More would need to be said about, particularly, *Blue Collar* (the least unpleasant of his movies); but I think this defines the essential viciousness of Schrader’s work. (51)

At this point, it is worth noting that Schrader’s directorial output during the period I examine must be understood in terms of what Wood defines elsewhere in his book as “a decisive “moment,” an ideological shift, in Hollywood cinema and (by implication) in American culture” (2). For Wood, the films produced in the aftermath of that first wave of postclassical Hollywood cinema and the dawning of Reagan’s US presidency (1981-1989) are marked by their tendency

to potentially “dramatize, as they inevitably must, the conflicts that characterize our culture: conflicts centered on class/wealth, gender, race, sexual orientation” (4). In the wake of the Stonewall riots of July 1969, the 1970s heralded a crucial period of transformation for American LGBT culture in terms of both mainstream visibility and political gain. In an article about the growth of gay activism during this decade, Rebecca J. Rosen cites the establishment of nationwide Gay Pride events, the removal of homosexuality from the American Psychiatric Association’s diagnostic manual, and the 1977 election of San Francisco gay rights activist Harvey Milk – the first openly gay person elected to public office – as evidence of the high-level social progress that defined the US gay movement in the years between Stonewall and the emergence of AIDS. Comparable progress was achieved in the arenas of racial and gendered conflict. Second-wave feminism broadened the discourse beyond women’s suffrage to draw public attention to issues of rape, domestic violence, female reproductive rights, divorce and custody laws, and inequalities in the workforce. Similarly, while the post-civil rights era heralded a decline in African-American protest activity, the 1970s also saw the recruitment of black students in Southern universities and the election of black candidates to political offices in Southern communities that had previously been centres of civil unrest (Foner and Garraty). If we consider Schrader’s work as a director during this same period, it is interesting to note how quickly he moved from the class/wealth discourse that appeared to flag him as a political filmmaker around the time of *Blue Collar* to the more overtly body-oriented conflicts of race, gender and sexuality that define his films in the first half of the 1980s. It is also interesting to note the broader contexts for Wood’s critique of Schrader as a filmmaker whose “quasi-fascist” tendencies betray what he considers to be a distinct aversion to the historical and cultural advances made by the gay movement, the women’s movement and civil rights activism in contemporary American society. Comparing *American Gigolo* to another 1980 film that many critics consider even more problematic, William Friedkin’s *Cruising* (in which a police officer played by Al Pacino is forced to go undercover on the New York gay club circuit to catch a serial killer targeting gay men), Wood claims that while neither film makes overt reference to the historical facts of gay politics, “the fact that these films got made testifies to some (however muddled and hostile) awareness that the gay movement was

somehow there and posed some kind of threat” (59). In the extended analysis of *Cruising* that follows on from his one-paragraph denunciation of *American Gigolo*, Wood calls for contemporary American cinema to start adopting a new set of progressive, socially conscious values and attitudes in future depictions of homosexuality. Among other factors, films that are either “centrally or peripherally concerned with gayness” (58) must address the widespread prevalence of homophobia in society; acknowledge the systematic cultural disavowal of bisexuality as an innate potentiality within all human subjects; and offer critique of heterosexual relations under a patriarchal system that continues to privilege heterosexual male subjectivity at the expense of either female or sexually non-normative subject positions. The combination of Schrader’s interest in racial, sexual and gendered conflicts and his apparent failure to provide a positive feminist, nonwhite or LGBT visibility in his films thus marks him a director who occupies a particularly uneasy liminal space in a transitional period of American cinema: somewhere between what Wood considers the reactionary, recuperative or quasi-Fascist tendencies of a 1980s Hollywood that tended to reaffirm dominant social norms about sexual and racial difference, and the New Queer Cinema explosion of the early 1990s independent American cinema, which celebrated diversity precisely by calling reductive essentialisms about cultural identity – and, in particular, sexual identity – into question.

To return now to the specific nature of Wood’s criticism of Schrader and how it relates to my own argument, I am inclined to disagree that Schrader’s position on other bodies and cultural identities can be “simply” defined as “quasi-Fascist” for a few reasons. The most obvious reason is that we must distinguish between the teller and the tale rather than blindly assuming direct autobiography even when an artist makes problematic statements – as Schrader has – about identifying deeply with the troubled characters they create. Nevertheless I find Wood’s statement helpful in beginning to think about the ways we might locate these problems in the work of a filmmaker who was during this period intensely devoted to the surface qualities of the image. My thesis will evaluate these bodily discourses that are expressed in the cultural areas of race, gender and sexuality by paying close attention to the aspects of *mise-en-scène* that Schrader clearly prioritised when making these three films. Wood notes the “implicit

denigration of gays” in *American Gigolo*, and thus my first chapter focuses on how we might begin to reconcile this perceived homophobia as well as the film’s flawed treatment of racial issues with Schrader’s unprecedented attention to stylised camerawork, colour, lighting and set design. My second chapter, on *Cat People*, considers how Schrader continues this exploration of high style (again using his core technical team of Bailey, Scarfiotti and Moroder) in a seemingly uncharacteristic remake of the 1940s Val Lewton-Jacques Tourneur horror classic about a young woman who transforms into a leopard upon sexual contact. In this case, I argue that the film’s uneasy fusion of 1980s body horror – heavy on sex, nudity and gore – and the stylistic influences of 1920s German Expressionism and the French poetic tradition yields another interesting experiment in the expressive potential of colour, production design and lighting effects. Yet this visual design also reveals deeply ambivalent elements of misogyny, bodily disgust and male sexual anxiety that often feel endemic to Schrader’s interpretation rather than the material itself. As previously mentioned, the film discussed in my third and final chapter – *Mishima* – is perhaps the most directly body-centric film of Schrader’s career, not only because it focuses on a protagonist who feels eternally trapped in the prison of his own flesh but because the film builds to a climax in which he quite literally tears his body apart. *Mishima* is also significant as the only one of these three films with an openly homosexual protagonist, though I argue that Schrader again demonstrates a strained approach to queer identity in this film. Specifically, I will argue that the attempt to express Mishima’s desire through the mise-en-scène elements of colour, production design and “crystalline” editing techniques (which blur the distinctions between reality, memory and imagination) also articulates Schrader’s own stated heterosexual neuroses about femininity and female bodies. In the case of all three films, I argue that Schrader’s approach to the self, to other bodies and to the broader mysteries of human identity are not so much “quasi-Fascist” as marked by an unmistakable sense of anxiety and discomfort about cultural categories of race, gender and sexuality. This makes his films undeniably problematic from an ideological viewpoint. Yet they are

also richly creative, insightful and illuminating from the perspective of mise-en-scène, that mode of filmmaking which seeks to express ideas through imagery.⁴

In outlining how my methodology attends to issues of both style and theme across the three chapters, I want to first briefly explore what Bordwell characterises as a waning interest in mise-en-scène criticism since the days of journals like *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Movie*, and critics such as Andrew Sarris, Ian Cameron and Jim Kitses (all of whom Schrader has cited as key figures in his own critical development).⁵ In *Figures Traced in Light*, Bordwell notes that while the academic study of disciplines such as art history or musicology remain dominated by a necessary attention to style, film studies has rather insecurely adopted the analytic strategies of literary criticism, promoting a “literary turn of mind” (33) that subordinates questions of style to the analysis of narrative and theme. On the one hand, this is quite understandable: as Schrader also points out in “Notes on Film Noir”, mainstream fiction cinema generally tends to direct the viewer’s attention not towards the minutiae of lighting, décor or staging but rather the broad development of the narrative, the relationship between characters, and the articulation of central themes. For this reason, “critics and scholars find it more natural to talk about characters’ psychological development, about how the plot resolves its conflicts and problems, or about the film’s philosophical or cultural or political significance” (*Figures* 33).⁶ Yet

⁴ While scholarship on cinema(s) of the body is too eclectic and sprawling to survey within this introductory literature review, see the editorial of *Alphaville*’s Summer 2014 issue on “Corporeal Cinema” (which I coedited with Gwenda Young) for a fuller account of body-oriented film theory.

⁵ See Schrader’s 1972 *Cinema* essay “Budd Boetticher: A Case Study in Criticism”, reprinted in Kevin Jackson’s interview book *Schrader on Schrader*: “Even in the best of auteur criticism [...] the biographical-psychological bias is present. Although these critics attempt (and to varying degrees, succeed) to place auteurism within the formalist, ‘textual’ critical camp, an important, invaluable task, their criticism is usually, for better or worse, a formalist approach to the psychology of a particular individual” (qtd. in Jackson 46).

⁶ Schrader has closely echoed Bordwell’s sentiment: “Most film criticism is essentially written from literary ideas because that’s the way we can understand film: the oeuvre of the director, the sociological context, the development of the characters, the theme of the movie. But very, very little criticism is written about the form and shape of the imagery” (“Paul Schrader’s Film Class”).

the broad thematic approach also tends to divorce films and directors from the important stylistic contexts and traditions in which they emerge. For Bordwell, this problem is exemplified by hermeneutic modes of analysis that aim to assess whether certain films embody reactionary or progressive ideas about culture, identity and social power formations, but do not pay equal attention to the films' stylistic enunciation strategies: "For many film scholars and students, movies exist less as parts of an artistic tradition than as cultural products whose extractable ideas about race, class, gender, ethnicity, modernity, postmodernity, and so forth can be applauded or deplored" (*Figures* 266). The so-called "literary" approach, in which narrative, theme and/or cultural analysis relegate issues of mise-en-scène to minimal importance, thus fails to address the fact that "style is the tangible texture of the film, the perceptual surface we encounter as we watch and listen", and also the means in which "that surface is our point of departure in moving to plot, theme, feeling – everything else that matters to us" (*Figures* 32). We can see the limitations of the strictly cultural approach in the Schrader criticism that I cited above by scholars such as Wood, Taubin or Greven, which effectively establish his work as problematic but barely acknowledge his precise stylistic methods or consider how they might inflect and nuance our engagement with his work.

On the other hand, however, Bordwell's career-long assertion of the need to conduct stylistic analysis has occasionally been subjected to charges of dogmatic aestheticism, as well as a degree of intellectual blindness to the construction of those cultural issues – *like* race, gender, sexuality – whose wider social importance cannot be disputed (*Figures* 266). In other words, the purely formalist approach also carries limitations, and when evaluating a complex filmmaker like Schrader, it is especially important to consider what *kinds* of ideas – about identity, bodies, culture – are being expressed by his carefully chosen, highly composed and designed images. Recent developments in film theory suggest that, rather than deploying an "either/or" dialectic in which stylistic and narrative modes of filmic analysis are necessarily opposed, it can be extremely fruitful to attend to both levels of study. In very different ways, a number of scholars have sought to unite a formalist attentiveness to mise-en-scène with interpretive analysis of culture, identity or social politics. For

example, in his essay on the Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini, John David Rhodes criticises the way that “style is often considered nothing more than “excess” or epiphenomena in many accounts of cinema” (146), but he mobilises Pasolini’s concept of a “Cinema of Poetry” to chart a discursive analysis of class structures in the European art cinema of the 1960s. In a recent book entitled *The Desiring-Image: Gilles Deleuze and Contemporary Queer Cinema* (which I will discuss in significant depth in my chapter on *Mishima*), Nick Davis argues that considerations of dissident sexual desire in cinema should not be restricted to critical frameworks based on LGBT identity politics but can also be located in the visual design, editing patterns and formal structures of many queer films. Stella Bruzzi’s book *Men’s Cinema: Masculinity and Mise en Scène in Hollywood* intertwines sociological and psychoanalytic theories of gender, desire and identification with a close textual analysis of the aesthetic tropes and stylistic effects that define male-oriented genre films to evaluate how images of masculinity are constructed in modern cinema. Less directly focused on gender issues, Galt’s book *Pretty: Film and the Decorative Image* traces a long-standing critical rejection of aesthetic, ornamental or decorative images in cinema back to a broader “anti-image discourse” (5) that “dates from Plato’s separation of idea from image” and, in the process, “finds the image to be secondary, irrational, and bound to the inadequate plane of the surface” (2). Yet Galt also interweaves formalist and cultural modes of analysis to evaluate a number of films whose emphasis upon visual surfaces betrays troubled ideologies, or, in her own words, films “whose inability to articulate a proper politics frequently stems from a combination of a pretty visual style with a somehow problematic staging of gender, sexuality, race, or all three” (21).

Inspired by the multilayered diversity of these approaches, my investigation into the dynamics of body and mise-en-scène in three of Schrader’s richest and most emblematic films will mobilise a critical methodology that attends to both style and theme in order to gain a fuller understanding of his work. Chapter One (*American Gigolo*) surveys the largely cultural and identitarian critiques of the film’s treatment of male bodily anxiety by scholars such as Wood, Peter Lehman and Sharon Willis, as well as the formalist analyses by Peter Fraser and Bill Nichols, both of whom have assessed the film in terms of Schrader’s own thesis

of transcendental style in cinema. While I partially agree with some of these previous observations about the film's troubled discourse of masculinity, I draw upon Richard Dyer's theories of lighting conventions for nonwhite skin and Bruzzi's analysis of claustrophobic visual design in male-oriented *noirs* to argue that closer stylistic analysis sheds important new light on Schrader's treatment of racial and homophobic anxiety. Chapter Two (*Cat People*) draws upon Barbara Creed's psychoanalytic theories of female monstrosity in horror films and also revisits Wood's work on the Othering dynamics of horror cinema from a different perspective, but it unites these gender-based approaches with a formalist consideration of colour, production design and Expressionist visual logic (integrating mise-en-scène theory by Bordwell, Angela Dalle Vacche and Schrader's own *Transcendental Style*). In doing so, I argue that the film constructs its female protagonist (played by Nastassia Kinski) as a monstrous object of desire in ways that are less concerned with female subjectivity or embodiment than with Schrader's own, candidly confessed male anxiety about the female body. Finally, Chapter Three (*Mishima*) extends this consideration of Schrader's own psychological investments in his corporeal cinema by uniting Kaja Silverman's psychoanalytic theories of male masochism, Nick Davis' recent queer interventions in Deleuzian film theory and Roger T. Ames' study of bushidō mythology in traditional Japanese culture to argue that the film's highly elaborate mise-en-scène and experimental narrative structure make it the kind of biopic that reveals at least as much about its creator as its subject. In each of these three films, the body is figured as a kind of metaphysical prison in which the protagonists are helplessly trapped – caught in complex dynamics of bodily deferral and displacement, unable to connect with themselves or others in any authentic way, and prone to moments of painful fragmentation and dissolution. In each case, their psychic and social mechanisms are visualised through highly distinctive and unusual images that suggest Schrader's own discomfort with bodies in general – both the self and the Other. For these reasons, it makes sense to examine the three films from the perspective of narrative but also, even more importantly, mise-en-scène. In uniting these often opposed modes of analysis, I will evaluate the disquieting ideas about the body that become visible when a filmmaker pledges his foremost commitment to the realm of the visual image.

CHAPTER ONE

Man in a Room:

Male Anxiety and Mise-en-Scène in *American Gigolo* (1980)

Introduction

“There is a nice quote from Leonardo da Vinci which goes something like this: ‘Think about the surface of the work. Above all think about the surface.’” (*Transcendental Style* 62)

This quest to privilege the surface in relation to cinematic images is the objective of Paul Schrader’s book *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*. The context for the above quote is his analysis of the iconoclastic French filmmaker Robert Bresson, whose film *Pickpocket* (1959) is frequently noted as a milestone in Schrader’s creative life. Describing his sense of awe upon discovering the film, which tracks the quotidian existence of an isolated young pickpocket (Martin LaSalle) disconnected from society, Schrader explains:

I saw a meditation about a man and his room, about solitude and spirituality... and I realised that there might be a place for me in filmmaking: I’d thought I was a critic and that’s where I belonged; I thought I couldn’t make a film about a man and his room. (Brooke)

Above *Pickpocket*’s treatment of narrative or performance, Schrader was inspired by Bresson’s ability to capture the surface of a life through his painstaking attention to subtle shifts in camera movement, framing and composition. Schrader’s detailed analysis of Bressonian technique in *Transcendental Style* verifies the fact that this investment in the expressive potential of mise-en-scène had been percolating in his mind for almost a decade before he wrote and directed his own archetypal “man and his room” film: *American Gigolo* (1980), in which a high-class Californian escort (Richard Gere) finds his precarious lifestyle disintegrating when he is framed for murder. The Schrader film’s mixed reception is instructive with regard to his unstable career trajectory. On the one hand, it received considerable critical attention, effectively launched the Hollywood careers of both Gere and fashion designer Giorgio Armani, and became the biggest commercial success of Schrader’s career, earning \$22 million at the US box-office on a modest budget of \$4.8

million. Yet on the other hand, many critics and viewers felt that Schrader had seemed to think about nothing *but* the surface of the work. Emblematic of this position is Geoff Andrew's *Time Out* review, which claims: "The film is so determinedly stylish (Gere's costumes, Giorgio Moroder's soundtrack, John Bailey's *noir*-inflected camerawork), and the performances generally so vacuous [...], that it all becomes something of an academic, if entertaining, exercise that fails to stir the emotions" (35).⁷

There is a sense in *American Gigolo* that Schrader is self-consciously locating himself in an intertextual dialogue with his cinematic forebears. The degree to which he wears the Bresson influence on his sleeve, as well as the manner in which he often seems to be applying the very theories of cinematic form that he himself developed in both *Transcendental Style* and "Notes on Film Noir", has understandably led scholars such as Bill Nichols and Peter Fraser to interpret the film as Schrader's bare-faced attempt to create his own transcendental Bressonian neo-*noir*. Yet in a short postscript to Nichols' article, Schrader rather wilfully discourages such readings:

I have chosen to believe that my current work as a writer and director and my previous work as a critic have nothing in common... My circumstances are so different from Bresson's that plagiarism is out of the question. I could remake *Pickpocket* shot for shot and not plagiarise Bresson" ("Postscript" 13)

⁷ This notion of filmmaking as academic exercise resonates with Noel Carroll's analysis of New Hollywood cinema, in which he criticises Schrader's penchant for self-conscious allusions to older films, directors and genres – specifically *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951, Robert Bresson) in *Taxi Driver*, *The Searchers* (1956, John Ford) in *Hardcore*, and *Pickpocket* in *American Gigolo* – as "a particularly extreme case of one whose "serious" ambition and big themes drive him to heavy allegory and pedantry" (250).

While I am not convinced by Schrader's stated disavowal, I also think there has been a critical tendency to read *American Gigolo* within the same limiting frames of reference. Following Bordwell's statement that formalist film study must establish films within precise artistic traditions and contextual frameworks (*Figures* 266), my first objective in this chapter is to establish how the character type Schrader terms the 'man in a room' relates both to the alienated heroes of postclassical Hollywood cinema and the loner protagonist in the films of Bresson, before offering a fuller analysis of how Schrader mirrors but also variegates from Bresson's representation of character at the level of camerawork. Moving beyond the Bresson influence, I will evaluate Schrader's use of colour, lighting and camera movement in relation to the work of other influential filmmakers: namely Bernardo Bertolucci and Michelangelo Antonioni, two concurrent visionaries of modernist European art cinema who became "canonical auteurs precisely because of their explorations of color, composition, and detail" (Galt 192), and whose intense focus upon visual surfaces, textures, inanimate objects and spatial relations between character and environment are all strongly evoked in Schrader's film.

Having established the contexts, traditions and bodies of critical thought within which *American Gigolo* emerged, I want to reconsider what is at stake in Schrader's investment in "the surface qualities of the image" (Galt 192). I contend that focusing upon the various elements of mise-en-scène can significantly enrich our understanding of the masculinity crisis at the heart of the film, which "differs from that of [Schrader's] European counterparts in its overt connection to sexual anxiety" (Kouvaros 41) and has led culturally oriented scholars such as Peter Lehman, Sharon Willis and Robin Wood to interpret the film's narrative arc as variously racist, fascist and homophobic. But where many feel that the film's fetishistic attention to visual style distracts from its problematic identity politics – particularly regarding homosexual and nonwhite bodies that are typically perceived as Other – I argue that these problems are in fact most vividly inscribed by the formal structures, visual motifs and aesthetic choices Schrader makes at the level of framing, lighting and cutting. Drawing upon Stella Bruzzi's ideas of how male anxiety is visually articulated in film *noir* and Richard Dyer's work on the aesthetic racism of lighting technology in

mainstream Hollywood cinema, I will demonstrate how the mise-en-scène of *American Gigolo* ultimately sheds light on the problems of self and other that have haunted Schrader's entire career.

'A Man and His Room': The Bressonian Hero and Transcendental Contexts

In his insightful monograph on the filmmaker, George Kouvaros notes that Schrader's transition from critic to screenwriter to director must be contextualised within the broader development of postclassical Hollywood cinema during the 1970s. His emergence coincided with a new wave of young American writers and directors – including Francis Ford Coppola, Robert Altman, Steven Spielberg, Bob Rafelson, Hal Ashby, and Schrader collaborators such as Scorsese and De Palma – whose auteurist films achieved unprecedented success precisely because they struck a balance “between old and new ways of telling a story, between the maintenance of commercial formulas and an openness to personal expression” (Kouvaros 4). Building upon Thomas Elsaesser's statement that the behaviour of the male hero in New Hollywood films such as *Five Easy Pieces* (1970, Rafelson), *Two-Lane Blacktop* (1971, Monte Hellman) and *The Last Detail* (1973, Ashby) tends to be aimless, alienated and “disconnected from a motivating context” (6), Kouvaros claims that the narrative arcs of Schrader's protagonists are “quite distinct from [those] found in classical Hollywood narrative” (7). While the development of the Schrader antihero is obviously indebted to broader shifts in the representation of male subjectivity onscreen, we can find more apposite reference points by looking beyond the 1970s American cinema within which he emerged. For instance, while critics such as Amy Taubin read *Taxi Driver* as a cultural critique of post-Vietnam/Watergate US society and note the uncanny correlation between the tone of Travis's disturbed journal entries and Arthur Bremer's *An Assassin's Diary* (1973), Schrader instead emphasises the formative influences of European existentialist literature and philosophy. During his series of interviews with Kevin Jackson, published as the book *Schrader on Schrader*, he notes:

Travis's is not a societally imposed loneliness or rage, it's an existential kind of rage. The book I reread just before sitting down to write the script was Sartre's *Nausea*, and if anything is the model for *Taxi Driver*, that would be it. (116)

Schrader also attests to the influence of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's 1864 novella *Notes From Underground*, in which the paranoid unreliable narrator recounts his memoirs in freeform monologue. Above all, though, Schrader claims that the device of using journal entries to narrate the protagonist's troubled subjectivity is indebted to Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest* and *Pickpocket*. Looking at these films, we can see how Schrader was heavily influenced by Bresson's iconoclastic conception of the existential hero who harbours a deeply strained relationship with the social world. The figure of the young country priest (Claude Laydu), who alienates his parish and revolts against prayer while dying of stomach cancer, is a case study in contradiction, a character whose mind and body often appear to be pulling him in opposite directions. In his chapter on Bresson in *Transcendental Style*, Schrader observes in this film a pattern that foreshadows how his own protagonists relate to the world: "what seems to be a rejection by the environment is more accurately a rejection by the priest – and not because he wishes to estrange himself, but because he is the unwilling instrument of an overwhelming and self-mortifying passion" (74). This motif of the isolated protagonist who abandons traditional social engagement in the name of a mysterious higher calling would prove central to a number of Schrader protagonists from Travis Bickle onwards. Even more than the country priest, however, the character of Michel in *Pickpocket* represents a crucial Schrader prototype: an ascetic young criminal who lives alone in a rundown Parisian garret containing little more than his cot and books. Believing he is fundamentally different from other people and therefore above the law, Michel spends his days in introspective seclusion, training his hands to perfect the gestures and movements that will enable him to become a master thief. As Schrader explains, Michel's obsessive training regime is "neither sociologically nor financially motivated, but instead is a Will to Pickpocket" (*Transcendental*

Style 77). Detached from his social, economic and political contexts, the Bressonian loner exists in a hermetically sealed world of solitude and ritual.

At first glance, Julian Kay – the glamorous, charismatic and high-priced Los Angeles gigolo played by Gere in *American Gigolo* – does not seem to possess much in common with either the psychotic Travis or Bresson’s wilfully isolated existential heroes. In fact, he represents the second incarnation of a Bressonian character type that Schrader first explored in *Taxi Driver* and would revisit in two later films that he directed himself: as the morose, withdrawn, insomniac drug dealer played by Willem Dafoe in *Light Sleeper* (1992) and the flamboyant but troubled, homosexual society walker played by Woody Harrelson in *The Walker* (2007). While the similarities between these four films and protagonists are not always readily apparent, Schrader conceptualises them in a more abstract manner that suggests we are essentially witnessing different facets of the same man at different stages of his life journey. Each of these four films concerns a mysterious, marginal figure that he terms “The Peeper, The Wanderer, The Voyeur, The Loner” (Kouvaros 122). In each case, the men are nocturnal workers who attempt to define their identities through their isolating, transitory and often dangerous professions:

The whole premise behind the character is someone who drifts around, often at night, peeking into other people’s worlds because he doesn’t have a life of his own. He wants a life, but he can’t figure out how to get one. And as he ages, he has different life concerns. He goes from anger to narcissism to anxiety to someone who has made it his life’s vocation to be deeply superficial. (Bliss 4)

American Gigolo firmly locates this enigmatic figure within the second of his four major life phases. According to Steve Neale, narcissism is a condition that involves “phantasies of power, omnipotence, mastery, and control” (11); these dynamics both organise Julian’s world and structure our relationship to him from the film’s now-iconic opening frames. Over the opening bars of Blondie’s “Call Me”, we cut from a spinning chrome wheel into a music video-style montage of Julian careening down the sunny Pacific Coast Highway in his glistening black

Mercedes convertible. Our introduction to Julian finds him seemingly in control of his destiny, confidently occupying what Kouvaros terms a “space defined by speed and unhindered movement” (39). In his analysis of the film, Kouvaros contrasts the fragmenting initial close-ups of the car’s wheel and taillight, shortly followed by Julian’s carefree glance into the rearview mirror, with the equally iconic sequence of Travis’s yellow cab slowly emerging from an urban sewer, almost like a coffin on wheels, at the start of *Taxi Driver* (39). But where the opening of that film instantly locates us in Travis’ vision of New York as hell, using Hitchcockian close-ups of his eyes bathed in red neon light as he surveys the urban sprawl through his windscreen, here we are denied any clear access to Julian’s subjectivity. Schrader’s distancing strategies take effect from the first shots of Julian’s face, initially concealed by the metallic upper frame of the windshield and then stylishly bathed in shadow, wearing designer sunglasses, in side profile. The remainder of the montage establishes him as a vain, wealthy ladies’ man: he tries on a suit at a Beverly Hills boutique, admires his reflection in the mirror, and finally swaggers back to his car with a slight smirk after kissing an elegant middle-aged woman at her porch. The combination of chic fashion, modern technology and the propulsive rock beat quickly locates the film within the high-gloss aesthetics of early 1980s Hollywood, often associated with the influx of style-conscious new directors – Michael Mann, Adrian Lyne, Alan Parker, Ridley and Tony Scott – whose background lay not in cinema but in commercial advertising.⁸ This is enhanced by the manner in which Bailey’s slick, fluid camerawork and Richard Halsey’s punchy editing rhythms emphasise movement, velocity and the commodities on display rather than the human figure, invariably framing Julian from high angles, at a distance or in motion. Peter Fraser describes how this technique is self-consciously employed to undermine our identification processes at a formal level: “Though Julian’s world appears free, loosely joined and attractive, the

⁸ For prominent examples of 1980s Hollywood visual style with strong roots in commercial design, see Mann’s *Thief* (1981), *Manhunter* (1986) and his television series *Miami Vice* (1984-89); Lyne’s *Flashdance* (1983), *9½ Weeks* (1986) and *Fatal Attraction* (1987); Parker’s *Fame* (1980); Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (1982); and Tony Scott’s *The Hunger* (1983) and *Top Gun* (1986). For studies of the relationship between advertising and 1980s film aesthetics (all of which refer to *American Gigolo*), see Mark Crispin Miller (1990), Justin Wyatt (1994) and Marco Calavita (2007).

points of view adopted by the camera strongly suggest that his world has stability only through artifice, not substance” (92).

Fig 1.1



The emphasis on glamour and speed in this credit sequence does not immediately suggest Travis, let alone Bresson or Sartre. What *is* immediately apparent is how Schrader’s visual expression of character is strongly felt through his use of location. Kouvaros notes the manner in which *American Gigolo* “treats its highly stylized settings as a means of defining the central character’s identity” (38), and indeed the first twenty minutes of the film construct Julian’s suave gigolo persona through his freedom to occupy and navigate a series of privileged social spaces: the upscale boutiques and abodes of his clientele; the Malibu cedar beach house of his Scandinavian madam Anne (Nina Van Pallandt); the plush hotel room where he seduces another middle-aged client; and the Beverly Hills Polo Lounge, where he first meets his eventual love interest, Michelle (Lauren Hutton). Even in an early scene where he is not immediately visible – a high-angle travelling shot in which a long row of palm trees form a pattern of vertical lines across the frame – the sense of “unhindered movement” is evoked in the following shots of Julian, again cruising the Pacific Coast Highway in his Mercedes (see Fig 1.1), smiling serenely and framed against sunshine, blue skies and mountains in the surrounding landscape. For Kouvaros, one of the authorial hallmarks that define Schrader’s oeuvre is the

unusual degree to which he “foregrounds a sense of place as a way of making visible a type of behavior” (31). Along with *American Gigolo*, he mentions *Light of Day* (1987) and *Light Sleeper* as notable examples of Schrader films in which the characters’ relationship to themselves and the external world is delineated through a vivid orchestration of place, space and environment. In truth, this observation applies to virtually every Schrader film. It is impossible to think of *Patty Hearst* without recalling the harrowing first reel where Patty (Natasha Richardson) is kidnapped, blindfolded and confined to a closet, and also how Schrader expresses her nightmare through the subjective experience of place: pointed spatial oppositions between her cramped position on the closet floor, relayed through low camera angles, and high-angle perspectives on the terrorist kidnappers outside the closet; harsh lighting contrasts between the oppressive blackness of the closet space and the painful brightness when one of the kidnappers opens the door or removes her blindfold (Kouvaros 68). Similarly, the psychic crisis that Wade Whitehouse (Nolte) suffers in *Affliction* is rendered through a precise evocation of North American small-town milieu that allows us to locate his personal story within the wider history of the community; the barrenness of his emotional life becomes palpable in the frozen landscapes whose vast whiteness fills the frame.⁹ While Schrader’s interest in the dynamics of character and place was evident from his earliest screenplays – we cannot separate Travis’ neurosis from his fundamental conviction that “Loneliness has followed me my whole life, everywhere. In bars, in cars, sidewalks, stores, everywhere...” – *American Gigolo* is the film in which he started to refine this process of visually relating character to the terms of his/her environment. In this case, the most consistent motif connecting place and behaviour concerns our degree of visual and emotional access to Julian, and it is thus significant that, as Kouvaros suggests, “the only time we get close to Julian is when he is in his apartment” (31).

As we begin to spend time with Julian, we see how Schrader recasts the European existential hero as a California ladykiller, making his high-style

⁹ Noting the film’s carefully wrought atmosphere, Robert Kolker describes *Affliction* as “not merely based on a novel, but with a visual texture so rich and complex that its mise-en-scène becomes novelistic in its detail and persistence” (187-188).

apartment the objective correlative of a lifestyle pared down to the essential elements of crafting his identity. In an article on the work of Italian production designer Ferdinando Scarfiotti, who developed the overall look of *American Gigolo* with the assistance of art director Ed Richardson, Richard Kelly describes Julian's apartment as a kind of "monastic gymnasium shaded in ash-grey and sea-breeze blue, devoid of anything but structural decoration" (6). This assessment captures the atmospheric effect of Julian's living space, which is at once flawlessly chic and rigorously minimalist. Kelly further describes how the apartment's distinctive "hard ceiling", which required the use of "augmented source-light" (6), creates a semi-theatrical platform for us to observe the business of Julian's daily life. As the film progresses, it becomes clear that his apartment is a deeply private space, far removed from his professional dealings with the outside world. He lives alone, appears to have no friends or relatives, and never entertains clients in his home. He has no television, though he collects books, paintings and ceramic urns, and is never seen eating at home. His activities appear limited to a few ascetic rituals in which he prepares to do business with his clientele: he teaches himself to speak Swedish by using a Berlitz tape before meeting a wealthy Swedish client who is flying into Los Angeles; he studies different combinations of designer clothing in order to make the best wardrobe choices; and he maintains a gruelling fitness regime where he sculpts his body by hanging upside down from an exercise bar mounted on the ceiling. These efforts serve as a measure of how seriously Julian takes his occupation, how dedicated he is to becoming the perfect gigolo. For Kouvaros, this intense, hermetic behaviour

indicates a degree of preparation and training that he applies to all aspects of his life. Julian's commitment to training and bettering himself reminds us of Travis's belated efforts to put his life in order. For both characters, these acts of self-creation evoke a sense of isolation and loneliness that is just under the surface. (40)

Certainly there are parallels between Julian's ritualistic lifestyle and those scenes of Travis resuming his military fitness regime, crafting his gun slide or holding his arm over the kitchen stove – strange rites of "bodily purification" (Kouvaros

26) to prepare for his climactic bloodbath. But we can also relate this loner behaviour to scenes of Mishima engaged in intense bodybuilding or writing alone in his room at night, or *Light Sleeper*'s John LeTour staving off insomnia by drinking and writing journal entries, making lists of people whose eyes do not match, or listening to a tape recording of his ex-wife's voice on an answering machine. In an interview with Jackson, Schrader expounds on this trope of male solitude and ritualistic behaviour:

That's Bresson again, and before Bresson it's Dostoyevsky, Camus and Sartre. It's the existential hero – what I like to call 'a man and his room' stories. You have these two characters, the man and his room – I love the kind of movies that are about those two. *Pickpocket* is like that, *Diary of a Country Priest* is, *A Man Escaped* is..." (Schrader qtd. in Jackson 163)

While his apartment is the place where we see Julian at his most exposed, it does not automatically follow that we get as "close" to him in this space as Kouvaros suggests: Schrader's mode of filming his protagonist mitigates against closeness even when he is at home alone; as with *Pickpocket* or *Diary of a Country Priest*, we are allowed to observe his behaviour but not relate to him. For Julian, the maintenance of his physique is crucial to both his identity and his livelihood, yet the bodily rituals that constitute his daily regimen are visualised in an ambiguous, disorienting manner. In his book *Running Scared: Masculinity and the Representation of the Male Body*, Peter Lehman claims that the historical problems of depicting the male body onscreen reflect deeper anxieties within the American film industry and, more broadly, a patriarchal culture whose ideas of male power and privilege are dominated by the symbolic, mythical phallus. According to Lehman, "men under patriarchy are not just empowered by their privileged position through the penis-phallus; they are also profoundly alienated from their own bodies" (39). Lehman charts these contradictory motifs of privilege, empowerment and alienation in his analysis of *American Gigolo*, which he considers "one of the few Hollywood films that overtly disturbs central classical tenets about how the nude male body is shot, edited, and narrativized" (14). He evaluates this textual disturbance through a close reading of the film's seminude workout scene, as well as a fleeting but significant instance of Gere's

full-frontal nudity after the main sex scene (to which I will later return). For Lehman, the primary motif of the training scene is its method of fragmenting Julian's body into a peculiar set of independent, disconnected and almost autonomous parts. He observes four dominant shot patterns in this scene, each of which functions slightly differently in terms of our spectatorial relationship to Julian. We alternate between tight close-ups of individual body parts (his legs from the knees down as he adjusts his ankle grips, his hands grabbing hold of the exercise bar, his forearms dropping the dumbbells), which isolate the actions and movements of these parts; medium shots of Julian hanging from the bar upside down, which highlight the alluring qualities of his bare torso; side-view mid-shots where "we see his muscles straining from the exertion" (Lehman 15), thus emphasising the labour and effort of the body; and an extreme long shot of his whole body hanging upside down from the bar, which resituates him in the sparsely furnished space of his apartment while also establishing distance between Julian and the viewer. The focus on bodily action and movement, combined with the unusual alternation of shot patterns, persists after Julian has finished using the bar. As the telephone rings and he starts discussing a business deal with his second pimp, named Leon (Bill Duke), he continues exercising his shoulders, neck and legs, admires his image in the bathroom mirror, and moves freely around the space of his apartment. Lehman notes that "Only at the end of the shot does he very briefly stand still and then the camera frames him in a conventional body-and-shoulders close-up; none of his body is on display" (15).

Although Schrader's resistance to conventional framing and cutting regimes is open to a range of different interpretations, Lehman focuses on its relationship to dominant patterns of representing masculinity. In his observation that "all the fragmented body shots emphasize the muscles either poised for action or in action" (15), he responds to other seminal early work on the sexual representation of the male body, which sought to explain how visual media negotiates anxieties about masculinity as the object of a desiring gaze through various textual mechanisms of displacement and disavowal. For instance, Neale suggests that the homosexual threat posed by the alluring male body in Anthony Mann's film *noirs* *T-Men* (1947) and *Border Incident* (1949) is defused by being subjected to sadistic punishment in the narrative, while Richard Dyer – in an

essay titled “Don’t Look Now” which Lehman finds pertinent for the training scene in *American Gigolo* – notes the overdetermined emphasis upon agency, effort and athletic equipment that differentiates photography of male pin-ups from the open eroticism of their female counterparts. Dyer’s argument that male pin-up imagery operates on the fundamental conviction that “it is precisely *straining* that is held to be the great good, what makes a man a man” (“Don’t Look Now” 276) is undoubtedly relevant for Schrader’s formal assemblage, particularly the ways in which the erotic potential of Julian’s body is partially desexualised through the persistent emphasis on action. To this end, Lehman observes that “Even when he is talking on the phone, there is a need to show him in constant action”, and that “the audible foregrounding of his breathing enlists the sound track in the service of stressing his exertion and activity” (15). He thus interprets the scene’s focus on action, effort and movement – figured through close-ups of separate body parts engaged in strenuous labour, the sound of Julian’s heavy breathing post-workout, and his seeming inability to keep still throughout the scene – as Schrader’s reactionary affirmation of phallic male agency, “a hysterical preparation and overcompensation for the static, passive display of Gere’s body in a later lovemaking scene” (Lehman 15). Yet this also points to a certain limitation in Lehman’s reading: if it were only the film’s nude scenes that deployed the motif of bodily fragmentation, then *American Gigolo* could be neatly categorised alongside those various other texts that exhibit deep anxiety about filming the male body. In truth, however, this style extends to Schrader’s filming of Julian in general – whether he is nude or clothed, driving down the highway or preparing for clients alone in his apartment – and as such, it demands wider contexts for analysis.

We can begin to evaluate these other contexts for Schrader’s stylised approach to the male body by relating it to his own critical writing and, in particular, assessing the degree to which Bresson may have influenced not only the film’s treatment of narrative, theme and character, but also more specifically its visual style. Peter Fraser, one of two scholars who have conducted detailed analysis of *American Gigolo* in relation to Schrader’s thesis of transcendental cinema (the other being Bill Nichols, whom I will shortly address), claims that we should approach the film as his direct and self-conscious “attempt to create an

American version of the transcendental style manifest in the films of Robert Bresson, Yasujiro Ozu and Carl Dreyer” (93). In my view this is an overstatement that tends to limit our range of engagements with the film, but I agree that the transcendental context sheds interesting light on both the theme of bodily alienation and the coolly defamiliarising modes of representation it entails. As Fraser notes, the camera largely avoids shooting emotive close-ups of Julian’s face at moments when we might expect them, and it continually refuses to adopt his first-person perspective, even when he is alone in his room (95). Unlike *Taxi Driver*, where we occupy Travis’ subject position from the film’s opening frames and are thus forced to share his experience of deepening psychosis, *American Gigolo* rarely confers upon Julian the subjectivity that we unconsciously expect via the conventional figurations of camerawork (facial close-ups, clear shot-reverse shot patterns). Instead, as Fraser notes, it documents his behaviour voyeuristically, compelling us to watch Julian and bear invisible witness to his private experience while simultaneously discouraging our close identification with him:

the camera forces an impersonal distance between Julian and the spectator. The majority of shots of Julian in the film are initiated from behind him or to the sides, and when he is shot from the front, the camera typically pulls back. (Fraser 95)

In articulating this self-conscious disengagement between spectator and subject, Fraser argues that Schrader’s representation of Julian’s body owes a stylistic, as well as narrative, debt of influence to *Pickpocket*.¹⁰ Given that he is consistently framed, blocked and edited in a manner that emphasises dissonance and fragmentation over wholeness or unity, the effect is that we are usually only granted access to isolated portions of his body, which obviously results in a degree of “spectator alienation” (Fraser 95). This mode of *découpage*, where the

¹⁰ In his 2010 blog post about Bresson on the American Society of Cinematographers website, John Bailey mentions that “Paul and I watched *Pickpocket* numerous times on VHS cassette” during the making of *American Gigolo* (Bailey, “Robert Bresson: Notes on the Cinematographer”).

protagonist's body occupies the filmic space in jagged or transitory segments, is a quintessentially Bressonian distancing strategy:

Schrader alludes to the Bresson film by imitating the camera style of fixing upon those parts of his protagonist's body which are the tools of his illicit trade, particularly his profiled face and torso. In *Pickpocket* Michel's hands are the focus for the camera. (Fraser 93) ¹¹

Despite both taking transcendental approaches to *American Gigolo*, neither Fraser nor Nichols examines Schrader's own critique of Bressonian mise-en-scène in great detail. It is thus worth returning to Schrader's chapter on Bresson in *Transcendental Style* to evaluate the relationship that Bresson orchestrates between the spectator and the subject of his films through the attitude and disposition of his camera, and to then consider the degree to which Schrader seeks to replicate or diverge from these strategies in *American Gigolo*. In doing so, we can better understand not only how Schrader interprets Bressonian technique, but also how and to what effect he applies it to his own film. According to Schrader, Bresson creates a distinct sense of the "everyday" as a self-conscious "opposition to the contrived, dramatic events which pass for real life in movies" (*Transcendental Style* 63). Contrary to what this description suggests, the Bressonian everyday is not a naïve endeavour for documentary authenticity or an attempt to present a verisimilar account of external reality. Instead it involves the painstaking dissolution of the core elements of traditional narrative cinema, which include cause-and-effect plotting, editing that adheres to the classical continuity system, acting based on theatrical concepts of psychological realism, and musical scores designed to stimulate emotional responses. Bresson's term for these elements is "screens", manipulative fabrications that dilute both the pure form of cinema and the potential authenticity of the viewer's response (*Transcendental Style* 64). Camerawork is the primary vessel for communicating cinematic meaning, and as such, it

¹¹ Gilles Deleuze also notes the manner in which Bresson's fragmenting and isolating visual emphasis on hands "makes touch an object of view in itself", and that the hand thereby "takes the place of the face itself for the purpose of affects" (*Cinema 2: The Time-Image* 12).

represents especially difficult obstacles for the transcendental filmmaker in search of formal purity:

Any possible shot – high angle, close-up, pan – conveys a certain attitude toward a character, a “screen” which simplifies and interprets the character. Camera angles and pictorial composition, like music, are extremely insidious screens; they can undermine a scene without the viewer’s being aware of it. A slow zoom-out or a vertical composition can substantially alter the meaning of the action within a scene. (*Transcendental Style* 67)

According to Schrader, Bresson negotiates the problem of “screens”, at least insofar as they pertain to camerawork, through the adoption of a rigorously ascetic camera style. His preference is for flat, clean but densely packed frontal compositions that are shot from “one unvarying height”, typically “at the chest level of a standing person”, and usually with “at least one character facing the camera, seeming caught between the audience and his environment” (*Transcendental Style* 68). Flatness and frontality supplant the “screens” that structure conventional camerawork: close-ups that express the protagonist’s inner life written across his/her face, establishing shots that orient us in space and time, or shot-reverse-shot patterns that foster identification by suturing us into the protagonist’s thought processes. The static camera is thus best understood as a technique through which Bresson avoids passing editorial commentary on the behaviour of his characters. The monotonous repetition of shot patterns and denial of stylistic variation, which constitute Bresson’s version of “everyday” at the level of camerawork, also dispel the viewer from “look[ing] to the angle and composition for “clues” to the action”, as is the case in traditional cinema (*Transcendental Style* 68). In sum, Bressonian camerawork problematises identification between spectator and subject, frustrates the expectations of mainstream viewers, and thereby “postpones emotional involvement” (*Transcendental Style* 68).

In an earlier account of *American Gigolo* as a failed attempt to create transcendental cinema, Nichols argues that we cannot separate Schrader’s

allusions toward Bressonian asceticism from the film's firmly planted roots in the genre conventions and industrial practices of commercial Hollywood filmmaking. He claims that the "effective application of a formula for a transcendental style" (13) is compromised by the film's reliance on precisely those screens that Bresson eschewed: the glamour of its principal stars, which differentiates it from the "everyday" mould (11); the "overly mechanical reliance on a formula" (13); and the "numerous borrowings from films and film traditions" (13) that locate it as a product of postclassical Hollywood. Yet this does not seem to me Schrader's primary intention with this film; in tracing the relationship between Schrader's film criticism and his own filmmaking techniques, I do not propose that we follow either Fraser or Nichols' strategy of reading *American Gigolo* as a mainstream version of an art film by Bresson, or indeed any other transcendental filmmaker. Bresson's idiosyncratic brand of minimalism must be qualified in a range of ways, most of which finally have little bearing on Schrader's style. For instance, in his extensive study of the development of modernist European cinema in the postwar era, András Bálint Kovács reads the emphasis upon narrative ellipsis, manipulation of offscreen space and sparsity of dialogue in Bresson's films – factors which coalesce to "give the impression that they consist of a series of almost still images, much like in the silent cinema" (144) – as integral to his aesthetic. In contrast, *American Gigolo* foregrounds an aesthetic of the cinematic image as lushly composed, designed and stylised; the roving movement of Bailey's unchained camera, along with Schrader's faith in the expressionistic capacity of colour, décor and lighting to evoke ideas about character, sufficiently differentiates it from the "everyday" to render any comparative reading limited at best. Yet despite the fundamental differences in their overall approach to mise-en-scène, Schrader still deploys key aspects of Bressonian camerawork – the isolating fixation upon different body parts, the disavowal of a human subject position in the scenographic space – to cultivate an attitude of impersonal detachment towards his protagonist. In this case, however, these techniques are not enlisted in the service of a transcendental filmmaking style, but rather to illustrate the wider point that Julian is divorced from his *own* psyche and emotional life, and that his efforts to construct the perfect gigolo persona constitute an attempt to disavow the void of his existence. Julian's alienation operates on a few different

levels. On the one hand, we may discern a certain anxiety about his lack of intellect: he poses as a language translator in a vain attempt to cultivate a cosmopolitan demeanour, but these strategies backfire on him when Michelle correctly identifies him as a gigolo during their first meeting, and when he later forgets his appointment with the Swedish client he has worked so hard to impress. (And in classic *noir* style, his failure to intuit “clues” and understand information will trigger his downfall as the thriller narrative escalates in the film’s second half.) More importantly, though, his alienation is manifested in his emotional numbness, his inability to feel anything authentic or even – as we later learn during an argument with Michelle – to experience pleasure unless he is successfully performing his professional duties as a sex worker. In this respect, Schrader mobilises the desubjectified techniques of Bressonian camerawork in order to create a protagonist who is unable to connect with his own interiority. Instead of deconstructing the grammar of classical narrative cinema, as Schrader suggests is Bresson’s aim, or anxiously overstressing the agency of the male body, as Lehman suggests is Schrader’s objective here, the motif of fragmentation reflects Julian’s neurotic bid to compartmentalise his life into different roles, activities and functions. In addition to the distancing camerawork, Schrader uses a range of other elements – in particular the film’s discourse of fashion, its evocative décor, and Gere’s sexually ambiguous star image – to convey Julian’s increasing alienation from his mind and body. While these strategies depart from Bressonian traditions, they also incite our voyeuristic curiosity about Julian, our desire to watch and know more about his unusual lifestyle, while simultaneously deferring our emotional involvement. In the process, they foster a mode of representation in which “Julian can be admired and enjoyed, gazed upon or analyzed, but never known as a complete human being” (Fraser 95).

We can approximate an understanding of Julian through his relationship to clothes. In addition to its function as a private gym, Julian’s apartment is a space in which he explores his love of fashion. Indeed, a considerable amount of the scholarly attention devoted to *American Gigolo* focuses upon a brief but pivotal scene that unites issues of masculinity, performance and fashion. Julian, wearing only a pair of grey trousers, prepares for a late-night meeting with a client. After

doing a line of cocaine on a glass tray, he swaggers unselfconsciously and sings off-key to Smokey Robinson & The Miracles' "The Love I Saw in You Was Just a Mirage". Opening a chest of drawers, he lays out a lavish selection of menswear on his large, empty bed. As the camera tracks the Armani jackets, shirts and ties in medium close-up from left to right, creating the sensual fluidity of movement that is now established as Bailey's trademark, we see Julian evaluating different combinations with a cocked eyebrow or a curl of his lip. Finally settling on the desired outfit, he dresses in the mirror while practising his Swedish phrases. Schrader describes this as the "artist at his palette" scene (Jackson 161), and there is a sense in which he means it quite literally. As with the training scene, this sequence represents an archetypal "man in a room" moment; it provides a voyeuristic glimpse into the private behaviour of a loner immersed in the task of constructing his social persona, preparing to present the idealised version of his self to the world. In contrast to that scene, which fragmented Julian's body to the point of inscrutability, here we are granted access to his thoughts via more conventional medium close-ups that express his contentment in mastering the act of self-creation. The emphasis upon Gere's satisfied expression helps us to understand Julian as someone who is only comfortable alone: dressing in the mirror, listening to music, learning a foreign language, and enjoying the task of moulding his persona. Kouvaros draws interesting parallels between this scene and the opening of *Mishima*, where the protagonist also lays out his clothes – in this case a pristine military uniform – on the bed before studying his reflection while dressing in the mirror; the camerawork (again by Bailey) even mimics the same smooth pan from left to right across the clothes displayed on the bed (Kouvaros 2). As such, both films articulate broader authorial concerns about the performance of masculine identity through the act of dressing, and an awareness of the ways in which this behaviour functions as a means of communing with the self:

Beyond the sense that both Mishima and Julian are fashioning uniforms, Schrader's filming of the preparations implies a deeper connection between the two films. The meticulous manner in which these characters prepare to dress suggests not only a state of heightened self-consciousness

but also a desire to re-create the self through the perfecting of certain roles.
(Kouvaros 2)

While the dressing sequence in *Mishima* has received little attention, *American Gigolo*'s discourse of masculinity and clothing has generated substantial analysis amongst scholars of gender, fashion and popular culture. A scan through the scholarship illustrates how this scene at once addresses certain anxieties about masculinity and appears to induce similar anxieties in viewers. For instance, Pamela Church Gibson claims the film "was the first to showcase fashion for men in a radically new way" (178), owing to the fact that Armani designed Gere's wardrobe and the way it depicts a male character spending time alone with his clothes (see Figs 1.2 and 1.3 overleaf). Gibson suggests that "No man, gay or straight, in the history of the cinema had ever before been seen making this type of considered decision about what to wear, and certainly not luxuriating in it as Julian does here" (178). In contrast with the focus on the active, straining and specular male body in the training sequence, William Luhr argues that the foregrounding of male fashion and the activity of dressing here promotes an unconventional type of male subjectivity: "The spectacle here is not his body, but the clothing of his body and his interest in the act" (29). Luhr adds that "Such a scene would be barely imaginable for a male star in a classical Hollywood film", on the grounds that seeing a male star "taking an inordinate amount of time selecting his clothing would have encoded him as feminine" (30). In her book *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies*, Stella Bruzzi agrees that the scene's disruptive quality is due to the fact that "a man is presented communing with his clothes, a rarity in itself, as the 'what shall I wear' scenario has traditionally been a female preserve" (26). However, this scene is not entirely without precedent. Many stars throughout cinema history have expressed tropes of androgynous, subversive or transgressive sexuality; to cite one example, Miriam Hansen argues persuasively that the screen image of Rudolph Valentino was conditioned by a mixture of narcissism, consumerism and feminine masochism, resulting in a "slippage of gender definitions" (267) that female viewers found particularly appealing. At the textual level, these slippages are typically worked out through the representation of certain actions and behaviours that are more widely associated with one gender than another,

which includes the acts of “dressing up” and attending thoughtfully to one’s appearance. In the decade before *American Gigolo*’s release, mainstream Hollywood films such as *Midnight Cowboy* (1969, John Schlesinger) and *Saturday Night Fever* (1977, John Badham) also featured narcissistic heroes (played by Jon Voight and John Travolta, respectively) who were intensely conscious of the social and sexual presentation of their masculinity. Indeed, those characters were also shown in private, ‘man in a room’ moments, explicitly thinking through the relationship between appearance, fashion choices and body language while dressing in the mirror or preparing for a night on the town.

Figs 1.2 and 1.3





Given that there are tangible precedents and intertexts for these scenes of Julian dressing and training, it seems the anxiety they generate is partly mediated by the expressivity of Gere's star persona, and how Schrader self-consciously uses that persona to construct a distinctly ambiguous male sexuality. Discussing his rise to stardom with *American Gigolo*, Robyn Karney notes how Gere's "sullen lips, slanted, heavy dark eyes and muscular body [...] made him one of the hunkiest heart-throbs of the 80s", and also the fact that his breakthrough role fortuitously "coincided with the time when it became acceptable for women to ogle men" (176). Charting this heightened attendance to the female gaze in Hollywood cinema between the late 1970s and early 1980s, Veronika Rall locates Gere within a new wave of glamorous male stars whose screen personas were defined by a mixture of forthright confidence, unapologetic narcissism and exhibitionistic willingness to present their bodies for eroticised display (93). She cites Travolta's singing/dancing, strutting and preening performances in *Saturday Night Fever*, *Grease* (1978, Randal Kleiser) and *Staying Alive* (1983, Sylvester Stallone), and Tom Cruise's uninhibited dance around the living room in his underwear in *Risky Business* (1983, Paul Brickman) as indicative of this shift in representing youthful masculinity onscreen. Gere's connections with these stars are both direct and symbolic: he played four roles that were originally offered to Travolta, including Julian in *American Gigolo*, while as Ruth O'Donnell observes, his Julian also presages the combination of vulnerability,

exhibitionism and “narcissistic enjoyment of his own physicality and interest in material goods” (101) that defined Cruise’s star image in films such as *Top Gun* and *Cocktail* (1988, Roger Donaldson). In Gere’s case, however, the associations with self-display are even more pronounced. He first gained attention with *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* (1977, Richard Brooks), in which he played a charismatic but abusive street hustler who brazenly assures Diane Keaton that he will be “the greatest fuck” of her life; afterwards he performs a frenzied dance wearing only a jockstrap and wielding a switchblade that glows in the dark. Linda Ruth Williams notes that both his profession and his textual function as a “dangerous love object” (78) in this film foreshadows his role as Julian. In addition, it signalled a willingness to strip for the camera that he repeated not only in *American Gigolo* but also *An Officer and a Gentleman* (1982, Taylor Hackford) and *Breathless* (1983, Jim McBride). This led critics to point out his limitations as a male star with a largely female fan base: David Shipman claimed “he is handicapped by the fact that, like Valentino – with whom he shares both a self-absorption and sexual insolence – he is disregarded by men while their womenfolk adore him” (104). Noting the fact that Schrader’s film deliberately “leaves blurred the crossover point for California gigolos” (105) in terms of Julian’s possible willingness to perform kinky, deviant or simply homosexual services for money, Shipman also finds it significant that “there would be other hints in later Gere movies that he was not exactly immune to bisexuality, which in the early 1980s (before AIDS) added to his screen appeal, to women at least” (105-106).

For Schrader’s part, it was precisely this quality of sexual ambiguity that he sought to capture in Julian. When questioned by Jackson whether he intended to reach a gay audience with the film, he acknowledged that “the circle I was moving in when I made it was seventy-five per cent gay, and the movie does have that gay feeling you mention” (163). An important factor in conveying that gay feeling was the casting of Gere, whose screen persona already operated outside the boundaries of heteronormativity: “A certain amount of androgyny is desirable in movie stars”, Schrader explains. “All the great stars work both sides of the line; they have to be appealing to both men and women sexually”

(Jackson 163).¹² In this light, we may understand how the film's lack of gay content allows Schrader to both draw on Gere's androgynous star image and mobilise the various elements of mise-en-scène in the service of a sexual ambiguity that is never verbalised (an aesthetic that he pushes to its extreme in *Mishima*, and which I will thus revisit in my final chapter). In fact, this sense of ambiguity is evident from the film's opening song, which Schrader used expressly because "that sort of icy-cool sound of Deborah Harry was perfect for the ambivalent male sexuality that Gere presented" (Gallagher 18).¹³ In keeping with Bailey's statement that the film's "style and content reflect and comment on each other very self-consciously" (Rebello 38), we can trace various other evocations of sexual ambivalence at both formal and narrative levels. Not only is Julian a professional sex worker, an occupation largely associated with women, but he is also frequently referred to by the feminising nickname "Julie". We first hear this appellation when he is conducting negotiations with Anne and demands a higher cut of their usual 50/50 split than she is prepared to give him; the fact that she calls him "Julie" while sternly reasserting control over her business operation and his finances thus becomes a way of subordinating him to a passive, "feminine" position. Similarly, when Julian anxiously recounts having to perform a "rough trick" to Leon (for whom he is working behind Anne's back) at a restaurant, he makes flirtatious eye contact with a woman dining at the next table. In this scene, Julian's first admission of the seamy underbelly of his profession accompanies the camera's focus upon the red brick wall of the restaurant entrance, which becomes a metaphorical cage fencing him into his lifestyle; his flirtation with the female diner thus registers not as any natural attraction but as an attempt to reclaim control of his upwardly mobile social persona and perform the gestures of heterosexual male desire. In this regard, Julian's seeming lack of a coherent sexual identity means that Schrader constructs his alienated, narcissistic and performative mode of existence less

¹² For a broader discussion of androgynous gender performance in Hollywood cinema, see Rebecca Bell-Metereau's *Hollywood Androgyny* (1985).

¹³ Schrader continued this musical gender reversal with the theme song of *Cat People*: "In the same way, the androgynous male voice of David Bowie was perfect for the creature that Nastassia plays [in *Cat People*]", which prompts interviewer Sharon Gallagher to note that "Nastassia sings to you with the voice of a man and Richard Gere sings to you with the voice of a woman" (18).

through his interaction with other people than with his relationship to the things of his world: clothes, objects, décor. In turn, this infuses the film's scenes of dressing and training with a sensuality that cannot be neatly categorised in binary terms of hetero/homo desire. Discussing the composition of the Armani clothes laid out on the bed in the dressing scene, Bruzzi reads the visual treatment of textured material as integral to its discourse of desire:

For all the interest in Julian's sexuality, *American Gigolo* is a clothes movie; the objects of fetishism are not Julian but what he wears. As the camera pans back and forth along the line of light jackets, silk shirts and knitted ties before Julian tries them on, the erotic fascination is with the clothes, the gentle folds on the lining, the harmonious juxtaposition of shade and fabric. (26)

For Bruzzi, the lingering focus upon the sensual materiality of his clothing addresses a type of consumer fetishism that is overlooked in more conventional image studies of the film's depiction of masculinity in crisis. In her study of male anxiety and postmodern spatial design in *American Gigolo*, Sharon Willis makes a similar observation about the film's aestheticisation of Julian's clothing. She argues that the fusion of a medium close-up composition with a left-to-right tracking movement along the "temporary display surface" (57) of Julian's bed promotes a visual style where "clothing is monumentalized in a way that suggests advertising and retail store appeals to consumer desire" (57). She also emphasises the fact that this camera style, which is less indebted to Bressonian fragmentation than to Michelangelo Antonioni's equally idiosyncratic technique of scrambling figure-ground relations, proves crucial in mediating our spectatorial relationship to clothing as the object of desire: "Bailey's European-influenced shot composition both monumentalizes objects and breaks down their environment into the density and resistance of individual detail in such a way as to emphasize a fetishistic relation to objects" (57).

I will examine the stylistic influence of Antonioni in my later discussion of the role of objects and surfaces in *American Gigolo*. For now, I want to close this section by considering how Schrader films Julian's clothing either in harmony or

dissonance with the other elements of his mise-en-scène to evoke ideas about his character and, in particular, his performance of identity. In his analysis of the relationship between the clothing worn by film characters and the spatial environment that these characters occupy, Bordwell explains the fact that “costume is often coordinated with setting” (*Film Art: An Introduction* 163). In conventional fiction films, the framing, décor and colour design of both locations and costumes facilitates an emphasis upon the human figure by enabling the viewer to locate the character in the visual field; this is easily accomplished by having protagonists wear vibrant colours against comparatively neutral backgrounds (*Film Art: An Introduction* 163). Yet there are also times where “the director may instead choose to match the color values of setting and costume more closely” (*Film Art: An Introduction* 163). To this end, Bordwell describes how a shot in *Fellini’s Casanova* (1976, Federico Fellini) “creates a color gradation that runs from bright red costumes to paler red walls, the whole composition set off by a small white accent in the distance” (*Film Art: An Introduction* 163). He suggests that this motif of neutralising the colour differences between clothing and environment, “this “bleeding” of the costume into the setting is carried to a kind of limit in the prison scene of *THX 1138*, in which George Lucas strips both locale and clothing to stark white on white” (*Film Art: An Introduction* 163). Such sequences thus invert the logic of their colour design with regard to the traditional relationships between character and environment, human body and inanimate location, figure and ground. Throughout the first half of *American Gigolo*, which employs a host of fragmenting, obfuscating and defamiliarising effects in its visual treatment of Julian, Schrader consistently matches the colours of clothing and location. The most striking example of this tendency to neutralise colour differences occurs in the correspondence between the pastel tones of Julian’s clothing and the décor of his apartment. In settling on his desired outfit in the dressing scene, Julian selects an immaculate grey jacket, an elegant taupe shirt, and a light grey tie with horizontal brown stripes, yet the colour and design of his clothing are almost absorbed into the space of the room. Retreating from the mirror, he stands in medium shot against a wall whose mushroom shade mirrors the tones of his jacket and shirt; even the stripe motif on his tie mimics the horizontal line of the ribbed panelling on the wall. If, as many have suggested, *American*

Gigolo must be understood as a film in which “the clothes make the man” (DCP Film), we must also consider how clothes figure into the environment that shapes Julian’s identity. Schrader’s decision to neutralise the tones of Julian’s clothing and apartment into near-monochromatic shades of muted greys and browns is significant both in terms of Julian’s characterisation and our spectatorial engagement with him. It suggests that the act of dressing and his choice of interior décor constitute part of the same impulse towards his construction of identity. His extravagant clothes form a type of protective membrane or “second skin” between his self and the external world, while his apartment is a hermetic enclosure in which to sculpt his gigolo persona without human contact (when Michelle visits unannounced and teases him that she expected the place to resemble a bordello, he defensively retaliates: “This is *my* apartment. Women don’t come here”). The effect of this colour neutralisation between clothing and locale subverts Gere’s status as sex symbol – someone who is in essence *different* from other people – to render Julian distant, anonymous, lacking authentic personhood. Ironically, his expertise in colour coordination reduces him to a function of his own mise-en-scène, another prop on display in his frozen environment. For all his glamour and charisma, there are times when Julian almost disappears into the surface of his world.

Objects of Beauty: Hollywood *Noir* and European Art Cinema

Preparing to direct *American Gigolo* in 1978, Schrader began to develop concepts for translating the life of Julian Kay into visual images: “I realized that the character of the gigolo was essentially a character of surfaces”, he told Jackson. “Therefore the movie had to be about surfaces, and you had to create a new kind of Los Angeles to reflect this new kind of protagonist” (158). Schrader’s desire to create shimmering surfaces that reflected the lifestyle of his protagonist meant reimagining his screenplay through a foreigner’s eyes and ears. He thus recruited a team of artistic collaborators to supply the film with a distinctly European sensibility. For Julian’s wardrobe he enlisted the Italian designer Armani, whose cleanly tailored menswear for this film led to him designing costumes for over a hundred films. For the score he chose the Munich-

based Italian composer Moroder, who had recently purveyed his trademark electronic sound as producer of disco artists like Donna Summer into an Oscar-winning film score for *Midnight Express* (1978, Alan Parker); his production work on the title songs of *American Gigolo* and *Cat People* provided Blondie and David Bowie, respectively, with hit singles. For the overall look of the film, Schrader collaborated closely with Scarfiotti, whose flamboyantly stylised, non-naturalistic sets on *The Conformist* (1970, Bertolucci) proved a defining influence on this phase of his career, and the American-born Bailey, who refined his continental sensibility through his love of French New Wave cinema and his apprenticeship as an assistant cameraman for leading European cinematographers Vilmos Zsigmond and Néstor Almendros (*Masters of Light* 49). The result of these collaborations is a film that synthesises a diverse range of stylistic influences. In the following section, I will discuss how Schrader draws upon the work of European art cinema filmmakers such as Bertolucci and Antonioni, as well as the narrative and formal tropes of classical Hollywood film *noir*, in order to express Julian's deepening social and sexual anxieties at the level of imagery.

When questioned about the foremost influences upon his approach to visuals, Schrader freely admits: "I've stolen from *The Conformist* repeatedly, not only in *Gigolo* but in *Cat People* [...] and *Mishima*" (Jackson 210-11).¹⁴ His primary interest in Bertolucci's film lies in the fact that it "reintroduced the concept of high style". He explains further: "Movies used to have high style in the thirties and forties and then gradually, through the fifties and sixties, they became more realistic, less production-designed, and *The Conformist* became a real sort of rallying cry" (Jackson 160). Of course, the expressionistic formalism of Bertolucci's film – a dazzling mixture of rich colours and chiaroscuro shadow, canted angles and monumental fascist architecture – is itself engaged in a highly self-conscious dialogue with the history of cinema, deftly incorporating allusions to 1920s German science fiction films such as *Metropolis* (1927, Fritz Lang),

¹⁴ Bailey corroborates Schrader's statements: "I've seen *The Conformist* probably twenty-five times. Schrader and I saw it five or six times while preparing *American Gigolo*... [It] very deliberately had a lot of stylistic characteristics of *The Conformist*" (*Masters of Light* 53).

1930s Hollywood horrors and romantic comedies such as *Frankenstein* (1931, James Whale) and *Angel* (1937, Ernst Lubitsch), and high-style 1940s classics such as *Citizen Kane* (1941, Orson Welles) and *The Maltese Falcon* (1941, John Huston) among many others (Forgacs). Its extraordinary attention to mise-en-scène makes it a classic example of a film in which the minutiae of “costumes, settings, lighting, and the arrangement of characters in the frame [...] all help to define the characters and their relationship to each other and to the conflict the film is working through” (Haralovich 147). Similarly, the Bertolucci influence on *American Gigolo* is most deeply felt in the way Schrader orchestrates emotion less through performance or dialogue than via shifts in colour, light and camera movement. An interesting example occurs in an early scene at the Polo Lounge, where Julian first meets Michelle, the lonely politician’s wife who patiently pursues him until he reciprocates her love (see Figs 1.4 and 1.5 overleaf). Against a backdrop of pastel-toned décor, their tentative exchange unfolds under an artificial reddish orange glow that recalls the stylised lighting schemes devised by Bertolucci and director of photography Vittorio Storaro on *The Conformist*. In particular, Schrader references that film’s motif of bathing characters in saturations of primary-coloured light at moments of heightened emotion, whereby internal states are conveyed through a meaningful intensification of colour. A notable example in *The Conformist* is the erotic encounter between newlyweds Clerici (Jean-Louis Trintignant) and Giulia (Stefania Sandrelli) on a train, where sexual ambivalence is figured as a distinctly non-naturalistic play of warm orange and cool blue light flickering across their faces and bodies. At such moments we are reminded of colour’s “overwhelming significance as a meaning-making structure of a film” (Price 3). More specifically, it reflects the tendency of certain European art films to mobilise colour in what Paul Coates terms a “deliberately complex, multivalent, poetic and cross-cultural manner” that may be “less predictable than that of mainstream American cinema” which, in its widespread subordination to narrative, often “takes colour simply as an unremarkable part of the workaday business of filming” (5).¹⁵

¹⁵ While we could certainly argue that Coates neglects the richly expressive colour design of certain classical Hollywood films, e.g. *The Wizard of Oz* (1939, Victor Fleming) or *An American in Paris* (1951, Vincent Minnelli), it is worth noting that the

Figs 1.4 and 1.5



In contrast to the latter part of Coates' statement, the Polo Lounge scene represents a largely technical exercise in the expressive potential of mise-en-scène. It is worth noting here that most critics berate Gere and Hutton's acting in the film: Nichols claims that they are simply too glamorous to function as human signifiers of the Bressonian "everyday" he thinks Schrader seeks to replicate (11), Fraser feels they are well-cast only "because they are two-dimensional Hollywood stars, mass-produced to satisfy audience expectations – the

European art film tradition he privileges is much closer to Schrader's own belated introduction to cinema.

prototypical star-models of the 1980s” (96), while Lawrence Russell compares their acting to “Revlon dolls in a sun-bath, unreal except for style, pure American pop despite the Italian make-over” (2000).¹⁶ While such critiques are perhaps unfair to both performers, their acting is clearly secondary to the manner in which Schrader plays on our cultural and aesthetic associations with the orange-red colour spectrum – which according to Bordwell “can evoke a sense of heat, danger, passion, or anger”, and thus demonstrate the capacity of colour to both “evoke emotion and suggest concepts” (*The Cinema of Eisenstein* 189) – in order to suffuse Julian and Michelle’s interview with a degree of intensity less palpable in their dialogue. In addition to the expressionistic use of colour – which Schrader would push to greater extremes in both *Cat People* and *Mishima* – meaning is also generated through other features of the mise-en-scène. Of course, we sense Julian’s reticence to disclose private information when Michelle enquires about his history and he responds in vague terms (he was born in Torino and studied an unnamed discipline at Nantes; when she notes that he has no European accent, he replies that he has travelled too much to pick up an accent anywhere). But when she punctures his pretences about being a “translator” by asking him how much he would charge her for “just one fuck”, Julian’s feelings of threat, humiliation and loss of control are registered not through dialogue but camera movement. As he exits the lounge, we see an example of what Schrader terms the “blind side POV” shot (*Cat People* Director’s Commentary), in which Michelle casts a wistful over-the-shoulder gaze at his departure and the camera dollies away from her. Here we are reminded of Robin Wood’s description of how the French director Max Ophüls’ famously mobile camera tended to “move *with* the characters, beside them and at their pace” in order to create a strange “sense of closeness without identification” (*Personal Views* 157). Rather than being explicitly tied to the perception of either character, the blind side POV shot locates its subjectivity in an ambient space *between* Julian and Michelle. In the process, it articulates emotional distance and mutual frustration: his anxious avoidance of anyone who

¹⁶ Russell’s comment is notable given that Hutton was the highest-paid model in the world at the time of *American Gigolo*, due to her contract with Revlon cosmetics; she also appeared on the cover of *Vogue* magazine a record 28 times (Wolfson). Hutton was cast as Michelle after Oscar winners Julie Christie and Meryl Streep rejected the role.

challenges his fastidiously regulated sense of himself; and her growing attraction towards this mysterious loner.¹⁷

In addition to the Bertolucci influence, many critics have drawn parallels with the style of classic film *noir* (Lukes 190; Russell). Such associations are doubtless compounded by the fact that Schrader wrote the seminal “Notes on Film Noir”, in which he explicitly theorises *noir* as a historical period defined by a set of distinct aesthetic attitudes rather than a concrete genre (83). In this sense, he suggests, perhaps a little too easily, that the spirit of *noir* can be invoked through self-conscious stylistic allusion.¹⁸ In addition to minor narrative references to *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Big Sleep* (1946, Howard Hawks), Fraser feels that “*noir* claustrophobia and neurosis are present in the film through lighting and camerawork creating vertical planes, brooding shadows and compositional tension” (92). Yet we can identify similarly self-reflexive visual tropes across a wide range of disparate 1980s neo-*noirs* such as *Body Heat* (1981, Lawrence Kasdan), *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1981, Bob Rafelson), *Blood Simple* (1984, Joel Coen), *Against All Odds* (1984, Taylor Hackford), *Blue Velvet* (1986, David Lynch) and *Black Widow* (1987, Rafelson). What distinguishes Schrader’s film from other neo-*noirs* is less a matter of specific allusion than a certain attitude towards lighting, production design and the mapping of narrative space that he had already conceptualised in his *noir* essay:

¹⁷ Schrader also acknowledges the influence of *The Conformist* in terms of camera movement: “By and large, in the first half of the history of movies the camera moved as action or character dictated; it moved to follow a character, it moved to lead with an action, and so on. But starting with Bertolucci we see a really strong case of the unmotivated camera, the camera moved on its own. If [Jean-Louis] Trintignant was walking away from you in the hallway, the camera might be pulling back rather than following him, and if he was in one room the camera might move over to the next room and wait for him to come rather than move when he did” (Jackson 211).

¹⁸ While a broader discussion of film *noir* is beyond the scope of this chapter, Schrader’s thesis that *noir* was a historical style rather than an evolving genre has been persuasively challenged in later studies such as J.P. Telotte’s *Voices in the Dark: The Narrative Patterns of Film Noir* (1989) and Foster Hirsch’s *Detours and Lost Highways: A Map of Neo-Noir* (2004). For an authoritative text on the genre, see James Naremore’s *More Than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts* (1998).

On the surface the German Expressionist influence, with its reliance on artificial studio lighting, seems incompatible with post-war realism, with its harsh unadorned exteriors; but it is the unique quality of *film noir* that it was able to weld seemingly contradictory elements into a uniform style. The best *noir* technicians simply made all the world a sound stage, directing unnatural and Expressionistic lighting on to realistic settings. In films like *Union Station*, *They Live By Night*, *The Killers* there is an uneasy, exhilarating combination of realism and Expressionism. (83)

In *American Gigolo*, the *noir* approach of treating the world as a stage is most visible in the scene that motivates the film's generic thriller plot: Julian performs a "rough trick" at the elaborately designed Palm Springs house of a wealthy middle-aged sadist named Mr. Rheiman (Tom Stewart), who wants him to sodomise and beat his young wife Judy (Patti Carr), and then discuss it afterwards. An elliptical fade to black at the end of their negotiation leads us to assume that Julian complies with Rheiman's request, but when Judy later turns up dead, Julian desperately needs an alibi to prove his innocence. This scenario unfolds in a set that resembles a location from a genre classic such as *Double Indemnity* (1944, Billy Wilder), or even a seminal 'man in a room' film like Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Samourai* (1967, Jean-Pierre Melville), only updated in the garish aesthetic mould associated with high-gloss 1980s productions such as *Miami Vice* or *Manhunter*.¹⁹ Schrader has often mentioned Scarfiotti's tendency to treat actual locations like studio sets, thus refashioning reality in order to express ideas about character, theme or narrative, and this approach to design would be further developed during their collaboration on *Cat People* ("Paul Schrader's Film Class: Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Conformist*").²⁰ In this case, the exterior shot of Julian pulling into the Rheiman driveway reveals

¹⁹ This is perhaps not surprising in light of Schrader's admission that "Michael Mann, who's a friend of mine, was very impressed by the work Scarfiotti did on both *Gigolo* and *Scarface*, and that's what he's tried to emulate" (Jackson 160).

²⁰ Also significant here is the influence of German Expressionist films such as *The Last Laugh* (1924, F.W. Murnau), which reconstructed huge urban sets and even shot rainy exteriors on soundstages. I will analyse the Expressionist contexts for Scarfiotti's design work in more detail in my chapter on *Cat People*.

Scarfiotti's influence in the vivid staging of architectural space. The white adobe villa is incongruously set against a backdrop of black mountains and glassy blue twilight (Kelly 7); the image feels hyper-real, at once painterly and photographic. The interiors are a study in severe modernism: plate glass, black marble walls, pre-Columbian artwork, and reflections of water rippling across metallic grey and silver décor all codify the house as a sinister, vaguely alien space, in which sexual identity is fluid, negotiable and untrustworthy.²¹ The clothing of the husband, who assures Julian that he is not gay yet insists on watching and discussing the sex act, also functions as a visual signifier of aberrant sexuality: he wears a pink sweater over grey trousers, thereby fusing our feminine associations with the colour pink with the murky, neutral morality echoed by the grey décor and Julian's own grey clothing elsewhere in the film.

The camera's attention to the props and décor of the Rheiman house signals a broader regime at play in *American Gigolo*, one that links the film's thematic concerns to the elements of visual style. Schrader continually foregrounds inanimate objects in the mise-en-scène in order to illustrate deeper anxieties about gender performance, sexual identity and the objectification of the male body. In this respect, the film follows a broad stylistic pattern that Andrew Klevan observes in a very different film, albeit one that Schrader also examines in *Transcendental Style*: Yasujirō Ozu's *Late Spring* (1949). For Klevan, the Ozu film mobilises a thoughtful distribution of props within and across the frame, so that certain objects "collect meanings through repeated usage, and develop associations throughout the narrative" (146); in this way, the characters' "interactions with [these objects] delineates their emotional progression" (146). The first example of such an object in Schrader's film occurs during Julian's interview with Anne at her beach house; as they haggle over their split, Julian is framed against a polished bust of a muscular male torso, carved in white marble and resting on a pillar. The pointed juxtaposition of Julian's attractive, well-dressed physique with the marble bust establishes an ironic correspondence

²¹ The water motif here resonates with another observation Schrader makes in "Notes on Film Noir": "There seems to be an almost Freudian attachment to water. The empty *noir* streets are almost always glistening with fresh evening rain (even in Los Angeles), and the rainfall tends to increase in direct proportion to the drama" (85).

between the human body whose economic value is currently being determined and the collectible art object that represents its inanimate counterpart. Significantly, the torso lacks a head, limbs and penis, and as such, its model of exemplary masculinity is coded as superficial, contingent, lacking agency or identity. It thus serves to foreshadow Julian's own crisis of masculinity as the film progresses. In this and several other scenes, Schrader highlights evocative spatial relations between bodies and objects in order to emphasise Julian's precarious status as an object of desire in a fickle, cutthroat environment, inscribing him as just "one more object in a world full of objects to be admired, gazed upon, and purchased" (Kouvaros 38). A more abstract variation of this pattern occurs during our first glimpse of his apartment in the training scene, when we see three successive shots of the empty space before Julian enters the frame (see Figs 1.6-1.8 overleaf). These shots are fundamental in establishing the ambience of Julian's carefully composed world and, in particular, the hermetic space where much of the film unfolds. The first image consists of five paintings stacked against a wall: two large unframed paintings stand upright, three framed paintings lie at the bottom of the frame, and to the left a few ornaments rest upon a woodblock. The second shot features a set of black, grey and mint green ceramic urns, placed on the floor alongside stylish packing crates; a bicycle rests against a mushroom-toned wall, while a shell-like sculpture lies on the window ledge against half-opened Venetian blinds. The third shot contains a plush biomorphic sofa with grey wool upholstery, bare besides a carefully placed sheet of paper; its austere elegance completes a space whose design feels constructed in decorative rather than functional terms. Indeed, even the fourth shot of this sequence begins as a depopulated image with only objects in view: an immaculate carpet with two dumbbells screen right, suggesting a staged advertisement from a men's health catalogue. Only after this spartan, object-oriented space has been established does Julian walk into the frame and commence his workout.

Figs 1.6, 1.7 and 1.8



The depopulated frames that introduce Julian's apartment differ from the establishing shots of traditional mainstream cinema, which typically orient the viewer in narrative space without drawing attention to the constructedness of the image. In their thoughtful duration, attention to detail that would usually be considered incidental, and evocation not only of narrative space but of the unframed character who occupies it, these shots suggest still photography and thus reflect the influence of another of Schrader's favourite Italian filmmakers: Antonioni.²² In his book *Antonioni; or, The Surface of the World*, Seymour Chatman argues that the director's early 1960s tetralogy – *L'avventura* (1960), *La notte* (1961), *L'eclisse* (1962) and *Red Desert* (1964) – demonstrates “an intense concentration on the sheer appearance of things” (2), rendering the surface of the object world with unusual focus and rigour. According to Chatman, “if one had to select Antonioni's leading contribution to the art of cinema, it would have to be his way of relating character to environment” (90). In this regard, one of Antonioni's foremost strategies is the eschewal of copious dialogue or exposition in favour of a visual emphasis upon what Chatman calls the “metonymic apparatus” (91) – a material object (or set of objects) whose primary function is to externalise the inner experience of the characters onto the *mise-en-scène* of the film. An interesting example of this phenomenon occurs in *L'eclisse*, where the bustling corporate urban lifestyle of the materialistic young stockbroker Piero (Alain Delon) is

annotated by shots of the machinery that capitalism so adores – the big stock exchange board, with its white letters and numbers whose random changes control the lives of those whom it has hypnotized, the battery-operated fan that can cool you in a hot public place, the fountain pen that dresses or undresses the photograph of a girl on its barrel, depending on how you hold it. (Chatman 91)²³

²² Bailey has also noted the influence of still photography on his camerawork in this film, especially the hard light used in Italian fashion magazines of the late 1970s: “By virtue of looking at the design elements in the still photography I really admire, I get ideas and try to think of ways I can take some of those elements and apply them in a cinematic context” (*Masters of Light* 55).

²³ As with Antonioni, the privileging of objects has also been noted in studies of Bresson. Tony Pipolo argues that Bresson's films (in particular *A Man Escaped* [1956])

Discussing his itinerary when shooting a film, Schrader notes that he spends considerable time watching videotapes of favourite films “continually with the sound off” (Jackson 170) in search of visual ideas that resonate with the theme he is exploring: “On *Gigolo*, besides *The Conformist*, it was *L’eclisse*; there was something about those angles and that sensibility” (170). He adds that even while making his later films, *L’eclisse* is a film “I’ve liked to steal from because it’s so strong architecturally” (Jackson 211). For my current purposes, the pertinent issue is the manner in which, like Piero in *L’eclisse*, the objects of Julian’s world appear to embody the order, discipline and aesthetic of his lifestyle. In this way, the stillness of the empty frames before the training sequence conveys a sense of defamiliarisation and frigidity that extends to the rest of his life.²⁴ The precise distribution of objects in the frame constructs his apartment not as a practical living area but as a decorated stage set, a designer showpiece or male dollhouse devoted to the maintenance of gleaming surfaces. The furniture, ornaments and training equipment complement a pristine space in which Julian can dress up, exercise, pose *like* an object, but not relax or *live* in. As with the marble bust, a parallel is drawn between the commodities whose value lies in their surface beauty, and Julian himself as a collectible but expendable object whose only apparent value lies in his own beautiful surface. More broadly, the film’s discourse of objects and objectification produces metaphorical connections between Julian’s consumer fetishism and his gender identity, feminising him not just through his relationship to clothes or objects but also his attitude towards self-objectification. When Detective Sunday (Hector Elizondo) interrogates him about the Rheiman murder while he gets his shoes shined in a hotel lobby, Julian – anxious about both the detective’s questions and

demonstrate an “ability to restore a sense of mystery and presence to the world, to turn objects and spaces into protagonists on equal footing with the characters” (24). Bresson himself acknowledges this in his book *Notes for the Cinematographer*, noting that “Persons and objects have the same mystery” (*Notes* 23), and “it is necessary that the persons and the objects of your film go together at the same pace” (*Notes* 80).

²⁴ Stephen Prince points out that these “still-life shots of Julian’s pad” also evoke the compositional style of another of Schrader’s chief influences, Yasujiro Ozu, who often used a system of three successive establishing shots (282). Schrader repeats this three-shot set-up in a scene near the start of *Cat People*.

his own inability to provide an alibi – uses his gigolo persona as a kind of social leverage against the invasion of his privacy: “I tell you what: you lay off my clients and I will give you pointers for picking up women, okay?” He provokes the detective by snidely criticising his looks, posture and dress sense – an oddly bitchy gesture that highlights how Julian’s sense of superiority is experienced wholly through the surface of his body. When the detective questions his potential moral misgivings about being a sex worker, Julian responds with dialogue loosely adapted from a similar exchange between Michel and the Chief Inspector in *Pickpocket*: “Legal is not always right”, he begins, defending his profession as one who “gives pleasure to women... Men make laws, sometimes they’re wrong. They’re stupid... [Looking up at the detective] or *jealous*... Some people are above the law.” If, as Schrader tells us, Michel’s criminal transgressions must be understood as an existential Will to *Pickpocket*, then Julian’s delusions of moral and legal exemption clearly derive from his ability to sell himself as a model sex object. Yet this scene also recapitulates the fundamental ambivalence of Julian’s sexuality, for as Bruzzi states, “Narcissism mixed with consumerism is traditionally a feminine trait, and the man who mixes the two (as Julian does in *American Gigolo*) is necessarily viewed as deviant” (*Undressing Cinema* 85).

This imbrication of narcissism and consumerism leads Jackson to state that, despite its subject matter, *American Gigolo* is not an erotic film at all, but instead “a cold film where the eroticism is displaced from bodies and on to things” (160). This displacement process is exemplified in the sequence where Julian robotically performs phone sex with a client while Michelle lies asleep next to him. As he feigns the need to masturbate in order to finish the phone call quickly, the insincere eroticism of his dialogue is relayed through a tracking shot that fluidly stalks out the space of his room. Opening on zebra stripes of darkness and light reflected from the Venetian window blinds (a familiar *noir* motif that cites *Double Indemnity* and *The Scarlet Empress* [1934, Josef von Sternberg] by way of *The Conformist*), the camera glides up a small staircase and curves left to reveal an elegant table, a metallic dresser and designer urn. Over the sound of Julian’s increasingly pornographic dialogue, we navigate the apartment through this desubjectified composition; the lust of his words – which

we clearly understand as a performance of heterosexual male desire – is thereby displaced onto these meticulously arranged objects, which serve as ornamental proof of his social position and class status. This projection of desire typically felt in and through the body onto an object world of beautiful things (a notion that Schrader fully develops in *Mishima*) also connects the twin themes of sexuality and consumer fetishism. We realise that he is performing phone sex in order to distract his client from the issue of repayment on a loan: “We’re lying here getting aroused talking about having more pleasure than you’ve had in years, and you have to bring up some stupid little \$1,200 stereo”. Indeed, Julian’s exchanges with his clients often evince the ambiguous qualities that Schrader was attracted to in Gere. When he accompanies the wealthy, older Lisa (K Callan) on a trip to Sotheby’s, he dispenses advice on collecting antiques before affecting the persona of an aristocratic, flamboyantly effeminate European art connoisseur in order to deceive one of her acquaintances from thinking that he is a gigolo. In this scene, a self-conscious engagement with a feminised world of ornament allows Julian to construct a homosexual persona as a convenient alibi. The glibness with which he assumes this mask suggests that his embodiment of heterosexual masculinity is also less stable than he believes.

In tracing the history of ornament from art into cinema, Rosalind Galt notes a distinct “paralleling of ornament and femininity” (113). She argues that Western modernist accounts of ornament as a decorative art form mobilise a “feminizing and effeminizing discourse” (113), wherein its critical subordination to fine art is typically figured in terms of gendered rhetoric and, in particular, gendered adjectives such as “*gracious*, *beautiful*, and, of course, *pretty*” (103; emphasis original).²⁵ Furthermore, this rhetoric invariably conflates notions of femininity and homosexuality in rendering the decorative arts a lesser category; among several examples, Galt notes how “a nineteenth-century design journal uses the coded language of effeminacy in warning that an Oriental interior is suitable

²⁵ In addition to Galt’s book, Sumiko Higashi’s *Virgins, Vamps and Flappers: The American Silent Movie Heroine* (1978), Gina Marchetti’s *Romance and the “Yellow Peril”: Race, Sex and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (1994) and Daisuke Miyao’s *Sessue Hayakawa: Silent Cinema and Transnational Stardom* (2007) also offer interesting considerations on gender, ethnicity and decorative aesthetics.

only for men of “delicate taste and silky constitution” (153). As such, this delegitimising logic employs a faint-praise structure that constructs the ornamental as a “feminized and inferior” art form (128). Galt charts the evolution of this logic in film culture, identifying similar problems in the reception pattern of decorative, ornamental or “pretty” films such as *Lola Montès* (1955, Ophüls). In fact, *Lola Montès* proves a useful intertext for *American Gigolo* in its related discourse of gender politics, camera movement and ornamental mise-en-scène. Not only does the film’s beautiful dancer heroine (Martine Carol) end up working as a courtesan, but her textual function as a spectacle of desire finds her constantly “trapped in the mise-en-scène, caught between the moving camera and her settings” (Galt 175). Galt lists the film’s lush network of elaborate architectural structures, hanging chandeliers and lace-curtain screens as examples of how “Lola is completely surrounded by decorative objects that threaten to overwhelm the frame” (175). While *American Gigolo* does not approach the density of Ophüls’ compositional spaces or sumptuous décor, Galt’s description of *Lola Montès*’ wider formal organisation – and the gendered logic it articulates – sounds remarkably similar to Schrader’s treatment of Julian: “the film deemphasizes the human qualities of its protagonist, rejects classical psychologization, and instead constructs meaning out of space and things” (175).²⁶ Given the broader cultural thinking that reads such decorative regimes in terms of gender and sexuality, we can see how Julian is not merely constructed in relation to space and things, but explicitly feminised through these relations. And of course, this feminisation process extends to the depiction of his body as itself a decorative object. Willis argues that the film’s visual schema consistently figures him as “an object on display in a space filled with consumer display objects, like his paintings and ceramics” (59). As with Lola and so many other female characters in cinema – including the heroine of Schrader’s next film, *Cat People* – Julian’s body becomes a surface to be acted upon, stripped of humanity through its subordination to inanimate objects and aesthetic effects in the visual field: bars of chiaroscuro from the window blinds, a red neon sign in a nightclub scene (Willis 59), interplays of dark shadow and

²⁶ Interestingly, Schrader acknowledges that *The Walker* – his only “man in a room” film with an *openly* gay protagonist – was a self-conscious attempt to make a lush, old-fashioned, Ophüls-style film (see interview with Mark Kermode on DVD).

coloured light that inscribe him above all else as a feature of design. Where he was first associated with kinetic agency and freedom of movement, the second half of the film sees him trapped in his lifestyle and frozen in motion, “consistently presented as an element in still life, framed in one of the mirrors that structure his apartment, displayed by the window frame, and later consumed by the surface” (Willis 59). Schrader’s investment in the details of décor, lighting and design thus consciously devalues the male subjectivity of his protagonist, for the enunciation of style “reduces all objects – including human ones – to the same status” (Willis 60).

I want to close my discussion of the object discourse in *American Gigolo* by considering the scene in which Julian is most explicitly presented as an object for visual consumption, and by assessing how Schrader uses the elements of mise-en-scène in this scene to formalise his concern with male sexual anxiety. After making love to Michelle, with whom he has now established a relationship, Julian explains his preference for having sex with older female clients – and the sense of accomplishment he feels in his work – while standing nude by the half-opened blinds. As with the training sequence, Lehman reads this fleeting instance of full-frontal nudity as an insecure attempt to rebuff the feminising process of objectification and reassert a dominant male subjectivity. He argues that the representation of Julian’s body is qualified on multiple levels: the high-angle long-shot composition that contrasts with the tight, fragmenting close-ups of Michelle’s nude body in the preceding sex scene (complete with subjective shots of Julian kissing and stroking her breasts in a homage to *2 or 3 Things I Know About Her* [1967, Jean-Luc Godard]); Julian’s distracted gaze out the window, which recalls the overcompensating emphasis on activity identified by Dyer in male pin-up photography; and his monologue about a recent job where he spent three hours bringing a middle-aged client to her first orgasm in ten years, which Lehman considers the film’s emphatic “affirmation of an extraordinary phallic male sexuality that is necessary for a woman’s pleasure” (18-19). In fact, Julian’s boastful proclamation of sexual expertise points to the wider thematic of his intense alienation from his own body, reiterated in a later scene where Michelle resists his attempts at lovemaking: “I love to be with you”, she says. “I love it when you kiss me, and when you touch me. But when you

make love, you go to work... I can't give *you* any pleasure, and you can't fool me anymore". Not only is Julian's masculinity predicated upon the notion of giving pleasure to women, but he also lacks responsiveness as a sexual being in his own right. These factors reinforce the lingering "gay feeling" that Schrader continually flirts with but never resolves at the narrative level. Yet even in purely aesthetic terms, the stylisation of Julian's nude body – in particular the graphic qualities of darkness and light casting shadows across him – modifies the image in a rather different way to Lehman's reading of the scene. Discussing the motif of light streaming through window blinds in *The Conformist*, cinematographer Vittorio Storaro explains that he "wanted to show through light the idea of claustrophobia, of being caged. I used the idea that the light could never reach the shadows" (Forgacs). The high-contrast chiaroscuro lighting of *The Conformist* thus formalises a symbolic interplay of knowledge and ignorance (Wagstaff 25), a motif that becomes especially significant when we consider Clerici's neurotic effort to fit in, to "conform" to the bourgeois values of mainstream society, and to expunge his latent homosexuality. Unlike the Bressonian hero who believes he is above the law and innately different from other men, Clerici wants nothing more than to *be* "like other men"; the bars of shadow are a formal analogue of his inner torment, the social and psychic prison of homosexuality. This sense of visual claustrophobia also motivates Schrader's approach to the lighting of Julian's nude scene in *American Gigolo*. As he explains to Michelle why he has chosen the superficial identity of the gigolo, the unexpected cutaway to a long shot – which Lehman reads as a formal disavowal of Michelle's desiring female gaze, "resulting from the contradictory impulses of wanting simultaneously to show Gere's body and to cover it up" (19) – reveals the reflected bars of shadow that delimit the entire space of his apartment. The chiaroscuro grid inscribes him as the archetypal 'man in a room' and a prisoner in the metaphorical cage of his own making: a life built upon the careful maintenance of image, and the embodiment of a phallic male sexuality from which he feels utterly disconnected. It also signals a broader discourse of darkness and light at work in the film – one that grows increasingly problematic in its final act.

Male Anxiety and *Noir* Mise-en-Scène: Visualising Difference

In the remainder of this chapter, I want to chart a closer analysis of *American Gigolo*'s strained treatment of first homosexuality and then racial difference. As part of that process, however, I must first elucidate how the disintegration of Julian's carefully ordered existence is expressed in the generic form of film *noir*. With his clientele dwindling and the police closing in on him, it becomes increasingly apparent that Julian is being framed for the murder of Mrs. Rheiman; the second half of the film concerns his desperate attempts to obtain an alibi, unmask the mystery villain, and prove his innocence. These scenes unfold almost like a self-reflexive enactment of certain ideas from "Notes on Film Noir", in particular that essay's focus on the inevitable psychic implosion of the male *noir* protagonist. In delineating a "third and final phase of *film noir*" (87) that lasted from 1949 to 1953, Schrader suggests that this phase was "the period of psychotic action and suicidal impulse. The *noir* hero, seemingly under the weight of ten years of despair, started to go bananas" (87). He cites James Cagney as a murderous convict in *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye* (1950, Gordon Douglas) and the *noir* heroes played by Robert Ryan and Lee Marvin as examples of a new type of cinematic masculinity defined by anxiety, neurosis and psychological intensity. While these characteristics are certainly visible in Julian (and indeed, most other Schrader protagonists), my primary interest here lies in how Schrader seeks to articulate these kinds of inner conflict at the level of visual style.

Stella Bruzzi's recent book *Men's Cinema: Masculinity and Mise en Scène in Hollywood* provides insightful commentary on how themes of "masculine anxiety" in certain cinematic genres are "commonly expressed via non-narrative means" (38). For Bruzzi, this tradition emerges most forcefully within genres such as *noir*, which constructs its "suppressive narratives" not only through labyrinthine plotting but also the "deployment of *mise en scène* features (costume, lighting, editing, camera)" (*Men's Cinema* 38) to signify the claustrophobic dread or morbid panic experienced by the threatened hero. Her examples of *noir*'s projection of anxiety onto the body of the film include the proliferation of framing devices in *Out of the Past* (1947, Jacques Tourneur),

where Robert Mitchum's investigation of the central mystery is relayed through an expressionistic maze of apartment buildings, nightclubs and under-lit doorways that signal his inability to ascertain the truth, and the climactic shootout in *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947, Orson Welles), in which the hall of mirrors that refract multiple distorted images of Welles, Rita Hayworth and Everett Sloane symbolises the whole genre's "omnipresent lack of clarity, stable identities and sound knowledge" (*Men's Cinema* 49). We can observe a number of these *noirish* aesthetic strategies in *American Gigolo* as Julian's paranoia escalates over his failure to find an alibi. Where earlier in the film his fashion choices blended almost seamlessly into his environment, the shift towards darker grey, navy and black clothing in the later scenes tends to highlight his isolation in the frame and promote a sense of discord rather than similarity to the surrounding spaces. When he visits Lisa's luxurious home in order to beg her to provide an alibi, he is first cropped from the midriff down, depersonalised by the exclusion of his upper half from the frame, and then shrunken in a zoom back to a high-angle shot of his figure dwarfed by the house, whose white marble exteriors and vertical pillars mark it as exactly the kind of privileged space from which he is now excluded. Both the textured exteriors and the motif of the headless, limbless male body also evoke the bust at Anne's beach house, inscribing Julian's own increasing dread as a visual metaphor while simultaneously illustrating Bruzzi's thesis that, in male-oriented cinema, "doubts concerning masculine authority often come to be expressed as a loss of control over the *mise en scène*" (*Men's Cinema* 30). Predictably, Julian's efforts to secure the alibi are foiled when Lisa's husband interrupts the tense exchange and promptly slams the door in his face, the camera trapping him in a star-shaped network of wooden panelling on the glass frame that Fraser deems an allusion to a similar composition at the end of *The Maltese Falcon* (92). These tropes recall not only classic *noir* but also, to a lesser degree, the wave of paranoid conspiracy thrillers that emerged in Hollywood during the post-Watergate era. In framing their vulnerable heroes as perpetually adrift in architectural networks of glass, concrete and steel which represent social power structures far beyond their control or understanding, films such as *The Conversation* (1974, Francis Ford Coppola) and *The Parallax View* (1974, Alan J. Pakula) united Antonioni's disorienting breakdown of figure/ground relations with *noir's* tendency to

manipulate “the spectator in conjunction with – or, more accurately, at odds with – the hero’s perspective and relative ignorance of the situation unfolding around him” (*Men’s Cinema* 47). These motifs coalesce in a scene that directly references *The Conversation*, when Julian ransacks his apartment in search of evidence he suspects has been planted to frame him for the killing. Shot from an extreme high angle, the scene foreshadows Julian’s eventual fate by repeating the motif of the chiaroscuro shadows as prison bars, supplanting diegetic sound with a whirring percussive rhythm that grows in volume and intensity before cutting back to ‘real’ sound as he shatters his ceramics, rips out his stereo, and trashes his telephone, lamp and answering machine. The destruction of the objects upon which Julian bases his sense of self here warrants a visual signifier of inner crisis, and Schrader lifts one from *The Lady from Shanghai*: a three-panelled, full-length mirror that reflects two “other” Julians from the back, tripling his image in an ironic gesture of its contingency and lack of personhood. This précis of unverbaised psychic conflict again supports Bruzzi’s notion that cinematic depictions of male anxiety frequently subordinate dialogue to issues of style, “enacting on the surface of the films the anxiety and strain of not being able to live up to the fantasy of masculinity” (*Men’s Cinema* 38).

Of course, Julian’s anxieties about failing to live up to the exemplary model of masculinity upon which he bases not just his livelihood but his whole identity are evident from the beginning of the film. Their most obvious manifestation is the casually homophobic language that peppers his first encounter with Anne, when he describes her other gigolos (his business competition) as “retarded faggots” that lack his personality and “class”; when Anne sarcastically interrupts, “Oh, look who’s talking!” he shoots her an angry glare and silently broods out the window. He shows a similarly scathing reaction when he appears at the Rheiman house and gets the false impression that the husband hired him for himself: “Look Mister, someone made a mistake: I don’t do fags”. While Julian’s language inspired critics such as Robin Wood and Stuart Byron to attack the film as itself homophobic, it also serves to complicate the ambivalent nature of Julian’s own sexuality. In an influential article entitled “An Introduction to the American Horror Film” (which I will revisit in a different context in my chapter on *Cat People*), Wood claims that mainstream culture is organised

around forms of social and psychic repression that have far-reaching consequences for discourses of sexuality, race, class, ethnicity and politics. Central to his thesis is the familiar concept of the Other, which involves the projection of difference onto human subjects or groups that diverge from prevailing norms of identity and culture. Crucially, this dynamic of “projection on to the Other” is structured by

what is repressed within the Self, in order that it can be discredited, disowned, and if possible annihilated. It is repression, in other words, that makes impossible the healthy alternative: the full recognition and acceptance of the Other’s autonomy and right to exist. (“An Introduction to the American Horror Film” 168)

While Schrader did not broach the subject of Julian’s possible homosexuality in explicit terms at the time of the film’s release, his more recent interview comments leave little doubt about exactly what it is that Julian is repressing within his self. When asked how he settled upon the unusual occupation of a society walker for Carter Page III, the character played by Woody Harrelson in *American Gigolo*’s unofficial or “spiritual” sequel *The Walker*, Schrader suggests that Carter’s open homosexuality was a natural extension of Julian’s own sexual identity:

The idea occurred to me when I was wondering what would become of a character like the one in *American Gigolo*. What would he be like in mid-life? Well, he’d be funny. His skills would be social. He’d probably be out of the closet. He’d probably be like a society walker. (“Paul Schrader Talks the Talk, Walks the Walker”)

Indeed, *The Walker*’s scenes of Carter gossiping with his wealthy middle-aged female friends over canasta games evoke those scenes in *American Gigolo* where Julian chauffeurs his clients, chaperones them at dinner parties or accompanies them while antique-shopping – purely social activities that he often seems to enjoy more than the actual sex work. On another occasion, Schrader claims that not only is sexual ambivalence a thematic thread that unifies all four

of his principal ‘man in a room’ screenplays, but that the first three are explicitly predicated upon the suppression of the protagonist’s homosexuality:

If you look at this character in this film I’ve just finished (*The Walker*), he is now gay. From *Taxi Driver* to *American Gigolo* to *Light Sleeper*, he has been working his way there. I’ve finally got him out of the closet!
(Macnab)

In mobilising Schrader’s provocative statements in order to read Julian as either consciously or unconsciously gay, I operate upon the obvious qualification that, regardless of Schrader’s own investments in the authorship of “this” character (singular), these four films in fact present four protagonists who look, act and feel different from each other in substantial ways. The contrasts and correspondences between and across the four films and characters are not overtly narrative but instead abstract, symbolic and conceptual: where Travis Bickle’s place in the iconography of modern cinema is defined by his position behind the wheel of his yellow cab, Dafoe’s drug dealer in *Light Sleeper* spends his nights sitting in the back seat of cabs on delivery runs; where Julian’s dressing scene ends with a confident look of self-assurance in the mirror, a similar montage of Carter getting undressed for bed in *The Walker* ends with him removing his hairpiece and gazing thoughtfully at his middle-aged reflection. Yet even taking these qualifications into account, the bluntness of Schrader’s statements, both of which were made twenty-seven years after the release of *American Gigolo*, corroborate the early critical intuitions (principally by those aforementioned scholars on the dressing scene) that Julian may be a closeted homosexual – a man whose feminised profession and nickname, heavy associations with the feminine spheres of fashion and decorative art, and lack of authentic desire towards either female clients or lovers all point to a deeper suppression of his true sexuality. Bearing in mind Wood’s suggestion that “what is repressed (but never destroyed) in the self” is typically “projected outwards in order to be hated and disowned” (“An Introduction to the American Horror Film” 168), I want to consider what Julian projects his repressed sexuality onto, and how exactly Schrader visualises this projection. In doing so, I will offer an extended analysis of a crucial scene in which the problematic content and excessive style of

American Gigolo coalesce in ways that also carry significance for the next two Schrader films I will discuss.

The scene in question is Julian's visit to a gay nightclub in search of his second pimp, Leon, who contracted him for the Rheiman job and whom he now hopes will provide him with the vital alibi. In its use of "Othering" formal techniques to depict gay urban nightlife, *American Gigolo* creates an uneasy mixture of salacious titillation and revulsion comparable to the same year's more controversial *Cruising* (1980, William Friedkin), whose reactionary homophobia is as discernible in its voyeuristic visual design and alienating colour schemes as in its scenes of fetishised violence against gay men. As with the coldly tinted night scenes in that film, the icy palette of blue, grey and metallic silver lends a defamiliarising, almost science fiction atmosphere to the club (pruriently named Probe), foregrounding the seedy, otherworldly qualities of difference about the homosexual space into which Julian must descend. This is intensified by a claustrophobic travelling shot of Julian entering the club through a long, dark corridor whose horizontal line patterns, steel piping and octagonal doorway evoke the cramped interiors of the starship Nostromo in *Alien* (1979, Ridley Scott), and whose dense shadows are irradiated with a blast of blue neon reflecting from the club interiors. In addition, this scene departs from the fluid mounted camerawork of the rest of the film by using a handheld camera that ominously stalks Julian from behind at close range as he confronts the space of homosexuality. Threatened male subjectivity is thus visualised in terms which verify Bruzzi's statement that "suppressed emotional responses that would otherwise remain half hidden or unacknowledged... will frequently be resolved at a non-narrative level" (*Men's Cinema* 38), and that in the process these "psychological anxieties surface in the form of non-narrative elements, such as performance, blocking, editing and use of camera" (*Men's Cinema* 39).

As we might expect, the inside of the club is a borderline cartoon of predatory homosexuality: shirtless men gyrating in cowboy drag and construction hardhats, leather-clad BDSM stereotypes snorting amyl nitrate from a bottle, and a dancefloor bathed in hot red neon that again evinces Bordwell's symbolic associations of the colour red with danger, menace and, in this case, sexual

threat. Yet the club scene also vibrates with seductive energy and palpable exhilaration, owing to its mixture of saturated colour and the dynamic beat of Cheryl Barnes' hardcore disco number "Love and Passion", which Schrader co-wrote with Moroder. In this regard, the *mise-en-scène* of the gay space is devised in terms that are deeply ambivalent rather than unremittingly negative. When Julian asks a rent boy if he has seen Leon, the boy responds that "I haven't seen *you* in a long time", which indicates that he knows Julian from his past working on the gay club circuit. Therefore, when he points Julian in Leon's direction by noting that he is busy "showing off his new little boy" on the club scene, we infer that Julian was also Leon's "new little boy" at one time, and that his embodiment of the heterosexual gigolo persona has been constructed and performed in response to his own homosexual history. In reading the film as directly revealing Schrader's fascist attitudes, Wood acknowledges that Julian is "trying to forget a past when he used to 'trick with fags'", but he rather simplistically interprets this suppression as evidence of both Julian's *and* the film's "insidious" homophobia rather than considering what this dynamic might reveal about him: "As Julian is not supposed to get pleasure from his sexual experiences with older women but likes to give *them* pleasure, as well as get paid, the implication is presumably that "fags" don't even deserve pleasure" (*Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan* 60). Yet this concern with female pleasure and apparent callous indifference to the question of homosexual pleasure makes sense in terms of a psychic suppression predicated upon the exemplary embodiment of heteronormative masculinity. In fact, Julian's homophobia speaks to a deep uncertainty about the self that also haunts the protagonists of *Cat People* and *Mishima* in different ways. While I do not wish to chart a full analysis of Schrader's protagonists in terms of his own biography, there are instances across all three of these films where his provocative commentary sheds interesting light on their problematic discourses of identity. Discussing the period in which he wrote the screenplay of *American Gigolo*, Schrader notes that he developed an intense and ambiguous relationship towards homosexuality and gay culture as an emotional response to his own background, "in which physical contact was rare, and in my family was exacerbated to the point at which my father actually shook when he held you" (Jackson 161). He explains that when he arrived in Los Angeles during his early twenties he still harboured anxieties

about physical intimacy, but that the gay club scene provided an unexpected shelter:

I started moving in gay circles and going to gay discos and I found a way into physical contact, because it was harmless. I mean I could go dancing stripped to the waist, hugging and holding men, and feel completely released and liberated because I knew nothing would come of it; I knew in the end I was not going to have a sexual contact. (Jackson 161)

This atmosphere of finding personal liberation in a space of Otherness is at least more tangible in *American Gigolo*'s club sequence than in the expressionistic depiction of the gay subculture in *Cruising*, where the ugly décor, menacing score, and blatant parallels between promiscuity and sexual violence serve to construct homosexuality in overtly nightmarish terms. Yet the primal fear of corruption through homosexual contact nonetheless remains a pivotal aspect of Julian's narrative, and at this point of this film it becomes intertwined with another, even more problematic instance of "Othering" projection at the level of racial difference. The marginal character of Leon has seemed purely incidental to the film until now, and neither his homosexuality nor his blackness have figured as major details in the narrative. But when Julian finally tracks him down for a negotiation about obtaining an alibi on the club stairway, Leon's sexual and racial otherness are rather suddenly accorded a meaningful new privilege in the mise-en-scène. These markers of cultural difference gain further prominence when we intuit that Leon is the one who has framed Julian for the Rheiman murder. Firstly, their exchange is shot from a low angle that establishes a homoerotically loaded spatial opposition between Leon "on top" of the frame and Julian at the "bottom", indicating that Leon has control of this situation and Julian is at his mercy. This conventional method of blocking is a familiar technique in which the villain asserts his/her diabolical agency and temporary domination of the narrative in crude spatial terms, and it is so naturalised by the formal structures of mainstream cinema that its implications frequently pass unnoticed. In this case, however, the blocking is contextualised by other factors that qualify its significance: the setting of a sexually transgressive space that is both threatening and seductive; Julian's extreme vulnerability at this point of the

story; and Leon's sinister declaration of ownership of the new male prostitute that he has acquired ("I'm gonna make sure none of these fruits snatch him from me"), whom we are encouraged to read as Julian's replacement, and who is later visually coded as stereotypically effeminate, with feathered blonde hair and a white tank top. Within those familiar dynamics of cultural projection, whereby that which is feared or hated in the self is transferred onto the Other as a monstrous exaggeration, such stylised modes of visual representation inevitably become bound up with the wider articulation of Leon's difference as Julian's perceived Other.

Other scholars have commented upon the implicit racism of Schrader's decision to make the only nonwhite character with a major speaking role in *American Gigolo* the film's villain, and to cast a notably dark-skinned African-American actor, Bill Duke, in the role. For instance, in his brief denunciation of Schrader's body of work as inherently fascist, Wood notes in passing: "the fact that the ultimate Schrader villain is both black and homosexual can scarcely be regarded, in the general context of his work, as coincidental" (*Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan* 60). Similarly, the editors of the collection *Pop Out: Queer Warhol* note the presence of a large poster of Andy Warhol's *Torso* exhibit (featuring a triple image of nude male buttocks) in Leon's apartment during the film's climax, arguing that the iconography of Warhol's queer art is used to "facilitate the condensation of sinister greed, perversion and betrayal onto the gay and black body of Leon" (Doyle, Flatley and Muñoz 14); they confine their analysis to Schrader's mobilisation of Warhol, which "in dramatizing the abjection of Leon does racist and homophobic work at the same time" (14). But given that *American Gigolo* is so self-consciously constructed as an exercise in cinematic formalism, I find it surprising that more scholars have not considered the visual treatment of Leon's race during the nightclub scene. As their stairway exchange progresses, Julian grows increasingly anxious, enquiring if the police have already interrogated Leon about the Rheiman murder and begging him to provide the alibi. Under the harsh blue neon that has come to signify the space of homosexuality, Julian is allowed to retain the natural pigmentation of his white skin; he is also backlit by a pulsing red light that again connotes the threat of homosexual danger (see Fig 1.9 overleaf). In contrast, Leon is shot directly

under the non-naturalistic blue light, with no visible source of backlighting or fill light. Combined with the use of emphatic close-ups, Duke's pointed line delivery and the threatening nature of their exchange, this lighting strategy has the strange effect of rendering his black skin at first uncanny, and then, as the scene progresses, almost frightening (see Fig 1.10).

Figs 1.9 and 1.10



In his book *White: Essays on Race and Culture*, Richard Dyer claims that the “aesthetic technology” behind the traditional lighting practices of mainstream cinema has tended to “produce a look that assumes, privileges and constructs an image of white people” (83). He argues not only that the photographic apparatus

itself was developed with white subjects in mind, but that the attendant lighting strategies of international film production have rarely been revised, expanded or challenged since the widespread standardisation of such techniques in 1920s Hollywood. Under this innately racist aesthetic rubric, the fact that white skin reflects light whereas black skin absorbs it – the obvious implication being that different skin tones require different lighting strategies – has almost exclusively been accommodated to the advantage of white photographic subjects, “so much so that photographing non-white people is typically construed as a problem” (*White* 89). Dyer supplies two particularly interesting case studies of white skin being treated as the norm in ways that inevitably become problematic for the black actors who occupy the same frame. His first example is *In the Heat of the Night* (1967, Norman Jewison), in which a heartfelt late-night conversation between ostensible co-leads Rod Steiger and Sidney Poitier blatantly uses an imbalance in lighting styles to provide a dramatic showcase for the white actor. Where Poitier is shot in side profile and lit from behind by a table lamp that half-bathes him in silhouette, Steiger is not only granted more frontal close-ups but also additional backlighting and fill light that alleviates the shadows around his face:

As a result, not only is Steiger more fully visible to us, but he can display a range of modulations of expression that indicate the character’s complex turmoil of feelings and reminiscences. Poitier, by contrast, remains the emblematic, unindividualised, albeit admirable, black man. (*White* 99)

Dyer’s second case study is a much later film, *Rising Sun* (1993, Philip Kaufman), which in itself suggests how little had changed in the intervening years in terms of technical solutions to the perceived problem of lighting different skin tones in the same frame. In that film, a police interrogation scene by equal partners Sean Connery and Wesley Snipes privileges the light around the white star’s temples while his black counterpart remains “shrouded in darkness” (100); in two-shots that attempt to use an “intermediate light setting” that fails to do justice to either actor, “Snipes’ skin shines whereas Connery’s disappears in the light – the surface of Snipes’ flesh is evident, his corporeality, whereas Connery’s flesh is dissolved into the light” (*White* 101). The description

of Snipes' skin being lit as a glistening graphic surface is redolent of the visual treatment of Leon in *American Gigolo*, in particular a mid-shot in which his villainy is signposted as he glares down at Julian with a forbidding expression on his face. In this composition, Leon's dark skin, black leather jacket and the wall behind him are all rendered slightly different shades of the same metallic blue tone that, within the wider visual schema of the film, designates the alien space of cultural difference. Leon's blackness thus becomes convenient visual shorthand for expressing his Otherness, and the lighting of his skin an aesthetic strategy for denying his human subjectivity. When questioned about the challenges of lighting actors with radically different skin tones in the same frame, Bailey admits: "I probably had two and a half times the amount of light on Bill Duke than I had on Richard. Some black people happen to take a lot more light, some don't. Duke did. It was difficult doing two-shots" (*Masters of Light* 62). Yet the highly charged narrative context of the scene means that the decision to shine more than twice the amount of light onto the black actor as the white one is hardly just an innocent formal solution to a technical problem. In an article on different approaches to lighting darker skin tones, African-American director of photography Cybel Martin notes that "overexposing brown skin while using a warm gel on your light can make the actor radiant", but that she is "always mindful of overexposing too much with brown skin. Go too far, and they can appear unnaturally lighter and washed out" (*Indiewire*). Cinematographer John Alonzo also notes that lighting a multiracial cast requires careful attention to the "different variations in color among black people. You have some black people who have a lot of blue that comes out of their skin, so you have to use a warm light and eye light to change it" (Malkiewicz 141). Alonzo's mention of the need to technologically "change" the appearance of dark skin tones is itself problematic,²⁷ but it suggests what we might reasonably expect when a film blasts cold blue light upon black skin that already transmits a bluish hue. In this regard, we cannot understate the aesthetic racism of

²⁷ Yet it is also fairly typical. For instance, Nick Davis considers the "top-lighted and over-bright flattening of Viola Davis's sublimely nuanced performance in *The Help* (2011)" evidence of an ongoing aesthetic racism in dominant filmmaking practice, in which the visual team, "by reflex, key every light source and lens to Caucasian complexions and performers" (139). See also Ann Hornaday's recent *Washington Post* article on the "aesthetic politics" of lighting black skin (2013).

Schrader's decision to cast a black actor with a particularly dark skin tone, overexpose him with considerably more light than his white co-star, and reveal his status as the film's mystery villain under an artificial and defamiliarising blue neon that, in magnifying the underlying blueness of his complexion, renders his racial difference borderline monstrous. When Julian asks Leon who he thinks killed Mrs. Rheiman, he answers: "If I was the police, I'd be more interested in Rheiman himself". After pausing a beat, he raises his eyebrows, cocks his head in Julian's direction, and adds in a conspiratorial tone: "He's a *freak*, you know?" At this angle, Leon's whole figure is tinted blue while large sections of his face are cloaked in silhouette. His face is almost indiscernible from the texture of his leather jacket, and his exaggerated expression makes the whites of his teeth and widened eyes glow menacingly in the dark. The implication of his statement is clarified through the image itself: the audience already knows that Mr. Rheiman is a "freak", so what Leon is actually telling us here – or rather, *showing* us, through Schrader's combination of angle, lighting and colour symbolism – is that he himself is the real freak, and the real villain of the film (see Figs 1.11 and 1.12).

Figs 1.11 and 1.12 (overleaf)





Closing their exchange, Leon offers Julian some prostitution work. Julian's immediate, one-word response is to ask "Straight?", to which Leon simply replies "This time of night? Are you serious?" Rejecting the job, Julian lashes out in anxious frustration: "Leon, I'm sick of doing weird shit. I'm sick of it. No more fag stuff, no more kink... nothing, *finito*, got it?" Here three distinct modes of sexual practice ("weird shit", "fag stuff" and "kink") are conceived as broadly interchangeable, which suggests that Julian has previously endured bad experiences working with non-heterosexual clients. Here we are reminded of Bruzzi's suggestion that, within the anxious world of *noir*, male subjectivity built upon the seemingly stable foundation – or in Julian's case, if Schrader's 2007 interview statements are taken into account, the *illusion* – of middle-class white heterosexuality finds itself especially vulnerable to perceived contamination from the cultural Others against which it defines itself:

The determining male 'anxiety' is not that masculinity is foolish or easily mocked, but that, having thought it was the identity position against which its 'Others' were defined, it discovers, in fact, that it is the most precarious and unsustainable of identity positions. (*Men's Cinema* 50)

By this point, the two men have changed position so that Julian now stands a few steps above Leon. But rather than redressing the power dynamics, the visual effect of this shift is to reveal Leon's face in its natural dark brown colour for the

first time in the scene. Sternly reminding Julian that, “Your clientele – your rich pussy – won’t touch you. They’re looking for new boys”, Leon retains narrative control by highlighting the contingency of Julian’s social status, and the permeability of his sexual identity to gay subjugation. The fact that Leon’s blackness is finally revealed in its natural light at this moment consolidates racial difference as the true fulcrum of his villainy; it also evokes Amy Taubin’s suggestion (in her analysis of *Taxi Driver*) that the discourse of racism in Schrader’s work may not be so neatly confined to the realm of fiction but rather reflects unconscious mechanisms in his own psyche (17). While this example of problematic lighting is, in keeping with the formalism of Schrader’s general approach, far more stylised than comparatively naturalistic films such as *In the Heat of the Night* or *Rising Sun*, it again illustrates Dyer’s thesis that black performers in cinema are seldom privileged as subjects of appropriate visual treatment: “Movie lighting discriminates against non-white people because it is used in a cinema and a culture that finds it hard to recognise them as appropriate subjects for such lighting, that is, as individuals” (*White* 102).

The climactic confrontation between Julian and Leon in the latter’s high-rise apartment uses a more naturalistic mode of lighting, but it nevertheless fails to endow Leon with any sense of humanity, complexity or even coherent motivation for his behaviour. Revealing that he framed Julian for the Rheiman murder simply because he “stepped on too many toes” and “I never liked you much myself” – and, above all, because he was “frameable” (which Bailey’s camera has laboured to tell us throughout the film) – Leon assumes the status of a grotesque caricature through a combination of clichéd thriller dialogue and Duke’s melodramatic line delivery (“Police want you *real* bad, Julie. Now they gotcha!” he whispers menacingly in a hushed tone while pointing at Julian). Yet his cartoonish villainy is also, again, a product of the film’s aesthetic choices. In this case, rather than disorienting lighting styles or spatial imbalances, it is a mixture of garish set design and clashing colour schemes that construct his blackness and homosexuality as fundamental signifiers of his villainy. Quite simply, he is depicted as having lurid personal taste through a set of unflattering choices: he wears cowboy boots and a fluorescent orange bathrobe that jars against his dark skin tone, while his apartment features a silver vinyl sofa with

pink satin cushions, a shiny green couch, a designer tree fringed with gold tassels, and the aforementioned Warhol artwork. It is a ghastly space, its homoerotically overdetermined objects, props and décor in sharp contrast to the rigorous minimalism of Julian's own tasteful apartment; in constructing Leon as Julian's cultural Other and dark shadow, Schrader also inscribes his apartment as Julian's worst aesthetic nightmare. As their argument grows heated and Leon proves unmoved by Julian's masochistic offer to prostitute himself in what has been coded as the most demeaning sex work possible ("I'll do fag tricks for you, Leon! I'll do kink! I'll do anything you want me to do"), a scuffle ensues where Leon falls to his death from the balcony and Julian is left holding one of his boots. He sinks back onto the sofa with the boot on his lap, looking dejected and lost in the space of Otherness, framed against the Warhol torsos that evoke the marble bust at the start of the film. In light of Schrader's comments about Julian being divorced from his own sexuality, the killing-off of Leon and Julian's subsequent imprisonment also suggest the failure to expunge one's own "difference" through the elimination of an Other who is not so discrepant from the Self after all. As Bruzzi reminds us, "In so many narratives the man's fear is the fear of an externalised 'Other' that is actually, as it turns out, the embodiment of his own perceived internal inadequacies, most significantly homosexuality" (*Men's Cinema* 53).

Conclusion

In his analysis of Bresson, Schrader claims that the much-discussed ending of *Pickpocket* crystallises the essence of transcendental cinema. He refers to the famous moment in which the withdrawn Michel, whose affectless monotone and deadpan expressions have hitherto revealed nothing of his interiority, suddenly finds himself the vehicle of a deep, spiritual surge of emotion. Imprisoned for his crimes, he receives a visit from his ethereal young companion Jeanne (Marika Green); pressing his face to the bars that separate them, he professes his love for her: "Oh Jeanne, how long it has taken me to come to you". It is, as Schrader explains, "a "miraculous" event, the expression of love by an unfeeling man within an unfeeling environment, the transference of his passion from

pickpocketing to Jeanne” (*Transcendental Style* 81). The precise orchestration of rarefied banality that Bresson has so painstakingly captured via the “everyday” mode is thus punctured by an unexpected burst of pure and redemptive feeling, all the more potent for having been so tightly suppressed until the film’s climax. Of course, the brazenness with which *American Gigolo* directly lifts the ending of *Pickpocket* has encouraged scholars to read the climax of Schrader’s film as a self-conscious attempt to mechanically “apply his own formula” (Nichols 13) for transcendental resolution. Over a series of slow dissolves, we learn that Julian is in prison for the Rheiman murder, silently resigned to his incarceration. Michelle visits a lawyer to make a false confession that she was with Julian on the night of the murder, thus sacrificing her social reputation, ending her unhappy marriage, and providing the alibi that will set him free and herald Schrader’s own transcendental moment. As Julian sits behind the glass screen of the visiting room, Michelle informs him that she did this because “I had no choice. I love you”. Finally accepting her demonstration of sincere, unwarranted devotion, Julian leans his head against the prison glass after uttering a slight variation of Michel’s closing sentiment in *Pickpocket*: “My God, Michelle... it’s taken me so long to come to you”.

Those who interpret *American Gigolo* as a step-by-step attempt to recreate Schrader’s own thesis of transcendental cinema tend to negate the film’s ending due to its blatant incongruence from the stylistic context in which it emerges. For Nichols, Julian’s redemptive final proclamation is “clearly at odds with the previously established abundant style”, and rather than “[point] to the transcendent for which a sparse style like Bresson’s prepares us”, it merely restores us to “those material conditions in which Schrader’s abundant style has immersed us” (12). Fraser blames the “conflict between Schrader’s personal style and his defined transcendental style” (98) on his over-reliance upon generic stereotypes and “two-dimensional allegory” (99) that forecloses upon the possibility of genuine spiritual awakening: this is, after all, a film in which transcendence is predicated upon an utterly conventional, clichéd and heteronormative resolution in which “Julian goes free, apparently back to prosperity, and he gets the girl” (Fraser 99). Yet this is also precisely the point. As I have attempted to demonstrate, both the strained construction of this happy

ending and its smooth compatibility with the dominant structures of mainstream cinema depend upon the suppression of a range of sexual and racial anxieties that are most potently articulated at the level of mise-en-scène. Given the construction of his character, the aesthetic design of the film and Schrader's later interview comments, we have little reason to believe that Julian truly *wants* the girl.

Finally, it is worth noting that, given his personal investments in gay culture around the time he made *American Gigolo*, Schrader was indignant when gay critics such as Wood dubbed the film homophobic on the grounds that it featured a gay, black villain:

At the time I thought it was just an interesting idea; I didn't see it in political terms at all and was very hurt by all the criticism, but now, in retrospect, I can see the justice of those arguments more clearly than I could at the time. (Jackson 163)

Yet even this disarming admission of fallibility tells only part of the story. The profound ambivalence that marks Schrader's response to bodies perceived as Other was evident since *Taxi Driver* and is, as we shall see, even more palpable in his next film, *Cat People*, where the horror of sexual difference is again sublimated through an overinvestment in the pleasures of cinematic form. In the wider context of his career, *American Gigolo* emerges as the first Schrader film whose dazzling aesthetic surface divulges murky ideological depths. It is a film in which the nuances of camerawork, lighting, costume, colour and production design disclose a deep-rooted fear of Other bodies, and an even deeper fear that those bodies may not be so "different" after all.

CHAPTER TWO

Beauty in the Beast:

The Monstrous-Feminine and Masculine Projection in *Cat*

***People* (1982)**

Introduction

In the early 1980s, Universal Studios decided to remake the classic low-budget horror film *Cat People* (1942, Jacques Tourneur), about a beautiful young Serbian woman, named Irena (Simone Simon), who is tormented by the mythical belief that she descends from an ancient race of people who transform into leopards when sexually aroused. The idea to revisit this film was part of the studio's trend of making big-budget updates of horror and science fiction B-movies from previous generations, such as John Carpenter's 1982 remake of *The Thing From Another Planet* (1951, Christian Nyby). Yet even beyond Universal, the decade yielded a host of 1940s and 50s genre remakes – including *The Fly* (1986, David Cronenberg), *Invaders From Mars* (1986, Tobe Hooper) and *The Blob* (1988, Chuck Russell) – that shared an affinity for modern special effects and gruesome creature make-up.²⁸ But while the likes of Carpenter and Cronenberg were established horror filmmakers clearly working within their natural milieu, few people could have reasonably expected to see Paul Schrader's name attached to a remake of *Cat People*.

Identifying a pattern that became increasingly prevalent over the course of his career, Schrader notes that he has frequently come onboard existing projects adapted from other writers' source material at a late stage. This is the case with several later films such as *Patty Hearst* (1988), *The Comfort of Strangers* (1990), *Auto Focus* (2002) and *Adam Resurrected* (2008), all of which were adapted from novels by other screenwriters. In each case, Schrader ended up directing the film because the studio's original choices were dismayed either by the uncommercial subject matter or the challenges involved in adapting difficult literature to a filmic mode. Claiming that his name is usually only mentioned at studio meetings when producers need a director "who'll do anything, who [has] no fear" (Kouvaros 127), he also admits that he has "never been afraid of trying things that other people said are impossible" (Simon). The films that he has directed from other writers' scripts signify a subtle shift in Hollywood's

²⁸ See also *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978, Philip Kaufman), whose critical and commercial success anticipated the following decade's wave of body-centric horror remakes.

conception of him: from an auteur writer-director who specialised in a highly individual set of thematic and stylistic concerns to a director-for-hire who can be entrusted to supply difficult adaptations with an interesting personal spin.

Cat People was the film that established the precedent for this gradual transition in Schrader's career. As with many of his later projects, the film had a long and troubled gestation period before Schrader even joined the production. Beginning in the mid-1970s, the project underwent numerous script treatments and working drafts by four different screenwriters before producer Charles Fries hired the final film's only credited writer, Alan Ormsby, on the basis of his screenplays for Bob Clark's low-budget horror films *Children Shouldn't Play With Dead Things* (1973) and *Deathdream* (1974).²⁹ The first director attached to the remake was Roger Vadim (best known for *Blood and Roses* (1960) and *Barbarella* (1968)); when he unexpectedly left the project in 1979, Universal executives considered hiring a range of young filmmakers who had recently achieved some visibility within the horror genre, including Cronenberg, Brian De Palma and Joe Dante, before finally settling on a director who held no previous associations with the genre: Schrader (Rebello 31). Although he initially had reservations about agreeing to direct the film because "the idea of people turning into cats is quite ludicrous to me" (Rebello 33), Schrader welcomed the opportunity to do something outside his comfort zone. Within the space of two years, he had written six scripts: *Blue Collar*, *Hardcore*, *American Gigolo*, *Old Boyfriends* (which was directed by Joan Tewkesbury in 1979), a biopic of Hank Williams (which was never made), and a semi-autobiographical screenplay titled "Born in the USA" (which struggled to secure financing but was eventually filmed as *Light of Day* in 1987). In the aftermath of this frenetic period, he suffered from an intense bout of writer's block (Kouvaros 46), and as a result

²⁹ Ormsby's credentials are generally rooted in exploitation subgenres: he also wrote and co-directed (with Jeff Gillen) the 1974 horror film *Deranged*, which was inspired by the serial killer Ed Gein, and co-wrote the teen sex comedy sequel *Porky's II: The Next Day* (1983, Clark).

I decided to do [*Cat People*] in order not to do a personal film... I said, 'OK, I'm going to do a genre film, a horror film, a special-effects film that will not be about me, and that will be a very salutary exercise.' Well, in truth, when I look back on it, I see *Cat People* as being almost the most personal film I've done. (Jackson 166)

The transition from an impersonal director-for-hire job to a deeply personal film is revealing in the context of Schrader's career. In an article on the making of *Cat People*, Stephen Rebello explains how Schrader "insisted on structural as well as thematic changes" (32) to Ormsby's screenplay, including an expository prologue and dream sequence, a revised ending and, more broadly, a shift in emphasis from conventional monster movie horror towards mythic "sexual fantasy – with touches of incest, bestiality, lesbianism and bondage thrown in for good measure" (Rebello 32). But *Cat People* also became a personal project for more specific reasons: it led to a turbulent affair with his lead actress, Nastassia Kinski, as well as an unexpectedly close identification with the film's lovesick hero (John Heard), a solitary zookeeper whose intimacy issues thoroughly define his relationship with Irena. For Schrader, this personal investment yielded a fresh interest in the generic source material:

I saw in it something I could use not only to get back to work, but to do a film of poetry, myth and eros. It isn't a horror film *per se*, but uses a horror context to play upon our notions of sexuality, sexual presence, and sexual iconography. (Rebello 32)

In contrast, the mainstream press and film industry felt uncertain of the film's artistic tone, conceptual intent or place in the commercial marketplace. Budgeted at \$15 million, *Cat People* was a box-office disappointment and received largely negative reviews. For instance, Kim Newman argues that the remake is tarnished by its abrupt scene transitions and "astonishingly slapdash plot" (243), while Stephen Prince feels that Schrader's humourless treatment of an innately absurd storyline subordinates narrative coherence to his formalist exploration of "camera movement, lighting, and color" (244). Also typical of the film's reception is David Denby's claim that, in updating a film revered for its

atmospheric subtlety and emphasis on the “unseen” with liberal amounts of sex, nudity and gore, the original story is

crassly refashioned so as to produce juicy Freudian horrors [...] and after a while we seem to be watching not the possibilities that were always inherent in the material but the mucky personal fantasies that have been loaded onto it. (60)

While I do not disagree with these criticisms of *Cat People*, I contend that the film also represents important developments in Schrader’s body-centric cinema at the level of both style and theme. After providing an overview of the original *Cat People* and establishing the generic contexts of 1980s body horror within which the remake emerged, I mobilise Barbara Creed’s psychoanalytic theories of female monstrosity, Robin Wood’s cultural approach to the Othering dynamics of American horror cinema and Schrader’s own formalist study of visual style in German Expressionist cinema to argue that *Cat People* constructs Kinski as an unattainable, monstrous object of desire in ways that illuminate Schrader’s unexpectedly personal investments in both the film and its leading lady. In doing so, I will demonstrate how his treatment of the film’s generic and narrative conventions are formalised in an unusually fetishistic attention to mise-en-scène, particularly the use of colour, production design and visual symbolism. Finally, in a variation of the problematic depiction of cultural Others already evinced by *American Gigolo*, I will argue that Schrader’s investment in mise-en-scène again reveals a disquieting set of attitudes not only towards his monstrous heroine, but to the female body in general.

Making Monsters Visible: From Lewton/Tourneur to Body Horror

The original *Cat People* was one of three stylish and evocative horror B-movies that Tourneur directed in close collaboration with producer Val Lewton for RKO in the early-mid 1940s. Shot on small budgets with non-star casts, they were defined by their elegantly expressionistic visual design, sophisticated allusions to literary and artistic intertexts, and privilege of “implied monsters and

psychological horror” (Benshoff 100) over shock value. This decision to leave things “unknown or unseen” (Telotte “Dark Patches” 43) has enabled a richer degree of critical inquiry than is typically the case with B-horror cinema. For instance, Gwenda Young argues that the second Lewton-Tourneur collaboration, *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), subverts the generic conventions of its supernatural narrative to offer a realistic and respectful depiction of Caribbean voodoo ritual, as well as a progressive vision of racial difference that “challenges the dominant representation of blacks and black discourse in American cinema and society” (105).³⁰ Harry Benshoff compares the Lewton-Tourneur films to the moral ambiguity of film *noir*, insofar as they create “a paranoid and pessimistic world wherein traditional roles of gender and sexuality are perpetually in flux” (100), and in which the emphasis on darkened corridors, locked doors and secret subcultures facilitates a surprising degree of queer interpretation.³¹ In the case of *Cat People*, this thematic complexity is mirrored by a *mise-en-scène* built around its chiaroscuro interplay of darkness and light, nuanced sensitivity to sound design, and evocative manipulation of offscreen space. Chris Fujiwara notes how the scene where Irena stalks her romantic nemesis Alice (Jane Randolph) on the transverse exploits our primal fear of what lies outside our visual knowledge in the way it “repeatedly places darkness at the edges of the frame, where it merges with a threatening offscreen space” (74). The celebrated swimming pool sequence, where Alice is terrorised by an unseen something that may or may not be Irena in leopard form, unfolds through a similar visual logic, with sinister animal moans accompanied by shadows flickering on the walls around the darkened, empty pool. In this way, “the annihilating absence threatening [Alice] becomes a diffusion of sourceless shadow over the whole space”, with the standard revelation of creaturely

³⁰ The third Lewton-Tourneur collaboration was *The Leopard Man* (1943), which despite its monster movie title concerns a human serial killer. Lewton also produced a *Cat People* sequel named *Curse of the Cat People* (1944, Robert Wise and Gunther von Fritsch), which features the same principal characters but a completely different story.

³¹ In his discussion of the original *Cat People*, Benshoff reads the exchange between Irena and the catwoman who intrudes upon her wedding celebration as a moment of dreaded lesbian recognition, and Irena’s self-loathing fear of her leopard side as a crisis of sexual identity.

monstrosity replaced by “empty shots of the walls and ceiling, over which Alice’s reverb-drenched screams assault us” (Fujiwara 76).

Given his long-standing cinephilia, it is surprising that Schrader did not favour the stylistic innovation of the original film. When questioned about it in interviews, he describes Tourneur’s film as “basically a very good B-movie with one or two brilliant sequences”, adding: “I certainly don’t feel I was trying to stand on top of a mountain. I mean, we’re not talking about a real classic, like *Stagecoach* or *Scarface*” (Mank 237). He claims that he felt “perturbed that people were trying to compare the two”, and that “In retrospect, I wish I’d changed the title because then there wouldn’t have been the comparisons” (Jackson 172). Schrader’s dismissal might be more credible if he had changed not only the title but also the names of the principal characters, and if he had avoided recreating famous sequences like the pool scene and the park-stalking scene followed by the “Lewton bus”.³² But whether to offset the anxiety of perceived influence or simply a matter of personal taste, his disconnection from the original meant that he had no interest in replicating its aesthetic of the unseen. Discussing the fundamental differences that distinguish the two versions of *Cat People*, Jonathan Romney notes: “A film of absences is replaced by one of complete presence in which everything is there on the surface” (149). As I will argue, this notion of displaying the theme across the surface of the film is central to Schrader’s treatment of the body, making something abundantly visible that was merely suggested in the original. This connects *Cat People* to the broader authorial discourse of bodies, surfaces and sexual anxiety that defined *American Gigolo*, but it also relates to emerging developments in the body horror subgenre of the early 1980s. While Schrader has professed little interest in this subgenre, his visual emphasis on blood, gore and nudity, and the broader decision to render bodily monstrosity as visible as possible – an aesthetic of “complete presence” – nevertheless signifies wider shifts occurring in horror cinema during this period. Discussing the motifs of disease, surgery

³² This was Lewton’s term for the “false alarm” shock effect used in his 1940s horror films, named after the stalking episode in *Cat People* where the climactic, cat-like screech is revealed to be the halting brakes of a bus.

and medical disorder prevalent in contemporary horror films such as *Coma* (1978, Michael Crichton) and *Visiting Hours* (1982, Jean-Claude Lord), Pete Boss notes the “unwavering scrutiny of the lens as it seeks out details of broken bodies” (16), favouring images that “shock by their revelations of detailed physical injuries” (15) and their dispassionate tendency to reduce the human body “to mere tissue” (16). Philip Brophy also characterises increased visibility as the dominant motif separating modern horror films from those of previous eras, claiming that “the mode of *showing* as opposed to *telling*” (8; emphasis original) constitutes a new method of representing monstrosity as something that emerges from inside the body rather than being incarnated in external forces. He cites *An American Werewolf in London* (1981, John Landis), Carpenter’s *The Thing*, and Cronenberg’s visceral early films – *Shivers* (1975), *Rabid* (1977), *The Brood* (1979) and *Scanners* (1981) – as evidence that “the contemporary horror film tends to play not so much on the broad fear of death, but more precisely on the fear of one’s own body, of how one controls and relates to it” (8). Such films are explicitly organised around the collapse of boundaries separating the inside and outside of the body, and thus function as nightmares about the capacity of our bodies to mutate, lose control, or prove vulnerable to destruction. Despite their generic associations, these anxieties resonate with themes of bodily crisis that Schrader had begun exploring in his screenplays for *Taxi Driver* and *Raging Bull*, started to visualise in *American Gigolo*, and would develop even further in *Mishima*. And while *Cat People* does not represent a coherent entry in any specific subgenre, the concurrent popularity of body horror provides useful background context for understanding the shift from Tourneur’s atmospheric subtlety towards the corporeal explicitness that was predominant in the 1980s.

In order to establish more precise generic contexts for my reading of *Cat People*, it is helpful to first evaluate some scholarship that relates these contemporary developments in corporeal horror to more specific issues of gender, sexuality and the female body. In her book *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Barbara Creed notes that work on femininity in the horror genre has historically tended to focus upon representations of women as victims. A blatant example of this approach occurs in the work of Gérard Lenne, who

claims that there have been few authentic female monsters in horror cinema and that what women “[do] best is to faint in the arms of a gorilla, or a mummy, or a werewolf, or a Frankensteinian creature” (35). Writing a few years later, Linda Williams posits “a surprising (and at times subversive) affinity between monster and woman” (18) in films such as *Nosferatu* (1922, F.W. Murnau) and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925, Rupert Julian), which construct both the male monster and the heroine as potent sexual Others within patriarchal looking structures, though she does not examine the specific nature or implications of female monstrosity.³³ Creed’s intervention is therefore to question the overemphasis on female victimhood in light of the fact that the horror genre *has* in fact derived much of its power to shock and disturb by repeatedly conceptualising the woman as monster; as she explains, “The horror film is populated by female monsters, many of which seem to have evolved from images that haunted the dreams, myths and artistic practices of our forebears many centuries ago” (1). Creed supports her observation by listing a number of popular female characters from a diverse range of horror texts who, in different ways, function as monsters: the demonically possessed adolescent girl in *The Exorcist* (1973, William Friedkin), the telekinetic anti-heroine of *Carrie* (1976, De Palma), the castrating rape avenger of *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978, Meir Zarchi), the bisexual vampire queen in *The Hunger* (1983, Tony Scott), and even Irena – “woman as non-human animal” (1) – in Tourneur’s original *Cat People*. Expanding on Boss and Brophy’s analyses of maximised visibility in 1970s and 80s body horror, Creed argues that the narrative construction of female monstrosity in horror films is invariably rooted in a profound disturbance of bodily experience, whether psychological or paranormal in basis, and that this corporeal crisis is often expressed through an uncompromising visual emphasis on blood, vomit, mucus and other bodily fluids. In theorising how women function as more than mere victims in horror cinema, she thus seeks to evaluate

³³ See also Judith Mayne’s “*King Kong* and the Ideology of Spectacle” for an analysis of the Othering patriarchal gaze that unites the eponymous ape, the white heroine and the island natives in *King Kong* (1933, Ernest B. Schoedsack and Merian C. Cooper). For an influential account of gender and spectatorship in horror cinema, particularly the 1980s slasher and rape-revenge subgenres, see Carol J. Clover’s *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992).

“the relationship between physical states, bodily wastes (even if metaphoric ones) and the horrific – in particular, the monstrous-feminine” (3).

Creed partly bases her definition of the monstrous-feminine on the seminal theory of abjection elucidated in Julia Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror*. Building upon a Lacanian conception of the human subject as unavoidably grounded in filth and waste, Kristeva describes the ‘abject’ as that which defies the rational constructs of the social order, refuses to “respect borders, positions, rules” and “disturbs identity, system, order” (4). Essentially, abjection describes the manner in which our sense of a coherent self-identity is threatened by feelings of repulsion towards the normal excretory functions that define our bodily experience: urination or defecation, ejaculation, menstruation, vomiting, and the elimination of saliva, sweat, mucus, pus or tears. As most of these functions are essential to our physical health, we reluctantly tolerate them, but an encounter with the abject always carries the potential to provoke trauma: it denotes a loss of clear boundaries separating self from other, subject from object, and human from nonhuman. The sense of disruption at the border between physical states can extend to other everyday activities such as eating. For Kristeva, the skin that forms on the top of milk represents one such corporeal disruption, and this awareness of liminality triggers a visceral uneasiness about one’s own sense of self and position within the cultural order. Creed explains that:

The ultimate in abjection is the corpse. The body protects itself from bodily wastes such as shit, blood, urine and pus by ejecting these things from the body just as it expels food that, for whatever reason, the subject finds loathsome. (9)

The act of bearing witness to the corpse of a loved one, who has fully lost human subjectivity yet continues to exist in the form of an abject body, thus becomes an especially traumatic reminder of our own biological materiality, our vulnerability to pollution and decay, and our inevitable death (Creed 10). For Kristeva, the association of the female body with menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth means that woman is culturally situated as closer to nature than man, and this in turn “gives woman a special relationship to the abject” (Creed 10).

The female body plays a pivotal role in that momentary recognition of boundaries between self and other – and also, significantly, between infant and mother – that constitutes the Lacanian mirror stage. At this phase of psychosexual development, the maternal body assumes its position as an abject element that must be consciously repressed, jettisoned and overcome in order for the infant to attain subjectivity and gain access to the symbolic order. According to Creed, horror cinema operates around an equally self-conscious breakdown of carefully policed borders – male/female, human/nonhuman, natural/supernatural – that signal a bodily lapse into the pre-symbolic maternal order:

Virtually all horror texts represent the monstrous-feminine in relation to Kristeva's notion of maternal authority and the mapping of the self's clean and proper body. Images of blood, vomit, pus, shit, etc., are central to our culturally/socially constructed notions of the horrific. (13)

In this regard, one of Creed's most pertinent case studies is *The Exorcist*, in which the demonic possession of twelve-year-old Regan (Linda Blair) plays out as a battle between the symbolic subject and the monstrous, pre-symbolic abject that must be suppressed in order for her to successfully transition into adult subjecthood. The traumatic metamorphosis of the female body also makes *The Exorcist* a significant touchstone for Schrader's remake of *Cat People*. It is thus revealing that, when Kevin Jackson questioned Schrader on his feelings about the horror genre, he confessed that the only horror films that interest him are what he terms "existential horror[s]" (167) with "deep spiritual connotations" (170), and that the two examples he provided were *The Exorcist* and *Rosemary's Baby* (1968, Roman Polanski). In both films, it is emphatically the female body that becomes vulnerable to the borders that separate good from evil, virginal from impure, and earthly from supernatural: possessed by the devil in the former, impregnated by the devil in the latter.

I think the greatest metaphor in the cinema is in *The Exorcist*, where you get God and the Devil in the same room arguing over the body of a little girl. There's not a more pristine debate imaginable – it's literally Satan and Jehovah arguing over who will possess this girl. (Jackson 167)

Schrader's comment suggests that his interest in horror cinema lies less in the generic elements of suspense, shock or special effects than its potential to articulate philosophical ideas about the threat posed by a descent into the pre-symbolic abject of the maternal order, particularly as experienced by the young and virginal female body. As Creed describes the monstrous coming-of-age narrative in *The Exorcist*:

It is Regan's body which becomes the site of this struggle – a struggle which literally takes place within the interior of and across the body. Slime, bile, pus, vomit, urine, blood – all of these abject forms of excrement are part of Regan's weaponry. Regan is possessed not by the devil but by her own unsocialized body. (40)

This notion of the vulnerable, sexually inexperienced heroine being susceptible to possession and corruption less by external supernatural forces than by the internal processes of her own body resonates vividly with Schrader's revisioning of *Cat People*. In contrast to the blatantly abject body of Regan, however, it is Irena's potent mixture of beauty, passivity and otherworldliness that allows Schrader to construct her as a nonhuman creature rather than a human subject. In fact, Schrader's Irena is almost conjured up as an unwitting receptacle for neurotic masculine projections in the film's mythic prologue, which overtly eroticises the links between femininity and monstrosity before we even meet her. Where Tourneur deliberately left the fact of Irena's animal ancestry uncertain by hinting at elusive myths about an ancient race of Serbian cat people, Schrader opens on a prehistoric landscape where a family of leopards prowl freely amongst black-cloaked natives divining for water. We see a young woman captured by a male tribe and dragged into the desert, where she is bound to a tree and offered as a human sacrifice to a ferocious-looking black leopard. Next we see another attractive virgin ushered into a cave, where she tentatively approaches a growling leopard; as we move between mid-shots of the animal's luminous green eyes and the girl's unusually feline face, we are encouraged to read her as the product of the first tribal sacrifice, confronting her animal ancestor and forced to repeat the same ritual. From this prologue, we literally

dissolve into the modern-day main frame of the narrative via a subtle superimposition from the face of the tribal girl into a close-up of Irena (Kinski). Arriving at the New Orleans airport to reunite with her long-estranged brother Paul (Malcolm McDowell), Irena radiates a dreamy, dislocated expression, her large green eyes even more catlike than those of the tribal girl. This introductory dissolve thus instantly constructs Irena in terms of her animal ancestry, as the unwitting modern embodiment of a mythic sexuality whose nonhuman origins are never in doubt.³⁴ The immediate visual focus on her beauty distinguishes Irena from more horrific examples of the monstrous-feminine, such as *The Exorcist*'s Regan, who blatantly incarnates the perceived cultural "foulness of woman" through "her putrid, filthy body covered in blood, urine, excrement and bile" (Creed 14). Yet the emphatic dissolve from ancient myth into modern 'realism' connects Irena to another archetype of female monstrosity: the mysterious beauty of otherworldly lineage, who "draws attention to the 'frailty of the symbolic order' through her evocation of the natural, animal order and its terrifying associations with the passage all human beings must inevitably take from birth through life to death" (Creed 83).

The sense that Irena embodies an animal spirit that lies outside the social order is evident during her reunion with Paul, who, as played by McDowell, quickly telegraphs his villainy with rather ludicrous dialogue and theatrical delivery (when she introduces herself to him with the words "I'm Irena", he replies ominously, "Yes, I know"). As they awkwardly move towards a hug, Irena's limpid gaze, quivering mouth and hushed voice suggest that they might enter into a lovers' kiss rather than a platonic embrace. While it is Paul who repeatedly attempts to force his incestuous lust onto Irena over the course of the film, her passivity renders her distinctly childlike, thus evoking the undifferentiated infant subject who has not yet learned to "reject or repress all forms of behaviour, speech and modes of being regarded as unacceptable, improper or unclean" (Creed 37). Irena's language also expresses a potent

³⁴ Schrader's comments about the prologue suggest a degree of lingering discomfort with the perceived absurdity of the story: "The prologue is really just a bunch of hooey to try and give the audience the freedom to have a good time. I wanted to try and take from their shoulders the burden of conventional, as well as psychological, realism" (Rebello 33).

sensuality of which she seems unaware. When Paul enquires what she remembers about their childhood since she last saw him at the age of four, she confesses, “I used to *fantasise* about you when I was in the orphanage... You coming to rescue me and things. Daydreams”. Traditional child/adult boundaries are again troubled when Paul shows her a chest of toys they played with as children, noting that their parents were circus animal trainers and that they used to practise tricks together when Irena was an infant. As he juggles balls while reciting a nursery rhyme about cats, Irena is surprised to discover that she too remembers the rhyme and joins in his recitation while juggling in perfect form, indicating that the “unsymbolized body” (Creed 38) of her distant past lies barely dormant beneath the surface. The sense of Irena’s femininity as simultaneously childlike and animalistic, and thus rooted in the abjection that Kristeva associates with the “partially formed” rather than the “fully constituted subject” (Creed 8), is reinforced when Paul’s creole housekeeper, named Female (pronounced Fe-mah-le) [Ruby Dee], greets her in terms that are blatantly infantilising: “Oh Paul”, she enthuses, “she’s a lovely, lovely little thing”. In redirecting the ostensible compliment towards Irena’s older brother and classifying her as a “thing”, Female’s comment points to the wider network of masculine projections in which Irena’s character is developed. Particularly given that Schrader’s previous films and screenplays had focused so heavily on male psyches and bodies, it is useful to consider how these dynamics are expressed in his first film with a female protagonist.

In his analysis of *Taxi Driver*, George Kouvaros argues that Travis Bickle’s inner crisis assumes an exteriorising force: his racism, homophobia and misogyny, combined with his self-loathing addiction to pornography and junk food, lead him to characterise the city as an “open sewer”, a corrupt and polluted landscape that enables him to “project his own sense of dirt and bodily waste onto others” (49). Similarly, in my chapter on *American Gigolo*, I drew upon Robin Wood’s work on “the Other” to consider how Julian projects his anxieties onto the bodies of other cultural identities, in particular the black homosexual body, and how Schrader uses the Othering qualities of light to render that body monstrous. While the fantastical elements of *Cat People* distinguish it from Schrader’s more realist psychodramas and character studies, it also continues

many of the authorial patterns I observed in *American Gigolo*: a conscious refusal to endow his protagonists with conventional human subjectivity, a tendency to define characters through their physical experience, and a strong narrative focus on the myriad cultural projections that circulate between the bodies of his various characters. I thus want to briefly return to Wood from a different perspective to consider a revealing gendered contradiction in the ways that Schrader's male and female protagonists tend to make or receive such projections. In assessing the dynamics of power relations in a heteronormative, patriarchal and majoritarian culture, Wood argues that certain members of society are inevitably more likely to find themselves the victims of unwanted projections, biases and fetishistic investments. Women constitute one of the primary categories for such Othering processes: "In a male-dominated culture, where power, money, law, social institutions are controlled by past, present and future patriarchs, woman as the Other assumes particular significance. The dominant images of women in our culture are entirely male-created and male-controlled" ("An Introduction to the American Horror Film" 169).³⁵ As *Cat People* progresses, it becomes apparent that Irena suffers as intensely as either Travis or Julian (and, indeed, the various alter egos of Yukio Mishima in his next film) from debilitating sexual anxiety and self-loathing neurosis about her body as an agent of abjection. The fundamental difference between Irena and Schrader's male protagonists – and perhaps one reason that Schrader would later acknowledge (using not the name of the character but the actress playing her) that "Nastassia in *Cat People* is a male creation" (Jackson 194) rather than a fully rounded protagonist – is that, where Travis, Julian and Mishima externalise their feelings of abjection onto other bodies, Irena (see Fig 2.1) internalises and absorbs other people's projections into her own body without fully understanding them.

³⁵ While Wood's essay focuses on both supernatural and "realist" horror films, it proved particularly influential on the later wave of scholarship on body horror, and is critiqued by both Boss and Creed in their respective studies. In addition, Schrader's status as a film scholar means that he was undoubtedly aware of Wood's critical contributions to the field when approaching the horror genre for the first time.

Fig 2.1



A prime example of this interiorisation occurs in the scene where Irena rather improbably confesses to the zoologist Alice (Annette O'Toole), whom she has just met, that she is still a virgin. When Alice questions her about her lack of sexual experience, she hints that she had some troubled history with a lecherous foster father and later considered giving her virginity to a would-be suitor, but that she simply “never met anybody I liked enough to have sex with”. At this point, they are interrupted by the appearance of an enigmatic, black-clad and distinctly catlike woman who appears to have stepped out of a 1940s film *noir*; tapping Irena on the shoulder, she whispers ominously “Mi Hermana” (“My sister”) and shuffles away. This is a slight but important variation of a scene from the original *Cat People*, where Irena’s wedding celebration is interrupted by the presence of a catwoman who evidently “shares her particular national and spiritual heritage, as well as her “corrupt passions” (Benshoff 101). In the original, Irena is haunted by the catwoman’s expression of animal sisterhood because it serves to confirm her gnawing suspicions about her own nonhuman identity; to this end, she at least understands her true nature better than other characters in the film, especially the husband and psychiatrist who unsuccessfully attempt to unravel the mystery of her identity in rational terms. Schrader’s recreation of the catwoman encounter is significantly placed during a sequence where Irena is sympathetically revealed as a virgin with an unhappy bodily history. The fact that she is approached by the older, seductive,

presumably sexually experienced catwoman – who intuitively feels their deep spiritual connection even as Irena confesses her virginity – serves to inscribe her as Creed's "possessed or invaded being" (32), whose abject qualities "can never be successfully obliterated but lie in wait at the threshold of the subject's identity, threatening it with possible breakdown" (40). Furthermore, the fact that Irena is confused by the catwoman's foreign speech (Alice translates it for her) constructs her as a clueless victim of her own monstrous erotic potency – someone who knows herself even *less* than others do, and who passively absorbs their projections as a result.

Over the course of the film, these projections increasingly structure and organise Schrader's depiction of female monstrosity. While Schrader seems to identify closely with the neuroses expressed by Travis, Julian or Mishima, in this film he clearly identifies less with his heroine than with those other characters that project their fears, fetishes and phobias onto her. Tellingly, his personal point of entry into the film was not Irena but the character of Oliver (Heard), the lonely zoo curator who quickly develops an overwhelming romantic obsession with her. When Oliver first meets Irena, she is visiting the zoo on a solitary tour of New Orleans and has remained on the grounds past closing time, transfixed in the act of sketching a caged leopard that she does not realise is Paul in panther form.³⁶ Oliver too has been engaged in a solitary pursuit, working after hours in his office while listening to a tape recording of Dante Alighieri's thirteenth-century verse collection *La Vita Nuova*. For Dante, this autobiographical text formed the cornerstone of his project to elevate the medieval tradition of courtly love poetry to the status of sacred love poetry; his muse was Beatrice, a beautiful young woman whom he met only twice during his life, but who came to personify the concept of romantic love as a divine force that allows man to

³⁶ Schrader does not exploit the perceived exoticism of the New Orleans locale as blatantly as many other 1980s films set in the South, e.g. *Southern Comfort* (1981, Walter Hill), *Crimes of the Heart* (1986, Bruce Beresford), *No Mercy* (1986, Richard Pearce), *Angel Heart* (1987, Alan Parker) or *The Big Easy* (1987, Jim McBride), all of which express cultural "difference" via representations of voodoo, mardi gras festivities, and Cajun music or cuisine. However, he acknowledges that he was intrigued by its status as "the most un-American town in America" and "tried to reflect that in the casting, to have a gumbo kind of cast to tune in with New Orleans's gumbo-pot of races and nations" (Jackson 170).

transcend the borders of the self and attain closeness to God. The love expressed by Dante in *La Vita Nuova* thus combines a sensual desire for Beatrice's physical beauty with a spiritual longing for beatitude. Discussing the short but revealing scene of Oliver listening to the Dante recording in introspective solitude, Kouvaros notes the manner in which he briefly "stops the tape to recite the words, as if he is interpolating his own voice into Dante's narrative" (51). The depiction of Oliver engaged in a task in his private workspace links him not only to Julian practising his Swedish to the Berlitz tape, but also to Travis writing in his diary, Mishima writing in his room at midnight, and Schrader's various other 'man-in-a-room' types who require a quiet space to create their neurotic interior worlds.³⁷ Given the degree to which Schrader intimately connects with his protagonists, it is not surprising that he formed a deep identification with Oliver. Indeed, this marked a crucial development in *Cat People*'s shift from a genre exercise to a personal project:

I realized I *was* one of the characters. I was the John Heard character.... I realized that what I had here was an intellectual, older Travis Bickle. This is me and this is my Calvinistic notion of the postponement of pleasure and the kind of sanctity of sex where you can only really be in love with something better. (Thomson 50-51)

The notion of falling for a love object perceived as vastly superior to the self constructs the Other as a screen for pathological transferences. In the case of the Beatrice complex, the obsessive romanticisation of the love object facilitates what Wood terms a "particularly severe repression of female sexuality" ("An Introduction to the American Horror Film" 167), a masculine projection whose success or failure depends on the degree to which "woman's autonomy and independence are denied" ("An Introduction to the American Horror Film" 169). The fundamental paradox of the Beatrice scenario helps to explain why Schrader has consciously revisited it in a number of guises over the years. Explaining his attraction to Dante's vision of love as occluded subjectivity and masochistic deferral, he notes:

³⁷ In fact, Oliver keeps a copy of John Nathan's book *Mishima: A Biography* on his bedside locker in an allusion towards the next film that Schrader was planning to make.

At Calvin I took a course on Milton, but I was more attracted to Dante because I liked the idea of that sort of romantic obsession. Beatrice was always a more compelling figure to me than Milton's Satan, even though Satan is one of the great figures in literature. But *Taxi Driver* has the Beatrice theme, *Obsession* has it, and, of course, it's one of the reasons I like *Vertigo* so much. (Jackson 167)

In *Cat People*, Irena's spiritual connection to the nonhuman realm makes her an especially apt candidate for Oliver's fantasmatic investments. When he first approaches Irena after noticing her outside his office window, he startles her so much that she attempts to flee the zoo and – like a cat – jumps up the nearest tree. But when they start talking and he questions her decision to remain after hours in order to sketch a potentially dangerous leopard, her suggestive response (“I can sense how an animal feels”) resonates with his own affinity for the company of animals. Schrader explains that the process of developing Oliver into “a sort of pursuer of a Beatrice figure” meant constructing him as “a man who lives with animals because he doesn't like humans very much. And then his Beatrice appears and his greatest fantasy comes true, because Beatrice is an animal” (Jackson 166). But while Oliver is warm and respectful towards Irena from their first encounter, there are signs that his attraction to her metaphorical animal side turns on the implicitly sexist assumption that she is a *tame*, passive animal: “C'mon, I won't bite you”, he playfully remarks while asking her to join him for dinner, little realising that it is she who holds the power to devour him if her inner leopard is unleashed.³⁸ Such gestures indicate that, rather than relate to Irena as an equal, he will try to instal her as the mysterious, animalistic child-woman of his long-harboured Beatrice complex. As Wood explains, such projections inevitably authorise “the attribution to the female of passivity, her preparation for her subordinate and dependent role in our culture” (“An

³⁸ For interesting considerations of the zoo within recent studies of animality in cinema, see Jonathan Burt's *Animals in Film* (2004) and Akira Mizuta Lippit's *Electric Animal: Towards a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (2008). For an account of human/animal relations from a Darwinian evolutionary perspective, see Creed's *Darwin's Screens: Evolutionary Aesthetics, Time and Sexual Display in the Cinema* (2009).

Introduction to the American Horror Film” 167). This sense of feminine dependence is reinforced during their date, when Irena mentions her ambition to work in commercial art and Oliver subsequently offers her a job as a sales assistant in the zoo’s gift shop. While his gesture is well intended, he is clearly less interested in her creative potential than with staging an effective mise-en-scène for his private fantasy. He seems unaware that the process of figuring Irena as his romantic ideal also constitutes that familiar “denial to women of drives culturally associated with masculinity: activeness, aggression, self-assertion, organizational power, creativity itself” (“An Introduction to the American Horror Film” 167).

Although Wood grounds his analysis of gender politics in real-world sociological terms, he stresses that the narrative and aesthetic conventions of the horror genre often facilitate “the most clear-cut and direct” exploration of these issues, “because central to it is the actual dramatization of the dual concept, the repressed/the other, in the figure of the Monster” (“An Introduction to the American Horror Film” 171). This sense of internal dualism is signposted long before Irena’s monstrous transformation actually occurs. During her first date with Oliver, we notice a subtle shift in the cadences of her speech, the sensuality of her body language and the directness of her gaze; David Thomson harshly describes this scene as expressing an essential contradiction between her “virginal face” and “a kind of irrational whoriness in the way she acts” (52). In fact there is nothing “whorish” about Irena’s behaviour at any point of the film, and in this scene she merely demonstrates a coquettish playfulness that indicates her reciprocal attraction towards Oliver. Yet Thomson’s invocation of the clichéd virgin/whore paradox resonates with Creed’s statement about the different shapes that the monstrous-feminine assumes in the horror film: “As with all other stereotypes of the feminine, from virgin to whore, she is defined in terms of her sexuality” (3). In fact, *Cat People* abounds with instances of overdetermined framing that constructs Irena in terms of these familiar cultural binaries. Early in the film, her status as an ethereal Beatrice type is consolidated by a radiant mid-shot that frames her against an icon of Christ exposing his heart; yet Schrader also exploits Irena’s allure by having her nipples visible through her light top, an image paralleled a few minutes later when she walks

past a street mural of Marilyn Monroe in her iconic *Seven Year Itch* pose, laughing as her white dress blows over the subway grate. The allusion to Monroe's star persona, with its combustible mixture of innocence and sexuality, is reinforced by the manner in which the camera lingers on the mural for a few seconds after Irena has exited the frame, suggesting that Irena's "pure" status depends upon the suppression of her sexuality. A more exploitative example of eroticised representation occurs during a brief scene of Oliver teaching Irena how to fish in a swamp river, which provides the pretext for a blatantly fetishistic shot of her bending over in hot-pants and waders, her buttocks and thighs gratuitously exposed for several seconds. More significant than these individual instances of heavy-handed visual symbolism is the fact that, for all the suggestions that Irena's sexuality is somehow dangerous, she actually *does* nothing that can be considered monstrous until her climactic transformation. As Karen Hollinger notes, for most of *Cat People*'s duration Paul is the film's real monster – a "threatening male monster" (see Fig 2.2) whose primary function is to evoke the potency of the "male sexual threat" (42-43). Irena's brother is a fabrication invented for the remake, though both Hollinger and Linda Rohrer Paige read him as a demonic exaggeration of the original film's agent of sadistic patriarchal authority, Dr. Judd (Tom Conway). A Pentecostal minister at the fictional Full Gospel Church of God in Christ, Paul was raised around cats until the age of ten, spent most of his adolescence in psychiatric wards, and now spends his nights stalking female victims before transforming into a cat whose main pleasure, we are told, is the act of "ripping out women's vaginas and reproductive organs" (Paige 296). When the local police join forces with the zoologists' hunt for a missing leopard and unexpectedly trace the murders back to Paul's basement, the grisly crime scene leads them to assume he has been feeding body parts to a pet leopard rather than morphing in and out of one himself. In this regard, Paul represents phallic violence in its most primordial form; the idiosyncratic savagery of his *modus operandi* recalls the rage of the disturbed cab passenger played by Scorsese in *Taxi Driver*, who informs Travis of his desire to avenge his cheating wife by mutilating her vagina with a .44 Magnum. For my current purposes, what is most interesting about the depiction of Paul's monstrosity is the fact that, in contrast to the network of Othering projections inflicted upon Irena, both the narrative and *mise-en-scène*

comparatively downplay his bodily abjection. This highlights a structuring contradiction of the film: while Irena (in her human form) is at once placed on a pedestal over other women and constructed as eerily mysterious Other, Paul's far more transgressive abjection is rerouted and displaced onto his blameless sister.

Fig 2.2



According to Creed, one of the primary methods of visualising feminine abjection in horror films such as *Alien* (1979, Ridley Scott), *The Brood*, *The Thing* and *Xtro* (1983, Harry Bromley Davenport) is through the visceral imagery of the monstrous birth scene. One of her most striking examples of this convention is *Altered States* (1980, Ken Russell), in which a male scientist experimenting with sensory deprivation and hallucinogenic drugs “gives birth to himself as an ape-creature” (17); the primal scene is thereby reimagined as an event that does not require the opposite sex, though “the creature born is primitive rather than civilized suggesting that a thin line separates the human animal from its ancestors” (17). In *Cat People*, we never actually see Paul transform from human into animal, though we do see the aftermath of him effectively giving birth to his inner leopard on two occasions. In each case, he is about to kill or has just killed one of his female victims (who are themselves interesting in ways I shall return to), and we see that he has excreted a trail of gelatinous slime during his metamorphosis. The parthenogenetic capacities of

Paul's body thus clearly locate him within the filth and waste of the pre-symbolic maternal order. And yet, rather than show us the full extent of Paul's monstrosity through the expected transformation sequences, it is Irena's body that is consistently Othered, both through the film's laboured symbolism and through her brother's castigating sermons about female sexuality. Paige notes that, "unlike Irena, whose soul struggles between good and evil, Paul undergoes no such psychomachia" (296), and indeed, while Paul is a two-dimensional genre villain who assumes nonhuman form to commit gruesome sex crimes, Irena is a haunted, passive child-woman who is somehow held culpable for his transgressions. We see this when he breaks into her room to interrogate her feelings for Oliver in terms that foreground the supposed abject qualities of her body: "You want to fuck him, don't you? You dream about fucking him. Your whole body burns. It burns all along your nerves, in your mouth, in your breasts. You go wet between your legs". The sense of Paul as a righteous avenger of bodily abjection evokes Lesley Stern's suggestion that Travis in *Taxi Driver* uses his blocked sexual energy and puritanical disgust for filth to "transform his own semen into others' blood" (55). The projection of male bodily horror onto the feminine thus emerges as a problematic motif across Schrader's oeuvre. In order to better understand how these motifs unexpectedly find their fullest expression within the stylised fantasy world of *Cat People*, I must move beyond the generic contexts of 1980s body horror and establish how other cinematic traditions and aesthetic influences relate to Schrader's bodily discourse.

A Matter of Style: Woman as Aesthetic Surface

In its distinct emphasis on scenes of sex, nudity and gore, Schrader's version of *Cat People* is clearly a radical departure from the aesthetic minimalism of the Lewton-Tourneur original. Yet despite the presence of these definitive modern horror elements, the film never quite feels like the work of a director who is deeply invested in the genre. Instead it feels like a self-conscious attempt to refine the exploration of high style that Schrader had begun with *American Gigolo*; as Marco Grosoli succinctly puts it, "*Cat People* the remake is hardly scary, hardly a horror film anymore. It is rather a matter of style" (148). It is significant that Schrader agreed to direct the film only on the condition that he

could again use the same creative team he had recruited for his previous film: director of photography John Bailey, visual consultant Ferdinando Scarfiotti and his principal art director Ed Richardson, and composer Giorgio Moroder; in Schrader's own words, he felt "anxious to keep this collaboration alive" ("*Cat People: An Intimate Portrait*"). As with *American Gigolo*, he considered this project "a real chance to think visually" (Director's Commentary), but in contrast to the personal nature of the previous film, the generic subject matter of *Cat People* provided him with the opportunity to approach filmmaking as a formalist experiment: "Because I hadn't written it, because I wasn't supposedly invested in the story or the theme, or because it was a genre film, I could just see it as colour and shape and design" (Director's Commentary). In an interview about the making of the film, Bailey explains that he and Schrader sought to recreate the potent sense of mobility established by his heavily Bertolucci-inspired cinematography in *American Gigolo*, only this time in the service of a different style and atmosphere. The floating camerawork of *Cat People* is defined by its fluid alternation between high and low angles, master shots that encompass the full space of the environment, and crane movements that stalk the characters from above or behind in an animalistic fashion. For Bailey, this photographic style promoted "an evocation of a dreamlike state" (*Masters of Light* 74) that was detached from any subjective viewpoint, thus again suggesting the wandering camera of *The Conformist*. Instead of being tied to human psychology, the distinct sense in which "the camera is lighter than air... up, down and floating around" mirrors the feeling that "the characters are also kind of drifting" (*Masters of Light* 74) in a state of uncertainty between reality and fantasy or, in some cases, human and animal. Discussing his attempt to capture a surreal, painterly use of light, Bailey notes that he and Schrader again studied various films together during preproduction. They were inspired by the "poetic French sensibility" (*Masters of Light* 53) of Jean Cocteau's dark fairytales *Beauty and the Beast* (1946) and *Orpheus* (1950), in which the baroque décor, rhythmic camera movement, and emphasis on glittering reflective surfaces construct narrative worlds that float between realism and fantasy, as well as by the visceral sensuality of Georges Franju's abattoir documentary *Blood of the Beasts* (1949) and prototypical body horror *Eyes Without a Face* (1960). Schrader explains that, in addition to the stylistic

influence of such films, this research process formed an attempt to recapture a certain “pre-*nouvelle vague* spirit, of those guys who did believe in magic – [Orson] Welles, [Georges] Franju, Cocteau, people who believed cinema was a myth, before realism and didacticism took over” (Thomson 52).

Fig 2.3



This interest in nonrealist cinematic traditions also led Schrader and Bailey to revisit the German Expressionist cinema of the 1920s, which shares a “stylized sense of irreality” with the French poetic tradition but supplants its lyrical softness “with a very hard edge” (*Masters of Light* 52-53). In his chapter on the films of Carl Theodor Dreyer in *Transcendental Style*, Schrader effectively summarises the peculiar hardness and emphasis upon surface that defines this artistic movement: “German expressionism featured rich chiaroscuro, jutting and oblique angles, surreal architectonics, antirealistic sets, and distorted faces” (117). He reads the gothic vampire narrative, ambiguous dream logic and shadowy mise-en-scène of Dreyer’s *Vampyr* (1932) – in particular the film’s “obsession with darkened staircases, arching doorways, and vanishing corridors” (117) – as emblematic features of this style. Though neither he nor Bailey mentions specific examples of German Expressionist films they studied while making *Cat People*, we can identify the evocation of cramped and claustrophobic visual spaces, jagged lines and canted angles in many scenes. On a few different occasions when Irena walks up the staircase in Paul’s house, the

balustrade reflects on the opposite wall as a row of exaggerated silhouettes, thereby containing and entrapping her within what soon becomes a dangerous space. Similarly, the use of a Dutch tilt when the camera first navigates Paul's corpse-filled basement creates a sense of psychological instability upon entering a deadly lair where human and animal life forms intermingle. Discussing the challenges of photographing a film explicitly conceived as "a myth and a dream" (*Masters of Light* 72), Bailey recalls that "even the exteriors tended to look like interiors" (*Masters of Light* 53); in fact, this is another dominant motif of the Expressionist tradition. In her study of the relationship between the emergence of German Expressionism in film and the staging innovations of theatre director Max Reinhardt, Lotte Eisner claims that exaggerated physical gesture, selective lighting of darkened sets, and a rupture of internal and external spaces were among the central motifs that were frequently transposed from stage to screen in the Weimar era.³⁹ Perhaps the most obvious example of this non-representational approach to design is *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920, Robert Wiene), which famously painted abstract buildings, objects, lights and shadows directly onto canvas backdrops and two-dimensional stage flats. Far from attempting to restage reality, "Expressionism constructs its own universe, it does not adapt itself to a world already in existence" (Eisner 153). *Cat People* offers a postmodern Hollywood variation on the expressionist strategy of treating exterior locations as studio sets through its deployment of a number of matte paintings by Albert Whitlock. In some instances, these paintings are relatively naturalistic, constructing scenic landscapes in the form of impressionistic large-scale canvases; for example, the exterior shots of the actual Audubon Society zoo in New Orleans against a matte insert of blue skies painted on a soundstage at Universal. At other times – such as the striking early shot of a panther lying under a tree, framed against a desert village of mountains, sand dunes and sky painted a distinctly nonrealistic shade of apricot (see Fig 2.3, p. 109) – these trick shots more vividly evoke the atmosphere of cinematic myth and magic realism that Schrader claimed as a critical influence upon the film.

³⁹ For an interesting account of post-traumatic shock, including issues of bodily crisis, in the films of Wiene, Murnau and Lang, see Anton Kaes' *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War* (2009).

In addition to the device of constructing artificial landscapes inside the studio, German Expressionism also popularised the notion of transporting real elements from the natural world into interior spaces. Eisner explains that in films such as Fritz Lang's *Die Nibelungen: Siegfried* (1924), "many landscapes were built inside the studio, with the shooting stage covered with earth, rocks, trees, moss, or artificial snow" (152). The clearest example of this technique in *Cat People* is the artificial desert set in the prologue, a prehistoric wasteland whose cracked earth and dyed red sand – the result of a mythical drought – were fully constructed on a soundstage at Universal. This set is later revisited in Irena's so-called "Leopard Tree Dream" sequence, where Paul reveals that they descended from an ancient race of incestuous cat people whose only hope for survival is to mate together; in the background, a family of black leopards rests upon the gnarled branches of a primitive black tree. The reconstitution of natural elements for these indoor desert sequences thus serves not only to trace the lineage of Irena's animal sexuality in terms of "grotesque graphics and mythic imagery" (*Transcendental Style* 116), but also reflects a wider expressionist tendency to denature the environment, blur the oppositions of interior/exterior and, in Schrader's own words, "transform the external world" (*Transcendental Style* 119). Above the film's narrative or thematic considerations, it is clear that Schrader approached *Cat People* as a stylistic exercise in transforming reality. In this respect, it is significant that at the very start of his commentary track on the film's DVD release, Schrader admits that "The most important name on the credits for me is [visual consultant] Ferdinando Scarfiotti", adding: "He was very, very influential on this film; he had the power to actually walk on the set and stop shooting and consult if he didn't think it was going right." On another occasion, he noted:

Scarfiotti's opinion was the one that mattered most. I gave the script to him and he said 'Let's do it'. If *he* thought it was worth doing, it really didn't matter what anybody else said. People could go around saying 'Sell out' and 'Cop out' all they wanted. (Rebello 34)

In fact, such was Scarfiotti's input that Schrader originally sought to give him a co-director credit on the film; given that he was not yet a registered union

member, he could not even accept the standard Production Designer credit and was instead listed as the film's Visual Consultant. In any case, Scarfiotti went far beyond his official designation to make pivotal decisions not only in the area of set design but also wardrobe, make-up, use of colour, and even the camera angles and compositions that would best showcase his sets.⁴⁰ He also designed the opening credit sequence (Director's Commentary), rebuilt the zoo interiors and animal cages at Universal⁴¹, dyed the sand, and created the leopard tree for the prologue and dream scene (LoBrutto 149). Even more than on *American Gigolo*, Scarfiotti effectively controlled the whole visual unit, echoing Vincent LoBrutto's claim about the potentially extensive operations of the production designer in developing a film's mise-en-scène:

In its fullest definition, this extends to translating the script into visual metaphors, creating a color palette, establishing architectural and period details, selecting locations, designing and decorating sets, coordinating the costumes, make-up and hair styles into a pictorial scheme, and collaborating with the director and director of photography to define how the film should be conceived and photographed. (xi)

The far-reaching influence exerted by Scarfiotti attests to the accuracy of Schrader's statement that "in scene after scene, shot after shot, the concern – more than normal – was just constantly colour and texture and composition" (Director's Commentary). Yet this concern also points to larger problems within the film's treatment of its subject matter. Ornate tracking shots through the zoo are clearly designed to exhibit the Gothic Victorian interiors that Scarfiotti

⁴⁰ Scarfiotti himself admits: "I was able to deeply influence the script with visual ideas. For example, I felt there were far too many dreams in the script. I insisted they be cut or simplified. I found all of it too baroque, too complicated" (Rebello 34). Schrader has also pointed out that this unusual system met some initial resistance: "It took the crew a couple of weeks to realise that this particular production designer had power and influence beyond the norm" ("Cat People: An Intimate Portrait").

⁴¹ The zoo's cruelly spartan animal cages also betray Scarfiotti's authorial input: "We built a very stylized zoo that uses a few motifs that exist in the real zoo. They are doing away with cages, which is the right way to handle animals, but that didn't work for this film. *Cat People* is about cages and unattainable objects. The zoo set we built was claustrophobic, almost like a prison" (Scarfiotti qtd. in Rebello 35).

agonised over (LoBrutto 149), while the scene of Irena visiting the gospel church in search of Paul takes pains to establish the fluorescent green neon exteriors before cutting to a master shot of a psychedelic art deco pulpit painted like a rainbow. During Irena and Oliver's first date, Schrader seems less interested in the generic, expository dialogue than with the visual detail of the setting: a kitsch oyster bar with large, turquoise plastic clam sculptures on prominent display in the window.⁴² As the couple get better acquainted, Bailey's wandering camera performs a dolly zoom to the bar exteriors before assuming an overhead position to map the full space: white tiled walls with diagonal design patterns, a row of incongruously exposed blue light bulbs hanging from the ceiling, and dining sets painted an unlikely shade of mint green. A more significant example of this incoherence between style and content occurs in the scene where Irena, on vacation with Oliver in the Louisiana bayou, awakens in the middle of the night feeling sexually aroused; rather than wake Oliver and risk a lethal transformation, she decides to wander into the swamp to kill an animal. This scene is another reference to the Tourneur film, where Irena reaches her hand inside an out-of-field birdcage to kill the pet canary Oliver has given her. Where Tourneur retains a mid-shot that focuses on her facial expression without showing either her hands or the bird, Schrader predictably reveals Irena stripping off her nightgown to stalk the bayou in full-frontal nudity, drawing rather hackneyed associations between her feral sexuality and the primeval swampland. The film also adopts her viewpoint to reveal the creatures of desire as fluorescent objects in the darkness: a snake hanging from a tree registers as orange, while the rabbit she finally kills is first glimpsed as a pink blur leaping through the grass. In his analysis of Dreyer, Schrader explains that "The ego is the essential part of the expressionist's universe; in fact, the universe is his projected ego" (116). To this end, he argues that the psychological interiority of *Vampyr*'s young male protagonist is reflected in the hallucinatory object world of Dreyer's mise-en-scène: "His feelings are already externalized: he wears them quite literally on his sleeve, or his staircase, or his coffin"

⁴² The oft-noted aphrodisiac properties of oysters also render this first date a kind of sexual initiation scene, particularly when Oliver teaches Irena how to shell and eat them.

(*Transcendental Style* 117). Similarly, the “cat vision” scene in *Cat People* is an extension of the original expressionist credo to capture the unconscious mind in images, to “[employ] every technique, every trick at their disposal to project their ego onto the universe” and thereby demonstrate cinema’s “endless possibilities for *trompe l’oeil*” (*Transcendental Style* 116): here it is not only the inanimate elements of the natural world that are painted, decorated and reimagined, but also the live animals that inhabit it.⁴³ But rather than express a disturbed subjectivity flickering between human and animal perception through the first-person device of the “cat vision”, the dyed animals and gimmicky light effects feel like a projection of Schrader’s ego rather than Irena’s. We are given no coherent insight into Irena’s psychic state as she finds herself literally on the brink of monstrosity, tormented by both her frustrated libido and her instinct for violence. As with Julian in *American Gigolo*, the highly composed framing, blocking and lighting of her body mean that we relate to her as an aesthetic object in the visual field rather than assuming her subject position and identifying with her perception. In both cases, the effect is that the nude body is subordinated to the affective properties of light, shade and colour with which it interacts; rather than giving any tangible sense of corporeal identity or embodied perspective, it is treated as a graphic surface and relegated to the status of another object within the *mise-en-scène*. But where Julian’s body was treated with a clinical dispassion, the supposed representation of Irena’s subjectivity here vibrates with the overheated masculine investments of Schrader’s psyche. As is often the case in his work, the formalist attempt to locate himself in relation to his cinematic precedents gives way to more personal psychosexual explorations:

Basically, I’m dealing with my own dreams and the collective fantasy that I participate in. [...] I began with certain philosophical, cinematic models, but then, my own tastes took over. I have certain romantic and sexual obsessions, and my film began to operate from those. (Rebello 35)

⁴³ Eisner cites the German Romantic poet and philosopher Novalis on a similar idea: “‘Every landscape’, Novalis said, ‘is the idealized Body of some form of Mind’” (153). In contrast to *Transcendental Style*, though, Eisner also emphasises the importance of other elements in Expressionism beyond the ego by locating it within wider contexts of modernist thought and its tendency to foreground modes of formal construction.

The candour of Schrader's statement highlights the fact that it is almost impossible to distinguish his stylistic explorations, and particularly his visual representation of Irena, from the common knowledge of his own, widely chronicled set of personal investments in the film. In his comments on *Cat People* since its release, Schrader has repeatedly articulated his psychic identification with Oliver's desire to possess and control Irena through the mechanism of the Beatrice complex. He explains that, in his own life, "the way I – and my whole background – dealt with my fear of women was to put them on a pedestal" ("Cat People: An Intimate Portrait"). He has also spoken frankly about his turbulent affair with Nastassia Kinski during the making of the film. Describing the excitement felt by the "decent, bookish" Oliver upon discovering Irena, Schrader notes:

Along comes this creature who sweeps him away and becomes this sort of mixture of the sacred and the profane at the same time. A not dissimilar thing happened between myself and Nastassia in that she invaded my life and threw it askew for a period of time – not without my complicity, of course. ("Cat People: An Intimate Portrait")

On another occasion, he addresses this odd life-imitating-art structure by suggesting that Oliver was subconsciously reconceived as a kind of alter ego at the script stage, a fictional conduit for exploring his own burgeoning feelings for his lead actress:

As we developed the character he evolved more and more along the lines of myself, and then during the actual shooting of the film I became involved with Nastassia Kinski and became obsessed with her. So the story of the film started to become very personal, so much so that I wasn't really aware of how perverse it was getting. (Jackson 166-167)

For her part, Kinski has remained more discreet than Schrader, though she later denounced *Cat People* as "slick and manipulative" (Foster 21), refusing to do publicity for the film on the grounds that she regretted her extensive nude

scenes. Given the frankness of Schrader's commentary on their relationship, it is worth considering how both the casting and representation of Kinski within the film dovetails with inter- and extra-textual discourses surrounding her star image, and how it enables Schrader to visualise her as both monstrous-feminine and unattainable goddess. When she made *Cat People* at the age of 20, Kinski was poised for superstardom, hailed as the new Ingrid Bergman or Brigitte Bardot, and widely dubbed "one of the most beautiful women in the world" (Jenkins), though she was better recognised for her well-publicised private life and highly visible magazine covers (*TIME*, *Vogue*, *Rolling Stone*) than her acting. Attention was also paid to her status as the estranged daughter of Klaus Kinski, the German actor famed for his eccentric portrayals of vampires, mad scientists and other monstrous villains in films such as Werner Herzog's 1979 remake of *Nosferatu*. David Quinlan notes that Nastassia "was in uninhibited roles from an early age, playing haunted heroines whose sexual magnetism is often the axis on which the plot turns" (268). This is certainly true of her English-language debut, at the age of fourteen, in the Hammer horror film *To the Devil a Daughter* (1976, Peter Sykes). One of a number of films about possessed adolescent girls to appear in the wake of *The Exorcist*, it featured Kinski as a nun pursued by Satanists grooming her to become the earthly representative of the devil. Her youthful star persona was blatantly organised around opposing forces of good and evil, angelic purity and demonic sexuality – binaries that are reconciled in the film's climax, where she strips off her white ceremonial robe for the satanic ritual. This overdetermined sense of dualism extended beyond her film roles: Richard Avedon's 1981 portrait "Nastassja Kinski and the Serpent" cast her as a modern-day Eve, blankly nonchalant as a python coils around her nude body and flicks its tongue in her ear (see Fig 2.4). The image became an iconic poster that sold over two million copies; when David Letterman asked her if she feared working with the python, her retort that the animal was actually more scared of *her* cemented her media image as an aloof, exotic and vaguely dangerous *femme fatale*. Creed notes that the snake is a "Christian symbol of woman's disobedience, unbridled sexual appetite and treachery" (33); the iconography of the Avedon portrait thus served to construct her femininity as feral, transgressive and not fully human even before she played the lead in *Cat People*. In assessing Kinski's ultimately disappointing career trajectory, Danny

Peary claims that “her naturalness was undermined by obsessive directors who turned her into a pawn as they defiantly got across their highly personal, annoyingly stylized visions” (294). Indeed there is a potent sense of a career thwarted by something of a collective Beatrice complex: she was invariably cast as a screen for various masculine projections that were worked out through the narrative structure and formal design of the films in which she appeared. She was Thomas Hardy’s tragic heroine in *Tess* (1979, Roman Polanski), emotionally manipulated and sexually exploited by patriarchal society, and pressed against the dividing lines of a barred window frame in the film’s poster (whose tagline tritely diagnoses her “a victim of her own provocative beauty”). She was reduced to a decorative prop in the musical fantasy *mise-en-scène* of *One From the Heart* (1982, Francis Ford Coppola), walking a tightrope in the desert and dancing in a giant, neon-lit martini glass (“Is she real?”, Frederic Forrest asks upon first seeing her). It is no coincidence that her most poignant and enduring role, in *Paris, Texas* (1984, Wim Wenders), literalises the metaphor of the glass cage by trapping her sad character behind the coin-operated, one-way mirror of a peepshow booth for the duration of her screen-time.

Figs 2.4 and 2.5 (overleaf)



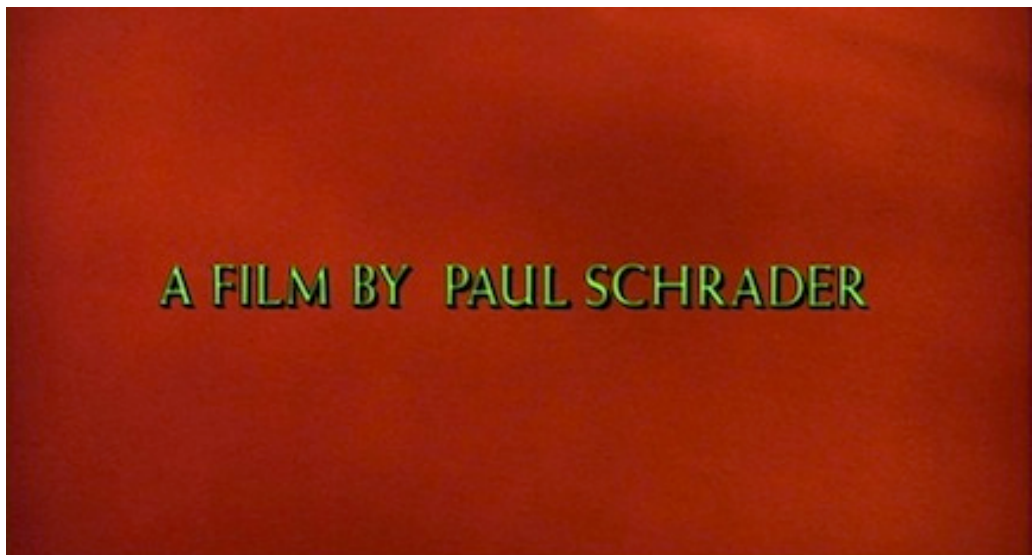
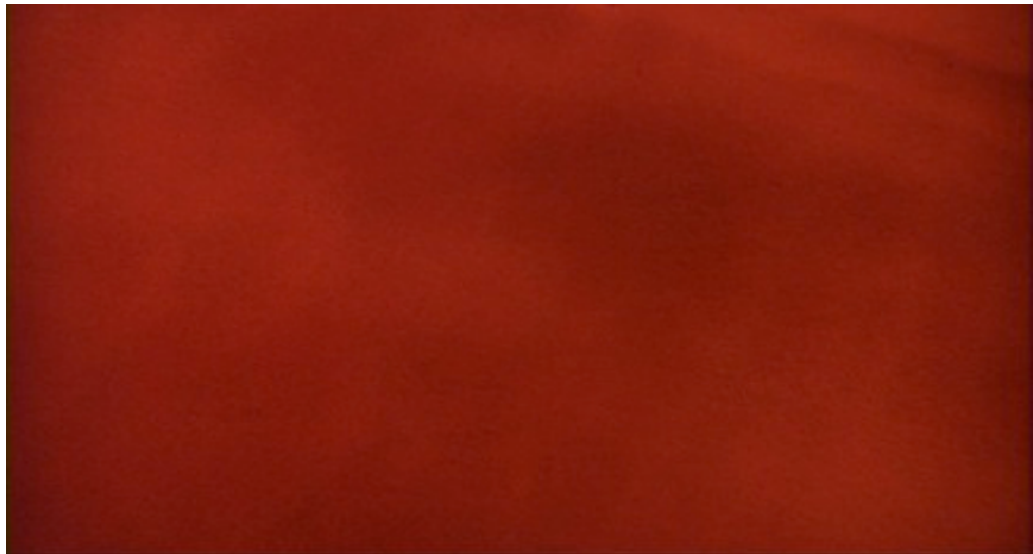


Of the many high-profile filmmakers with whom Kinski worked at the height of her fame, Schrader is the first name on Peary's list of those "obsessive directors" who flagrantly attempted to negotiate their own psychosexual neurosis through the visual, thematic and symbolic manipulation of her screen image. In *Cat People*, the mise-en-scène alternately works to sanctify, demonise and entrap Kinski in a web of fetishistic projections. As with Gere's Julian in *American Gigolo*, she is not only presented as an object for visual contemplation – "the star as commodity to be displayed" (Romney 152) – but our access to her image is mediated through a network of screens, reflective surfaces and framing devices that serve to distance and tease us rather than draw us closer to her. A travelling shot of Oliver approaching Irena in the zoo gift shop clearly assumes the worshipping perspective of a male lover putting his mysterious Beatrice on a pedestal, filtered first through a row of window frames and then a brick wall. A shot of her alone in the gift shop frames her against a row of stuffed animal toys, but with dense black shadows falling on one side of her face to remind us that *she* is the real animal (see Fig 2.5). At such moments, Schrader does not appear to be directly referencing the claustrophobic compositional design of previous Kinski films like *Tess*, or even the darkened spaces and "evocative, low-key lighting" (Young 105) of the original *Cat People*, but rather a whole legacy of more overtly expressionistic lighting and framing motifs from horror, film *noir* and even classical melodrama. In his analysis of Dreyer, Schrader describes how his visual treatment of the young adulteress suspected of witchcraft in *Day of Wrath* (1943) mobilises "chiaroscuric close-ups" where "her face is often

blocked half in light, half in dark” (*Transcendental Style* 130), divided by window frames, with the reflection of flickering candlelight in her eyes or the double exposure of leaf patterns outside the window cast upon her body.⁴⁴ *Cat People* features many similar compositions that construct Kinski’s face and body as a decorative surface for patterns to play across, such as a close-up of her standing beneath the moving silhouettes cast by a rotating ceiling fan. One could argue that the film’s narrative of barely suppressed animality demands a mise-en-scène built around oppressive framing devices: Fujiwara states that Tourneur’s film also “represents Irena’s problem in terms of dividing lines, barriers, traces, and absences” (74), noting how her imprisonment in human form is evoked by the barred jalousies and birdcage in her apartment, the rail of the balustrade on the surrounding stairwell, and the barred cages, protective fences and chains at the zoo, which “represent the dividing line between human and animal” (74). But the original *Cat People* also treats Irena as a thinking, feeling subject who understands why her condition cannot be treated by rational science: “You’re very wise, you know a great deal”, she tells Dr. Judd at one point. “Yet when you speak of the soul, you mean the mind, and it is not my mind that is troubled”. In contrast, when Schrader’s Irena visits Female in prison to enquire about the truth of her incestuous animal lineage towards the end of the film, she presses her face and hands against the crisscross wire fence of the visiting room and asks plaintively: “Who am I?” It is precisely this lack of certainty about personal identity that enables Schrader to treat Irena – and, by extension, Kinski – as a blank surface for masculine projections at the levels of both narrative and visual style.

⁴⁴ According to Schrader, the stylised compositions in *Day of Wrath* are not driven by emotional identification in the manner of Dreyer’s earlier *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928), in which tight, expressive close-ups of the suffering martyr’s “agonized visage” (*Transcendental Style* 146) are used “to create audience sympathy – both pity and fear – for Joan” (123).

Fig 2.6, 2.7, 2.8 and 2.9 (overleaf)





Another formal strategy used to construct Irena as mysterious Other is the film's flamboyant colour scheme, which was again devised by Scarfiotti yet bears the force of a personal expression from Schrader himself: "*Cat People* is very colour-coordinated, in salmon reds and chartreuse greens, right from the opening where you have those green letters coming over red sand" (Jackson 172). Over the pulsing din of Moroder's percussive synth drone and David Bowie's mournful tribal chanting, the film opens on a tight close-up of a brick-red colour field (see Figs 2.6-2.9). It is only when we see the red texture start to fragment and blow over a pile of human skulls that we realise the material is sand and that we are in the prehistoric desert of the prologue. The camera's tactile proximity to the sand forces us to engage with the image in affective terms, as a plane of pure surface that boldly announces that Schrader's version of *Cat People* will be – as much as anything – an experiment in the expressive potential of colour. The opening credits roll in garish lime until the film's title appears as a jagged scrawl of white over a slash of blood, as though the words were scratched across the screen by a pair of cat claws. As the film progresses, it consistently foregrounds warm red and cool green tones to evoke danger, sex and death through colour, which leads Bailey to characterise it as "expressionistic in the real sense of the word, not just in terms of long shadows but in terms of the colors" (*Masters of Light* 72). In questioning the veracity of Bailey's statement, I do not wish to suggest that films deploying an expressionistic style should aim to recreate the aesthetics of canonical texts like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, where the

chiaroscuro design clearly mirrors the distorted subjectivity of the mental patient narrating the story. Consider, for instance, a film such as *Red Desert* (1964, Michelangelo Antonioni), a crucial formative influence upon Schrader that he often watches with his visual team during preproduction (Kouvaros 95), and whose very title is invoked in *Cat People*'s opening images. In her analysis of that film, Angela Dalle Vacche notes the expressionistic capacity of colour to "convey movements or changes at a psychological level" (187): the failure of the neurotic protagonist, Giuliana (Monica Vitti), to adapt to a modern industrial environment she perceives as frightening and unstable is figured through the familiar technique of spray-painting landscapes, vegetation and architectural features. While it does not purport to be a complete reflection of Giuliana's interiority, *Red Desert* floats between subjective and objective planes of reality in order to "convey how a newly painted environment can externalize inner psychic mobility" (187). In contrast, Schrader's refusal to grant Irena the status of proper subject throughout *Cat People* means that his explorations of colour shed comparatively little light on her psyche. A closer study of cinematic colour theory reveals his use of red and green as less concerned with evoking Irena's state of mind than with creating a set of stylistic and symbolic motifs that ultimately serve to express his own anxieties about the nature of female sexuality.

Drawing upon Sergei Eisenstein's theory of colour as an aesthetic element that can conjure a series of psychological associations over the course of a film – a concept he later applied to the vividly chromatic banquet sequence in his own film *Ivan the Terrible, Part II* (1944) – David Bordwell claims that colour in cinema is "detachable from specific objects" and hence "can also "generalize" the object by linking it to other objects" (*The Cinema of Eisenstein* 189). In *Cat People*, the symbolic import accorded to the red sand in the prologue contaminates various other images in the film, most obviously those associated with blood, setting in motion a colour logic in which red connotes the intrusion of the repressed ancient past into the present tense. When Irena wears an elegant scarf while visiting Female in prison, its deep scarlet colour triggers our memory of another red scarf we briefly glimpsed during the prologue, where it was used to bind the virgin's hands to the leopard tree. In the latter-day scene the scarf

provides a striking accent of red in an otherwise steely grey composition, marking Irena as a stranger to herself at the precise instant that she directly questions her identity; moments later, it blows mythically around her neck as she drifts zombie-like through the windblown desert of her lineage. The scarf assumes the status of a scarlet letter, innocently worn on the surface of her body but connecting her to her animal past on a subliminal, ahistoric level that she fails to understand. In this respect, colour becomes a primordial force that not only unites past and present, mythic and ‘realist’ registers, through its capacity to “[create] new connections among compositional elements” (*The Cinema of Eisenstein* 189), but it also certifies Robin Wood’s dictum – about horror cinema in general – “that what is repressed must always strive to return” (“An Introduction to the American Horror Film” 177).

This sense of colour’s potential to transgress the bounds of the orderly and respectable bears special significance for issues of gender, sexuality and desire. Evaluating cultural attitudes towards colour from Ancient Greece to contemporary intellectual discourse, David Batchelor posits that colour in general “has been the object of extreme prejudice in Western culture” (63). He observes a distinctly feminising rhetoric in art-critical tendencies to read colour in terms of decorative excess, cosmetic artifice or occult irrationality, thereby forming a masculinist tradition of aesthetic judgement where colour becomes something that must be “contained and subordinated – like a woman” (64). As discussed in the previous chapter, Rosalind Galt has found that “color is closely related to gender: the hierarchy of line and color attributes masculine reason to line and feminine emotion to color” (45), and she discerns an equivalent rhetoric that consigns the operation of colour in cinema – especially deep, rich or pretty colour – to the realm of the feminine. This context may help us to appreciate why films that mobilise a vivid saturation of colour in conjunction with intense subject matter are often theorised as formal evocations of death, femininity or male sexual anxiety.⁴⁵ Consider, for instance, the fact that red and particularly

⁴⁵ See also Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger’s *Black Narcissus* (1947) and *The Red Shoes* (1948), which Siegfried Kracauer describes in terms that are uncannily similar to the mise-en-scène of *Cat People*: “Moira Shearer dances, in a somnambulistic trance, through fantastic worlds avowedly intended to project her unconscious mind –

green both feature prominently in the mise-en-scène of *Vertigo* (1958, Alfred Hitchcock), which Schrader associates with the Beatrice scenario, and whose colour design Paul Coates reads in terms of the “creation of a blank dream woman as the screen to entertain projections” (139). Like all colours, green is open to myriad contexts and cultural interpretations: Coates explains that, among other associations, it can be restful, erotic, deathlike, or evocative of maternity (145) – all of which comes into play in a film as richly ambiguous and psychoanalytically loaded as *Vertigo*. However, Coates argues that the green clothes worn by Judy (Kim Novak) and the green neon silhouette that frames her against the hotel window most vividly emphasise the absence of the presumed-dead love object, Madeleine, and hence “connotes the ghostliness it signified in the Victorian theatre to which Hitchcock was alluding consciously” (143). These associations of green with the paranormal, nonhuman and dangerously feminine also resonate with the genre context of *Cat People*, in which the green of Irena’s cat eyes, frequently shown in loving close-up, is echoed in other spaces that connote encroaching menace: the neon that illuminates the exteriors of the church (whose minister is a serial killer); the ghostly light cast upon the walls of Paul’s house; even the décor of the oyster bar, which foreshadows the carnage that will transpire if Irena and Oliver consummate their desire.

Coates explains that the deeply coloured “world[s] of private fantasy” created by films such as *Vertigo* “might be described as ‘expressionistic’, as they radiate from a single individual’s gaze” (139). Crucially, this is the traditional *male* gaze, with all its concomitant psychic phenomena of fetishism, projection and disavowal, and *Vertigo*’s colour design privileges these structures of male desire: for example, the lushly enveloping scarlet décor in Ernie’s restaurant mediates the construction of Madeleine (in her emerald evening gown) as the object of a consuming passion. Having already noted “the widespread modern Occidental cultural links (facial, and in attire) between women and red” (4), Coates argues that red occupies a wider significance in the colour field as a primary indicator of life, death and shifts in bodily experience. Blood precedes the metaphorical

agglomerates of landscape-like forms, near-abstract shapes, and luscious color schemes which have all the traits of stage imagery” (36).

darkness of the void or the whiteness of exsanguination, and it may “[stain] sheet whiteness with the menstrual marker of virginity, fertility” (Coates 69); furthermore, the colour red “is concealed not just within the human body but within that of earth itself, from which emerged the ‘Adam’ whose name means ‘red’” (69). As such, “red gains power from its status as a hidden principle” (69), a hue that often remains out of vision but whose presence signifies a potent shift in emotional, psychological or corporeal intensity. Its capacity to lie dormant before erupting and spilling out unbidden at any moment also gives red – via blood – a privileged status within psychoanalytic theories of abjection and the female-centric horror film: in both *The Exorcist* and *Carrie*, the onset of menstruation heralds the arrival of the monstrous-feminine (Creed 14). *Cat People*’s dominant image of bloodshed occurs when Irena, on her lunch break at the zoo, visits the black leopard she feels drawn to without realising that it is Paul in panther form. As one of the zoo employees (Ed Begley Jr.) tries to feed the increasingly restless animal, Irena moves closer to the bars of the cage and inadvertently distracts him. The leopard reciprocates her green-eyed cat gaze and unleashes a savage growl; the camera zooms into Irena’s face for a tight close-up of terrified realisation that this beast is her own brother. In the Tourneur film, Irena also visits a leopard that “represents her own caged sexuality, which she abhors but which fascinates her. It is, quite literally, her *bête noire*, her Mr. Hyde, the sexual desires which she cages in her mind as the evil side of her nature” (Craig and Fry 8). Schrader’s version intensifies the human-animal exchange through Irena’s incestuous blood ties to the leopard, so that her eye contact with the beast functions as a gaze into a metaphorical mirror, a painful recognition of the monster within. Also significant is the fact that the leopard bares its teeth while growling at her. Creed explains that in classic creature films such as *Jaws* (1975, Steven Spielberg), *Alien* and *Little Shop of Horrors* (1986, Frank Oz), images of gaping mouths, snapping jaws and exposed fangs provide common substitutes for direct representations of female genitalia: “all images of menacing, toothed mouths – regardless of the gender of the character – suggest the *vagina dentata*” (107).⁴⁶ In keeping with the gendered displacement I noted

⁴⁶ The popular myth of the *vagina dentata* (toothed vagina) “states that women are terrifying because they have teeth in their vaginas and that the women must be tamed or the teeth somehow removed or softened – usually by a hero figure – before intercourse

earlier, whereby Paul's literal bodily rampages are rerouted to the innocent Irena through a focus on the transgressive potential of her body, *his* killer fangs become a narrative alibi for *her* potentially deadly vagina. The leopard's mouth is "the voracious maw, the mysterious black hole that signifies female genitalia" (Creed 27); accordingly, "Paul" lunges at the zoo employee through the half-open bars and tears his arm off, leaving the socket a bloody stump as he collapses to the floor. As security rush to the scene of the attack, Irena stands devastated while a distinctly Franju-style river of blood floods the white tiled floor and washes over her feet in slow motion (see Fig 2.10). Kouvaros claims this shot directly "implicates her own sexual awakening with the violence of the leopard's actions" (49), and indeed it is typically overdetermined in its evocation of feminine innocence and corrupted purity: she wears pretty white canvas slippers with ballerina-style ribbons around the ankles. In fact, the image does more than implicate Irena in the bloodshed: it literalises a male projection of abject filth onto her, impugning her guilt long before she has done anything that could be considered remotely deviant. The blood of Paul's violence forms a liquid torrent across the surface of the screen, just as the desert was initially a frame-filling abstraction of pure colour, but in both cases they construct Irena as monstrous Other: one represents where she came from, the other what she is *capable* of doing. Colour is thus enrolled in the service of gender politics as old as the earth itself. Adam's name means red, but it is Eve who is held accountable.

can safely take place" (Creed 2). See also the related horror film *Teeth* (2007, Mitchell Lichtenstein).

Fig 2.10



The Mise-en-Scène of Desire: Castration Anxiety and Formalist Fetishism

In his commentary track on the *Cat People* DVD, Schrader emphasises his need to treat this film as a formalist exercise by noting the privilege accorded to the details of mise-en-scène over issues of plot, theme or representation of character. He concedes that “obviously every single filmmaker is always thinking about [mise-en-scène], but in certain films you feel that it is so important that it starts to drive your shooting, your lighting, your editing”. It is evident that Schrader craved freedom from not only the traditional concerns of narrative structure, realist logic and human psychology, but also the wider discourse of cultural identity that defines the majority of his work as a screenwriter and director. Yet there is also a distinct element of wilful naivety to his aesthetics-first ethos: the myth of animal sexuality at the heart of *Cat People* automatically implies a degree of identity politics that cannot be avoided, and as I have shown with regard to the film’s mise-en-scène – especially its use of colour, production design and visual symbolism – even Schrader’s attempts at formalist genre filmmaking inevitably disclose personal neuroses about gender, sexuality and the abject body. In tracing potential sources of these neuroses, I want to revisit Creed’s thesis of female monstrosity from a different perspective to evaluate

how the dominant psychoanalytic tropes of castration anxiety, fetishism and disavowal fuel Schrader's aesthetic vision in *Cat People*.

In the second section of *The Monstrous-Feminine*, Creed shifts her concern from theories of abjection widely associated with the maternal body and its reproductive functions towards a broader analysis of those cultural fictions that typify female sexuality itself as being somehow monstrous. Looking beyond horror cinema, she traces the origins of the *vagina dentata* myth across a diverse range of cultural contexts and artistic practices. She cites the Yanomamo tribal belief that "one of the first women on earth possessed a vagina that could transform into a toothed mouth which ate her lover's penis" (105); a number of primitive cultures that believe a deadly snake lives inside the vagina (119); and a peculiar tradition within classical art whereby beautiful women were frequently accompanied by cats, tigers, lions, bears or other wild creatures whose "open jaws and snapping teeth" blatantly symbolise the woman's own "deadly genital trap and evil intent" (108). She also detects symbols of the vagina as an organ that ensnares, dismembers and mutilates within the narrative and aesthetic design of traditional fairytales such as "Sleeping Beauty", "Little Red Riding Hood" and "Hansel and Gretel", thus confirming the myth's status as a phenomenon that exceeds the boundaries of horror cinema and reflects intense cultural anxieties in general (Creed 107-109). On a wider scale, "the myth about woman as castrator clearly points to male fears and phantasies about the female genitals as a trap, a black hole which threatens to swallow them up and cut them into pieces" (Creed 108).

In contrast to the pervasive myth of the vagina as an agent of castration, Creed notes that psychoanalytic film theories of sexual difference remain heavily grounded in conventional Freudian accounts of the woman as castrated. She thus posits a revaluation of Freud's own theories of sexual difference in order to better understand cultural conceptions of woman as monstrous castrator. Creed's thesis centres on a rereading of the case history of Little Hans, the five-year-old boy whose fear of horses and related agoraphobia were used to provide support for Freud's theories of infantile sexuality – in particular the Oedipus complex and castration anxiety, founded upon the thesis that the male child's fear of his

mother stems from his belief that she herself is castrated. She explains how Hans' nervous disorder coalesced around a few related developments in his childhood: the onset of a compulsive interest in his "widdler" (penis), which included masturbation and repetitive questions about the sex organs of other people, particularly his mother; his traumatic memory of his mother's threat to have the doctor visit the house and cut off his penis if he did not stop touching it; and the confused mixture of affection and desire he experienced for his mother during certain activities, such as when he lies in bed with her or asks her to touch his penis while she bathes him (92). These feelings trigger episodes of debilitating anxiety, which Freud – intent on characterising the mother as a castrated figure for the coherence of his psychosexual development theory – reads purely as a symptom of suppressed longing. In contrast, Creed interprets Hans' neurosis as the product of the mother's original threat to castrate him *because* of his illicit desire, which generates a dizzying conflict of internal drives: "Freud does not consider that Hans might both fear and desire his mother – desire to have her for himself yet fear she might come into his room at night, when he desires her most, and cut off his widdler" (93). Creed's account of Hans' castration anxiety intersects with her rereading of a game he plays with his rubber doll, in which he inserts a penknife inside the doll's body, pulls its legs apart and lets the knife drop through; Freud claimed that the knife symbolised a baby, but Creed considers it far more likely a phallic symbol – understandably so, on the basis of Hans' supposed exclamation: "Look, there's its widdler" (96). In this revisioning of the knife game, the boy psychically endows his mother with a mysterious sex organ that "is phallic in shape and has a sharp, cutting blade, like teeth" (96). Coupled with the fact that Hans was already traumatised by his mother's castration threat, the sinister notion of an organ whose power stems from its ability to retract and remain largely invisible – "folded up inside her body" (Creed 91) in the manner of a horse – triggers a whole set of neurotic fantasies about the biological processes of the female body, in particular the nature of coition, childbirth and menstruation. According to Creed, it is when "the boy first learns about the vagina and the role of the penis in penetration... that he develops an acute anxiety about castration" (98). If we find Creed's account of the origins of the castration complex more persuasive than Freud's, it is the primal, mythic image of the *vagina dentata* that lays the

foundations for later imaginary constructions of woman as a figure who “represents castration, suffocation, death, the void – themes also common to the representation of the monstrous-feminine in the horror film” (102).

The fantastical mise-en-scène of *Cat People* abounds with potent visual substitutes for the *vagina dentata*: the family of black leopards in the desert, Paul baring his fangs in panther form, Irena’s climactic metamorphosis into her “true” self. Yet it is important to remember that each these images represents a typically masculine construction, and that as a general principle, “the presence of the monstrous-feminine in the popular horror film speaks to us more about male fears than about female desire or feminine subjectivity” (Creed 7). The male tendency to construct woman as a symbol of Otherness is perhaps best exemplified in a brief sequence towards the end of the film, in which Oliver is deeply immersed in the task of developing photographs in his darkroom. His solitude marks this sequence as a bookend to the earlier ‘man-in-a-room’ scene of him listening to the Dante recording and almost conjuring up his Beatrice before first meeting Irena. Under an illumination of red neon light, which here assumes the symbolic import of blood, fire or danger, he silently studies a string of developing photographs of Irena in various poses – smiling angelically, gazing moodily, and so on. Placed between these portraits is a single image of the caged leopard at the zoo, which Oliver now realises is her late brother (Paul, who dies in a fall from a window after trying to attack him). The camera tracks down to reveal another shot of the leopard overlapping with a sketch of Irena’s face, now looking pointedly feline, her eyes enshrouded in blackness as though she were hiding her true identity behind a mask. Oliver’s gaze passes back and forth between the actual photographs of Irena, the sketch of Irena, and the shots of the leopard, inferring meaningful connections between the various images but failing to realise that each one of these images simply represents different facets of his own projections onto her: the angel, the *femme fatale*, the beast. Romney describes the movement of this scene in terms that evoke Hans’ compulsion to cut into his doll’s body in a desperate attempt to know the truth about his mother’s missing genitals: “The row of photos of Irena, with one of the panther hanging among them, makes it seem as though Oliver’s photography has successfully cut into her skin and exposed the cat inside” (152). At this moment

of dawning recognition of Irena as monstrous-feminine, the telephone rings; it is Alice, disturbed by the swimming pool incident and calling to warn Oliver about what he already suspects: Irena is dangerous. Hanging up the phone, Oliver notices Irena's reflection in the glass frame of a photograph on the wall before him. She starts to disrobe, ready to surrender her virginity as she leads him up the stairs with her challenging gaze. Just as Hans characterised himself as "almost always the passive victim of his mother's frightening sexuality" (Creed 103), Oliver's palpable sense of nervous arousal affirms Creed's conviction that male fears of the castrating vagina are shadowed by a potent desire for the monstrous-feminine. Romney intuitively feminist undertones in this depiction of Irena's gaze, claiming that she is here "endowed with the power to return the look, again able to confront the camera and question her status as object", and that Oliver and the viewer alike are subordinated to both her look and her bodily movement "as Irena on the staircase transforms herself from prey into aggressor" (153). While this is a refreshingly different reading insofar as it assigns Irena a power less discernible elsewhere in the film, the fact remains that even her erotic empowerment here ultimately feels like another projection of male sexual anxiety. Despite her uncharacteristic demonstration of bodily agency, she still begins this scene, like so many others, as a two-dimensional reflection trapped in a glossy surface, eternally framed by a male vision that sees only what it wants to see.

The overt fetishisation of the female body as an aesthetic surface for neurotic projections can be better understood with reference to the psychic mechanism of fetishism itself, which Freud famously deemed the logical response to castration anxiety. Creed explains that the set of fantasmatic investments at the heart of fetishism retain their validity whether we believe they are ultimately rooted in Freud's thesis that the woman terrifies because she is castrated or her own variation: that woman terrifies because of her literal or symbolic *vagina dentata* (115). In both scenarios, woman signifies the taboo concept of castration, and this horrifying knowledge necessitates the production of a fetish object in order to disavow the reality of sexual difference and the threat posed by the possibility of man's own castration. Creed notes that the object of fetishism is typically the last detail observed by the male child before his traumatic first glimpse of female

genitalia – feet or shoes, underwear, sensual material such as fur or velvet – and that such objects may be termed “phallic” insofar as they represent a substitute for the missing penis: “The phallic woman is created in response to the fetishist’s refusal to believe that woman does not possess a penis” (116). Thus she notes the proliferation of phallic symbols such as whips, guns, stiletto heels or leather clothing in softcore pornographic images of women as decorative sex objects. In her own variation on the theory, “the fetish stands in for the *vagina dentata* – the castrating female organ that the male wishes to disavow” (116), and the cinematic equivalent of the fetishistic response is visible in the pronounced emphasis upon the sexual desirability of many female monsters. She cites a lineage of screen villainesses and psychopaths whose beauty masks their capacity to annihilate men: films such as *Repulsion* (1965, Roman Polanski) and *Sisters* (1973, Brian De Palma) play upon the “stereotype of feminine evil – beautiful on the outside/corrupt within – that is so popular within patriarchal discourses about woman’s evil nature” (42), while *Basic Instinct* (1992, Paul Verhoeven) not only literalises the *vagina dentata* metaphor by having its murderess conceal an ice pick underneath her bed, but also presents a whole assortment of sexually voracious female murder suspects; in the process, it “suggests that all women are potential killers and that having sex with women is an extremely dangerous business” (124).

The manner in which castration anxiety extends to virtually *all* of the female characters in Verhoeven’s film makes it an unexpectedly apposite reference point for *Cat People*. Schrader’s projections onto woman as Other do not begin and end with the representation of Irena, but extend in troubling ways to the film’s secondary female characters. While they are not “dangerous” like Irena, each of these peripheral women is explicitly defined in terms of her sexuality, and each of them is required to strip before misogynistic scenes of degradation, assault or murder. Comparing the gender politics of the two versions of *Cat People*, Hollinger notes that Alice, who begins as a potential friend for Irena but soon becomes her rival for the affections of Oliver, “represents the asexual non-threatening femininity characteristic of her counterpart in the original version” (43). I am inclined to disagree with Hollinger on both counts of this statement: while the original Alice is not entirely innocuous (she gently manipulates Oliver

into an extra-marital affair after he confesses having problems with Irena), Schrader's underwritten Alice exists purely as an earthy, sexually experienced contrast to Irena's tormented, otherworldly femininity. She displays a frank interest in Irena's sexual history during their first social interaction, which some read as an indication of "bicurious" flirtation on her part (Prince), and expresses shock at the notion of anyone remaining a virgin "these days". Her desiring glances and possessive gestures towards Oliver, with whom she has a prior relationship, also indicate that her jealousy is not only emotional but also erotic in nature. Far from the embodiment of "asexual non-threatening femininity", Alice threatens because she is indeed sexual; in this regard, Schrader's much-criticised recreation of the swimming pool sequence can be read as a reactionary punishment of Alice *as* a sexual being. In the original film Alice remains in her bathing suit throughout the scene, but in the remake, she is unnerved by mysterious growling noises emanating around the corner in the changing room and so has no choice but to dive into the pool topless – a strategy that allows for liberal and shamelessly exploitative coverage of her ample breasts. Explaining his objective in changing the original clothed scene to one that feels closer to softcore pornography, Schrader admits that his primary aim was not to generate suspense through the careful orchestration of atmosphere but to titillate the viewer's sense of "prurient voyeurism" by displaying Alice's seminude body during a traumatic moment of extreme vulnerability ("Cat People: An Intimate Portrait"). The focus thus shifts from Tourneur's Alice being menaced by an unseen force to Schrader's Alice being terrorised *while naked*: her nudity is the fulcrum upon which the scene turns. While she finally escapes unharmed, her nudity adds to her sense of shame and humiliation when it is revealed that Irena is still in human form and that the scene has played out as a kind of red herring. In constructing Alice's topless, screaming panic as an overreactive bout of feminine hysteria, Schrader simultaneously indulges his fetishistic instincts and disarms the castrating threat of female sexuality by reducing her to the status of a generic horror victim.

Other female characters are more explicitly coded as genre stereotypes, and accordingly they endure bloody annihilation from the teeth and claws of Paul in his panther form. His first victim is a prostitute (Lynn Lowry) whom he has

arranged to meet at a seedy massage parlour. Though he only manages to maul her leg before she escapes, her lacy black lingerie marks her as the typical fetish object of an overcompensating male anxiety (Creed 116), while her crude dialogue about the price she charges for different sexual activities evokes Creed's suggestion that, within the gendered conventions of the horror genre, "abjection is constructed as a rebellion of filthy, lustful, carnal, female flesh" (38). Paul's second victim is a woman named Billie (Tessa Richarde), who is immediately established as an exemplary model of the dumb blonde stereotype when he spies her looking curiously high-spirited at a graveyard. After a perfunctory flirtation during which he asks to take her picture – again, highlighting the act of framing the female body as an object for male contemplation – we see the two in bed together, with Billie assuaging his performance anxiety after a humiliating bout of erectile dysfunction. Her hushed, Monroe-inflected tone and sympathetic assurances to Paul's bruised ego ("Don't worry baby, it happens") underscore the implicitly "maternal functions" and "debt to nature" (Creed 10) in her specific brand of female sexuality, further reinforced by Paul's odd remark about the softness of her platinum hair. When she helps him overcome his anxiety by performing oral sex, it triggers his offscreen metamorphosis into panther mode; the last time we see Billie is as a dismembered corpse, with an arm torn off her body and an expression of frozen terror on her face. Upon beholding her grotesque death look, we may recall Linda Williams' assessment that, while the male gaze at the monster in horror cinema typically expresses fear of bodily difference, "the female look – a look given preeminent position in the horror film – shares the male fear of the monster's freakishness, but also recognizes the sense in which this freakishness is similar to her own difference" (20-21). Taken collectively, the misogynistic attitudes exhibited towards these peripheral female characters – terrorised, maimed and mutilated, each time without clothes – suggest that, for Schrader, the realm of the different, monstrous and Other is not specifically confined to Irena, but rather includes the category of women in general. And while the film's scenes of violence against overtly sexualised female bodies would hardly be considered extreme by the increasingly graphic standards of current horror cinema, they still signify a virulently aggressive effort to ward off the threat of castration by any means necessary.

To return now to Schrader's treatment of Irena (and Kinski), we can see how the intertwined dynamics of fetishism, disavowal and castration anxiety necessitate the construction of a fantasy object in which the male ego can overinvest. In *Cat People*, the fetish adopted to disavow Irena's difference is not an object but a highly idiosyncratic idea of love-as-salvation that gets inflated to pathological proportions: the Beatrice complex, in which the female love object is sanctified and venerated as something greater than human. By the same logic, this gesture of larger-than-life romanticism forecloses upon the possibility of mutual adult love because it unburdens the neurotic male lover of any imperative to treat the Other as a human equal. Confessing his feelings to an increasingly disturbed Irena on the street late at night, Oliver delivers a somewhat ludicrous monologue that clearly casts himself in the starry-eyed role of the lovesick obsessive:

Listen Irena, I'm 34 years old. I've spent most of my life looking for somebody I even wanted to be in love with. Now that I've found you I'm not going to let you go. I love you. I'll always love you. I loved you before you were born.

His unwitting admission that he loved her before she was born carries a different resonance than he consciously intends, given what Irena actually evolved from before her human birth. When Paul attempts to coerce Irena into committing incest, he accurately observes the manner in which Oliver's overcompensating confessions of love not only mask his deep fear of the monstrous-feminine, but are in fact predicated upon his secret attraction to her inner beast: "Oliver doesn't love you, he loves the panther. He wants you because he fears you". While Paul's theatrical proclamations about desire and animality have the effect of signposting *Cat People*'s themes too literally, they also serve to highlight the film's recasting of the female monster as a sacred fetish object for male castration anxiety. The introduction of the Beatrice complex to the story thus fosters an explicit narrative shift towards male psychic processes of fetishism and disavowal. In this respect, Andrew Sarris claims that Schrader's primary intervention in remaking *Cat People* is the fact that now "there are no longer any nonobsessive major characters"; furthermore, he argues, "Oliver is in some ways

crazier than Irena and Paul in his ultimate decision to love the woman in the panther as much as, if not even more than, he ever loved the panther in the woman” (43).

Amidst this network of masculine investments, it makes sense that some of the film’s most effective moments are arguably those few quiet scenes where Irena is alone with her own thoughts, and we are given at least a fleeting insight into her conflicted sense of herself as a creature trapped in limbo between woman and panther. The first instance is when she arrives back at Oliver’s shack after killing the rabbit in the swamp. When Oliver awakens and turns on the light, he sees Irena still naked, with a feral expression on her face and the blood of her prey smeared around her mouth. Her appearance marks her as both the abject woman whose wallowing in filth and waste locates her outside the “clean and proper body” of civilised culture, and the imaginary woman-as-castrator embodied by the myth of the *vagina dentata*. Before Oliver has a chance to say anything, Irena, feeling shamed by her own monstrosity, screams “Don’t look at me!” and knocks the light over so that the screen cuts to black. Romney interprets Irena’s ferocity in this scene as a product not only of her voice and body language, which are notably more aggressive than at any other point of the film, but also the manner in which she directly commands the camera to leave her alone: “At this moment, the viewer is completely disarmed – not only does the object withdraw from sight, but removes sight itself” (154). At an aesthetic level, the sudden blackout thus materialises a fleeting attempt on Irena’s part to resist the formalist system of light, shadow and colour that has rendered her eternally visible, and to escape a masculinist mise-en-scène that encourages us “to regard the woman at the requisite safe distance necessary to the voyeur’s pleasure” (Williams 15). Here we may recall the scene late in *Vertigo*, where Judy – having been stalked, scrutinised, placed on a Beatrice-style pedestal, and rendered the stylishly passive object of the male gaze for the duration of the film – is granted a flicker of subjectivity alone in her hotel room; through the device of the confessional letter she writes to Scotty (James Stewart), she shares her version of past events by returning the camera’s probing gaze to challenge her status as object before the film resumes its masculine perspective. In this respect, Irena’s rage at being seen in her most abject state does not merely suggest an

animalistic response that foreshadows the emergence of her inner beast; it also seems an expression of very *human* frustration with the encumbrance of her lover's goddess worship, here exposed as the defensive flipside to the wider cultural "belief that woman's monstrous nature is inextricably bound up with her difference as man's sexual other" (Creed 83). The second interesting moment of Irena alone – a 'woman-in-a-room' sequence to match the intensity of Schrader's solitary antiheroes – occurs after she loses her virginity to Oliver. To her surprise, she does not transform into a leopard immediately after intercourse. Unable to sleep, she walks to the bathroom, stands in front of the mirror and stares intensely at her reflection, as though she were a stranger to herself. Reaching down with her hand while maintaining eye contact with her mirror image, she inserts her fingers into her broken hymen, smells them, and smears the blood of her defloration over her mouth, so that she recalls her earlier blood-soaked appearance after killing the rabbit. Her libido is here explicitly connected to her instinct for aggression: both signify the abject elements of her identity that she has failed to control. Creed reminds us that "the *vagina dentata* is a mouth" (109), and that for the male child in the oral stage, "the threat of incorporation issuing from the maternal body is most likely to be concentrated on the two areas associated with incorporation: the mother's facial mouth and her genital mouth" (113). Furthermore, the set of "complex mythological and linguistic associations between the mouth and the female genitals" (109) is reflected in generic horror film imagery of female mouths that bleed, bite or drain their victims: "the visual association between biting and bloodied lips, sexual intercourse and death provides a central motif of the vampire film" (Creed 107). Though Irena is not a vampire, the recurring association of her blood-smeared mouth with her vaginal lips evokes the oral male child's fear of a monstrous-feminine capacity to incorporate, devour and annihilate. Tellingly, it is at this point that Irena anxiously washes the blood from her face and hands, in an effort to disavow the masculine conception of her body as abject that she has now thoroughly internalised (see Fig 2.11). Thus begins her gradual, agonising transformation from human form into the animal she already sees in herself: she

sheds hair and grows fur, sprouts fangs and claws, and finally sees her skin tear open to reveal the sleek black musculature of her leopard self.⁴⁷

Fig 2.11



Within the patriarchal ideology of *Cat People*, Irena can be “either the tamed, domesticated, passive woman or else the savage, destructive, aggressive woman” (Creed 116), but not both. The problem of her abject status – the impossibility of her living as either a fully human woman or a nonhuman creature – is resolved in suitably mythic fashion. Having temporarily resumed human form after killing Oliver’s fisherman friend at the bayou shack, she waits for Oliver to find her there and begs him to either kill her or make love to her one more time, which will allow her to change into leopard form forever. Creed explains that within theories of abjection, “ritual becomes a means by which societies both renew their initial contact with the abject element and then exclude that element”; furthermore, it is precisely through ritual that “the

⁴⁷ While the transformation sequence is a familiar trope of early 1980s body horrors such as *The Howling* (1981, Joe Dante) and *An American Werewolf in London*, Ormsby had reservations about including it in his script: “To tell you the truth, the cats bursting through the skin approach was just a crass commercial decision. I figured, well, this is the era of *Alien*” (Rebello 32).

demarcation lines between the human and the non-human are drawn up anew and presumably made all the stronger for that process” (8). In stark contrast to the nuanced subtlety of Tourneur’s film, Schrader’s *Cat People* closes on a “zoophilic bondage scene” (Jackson 167) lit, staged and filmed in the fetishistic manner of religious ritual, with Moroder’s primitive beat and Bowie’s tribal chanting on the soundtrack as Oliver ties Irena to the bedposts and “performs his rites of transformation” (Hollinger 44). Though this final transformation occurs offscreen, the preamble illustrates the film’s troubled and troubling approach to female sexuality. Hollinger notes that “the visual presentation of this scene is significant. The shadows from the cabin window screens cast a cage-like pattern on Irena”, which gives the impression that she has “willingly sought out her own imprisonment” (44). In Schrader’s most obvious citation of the *Day of Wrath*-style framing and lighting he critiqued in *Transcendental Style*, the window not only forms a grid over Irena’s nude body, with her face and torso divided by vertical and horizontal framelines, but the addition of cross-hatched shadows reflecting from the outdoor light reduces her to a flattened surface. In this regard, she does not seek out her own imprisonment so much as she is already imprisoned by a *mise-en-scène* that cannot stop appropriating her image to its own end. Schrader notes how the cabin set evokes the Mission Dolores chapel in *Vertigo*, with church-like windows and a balustrade of wooden railings that cast expressionistic chiaroscuro across the frame as Irena walks nude towards the bed: “So much of this for me is the love of the textures: the painted brick, the wood, the plaster, the human skin, all laid upon each other”. He then adds, as if there were any doubt: “For me this film’s great pleasures are all in the visual aesthetics” (Director’s Commentary). It feels significant that he reasserts one last claim of formalist detachment while the film’s climax directly broaches the male desire to possess and control the female love object by whatever means necessary. Just as the Beatrice complex signifies Oliver’s defense mechanism against castration anxiety, the fetishistic overvaluation of *mise-en-scène* itself represents Schrader’s own strategy for disavowing the whole theme of male neurosis in the face of sexual difference.

Conclusion

As with Julian in *American Gigolo*, the postscript to *Cat People* sees its tormented protagonist receiving an unlikely offer of love behind bars. This time, however, the resolution is even more problematic. After fading out from the love scene, we return to the zoo some time later. Oliver has now reunited with Alice and kisses her goodbye when she leaves on her lunch break. Visiting the animals, he stops outside the cage of a majestic black leopard that we realise is Irena. He tenderly hand-feeds her through the bars, looking at the animal with a far deeper passion than he has ever shown Alice. For her part, the leopard looks deep in thought. Perhaps she is contemplating her status as a domesticated beast with a nametag around her neck, on permanent exhibit for public consumption, and realising that it is not as different from her human life as she might have hoped. As Kouvaros observes, Irena merely substitutes the spiritual prison of her flesh for the literal prison of the zoo (51).

It is worth noting that Schrader rewrote Ormsby's original ending, in which the monster is killed in a house fire, so that he could close Irena and Oliver's affair on an unmistakably personal note of romantic perversity: "The big change I made was that he doesn't kill the monster", he explains. "He makes love to her and puts her in a shrine and lives with her" (Jackson 167). He remains in little doubt that this constitutes an ideal state of affairs, at least for Oliver... and perhaps for himself, too: "The happy ending for me is that he and his Beatrice share these shrine moments" (Director's Commentary). The improbable naivety of his statement makes it all the easier to understand why critics such as Hollinger lambast the film's ending as a reactionary gesture of barely suppressed misogyny, one whose only possible associations with happiness could stem from a smug reaffirmation of patriarchal dominance whereby the abject woman is put in her place and the man is satisfactorily relieved of his castration anxiety: "It is a scene that shows the threat of female power effectively subdued and the final triumph of the male complete" (44). Yet there is also something naïve about this assumption of masculine "triumph": Oliver's happiness is bittersweet at best, wholly predicated on structures of fetishism and disavowal that allow him to relate to his lover only when she is safely confined to a cage. In fact he is as

trapped as Irena, imprisoned in a psyche that denies him any authentic connection with a human Other. It is thus fitting that Schrader would explore this exact dilemma to its fullest capacity in his next film.

CHAPTER THREE

The Closed Crystal:

Autoerotic Desire and the Prison of Narcissism in

***Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters* (1985)**

Introduction

Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters opens on the final morning of the life of its protagonist: the Japanese author, actor, playwright and bodybuilder Yukio Mishima (Ken Ogata), who famously committed seppuku after leading his private army in a terrorist attack on the Tokyo headquarters of Japan's National Defense Forces on 20 November 1970. As he prepares for his suicidal journey, Mishima lays his pristine uniform on the bed, pauses to reflect upon it, and starts to dress while looking in the mirror, paying fetishistic attention to the details of military fashion: the gold buttons of his jacket, the buckle of his leather belt, the gilt-edged cap. As John Howard Wilson notes in his article on the film, the relations between "man, clothes and mirror echo scenes in *Taxi Driver*, *American Gigolo* and *Raging Bull*" (268). This suggests one possible reason that Schrader claims "Mishima was the sort of character I'd like to have created if he hadn't already existed" (Jackson 172-73). Elsewhere, he elaborates on the fact that he felt drawn to Mishima because

he is an example of a certain pathology of suicidal glory that transcends education and culture. When *Taxi Driver* came out, somebody accused me of inflating the heroic impulse of an ignorant kid with a penchant for violence, and I responded in some attempt at an intellectual justification of what I had done – which I might add I'm less inclined to do anymore. In the process, I mentioned Yukio Mishima as an example of such a pathology, despite his intellect and education and higher motivations. (Jaehne 12)

Following the box-office success of *American Gigolo* and the comparative critical and commercial disappointment of *Cat People*, *Mishima* constituted an important turning point in Schrader's filmography. The most obvious difference from the two preceding films is that it was filmed in Japan with a Japanese cast, mostly Japanese crew, and an unusual mixture of Japanese dialogue with English-language voiceover narration (courtesy of actor Roy Scheider). Budgeted at \$5.75 million, the film was an international coproduction uniting two Japanese financiers, Fuji Television and Toho-Towa Distribution, with high-

profile Hollywood executive producers George Lucas and Francis Ford Coppola, who encouraged Warner Bros. to distribute the film and thus allowed Schrader the rare luxury of having major-studio support on a project that, by his own admission, “no one ever expected to make a dime” (Jackson 180). His words were sadly prescient, and the commercial failure of *Mishima* meant that from this point onwards he struggled to generate funding for every film he directed, increasingly working with smaller budgets, independent production companies and European distributors through the remainder of the 1980s and 90s (Kouvaros 79). As such, the film represented his last opportunity to direct a deeply personal project on the fringes of mainstream cinema.

Even more significantly, *Mishima*’s discourse of bodily crisis marks a highly self-conscious shift from the established commercial formats of *American Gigolo* and *Cat People*, both of which utilised the recognisable tropes of traditional film genres – *noir* and body horror – to explore themes of corporeal fragmentation and metamorphosis. As a study of a real-life historical figure, the genre with which *Mishima* is most closely identified is the biopic, yet Schrader’s lack of interest in what he terms “conventional biographical films” (Jackson 127) led him to devise an experimental narrative structure and formal regime that departs from the traditions of biopic cinema. The film opens with a literary table of contents that divides it into four chapters, subtitled “Beauty”, “Art”, “Action” and “Harmony of Pen and Sword”. Stylistically, it alternates between elegantly naturalistic black-and-white scenes from Mishima’s childhood and adult past; gritty, handheld, documentary-style footage of his final day; and extravagantly staged, colour-saturated dramatisations from three of his novels that resonate with each phase of his life journey. Discussing his rationale in crafting such an unconventional portrait, Schrader explains the problem posed by filming an account of Mishima’s life:

Here you have a functioning schizophrenic: a man who lives multiple, simultaneous lives, contradictory ones. How do you portray such a character? How do you portray his inner life as well as his creative one? So you create this odd, cross-hatch structure: time, place, film stock that

reflects the contradictory, schizophrenic nature of the character. (Simon 2008)

Schrader's experimentation with nonlinear chronology, narrative space and formal design enables him to move beyond the confines of genre to explore more abstract philosophical concepts about the relationship between self, body and world. He notes that he was "interested in the idea that as an object becomes more and more beautiful, it seeks its own destruction", and also "the idea that one must not only be a see-er, one must also be seen while one sees" (Jaehne 16). For Schrader, these issues represent "rarified, obscure but artistic ideas, and the film goes right to the heart of them. There's no way you can talk about such things and make it an easy watch" (Jaehne 16). In this acknowledgement, he addresses the problem that many viewers have with *Mishima*, echoing the qualifying tone of even its most ardent supporters. For instance, Stephen Prince claims that "its audacious visual design, complex narrative structure, and masterful thematic integration made this Schrader's best film of the decade" (284), but he also notes that "its 'art film status' [...] places it far outside the normative patterns of American commercial film" (285), while David Bordwell hails it "one of the most artistically courageous films in American cinema" but cautions that "its formal intricacy and specialized themes make for a fairly chilly experience" ("Salvation through self-punishment").

While the minimal existing scholarship on *Mishima* has approached the film as a model of unconventional biopic filmmaking (Kouvaros, Wilson, King)⁴⁸, I want to consider how Schrader uses Mishima's life story – his neurotic obsession with beauty, his autoerotic sexuality, and his lifelong fantasies "driven by an aesthetic of death as both the ultimate sexual experience and the supreme realization of beauty" (Varley 331) – to continue his own formalist explorations of corporeal cinema. Drawing upon Kaja Silverman's psychoanalytic theories of male masochism, Nick Davis' recent queering of Deleuzian film theory and Roger T.

⁴⁸ On the biopic genre, see George F. Custen's *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History* (1992) and Dennis Bingham's *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?: The Biopic as Contemporary Film Genre* (2010).

Ames' account of bushidō mythology in traditional Japanese culture, I will argue that *Mishima* demonstrates a strained approach to its subject's well-known homosexuality. Partly in response to artistic limitations imposed by Mishima's widow, who owned the rights to her late husband's literary estate and attempted to quash public knowledge of his indiscretions, Schrader defended his elision of gay content on the grounds that "I don't believe you have to show men in bed to discuss homosexuality. Lust is truly more challenging to figure out visually than sex" (Jaehne 14). Through close analysis of *Mishima*'s colour, production design and "crystalline" editing techniques that blur the distinctions between actual and virtual reality, I argue that Schrader creates meaningful juxtapositions between the ostensibly heterosexual protagonists of Mishima's novels and suggestive episodes from his "real" life to infuse the film with a queer ambiguity. Yet these strategies also betray a problematic approach to the female body already familiar from *Cat People*, as well as an aesthetic of "suicidal glory" (Jackson 170) that harks back to his semi-autobiographical screenplay for *Taxi Driver*. In this way, *Mishima* becomes the kind of biopic that reveals at least as much about its creator as its subject.

Othering the Self: Heteropathic Identification

In her book *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, Kaja Silverman draws upon a diverse range of psychoanalytic theory, continental philosophy and feminist thought to outline some fundamental characteristics of male masochism. While she acknowledges that desire functions at a number of conscious and unconscious levels, Silverman operates from the central premise that the masochistic male rejects the psychosocial terms and conditions which define conventional masculinity. Following Lacan's influential thesis of the mirror stage, Silverman explains that the normative male subject only attains a sense of cultural power and privilege through his fetishistic disavowal of the void at the centre of all human subjectivity. It is precisely through this mechanism of disavowal that the terms of sexual difference – the symbolic demarcation between masculinity and femininity that governs the psychic life of the conventional male subject – are firmly established. In contrast to this "ideal"

progression into the ideological structures of exemplary masculinity, the psychic economy of the masochistic male is defined by his tendency to “not only acknowledge but embrace castration, alterity, and specularity” (Silverman 3). In other words, he avows his identification with the negativity and lack that is assigned to women in traditional culture.

Silverman employs a number of literary and cinematic examples to illustrate the ways in which masochistic masculinity typically materialises across a range of sexual, moral and psychological registers. One of her more pertinent examples of an overtly eroticised male masochism occurs in *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1974, Rainer Werner Fassbinder), where the muscular nude body of the showering protagonist (El Hedi Ben Salem) is explicitly offered as an object of the gaze via his reflected image in the bathroom mirror. According to Silverman, the indirect visual mediation of his body through a mirrored surface combines with the lustful diegetic gaze of his older wife (Brigitte Mira) – who even comments on his physique (“You’re very handsome”) – to produce an implicit understanding that “it is not so much the body itself as the representation of the body which constitutes erotic spectacle, and once again the form which that representation takes is almost classically feminine” (140). Significantly, it is Ali’s passively smiling embrace of his own objectification that encodes him as “someone whose pleasure in himself is entirely dependent upon the pleasure another takes in him” (140), and thus aligns him with the classic subject position of conventional femininity. In this respect, we may also understand many of Schrader’s male protagonists as embodying different aspects of masochistic pathology more typically associated with women onscreen. The most immediate example, of course, is Julian Kay’s flamboyantly exhibitionistic narcissism throughout *American Gigolo*, but we can also read Oliver’s perverse Beatrice complex in *Cat People* as a neurotic disavowal of female difference that necessarily reveals him in a prostrating, worshipping pose of male inferiority. As with Ali in the Fassbinder film, there is a vivid sense in which the interior fantasy lives of Schrader’s men are predicated upon their narcissistic enactment of certain roles, behaviours and subject positions; they cast themselves in these roles in order to live out certain desires that would otherwise be impossible to access. Citing Lacan’s work on the ego or *moi*, Silverman notes that the relation of the self to

its mirror image thoroughly structures and mediates the psychosexual dynamics between the self and any actual or perceived Other. Within this libidinal economy, the Other is essentially reduced to a symbolic, reflexive function of the self's desiring relations, and its erotic potency is entirely dependent on its capacity to reflect back a desired image of the self: "the *mise-en-scène* of desire can only be staged, in other words, by drawing upon the images through which the self is constituted" (Silverman 5).

Building upon the early psychoanalytic work of Max Scheler, Silverman locates the logical "end point" (265) of male masochism within a highly idiosyncratic mode of self/Other relations. She describes certain moments in the fantasmatic life of the masochistic male where "the male psyche is in effect "lifted out" of the male body" (10) and made to experience pleasure or pain through the body of an Other. The term she uses for this imaginary divestiture of the self, following Scheler, is "heteropathic identification" (10). According to Silverman, the heteropathic mode of identification exists in stark contrast to the internalising or "idiopathic" mode that defines conventional male subjectivity. Within the latter identificatory system, which mirrors the narrative structure of Freud's oral phase, the object of desire is symbolically possessed, assimilated and effectively "swallowed" in a manner that establishes the (typically male) ego as a site of stability and coherence; in the process, the Other's subjectivity is denied. By contrast, the heteropathic mode promotes a loss of self in which the subject, far from consolidating the ego, instead "lives, suffers and experiences pleasure through the other" (Silverman 205). Silverman reads this self-sacrificing, self-occluding dynamic as "a formation at the heart of classic female subjectivity, central both to motherhood and romantic love" (265), but also as the psychic manifestation of the male masochist's denial of a normative subject position.

Given the focused intensity with which he explored male masochism in *American Gigolo* and *Cat People* (as well as his screenplays for *Taxi Driver* and *Raging Bull*), it makes sense that Schrader would eventually be drawn to a male subject whose desire to occlude the self was pushed to its furthest extremes. In fact, the heteropathic structure of desire proves fundamental to Yukio Mishima's writing from the opening pages of his 1949 debut novel, *Confessions of a Mask*.

Reminiscing about his childhood in suburban Tokyo before the Second World War, Mishima describes a formative memory in his dawning awareness of his homosexuality. Besieged by the vision of a rugged young night-soil worker ladling excrement on the road, the four-year-old Mishima is subjected to an overwhelming libidinal projection that he does not understand yet experiences with burning intensity. “I had a presentiment then that there is in this world a kind of desire like stinging pain”, he recalls. “Looking up at that dirty youth, I was choked by desire, thinking, “I want to change into him,” thinking, “I want to be him” (*Confessions* 8-9). The structure of his desire does not turn upon the conventional idiopathic drive to possess and internalise the Other, but rather a strange compulsion to vacate his bodily reality and take up residence in the identity of his lust object; or, as Silverman puts it, to “surrender [his] own corporeal frame of reference for that of the other” (217).

Although the episode with the night-soil worker is not recreated in Schrader’s *Mishima*, the film does include another famous passage from *Confessions of a Mask* that charts the same exteriorising circuit of desire: the moment where a 12-year-old Mishima, isolated from peers and increasingly attuned to his sexual difference, experiences his first orgasm after discovering a reproduced Guido Reni painting of St. Sebastian bound to a tree and pierced with arrows (see Figs 3.1 and 3.2 overleaf). The scene’s voiceover narration is closely based on the text of *Confessions*:

Suddenly I came across a picture whose only purpose had been to lie in wait for centuries and ambush me. The white matchless beauty of the youth’s body hung against the tree trunk, his hands tied by thongs. I trembled with joy. My loins swelled. My hand unconsciously began a motion it had never been taught.

Figs 3.1 and 3.2



Mishima's lust for the image of the suffering martyr, his body permanently arrested at a peak of youthful beauty, is potent enough to inspire masturbation. Yet the combination of framing, cutting and narration in this scene prevents us from reading his behaviour in terms of a conventional desiring modality, wherein the subject seeks to possess and assimilate a clearly defined Other and thus reconsolidates the ego as a site of coherence. The scene opens on a cramped full shot of Mishima sitting at his desk in a prison-like room with barred window frames, the door half ajar to suggest his feelings of entrapment. Upon reaching the page of the book with the Sebastian portrait, his head instinctively bows forward and leans down, as if to mentally project himself inside the painting;

Schrader now intercuts between expressive mid-shots of his haunted face poring over the book and tactile, immersive close-ups of Sebastian's mutilated flesh – the place he desperately wants to be. While his orgasm occurs offscreen, the film's mise-en-scène and narration verifies that the trigger is not a desire to have sex with Sebastian, but the incipient fantasy of his *own* violent death that organises his sexuality from this point onwards: he needs to feel what Sebastian is feeling. As with his drive to *become* the night-soil worker in the novel, his lust is thus conditioned by a momentary dissolution of self/Other boundaries that allows him to “see” himself in the body of the dying martyr, and to identify deeply with Sebastian's frozen beauty and languid ecstasy at the precise moment of his expiration.⁴⁹ In her analysis of the looking relations that structure male castration fantasies, Silverman refers to this fantasmatic splitting of the self as “the “I saw myself seeing myself” of classic femininity” (207). Within the terms of this narcissistic displacement, the subject is temporarily abandoned and pleasurably relocated at the site of an Other, thus inhabiting a desiring imaginary gaze outside one's own corporeal identity. Elsewhere she characterises this dynamic as “the photo session,” comparing it to “the clicking of an imaginary camera which photographs the subject and thereby constitutes him or her” (Silverman 127). The photographic analogy is particularly insightful in light of the fact that Mishima later reenacted the St. Sebastian pose for Japanese photographer Eikoe Hosoe's 1962 book of exhibitionistic portraits, *Ordeal by Roses*. In the film, Schrader closes the photographic montage sequence on a suggestive freeze frame of Mishima bound to the tree, with his hands shackled and eyes rolled towards heaven, and further punctuates it with the amplified clicking noise of the camera on the soundtrack. Schrader's audiovisual design thus cements our understanding that, in adopting the persona of his first masturbation fantasy, Mishima is not merely recasting himself as his own childhood object of desire, but playing out the terms of a thrilling “psychic exteriorization” (Silverman 10) whereby the self is evacuated, dispersed and reconstituted at the site of another body in crisis. Bearing in mind the Sebastian fantasy as the conceptual basis for Mishima's artistic, sexual, political and

⁴⁹ The most overtly homoerotic film interpretation of Sebastian's iconic martyrdom is undoubtedly *Sebastiane* (1976, Derek Jarman and Paul Humfress).

psychic life, I now want to consider how Schrader charts the development of his erotic death wish in the first chapter of his film.

Heteropathic Desire and Nonhuman Others: In Pursuit of “Beauty”

While heteropathic flows of desire are evident throughout Mishima’s body of work, his 1956 novel *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* represents an especially intense variation of this dynamic: in it, heteropathic identifications extend beyond the realm of the human body and into the world of nonhuman objects. The novel is loosely based on the factual incident in which a disturbed young Zen acolyte set fire to Kinkakuji, the medieval pavilion in Kyoto. In both the novel and the first chapter of Schrader’s film, the acolyte is an antisocial virgin named Mizoguchi (Yasosuke Bando) who, upon entering the service of the temple during the Second World War, develops a bizarre fixation on the timeless beauty of the pavilion. While his complex relationship to the building remains ambiguous throughout the story, Mishima draws correspondences between the pavilion as an embodiment of aesthetic perfection and the paralysing mental pain that Mizoguchi suffers as a result of his stutter, his feelings of physical ugliness, and his lack of sexual experience. Interestingly, this emphasis on themes of beauty, sexuality and corporeal identity was considerably downplayed in the novel’s first screen adaptation, Kon Ichikawa’s 1958 film *Conflagration* (*Enjo*). In her comparative study of the novel and Ichikawa’s version, Keiko I. McDonald argues that *Conflagration* functions as a sociological commentary on the kind of collective alienation “experienced by the post-war younger generation that can be found in many other Japanese novels and films of the 1950s” (139); in this respect, Mizoguchi’s neurosis is expressed in more general, less psychoanalytic terms, and the temple is constructed as a sacred national monument whose beauty symbolises the purity of a prelapsarian society rather than evoking an internal crisis. Donald Richie takes a related stance in his suggestion that *Conflagration*’s use of the temple architecture, shot from low angles with telephoto lenses in textured, deep-focus widescreen compositions, tends “to emphasize the narrative, the boy’s awareness of his isolation and loneliness”, and also “to envelop and to define the acolyte and his feelings, to

create an atmosphere, a space to hold them” (*A Hundred Years of Japanese Film* 159); this ambience, however, is firmly couched within the generic parameters of the *keiko-eiga* or “tendency” film that intimately concerned itself with “the Japanese social dilemma” (160). While Mishima’s novel does critique the secular materialism of postwar Japanese culture, the pavilion is clearly coded as a fantasmatic projection of Mizoguchi’s inner life, facilitating “a condition in which I exist on one side and beauty on the other” (*Temple* 64); as with the St. Sebastian episode in *Confessions*, the protagonist’s inability to relate to the social environment is figured through a fetishistic and anthropomorphising projection onto the material elements of his object world. Though he does not invoke the psychoanalytic terms of the heteropathic (or, indeed, the essential masochism of the character), Paul Varley notes the story’s exteriorising flow of desire in his suggestion that “Mizoguchi fixes on the Pavilion as an ideal of externalised beauty and, at the same time, identifies it with the beauty he feels within himself but cannot bring out because of his speech impediment” (332). Comparing the outward movement of the novel’s exteriorisation onto the temple to the more conventional retreat inwards of *Conflagration*, McDonald claims that: “Mizoguchi actually *becomes* the temple. He projects his alter ego onto it”, such that “Moments of emotional and moral crisis relate to it... Temple and conscience become one” (140).

Perhaps because he adapts truncated sequences from the novel as part of a broader portrait of Mishima’s life, Schrader’s film remains much truer to the exteriorising movement of *Temple* than Ichikawa’s version. Rather than offer commentary on the disaffected state of Japanese culture, *Mishima* seeks to condense the novel’s central philosophical themes and psychoanalytic tropes into a striking miniature character study. For instance, in the scene when Mizoguchi confides in his hardened, sexually experienced friend Kashiwagi (himself embittered due to his clubfoot) about suffering a humiliating bout of impotence, he bypasses conventional filmic exposition and speaks in abstract, cryptic riddles closely based on the novel: “It was as small as this but grew so big”, Mizoguchi begins, ostensibly referring to both the actual pavilion and to his crippling anxiety at being confronted with a sublime force he cannot process. “It filled the world like tremendous music. That’s the power of beauty’s eternity.

It poisons us. It blocks out our lives.” Similarly, he earlier refers to his speech impediment as being “like a mirror you can’t break”, before pointing to the pavilion and stammering that, “It’s too beautiful”. Kashiwagi’s unsympathetic response to his predicament (“Nothing is unbearable. You’ll get over it”) recalls the moment in *Taxi Driver* where Travis attempts to confide in Wizard (Peter Boyle) about his fears of impending madness, only to be rebuffed by the latter’s crudely insensitive advice. When Mizoguchi angrily retorts, “Beauty is now my enemy. Life is bearable only when I imagine the Golden Pavilion has been destroyed” – while simultaneously crushing a toy miniature of the pavilion in his fist – we understand his relationship with the building as a disturbed narcissistic investment that dissolves the ego boundaries distinguishing self from Other and, in this case, human from nonhuman.

At this point, it is useful to consider how Schrader’s treatment of externalised corporeality transposes Mizoguchi’s desiring identifications onto the terms of his *mise-en-scène*. The *Temple* sequence mobilises a vivid saturation of colour, the cellular rhythms of Philip Glass’ score, and the sweeping movements of Bailey’s camerawork in a manner already familiar from the heightened formalism of *American Gigolo* and *Cat People*. Yet it is further intensified by Schrader’s overt foregrounding of more obviously theatrical staging practice. The sequence was designed by Eiko Ishioka, then a film industry novice whose work was primarily based in the fields of advertising and graphic design. Schrader felt that an outsider to the film industry could contribute a different kind of creativity to the task of articulating abstract visual concepts, while Ishioka was intrigued by the prospect of working on “a commercial movie in which the production design would finally be given a starring role... a movie that would employ design as a means of expressing a meaningful portrait to a general audience” (Ishioka 11). The principal set in this chapter of the film is a mobile three-walled showpiece that evokes the kind of traditional rustic scene familiar from a wide range of Japanese artistic mediums and traditions, including decorative murals, scroll paintings and Noh drama (Ishioka 11). Against a painted gold backdrop, a green lotus pond, curvilinear mountain shapes and fake bamboo trees construct a self-consciously sterile artificial landscape, while painted green wooden footbridges intersect across the glittering aquatic surface of the stage floor. The three-tiered,

gold-leafed pavilion itself is a small-scale model that resembles less the actual building of Kinkakuji than a toy miniature from a dollhouse kit.

Here it is helpful to remember the privilege that is traditionally accorded to motifs of flatness, artifice and non-naturalism in Japanese visual art in general, and Japanese theatre and film in particular. In his extensive work on the history and development of Japanese cinema, Donald Richie argues that this national cinema was in its formation “regarded as an extension of the stage, a new kind of drama, and not as in the West a new kind of photography” (*Japanese Cinema* 2). Western concepts of illusionistic realism were thus largely eschewed in favour of the self-consciously presentational mode established by long-running dramatic traditions such as Noh, kabuki and bunraku puppet theatre. Each of these art forms departed in various ways from what we typically understand as naturalism. For instance, the staging of Noh dramas combined the use of performers in stylised masks and elaborate costumes, a chorus and musicians sitting onstage in view of the audience, and a highly minimal playing space consisting of a painted pine tree set against sparse wooden panelling; as Graham Parkes states bluntly, “There is no attempt in Noh at realism” (95).⁵⁰ While some canonical directors of the Golden Age of Japanese Cinema – particularly Ozu, Ichikawa, Mikio Naruse and Kenji Mizoguchi – evinced a flair for composition as indebted to their background in painting and draughtsmanship as theatre (*A Hundred Years* 59), the tradition of presentational dramatic style continued to flourish well into the postwar and New Wave periods of Japanese cinema. Keisuke Kinoshita’s *Ballad of Narayama* (1958) incorporated two-dimensional rural backdrops, artificial lighting schemes and the *nagauta* (singing onstage narrator) device widely associated with kabuki, while his *The River Fuefuki* (1960) integrated colour design reminiscent of Japanese woodblock prints with elements of still photography inspired by the twelfth-century paper-slide theatre known as *kamishibai* (*A Hundred Years* 144). The expressionism of Nagisa

⁵⁰ In an essay on the history of Noh drama, Makoto Ueda notes that actors frequently played nonhuman roles such as gods and demons, buildings, or pine or cedar trees. Noh performance was thus dependent on a heteropathic projection of the self: “... to imitate an object would mean that the actor becomes identical with that thing, that he dissolves himself into nothing so that the qualities inherent in the object would be naturally manifested. Zeami’s way of saying this is that the actor “grows into the object”” (179).

Oshima's *Death By Hanging* (1968) and *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief* (1969) owes much to their use of "stagelike settings and shallow playing spaces [that] have been seen as continuations of early Japanese cinema" (*A Hundred Years* 199), while *Double Suicide* (1969, Masahiro Shinoda) is explicitly conceived as a bunraku doll drama, with masked, cloaked puppeteers manipulating the bodily movements of live actors on enclosed stage flats. Indeed, even Akira Kurosawa – undoubtedly the Japanese director whose work has proven most popular and accessible to Western audiences – employed painted backdrops, shallow playing spaces and Noh-based décor in films ranging from *The Lower Depths* (1957) and *Dodes'ka-den* (1970) to *Kagemusha* (1980) and *Ran* (1985). All of this is not to say that Ishioka's production design on *Mishima* is exclusively concerned with replicating established tropes in Japanese film and theatre, but simply that her choices can be located within particularly rich aesthetic traditions where the set is not "a simulacrum for actuality" but rather "a playing area, one bound by conventions which had little to do with any illusions of reality" (*Japanese Cinema* 7).

Yet the film's approach to design also inevitably mirrors certain stylistic innovations that defined the modernist European art cinema Schrader often cites as his primary influence, in particular the emphasis upon colour, camera movement and art direction in the 1960s and early 1970s films of Bernardo Bertolucci and Michelangelo Antonioni. Following on from the use of dyed sand and matte paintings to create the mythic internal landscapes of *Cat People*, there is in *Mishima* an even more pronounced attempt to convey crises of bodily identity and reality through the self-reflexive visual transformation of the world. Consider again how the exaggerated recreations of monumental fascist architecture in *The Conformist* or the desolate industrial wastelands of *Red Desert* reconstituted the profilmic space and staged neurotic relationships between protagonist and environment by painting objects, manipulating colour intensities, and decorating natural landscapes in the manner of studio sets.⁵¹ In

⁵¹ For more on Bertolucci's design choices in *The Conformist*, see Christopher Wagstaff's BFI Film Classics book and David Forgacs' DVD commentary track on the film. On Antonioni's use of colour and production design, see my previously cited Antonioni scholarship by Seymour Chatman and Angela Dalle Vacche, as well as Laura

the case of the Bertolucci influence, this stylisation in *Mishima* takes the form of specific camera angles and shot set-ups borrowed from *The Conformist*: a craning movement down a terraced rooftop in the *Temple* sequence is modelled on an equivalent shot in Bertolucci's film, while the motif of light streaming through slatted window blinds, already referenced in both *American Gigolo* and *Cat People*, is used twice more in *Mishima*. Most notably, Schrader rehearses *The Conformist*'s low-level, right-to-left tracking shot of an autumnal pile of leaves blowing on the ground.⁵² In keeping with *Mishima*'s broader departure from realism, we see Mizoguchi sweeping a sheaf of obviously paper leaves, dyed bright scarlet, against the golden pavilion and the two-dimensional flats of the Kyoto countryside (see Fig 3.3, p. 159). Schrader deploys these modernist stylisation tactics to denature the environment and reflect a radical incompatibility of self and world, rendering the dissonance between Mizoguchi's impotent, abject body and the dazzling body of the pavilion on a mythic scale. Yet his construction of the environment as something radically Other from the self also intersects with his depiction of male sexual anxiety, and in doing so, it fosters a troubled conception of the pavilion as a deathlike, claustrophobic and distinctly feminine structure. In fact, it is this feminisation of the architectural body at the heart of *The Temple* that allows me to extend my psychoanalytic considerations of the film – in terms of narrative, theme and identity – into the realm of mise-en-scène. The psychological ramifications of *Mishima*'s transformative visuality are perhaps best approached through a chillingly evocative passage from *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*. Noting the existence of heteropathic transferences at work in the animal world, Silverman cites Max Scheler's account of a jungle squirrel that encounters a visibly hungry snake hanging from a tree; fearing inevitable death, the squirrel

Rascaroli and John David Rhodes' edited collection *Antonioni: Centenary Essays* (2011).

⁵² As noted in the previous chapter, *The Conformist* is itself engaged in a heavily intertextual dialogue with the history of cinematic design, and its mobile camerawork betrays the influence of filmmakers such as Orson Welles, Josef von Sternberg, Jean Renoir and Max Ophüls (Forgacs). The famous "leaves" shot has been cited in a range of other films, including *The Godfather Part II* (1974, Francis Ford Coppola), *The Fourth Man* (1983, Paul Verhoeven) and *Empire of the Sun* (1987, Steven Spielberg).

gradually moves towards instead of away from the snake, and finally throws itself into the open jaws... plainly the squirrel's instinct for self-preservation has succumbed to an ecstatic participation in the object of the snake's own appetitive *nisus*, namely "swallowing." The squirrel identifies in feeling with the snake, and thereupon spontaneously establishes corporeal "identity" with it, by disappearing down its throat. (Scheler qtd. in Silverman 266)

As this unnerving fable highlights, the externalising divestiture of self that constitutes the heteropathic impulse is predicated on narratives of immersion and engulfment: the masochistic subject projects itself onto an Other that consequently swallows it up. While Schrader's desire to translate Yukio Mishima's idiosyncratic psychic life into imagery should hardly be restricted by the mandates of political correctness, the motifs of engulfment that condition his specific brand of masochism here authorise an uneasy instance of gendered symbolism. The scene in question is a prelude to Mizoguchi's failed sexual encounter with a young woman whom Kashiwagi has encouraged him to seduce during a stroll through the countryside, and who eventually proves as unsympathetic to his crippling performance anxiety as he initially fears. Wandering back through the plastic bamboo forest to his duties at the temple, alone and disheartened by the manner in which Kashiwagi has suavely seduced the woman's friend, Mizoguchi stops before the pavilion and stands transfixed. As Glass' score escalates to a bombastic crescendo, he envisions the pavilion bursting with light and splitting open down the centre to reveal its glowing entrails. No longer a nonhuman structure that symbolises an abstract ideal of unattainable beauty, the pavilion now becomes a vaginal abyss, ready to devour him (see Fig 3.4).

Figs 3.3 and 3.4



According to Ishioka, the decision to show the pavilion splitting in two was her idea:

For the acolyte, the pavilion is the aesthetic embodiment of all beauty, and he has a sensual relationship with it. My original idea was to have him enter the halved building, making the sexual symbolism even more explicit, but Schrader decided against it. (14)

Schrader rejected the idea of Mizoguchi walking around inside a symbolic vagina that simultaneously fascinates and terrifies him in order to avoid the kind

of blatant symbolism he considers reductively “simplistic” and “a young man’s game” (Bliss 7).⁵³ Yet the image is still sufficiently explicit to construct the temple as a space whose engulfing, threatening qualities are unmistakably feminine; in this regard, it evokes Barbara Creed’s statement that the *vagina dentata* myth treats “female sexuality as a difference which is grounded in monstrousness and which invokes castration anxiety in the male spectator” (2). Of course, this discourse of female difference is also redolent of *Cat People*, where Schrader represented the female body as monstrous Other in its most literal and primordial form. While he chose not to represent that body as directly as Ishioka suggested in *Mishima*, the pavilion imagery nonetheless conveys palpable anxieties about sexual difference. Furthermore, in his willingness to psychoanalyse his real life in the interest of art, Schrader has confessed feelings of profound ambivalence towards the female body. Wrestling with suicidal tendencies in his early twenties, Schrader used the money he made by selling his screenplays for *Taxi Driver* and *The Yakuza* to enter an intensive course of psychoanalysis five days a week, which he often credits with saving his life. His comments to interviewer Alex Simon about his original symptomatology are interesting with regard to the present discussion:

My presenting cause – which is an infirmity you have that’s psychosomatic – of my neurosis was extreme claustrophobia, which I learned through research results from fear of the womb. I couldn’t ride on elevators, or go on airplanes. I’d have rather walked up twenty flights of stairs than go on an elevator. My doctor said to me “When you see a woman’s vagina, what do you think?” I said ‘The first thing I think is that I’m in the wrong place, that I walked into the girls’ locker room by mistake. I shouldn’t be there.’ Then I said, right out of the blue, ‘I feel like I’ve stepped into an elevator, and once those steel doors close, they’ll never open again.’ And I jumped up from the couch and started running

⁵³ The context for this statement is Schrader’s account of writing the screenplay for *Bringing Out the Dead*, on which Scorsese wanted to retain the heavy Catholic symbolism of the source novel while Schrader felt that they needed to “get in there and root them out... change those symbolic names, change those symbolic images” (Bliss 7).

around the room saying ‘I just said it! I just said it! I made the connection!’ It was about the power of the female to swallow your ego, and devour it. (Simon 2008)

While my aim in this thesis is not to conduct a biographical study of the relationship between Schrader’s cinema and his real life, such provocative interview statements render it especially difficult (and perhaps unwise) to forge overly neat distinctions between the man and his work. Considering the critical impetus fuelling this phase of his career – the drive to communicate ideas about bodily experience through visual imagery – the depiction of a sacred monument as an overtly feminine threat illuminates Schrader’s personal anxieties about the “difference” of other corporeal identities as much as the blue neon lighting of blacks and homosexuals in *American Gigolo*’s club scene, or Irina’s gruesome final transformation into the “monstrous feminine” in *Cat People*. As such, I want to fully explore the implications of his visualising a nonhuman Other in gendered terms.

Queering Schrader: Locating the Desiring-Image in *Mishima*

The transmutation of feelings that are typically directed towards human bodies into an abstract world of nonhuman landscapes, spaces and objects is a central concern of Nick Davis’s recent book *The Desiring-Image: Gilles Deleuze and Contemporary Queer Cinema*. By first unpacking Davis’s complex thesis of queer desire, and also evaluating how his ideas provide a fruitful new intervention into the field of Deleuzian film theory, we can gain a better understanding of Schrader’s attempt to represent states of desire and identification that cannot be reduced to conventional social or psychic categories. In constructing his thesis of how a “desiring-image” in cinema might look and feel, Davis unites a few previously unlinked strands of Deleuzian thought on both film-philosophy and the social order. The first areas of investigation are Deleuze’s two influential *Cinema* volumes, in particular his thesis of a “time-image” that broadly defines the montage and formal structure of international film production after the Second World War. In Deleuzian

thought, the time-image connotes a cinema in which temporality is freed from the causal frameworks, linear narratives and firm basis in action that constitute the “movement-image” phase of cinema before this historical and cultural epoch. This departure from the smooth foundations of the continuity system necessarily demands new modes of spectatorial perception. The unconventional framing, elliptical editing and shifting interplay of possible pasts, presents and futures that define a canonical time-image film such as *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961, Alain Resnais) or Antonioni’s *L’eclisse* encourage (or force, depending on one’s subjective response to such films) the viewer to actively “read” the cinematic image, to interpret its ambiguous content and thereby *produce* their own set of meaningful engagements with the image rather than passively accept it as discrete truth. The second major element of Davis’s inquiry into Deleuzian philosophy concerns a motif that pervades the first instalment of his two-volume collaboration with the psychoanalyst Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. In this study, the theorists address issues of psychology, economics and history through their fundamental belief that desire is the primary creative force underlying not just capitalist society, but reality in general. Desire thus assumes an equivalent conceptual force in this volume as the privileged categories of time and movement do in Deleuze’s film theory. Davis is especially inspired by Deleuze and Guattari’s rejection of Freudian models of Oedipal desire, which tend to reduce complex issues of gender, sexuality and identification to the limited set of relations at play in the human family; for Deleuze and Guattari,

desire does not take as its object persons or things, but the entire surroundings that it traverses, the vibrations and flows of every sort to which it is joined, introducing therein breaks and captures – an always nomadic and migrant desire. (*Anti-Oedipus* 292, qtd. in Davis 15)

In light of their stated conviction that desire “is at work everywhere, functioning smoothly at times, at other times in fits and starts” (*Anti-Oedipus* 1, qtd. in Davis 14), but always as an overwhelming existential force at the heart of reality, Davis ponders why questions of desire – including related issues of gender, sexuality, eroticism and identification – are then completely bypassed in

Deleuze's *Cinema* books. His project is thus to queer Deleuzian film studies with the theoretical aid of the Deleuzo-Guattarian statement that desire cannot be securely restricted to Freudian models of sexual identity or orientation, and thereby grant it an equivalent status to time or movement: "In a corresponding model of cinema," Davis argues, "sexuality orients itself toward people but equally toward objects, ideas, or sensations, or to no specific site whatsoever" (14-15). According to Davis, cinematic "desiring states" (17) can attach themselves to the sensuous, affective qualities of costumes, paintings or music in the films of Peter Greenaway or Derek Jarman, to the textured enfolding of origami in *Drawing Restraint 9* (2005, Matthew Barney), or to a mysterious box whose contents remain seductively hidden in *Belle de Jour* (1967, Luis Buñuel). Yet he also considers the queer value of a human-centred, ostensibly heterosexual sex scene between Jeremy Irons and Genevieve Bujold in *Dead Ringers* (1988, David Cronenberg), which minimises our visual access to full shots of the actors' faces and bodies and instead privileges shots of surgical equipment used as sadomasochistic bondage devices, extreme close-ups of "nonsexual" body parts such as hands, necks and ankles, and the fusion of orgasmic breathing with other ambient noise on the soundtrack; in this manner, such a scene "discourages our perception of two integrated, bi-gendered subjects engaged in a legibly heterosexual act" (60). Such transmutations of desire outside the Oedipal sphere can be located in a range of other films; consider, for instance, the overt fetishisation of shattered automobile machinery that thoroughly mediates the characters' sexual identifications in *Crash* (1996, Cronenberg), or the "sympathetic vibration" (Murphy) of the running engine that sensually permeates the in-car seduction scene in *Vendredi soir* (2002, Claire Denis). Just as the fractured temporality of time-image cinema incites the viewer to "produce" meaning, so too these queer permutations of cinematic desire lead the viewer to infer their own set of meaningful connections between and across bodies, genders and objects, "to produce new desiring-relations of our own, outside any hetero/homo grid" (16-17).

To return now to the *Temple* sequence of *Mishima*, we can see how Mizoguchi's relationship with the golden pavilion represents an ideal candidate for this mode of queer representation. Not only does it feature a character whose masochistic

obsession with beauty troubles the conventional borders of identity and orientation, and thus cannot be neatly reduced to any obvious categories of hetero- or homosexuality, but it also concerns his intense psychic investment in an object of desire that is not *innately* raced, sexed or gendered; in keeping with the liberating principles of Davis's queer desiring-image, the pavilion is an object that – just like the box in *Belle de Jour* or the cars in *Crash* – “may be male or female, animate or inanimate, conventional or otherwise, and so forth” (18). Clearly, then, it is Schrader's specific conception of the pavilion as a feminised structure, an anthropomorphic metaphor for male anxiety about the vagina as a threat to the male ego, which restricts the film's queer potentiality and recuperates Mizoguchi's desire within more familiar psychoanalytic realms. It is true that the heteropathic impulse does not perceive the Other “as” Other, so we could argue that Mizoguchi's desiring identification with the temple is in fact a self-loathing identification with its projected femininity; this resonates with Mishima's own self-loathing dissociation with his perceived “feminine side”, which so many critics and commentators have observed in both his literature and his personal life. But for Schrader, the dominant theme of *The Temple* is the abstract notion “that beauty in and of itself is dangerous, that being in the physical presence of beauty is life-threatening” (Bliss 7), and he instinctively visualises this concept in terms of Creed's monstrous feminine. As Mizoguchi prepares for his sexual encounter with the young woman by nervously unbuttoning her blouse, he becomes paralysed with fear and the camera zooms vertiginously towards the object of his thoughts: the pavilion. Rather than letting the monument remain a genderless symbol of beauty, Schrader's film dilutes its queer significance by assigning it a more conventional gender script, relaying Mizoguchi's desiring identification with a nonhuman object through *his own* heteronormative and masculinist visual conception of woman as unattainable, mysterious, dangerous Other.

This is not to say, however, that Schrader entirely forecloses upon the queerness of his subject's desiring-relations with self, Other and world. Rather, he shifts the terms and conditions of how that queerness is expressed. In one of the few existing scholarly articles on *Mishima*, grounded in literary and biographical theory rather than film studies, John Howard Wilson draws a comparison

between Schrader's filmmaking technique and literary modes of capturing subjectivity. In film-theoretical terms, *Mishima's* fractured montage and nonlinear treatment of temporality correspond closely to Deleuze's time-image; for Wilson, the literary equivalent of this image-making practice is the stream-of-consciousness mode of narration: "Both use narrative frames and flashbacks, cutting between past and present. Both develop distinctive styles and depend on them, though Schrader demonstrates that various styles in the same film can create contrasts and connections" (281). Rather than conducting a comparative analysis between literature and cinema, I want to consider how this technique of alternating styles to "create contrasts and connections" allows Schrader to articulate desiring-states that resist easy categorisation. In explaining how cinema's purely formal qualities of light, colour or sound intimately shape our response to a desiring-image, Davis asserts that "the sensory connections and disjunctions within or across cinematic shots complicate the frame's internal relations at any given moment while also ramifying outside of it" (18). To illustrate this point, he argues that the "aqueous light" of the New Zealand bush landscape in an early sequence in Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993) triggers a series of sensuous perceptual relations that mediate our affective engagement with later pivotal scenes of sexuality, violence or death, precisely because this recurring light "relat[es] to other objects and scenes in the film, such as the climactic near-drowning" (18). If these sensory and perceptual shifts at the level of style encourage the viewer to produce their own set of desiring-relations in a relatively linear film such as *The Piano*, it makes sense that Schrader's expanding field of "contrasts and connections" opens avenues of queer possibility. *Mishima's* constant interplay between past and present, fictional episodes and autobiographical confessions, black-and-white and colour stock, and realist and nonrealist staging, is thus instructive with regard to its ambiguous status as a queer text.

Schrader intercuts the *Temple* sequences with black-and-white flashbacks that elucidate Mishima's lonely and sheltered childhood, dominated by an intensely possessive grandmother who took him from his parents at the age of seven weeks. Denying him access to both his family and to male social peers, his grandmother nurtured what Mishima later described in essays such as *Sun and*

Steel as his feminine side – intellectual, literate, but detached from any social or physical experience of his own masculinity. While his writing talent and interest in drama were carefully nurtured, this development occurred at the expense of the normative processes of childhood socialisation: “When I examine my early childhood,” Scheider’s narration informs us, “I see myself as a boy leaning at the window, forever watching a world I was unable to change, forever hoping it would change by itself”.⁵⁴ Over this voiceover, we see the five-year-old Mishima gazing out a window at boys playing on the street. His expression registers a sense of frustrated disconnection from the traditional play routines and bonding rituals of his peer group, and Bailey’s camera further emphasises his isolation by trapping him behind the frame of the window, expressionistically barred and patterned with the falling shadows of tree branches outside. This pointedly claustrophobic visual set-up evokes the motifs of domestic entrapment familiar from the social melodramas of Douglas Sirk, Nicholas Ray and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, whose queer significance has been heavily theorised (Elsaesser, Klinger, Mercer and Shingler). At this point, Mishima’s gaze out the window is interrupted by a call from his ill grandmother, resting on the floor, to close the curtains, sit beside her, and massage her aching legs. When he shows signs of reluctance to do so, she manipulates him by instilling fear about his ability to integrate with the traditional male social world: “You would have died in your mother’s care. A delicate plant like you must not go outdoors... If you want her so much, just go! Leave me forever!” As the boy starts weeping and begins to massage her legs, the camera assumes the static, low-level position that Donald Richie terms the tatami shot. For Richie, this shot type is a still composition that adopts the perspective of a person seated on a traditional Japanese tatami mat, about three feet from the floor, and it is most widely associated with the domestic family dramas of Ozu:

⁵⁴ Schrader notes that the idea of using an English-speaking voiceover narration stemmed from Bresson’s decision to use the same device for the US release of *Pickpocket*. He found Scheider an ideal approximation of Mishima’s dualistic sensibility because his star image connoted both a literary, “intellectual” type and a more traditional “man’s man” type (Director’s Commentary).

This traditional view is the view in repose, commanding a very limited field of vision. It is the attitude for listening, for watching. It is the same as the position from which one watches the Noh or the rising moon, from which one partakes of the tea ceremony or a cup of hot sake. It is the aesthetic attitude; it is the passive attitude. (*Ozu* xii)

In his chapter on Ozu in *Transcendental Style*, Schrader explains how the tatami shot and other characteristic figures of Ozu's film form – the stillness of the camera, the proliferation of uncluttered and depopulated spaces, the use of the straight cut over any other editorial transition – are put in the service of one or two basic storylines that he chose to revisit and rework from one film to the next. His most celebrated films, including *Late Spring* (1949), *Early Summer* (1951), *Tokyo Story* (1953) and *Floating Weeds* (1959), typically concern alienated or estranged family relations between different generations on the cusp of epochal social change: “Ozu focuses on the tensions between the home and the office, the parent and the child, which are extensions of the tensions between the old and new Japan, between tradition and Westernization, and – ultimately – between man and nature” (*Transcendental Style* 19). Schrader's self-conscious invocation of the tatami shot in *Mishima* is one of the film's few direct references to Ozu, but its framing of the exchange between the sick yet dominant grandmother and weeping, feminised boy is especially interesting from a queer perspective. The suffocating bedroom, with its barred windows and closed curtains, establishes correspondences between the grandmother's body – as a site of illness, abjection and proximity to death – and the excessive feminine influence that segregates Mishima from a masculine world that is symbolically and literally denied to him. When the grandmother proclaims, “That's wonderful. Only you can make grandma feel better,” we cut to a shot of Mishima's traumatised, tear-stained face as he massages her legs; the vague yet troubling undercurrent of sexual perversion in her statement adds to a sense of diseased corporeality that the boy now associates with the feminine. More significant, however, is the sensory and perceptual chain of associations set in motion by this scene, and the *relational* impact that connects it to other scenes in the film. Through its evocative use of enclosed space and a few lines of dialogue, the scene conveys Mishima's profound childhood insecurity in his

masculine identity in a way that foreshadows his alter ego Mizoguchi's feelings of ugliness, fear of women and sexual performance anxiety in the *Temple* sequence. Furthermore, our lingering memory of the little boy forced to massage his grandmother's legs reverberates during a similarly resonant shot, ten minutes later, of Mizoguchi's hand trembling in terror over the exposed breast of the woman to whom he tries to surrender his virginity. In this regard, Schrader's adoption of a camera position associated with traditional domestic scenarios in classic Japanese cinema mediates a set of dysfunctional desiring relations that exist far outside the social norm. It amounts to a queer perversion of Ozu's tatami shot.

The sense of queer desire as a potent mixture of identificatory responses also undercuts another flashback sequence in this chapter, where a 12-year-old Mishima experiences a moment of erotic discovery comparable to both the night-soil worker episode that opens *Confessions* and the St. Sebastian moment recreated elsewhere in this film. During a trip to the theatre with his grandmother, who reiterates her statement that "You're just a fragile plant" after a woman bumps into him in the foyer, Mishima catches a glimpse of a dressing room door opening to reveal an onnagata sitting backstage in full female costume. The actor and the boy exchange an erotically charged glance of self-recognition before the door shuts closed; Mishima's gaze here seems to float between an exteriorising identification with the actor's femininity – his realisation that "*I am like him*", or rather, to follow the logic of heteropathic investments more closely, "*I am him*" – and a desire that he does not quite understand. The camera holds for a moment on the door closing in Mishima's face, disbaring him from a mysterious adult world of erotic possibility about which he is now deeply curious. As with five-year-old Mishima's plaintive gaze at the boys on the street (see Fig 3.5), 12-year-old Mishima's incipient awareness of homosexuality is presented as a familiar précis of queer looking relations, and the closing door becomes a visual metaphor for his experience of painful isolation. Here we may recall Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's articulation, seminal in the development of 1990s queer theory, about the LGBT child's early recognition of his/her difference as being inevitably structured by "associations

of shame”, and by “the terrifying powerlessness of gender-dissonant or otherwise stigmatised childhood” (4).

Fig 3.5



Again, what is most interesting about the onnagata scene for my purposes is the manner in which its sexual potency transmits to other scenes that take place before and afterwards, and thus conditions our reception of the film as a whole. In his analysis of this scene, George Kouvaros notes, “The prolonged contact between the small boy and the actor suggests the stirrings of the young author’s sexual impulses and a type of temporal overlap whereby different Mishimas seem to coexist” (61-62). It is precisely this coexistence of “different Mishimas” – produced equally by the sequencing of the film and by the viewer’s own creative inferences between and across different narrative and stylistic registers – which enables a queer interpretation of the film in the absence of overt homosexual content. Fusing elegant black-and-white cinematography, naturalistic production design by Kazuo Takenaka (a veteran art director from Japan’s prestigious Toho Studios, who had worked on several of Naruse’s later films), and the measured authority of Scheider’s voiceover narration, these realist flashbacks are presented as the authenticating context undergirding the colour-saturated, theatrically staged fictional passages. As such, they allow us to read Mizoguchi’s ostensibly heterosexual neurosis within the wider heteropathic logic of Mishima’s masochistic desiring identifications, which are directed

towards images of male bodies (the St. Sebastian painting, the onnagata). Bringing our knowledge of Mishima's desiring relations into the *Temple* sequence, we can read Mizoguchi's fear of women, desire for beauty and psychic investment in the pavilion as inherently queer phenomena. Taken in context with the film's second chapter, "Art", we can also understand his urge to project himself onto the frozen, ahistoric beauty of the temple as a function of that queer masochistic drive to preserve the body by dying at a peak of physical vitality. And yet *Mishima* only flirts with queerness up to a point. In what emerges as a structuring ambivalence of the film, the fractured narrative design privileges a montage that opens onto queer flows of deterritorialised desire, while the enclosed and enclosing sets present more conventional inscriptions of sexuality that tend to recuperate it within a heteronormative visual schema.

Gender Trouble: The Body as "Art"

For the fiction-based elements of the film's second chapter, subtitled "Art", Schrader originally hoped to dramatise passages from Mishima's most explicitly homosexual novel, *Forbidden Colors*, which concerns a closeted married man exploring gay nightlife. As with the use of *Temple* in the "Beauty" segment, a few pivotal episodes from the novel would be integrated into the film chapter to provide commentary on factual developments in Mishima's life and career during the early-mid 1950s, by which time he had amassed major critical recognition and become the only Japanese author whose work had been translated in the West. The sequences from *Forbidden Colors* would adumbrate a flamboyant, exhibitionistic phase of his life where he began to rail against the traditional conception of the writer as invisible and anonymous. Mishima's deepening passion for bodybuilding, acting on stage and screen, and having his image recorded in photo shoots roughly coincided with a period in which he began frequenting the first wave of gay bars and cafés that appeared in Tokyo after the Second World War. Typically carrying a pen and note cards, his stated objective in visiting these establishments was to research homosexual nightlife while writing his new novel. As John Nathan observes in his biography, "There is no evidence that Mishima had become actively homosexual until his first

journey to the West in 1952; but clearly the writing of *Forbidden Colors* led him deeper into the homosexual world than he had dared to venture before” (106).⁵⁵

Yet when Schrader attempted to use *Forbidden Colors* as the middle novel in his film, he was dismayed to find that Mishima’s widow denied him the adaptation rights. According to the director,

part of his widow’s post-mortem business is to whitewash the bibliography. She has tried to play down the anti-social aspects of her husband’s work, the politics and the homosexuality; she really hates *Forbidden Colors*, though I think it’s a terrific book and I thought I could eventually beat her down about it. (Jackson 177)

On the contrary, Schrader’s desire to adapt the novel eventually became a legal sticking point with the widow, who granted him the rights to the rest of Mishima’s literary estate on the condition that he agreed not to use any material from *Forbidden Colors* (Jackson 177).⁵⁶ His response to the creative limitations now imposed on the “Art” chapter was to adapt a few sequences from another of Mishima’s 1950s novels: *Kyoko’s House*, a complex and ambitious 1,000-page epic that received a muted response upon its serialised publication in 1959 and remains his only major work not yet translated into English. The novel features four young male protagonists – a businessman, a boxer, a painter, and an actor – who each respond in different ways to their existential crises of alienation in postwar Japanese society; not surprisingly, the four characters have been widely understood as expressing different facets of Mishima’s own identity (Nathan

⁵⁵ Nathan’s book remains the definitive Mishima biography, and he also contributes valuable insights on Mishima in a bonus feature on the Criterion DVD. Other notable biographies include Henry Scott Stokes’ *The Life and Death of Yukio Mishima* (2000), Marguerite Yourcenar’s *Mishima: A Vision of the Void* (2001) and, most recently, Naoki Inose and Hiroaki Sato’s *Persona: A Biography of Yukio Mishima* (2013).

⁵⁶ The notion of a major American film depicting Mishima’s homosexuality triggered threats of violence by right-wing extremist groups during the shooting, and “rumours that if the film were ever shown in Japan there would be bombings” (Jackson 181). The film was withdrawn from a scheduled screening at 1985’s Tokyo International Film Festival and was never officially released in Japan.

160). Aside from one scene in which the men debate the relationship between art and the body at a soba noodle stand in downtown Tokyo, Schrader dispensed with the first three characters and instead focused on the novel's fourth hero. Far from conceding to the widow's efforts to quash public expressions of Mishima's homosexuality, his decision to focus on only one character from *Kyoko's House* was a strategic move to negotiate the problems of being unable to adapt his preferred literary example. In fact, it was the character of Osamu – the young actor – who most closely embodied “the same kind of sexual ambivalence and narcissism I had wanted from *Forbidden Colors*” (Jackson 178). Schrader's goal was to find ways of evoking the homoeroticism that pervaded Mishima's writing, but in the absence of a fictional alter ego whose homosexuality was clearly articulated. His response was to displace a range of thematic and stylistic elements of homoeroticism onto this character who neither has sex with men nor conveys any erotic interest in men, but whose identity is so utterly organised around sexual narcissism that the viewer can hardly consider him heterosexual.

In the film, we are first introduced to Osamu (Kenji Sawada) via the now-familiar cutting pattern that connotes a narrative shift between Mishima's “real life” and his fiction: from serene black-and-white to vibrant colour, naturalistic staging to nonrealist décor, and static, Ozu-style compositions to rangy, fluid camerawork. More significant than these stylistic markers, however, is the manner in which Schrader consistently establishes editorial correspondences between the real Mishima and his fictional protagonists. In the first chapter, a shimmery cross-fade from a medium close-up of 12-year-old Mishima, stuttering in response to the provocations of a school bully, sutures us into a shot of his literary alter ego Mizoguchi failing to discharge his words to Kashiwagi. In this chapter, we transition into the *Kyoko's House* sequence from an especially pregnant snippet of voiceover narration that finds Mishima writing alone at night – an archetypal Schrader man in a room:

Every night at midnight I return to my desk to write. I thoroughly analyse why I am attracted to a particular theme. I drag everything into my conscious mind. I boil it into abstraction. I am constantly calculating until I sit down to write. Only then can my unconscious dreams take over.

The sequence that follows is thus already contextualised as a direct projection of Mishima's unconscious fantasy world, and the characters that populate it as not merely fictional creations but extensions of his own psyche. Opening in what appears to be a theatrical rehearsal space, designed by Ishioka as an open ceiling grid in incongruous shades of deep pink and metallic grey, the camera pans backwards through a crowd of actors reading scripts for an audition. It settles on Osamu, smoking a cigarette in a black polo neck sweater. Far from the stuttering acolyte in the previous chapter, Osamu looks effete, worldly and coolly dejected, as though he has failed to secure a desired role. Before leaving the theatre, he passes a young actress melodramatically performing a scene from *Romeo and Juliet* – “Come, night! Come, Romeo! Come, gentle night” – and pauses to give a barely suppressed sneer. He appears jealous of the actress getting the opportunity to publicly emote, express herself and, most importantly, be *seen* by others in the act of performance. The use of a classic Shakespeare tragedy proves an ironic foreshadowing of Osamu's own story, which grows progressively darker as he obsesses over his looks, devotes himself to an intense bodybuilding regime, and enters a deeply sadomasochistic relationship with a powerful older woman in order to pay off a business debt incurred by his café proprietress mother. In the process, his overwhelming need to envisage himself as an object of desire will lead him to act out, in a morbidly perverse fashion, the myth of star-crossed lovers who die in a bloody suicide pact.

By confining his focus to an intimate study of one character from a sprawling novel that was not his first choice, Schrader faced an unusually restrictive challenge in adapting passages from *Kyoko's House* to the screen. At the formal level, Osamu's traits of “sexual ambivalence and narcissism” are reflected through fundamental decisions about casting, blocking, and relations between bodies in the frame. For instance, in the aforementioned theatre scene, Osamu's gaze at the actress playing Juliet clearly suggests an identification with femininity that manifests itself as a jealous longing to take her place. As he turns to exit the space, a more conventionally masculine young man bumps into him and grunts aggressively under his breath (echoing the woman who bumped into 12-year-old Mishima in the theatre foyer), to which Osamu responds with an

irritated glance. This brief scene thus reconciles the contradictory desires that lie at the heart of its subject's conflicted gender identity: to avow his identification with the actress emoting onstage, and to express his masculinity by possessing a virile physique. The sense of sexual ambiguity is reinforced by the casting of Sawada, whom Schrader describes as "a rock star, a kind of Mick Jagger in Japan" (Jackson 181). Sawada was famed for his use of outrageous costumes and make-up onstage, and was nicknamed "Julie" due to his love of Julie Andrews; in addition, he had already played a version of Narcissus in a controversial nude advertisement for Parco department stores, photographed by Ishioka.⁵⁷

In an earlier passage about the dynamics of male masochism as outlined by Silverman, we saw how this perversion is based on a male identification with the lack, specularity and exhibitionism that are socially designated the province of femininity. I want to briefly revisit this territory to consider how this form of phallic repudiation, which was vividly evoked in Mizoguchi's self-occluding desire for beauty, plays out more fully in Osamu's character arc. Citing Freud's decision to use the term "feminine masochism" in "The Economic Problem of Masochism" on the basis that so many of his male patients fantasise about being castrated, sodomised or impregnated, Silverman posits that "feminine masochism is a specifically *male* pathology, so named because it positions its sufferer as a woman" (189). Although both male and female masochists may exhibit closely related symptoms in their imaginary and actual lives, Silverman traces an unusual emphasis on masculinity in masochism studies by not only Freud but Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Theodor Reik and Gilles Deleuze to conclude that "it is only in the case of men that feminine masochism can be seen to assume pathological proportions" (189). Thus, while masochistic processes in women are culturally normalised as a rite of passage into adult female subjectivity,

⁵⁷ Schrader told Kevin Jackson that "we succeeded much better in the casting of Kenji Sawada" than Ken Ogata, who "lacks Mishima's bisexuality. Ogata's image and persona are very much those of a somewhat lower-middle or working-class heterosexual and, try as he might, that is still how he is perceived. We searched long and far trying to find an actor who had that sexual ambiguity and we just couldn't" (181).

the male subject, on the contrary, cannot avow feminine masochism without calling into question his identification with the masculine position. All of this is another way of suggesting that what is acceptable for the female subject is pathological for the male. (Silverman 190)

In considering how Osamu's identification with femininity is gradually shown to assume "pathological proportions", we must assess how Schrader queers him through a range of textual strategies. Most obviously, his surface qualities of effeminacy are visible to other characters, who either comment directly or gesture implicitly towards them; there are moments when Osamu actively encourages external perceptions of him as fragile, specular or otherwise "different" in ways that locate him outside the bounds of traditional masculinity. Lying in bed with a casual girlfriend after a sexual encounter in a seedy motel set constructed from pink plastic, Formica and flashing neon, he raises his bare leg from the sheets and asks "What do you think? Would they look good in tights?" When she offers a disinterested response while studying her nail polish ("I guess so"), Osamu continues to verbalise his stream-of-consciousness observations on his body as though he were barely aware of her presence in the room: "These damn legs. I pay too much attention to my face, but what about my body? If only I were more muscular, like a matador. Then my whole body could be my face." Evoking Julian's unabashed attention to his appearance in *American Gigolo*, he now retreats from his stated alignment with femininity by suddenly declaring that he will commit himself to a ritual of hypermasculine bodily transformation: "I'm going to take up bodybuilding". With this announcement, the young woman erupts in derisive laughter, climbs astride him, and begins to tickle him. "I mean it", he protests petulantly, but in response she teasingly mock-wrestles him: "All right, muscle man. You *are* a weakling". Osamu's attempt to connect with his masculine side is construed as ludicrous and unlikely even by a woman with whom he is having a heterosexual affair.

In his analysis of *Kyoko's House*, Nathan argues that Osamu's narcissism is a manifestation of the void at the centre of his life, of his quite literal feeling that "he can never be certain of his own existence" (128). As such, it seems to

foreclose upon his capacity to experience genuine desire towards another human subject. To this end, Nathan quotes a translated passage from the novel that suggests Osamu's sexual encounters with women are utterly conditioned by a powerful reflexive attraction to their desire for him: "For a fleeting proof of his existence he slept with women. Women could be depended on to respond to the fascination of his good looks. But there was something that responded even more faithfully – the mirror" (*Kyoko's House* qtd. in Nathan 128). Osamu's deepest desire is thus located in a wholly autoerotic attraction to his mirror image. Women are never considered sexually appealing subjects in and of themselves, but are valued only to the extent that their gaze reflects desire for him. Rather than reciprocate their attraction, he seeks to identify with, invest in, and externalise himself onto *their* vision of his "self" at a peak of desirability. According to Silverman, this kind of "peculiar identificatory transfer... is once again indicative of the heteropathic impulse implicit in feminine masochism", allowing "the fantasizing subject himself to see how he will be seen" by a desiring Other (207). The heteropathic dynamics of Osamu's desire are most explicitly evoked in the motel scene, when his girlfriend's laughter briefly punctures his fantasy vision of himself as a heroic, bodybuilding matador. Prying a pocket mirror from his hand, she holds it up to herself over his nude body, thereby splitting them into a hermaphrodite fusion of body parts (see Fig 3.6). "I'll be your mirror", she proclaims, whispering gently as she moves the mirror over her own anatomy: "This is your hair. This is your face. This is your breast". Although he does not resemble his idealised muscleman vision, Osamu is transfixed by an image that allows him to "see" himself from inside a worshipping female gaze. The woman clearly understands that this is the psychic transfer upon which his libido turns: "See, isn't this better than a mirror?"

Fig 3.6



In his endeavour to queer the Deleuzian time-image, Davis unlocks a particularly rich vein of erotic potentiality in one of that book's most widely debated image-types. Deleuze's crystal-image, which is often considered the conceptual cornerstone of postwar time-image cinema in general, is a complex aesthetic regime in which different modes of temporality intersect such that the distinctions between true and false narrative events dissolve. While the time-image broadly departs from the continuity principles of movement-image cinema, the crystalline mode represents its logical extreme by shattering the conventional transitions from scene to scene and, in some cases, from shot to shot. As past, present and future story worlds coalesce and fragment over the course of a film, the viewer is presented with a multitude of potential relations that impart an ever-expanding chain of possible meanings. In place of causation and chronology, the viewer is required to engage directly with the temporal texture of the image in order to produce their understanding. Deleuze theorises this crystalline structure in terms of *actual* and *virtual* image-relations: "the crystal-image energizes the links between an actual shot as we perceive it, the temporal multiplicities subsisting within it, and the virtual potentials it bears for signifying otherwise" (Davis 142). Davis's queer crystal-image transposes this alternation of actual and virtual relations from the temporal realm onto equivalent systems of gender and sexuality, mobilising similarly "unstable relations between and among shots" (142) to articulate erotic possibilities that –

in their fundamental ambivalence – prove “queerly resistant to identity-based essentialisms or standard movements of desire” (150). In this regard, he reads the suppressed homoeroticism that occupies an uncertain limbo between dream, memory and flashback in *Beau travail* (1999, Claire Denis), or the dense web of gender identifications unleashed by the nonlinear sex-reassignment narrative of *The Skin I Live In* (2011, Pedro Almodóvar), as especially potent examples of these crystalline structures of queer desire.

In the case of *Mishima*, crystalline desiring-images emerge through what Kouvaros terms “an explicit exchange between the body of the film and the body it seeks to represent” (61). For Kouvaros, this corporeal exchange is exemplified by an early sequence where the composition shifts almost imperceptibly from the adult Mishima leaving his house on the morning of his eventual suicide to five-year-old Mishima gazing out of his grandmother’s bedroom window. In addition to other examples that I have already discussed – the evocation of future sexual interests in the gaze that passes between 12-year-old Mishima and the onnagata, the introductory cross-fade between the stuttering 12-year-old Mishima and Mizoguchi – such moments “enact a type of formal disturbance whereby, for a brief moment, past and present are unsettled. This reconfiguring of the scene keeps the narrative from congealing, but it also allows something to become visible that would otherwise remain hidden” (Kouvaros 62). This sense of something straining for visibility intensifies in the second chapter of the film, where the proliferation of formal disturbances increasingly feels like an attempt to express a thwarted and compromised sexuality. The “real” Mishima and “fictional” Osamu are thus queered through a crystalline enfolding of actual and virtual image relations. Through careful sequencing and allusive juxtapositions, Schrader allows erotically suggestive links between author and character to accumulate until any coherent distinction between their desiring identifications collapses in uncertainty. From the scene of Osamu gazing at the split reflection of his androgynous mirror image, we cut to a black-and-white segment of Mishima presumably conducting research for *Forbidden Colors* in a Tokyo gay bar, smiling with a drink in his hand as male couples dance on the floor. Scheider’s voiceover narration now resumes, proceeding to make the film’s only direct reference to homosexuality via an adapted passage from *Confessions*:

My life is in many ways like that of an actor. I wear a mask; I play a role. When he looks in the mirror, the homosexual – like the actor – sees what he fears most: the decay of the body.

While this is a striking passage that appears to directly illuminate the central themes of not only the film but also Mishima's whole life, it would be unwise to take it too literally. Firstly, its placement in the film is structured by our knowledge that Osamu is also an actor; that his supposed interest in women is a kind of mask, and that he is playing a kind of (heterosexual) role to generate the attention that feeds his bottomless ego; and finally that his narcissism belies a terror of losing his beauty to the ravages of time. Furthermore, the following sequence shows Mishima dancing with a younger man whom he brutally rejects after he makes an insensitive joke about his body getting soft. When the young man begs Mishima to explain why he suddenly wants nothing more to do with him, Mishima coolly explains that "Both you and I have a strong sense of aesthetics. When you look in the mirror, you see beauty... I can't even look at myself. So don't make jokes like that again." His bruised ego mirrors Osamu's sensitivity upon being teasingly labelled a "weakling", and the callousness with which he dismisses the young man demonstrates how heteropathic desire evaporates at the very moment the Other's gaze – whether male or female – fails to reflect the idealised image of the self. In this respect, the film's editing patterns frame our engagement with the "officially" heterosexual passages from *Kyoko's House* in terms of a broader critical understanding that is distinctly queer. Yet Schrader's use of the revealing extract from *Confessions* does not work to elucidate a unified, coherent or authentic homosexual identity that supposedly lies beneath the metaphorical mask of a closeted heterosexual lifestyle. Rather than reifying essentialist truths about identity or orientation, it suggests that the "actual" author and "virtual" character share an identical relationship to their mirror image, one that is entirely predicated upon the gaze of a desiring Other. If their autoerotic impulse is understood as fundamentally homosexual, that is primarily because it revolves around the self. And rather than engage with Mishima and Osamu as discretely separate characters whose desires extend in different directions, we understand their erotic identifications

as circular, reversible, and dependent upon the same terms and conditions; their desires “compound and reflect each other – similar to the fractal growths and endlessly mirroring faces of a crystal” (Davis 142).

The blurred boundaries between where Osamu ends and Mishima begins extend to the rest of the chapter. For instance, we *hear* that Osamu has taken up bodybuilding, but what we *see* is Mishima himself sweating and grunting through a ritualistic workout regime, shot in that obsessive montage style now familiar from both *Taxi Driver* and *American Gigolo*; yet as Mishima finishes his exercise at the gym and enters the changing room, we cut on the opening doorway from black-and-white to saturated colour and instead find Osamu showering after *his* workout. A little later, during a similar photo-shoot montage of Mishima posing as a gallery of homoerotic masculine icons (including St. Sebastian, samurai warriors, and leather-jacketed, gun-toting gangsters), he theorises his drive to record and preserve his body at a peak of perfection in a manner that also highlights the queer ramifications of Osamu’s narcissism:

A writer is a voyeur par excellence. I came to detest this position. I sought not only to be the seer, but also the seen. Men wear masks to make themselves beautiful, but unlike a woman’s, a man’s determination to become beautiful is always a desire for death.

While the dizzying shift between actual and virtual registers encourages us to read *Mishima* in the crystalline mode, the film’s portrait of narcissism as a closed, self-reflexive system of desire also resonates with an even more specific subcategory of crystal-image that, according to Davis, carries especially queer valences. For Deleuze, one of the characteristic models of the crystal-image is what he terms the “closed crystal”, films in which “the mirrors are not content with reflecting the actual image but constitute the prism, the lens where the split image constantly runs after itself to connect up with itself” (*Cinema 2* 83). Discussing the circular narrative structures and glittering mise-en-scène of diamond jewellery, reflecting mirrors and glass surfaces that define Max Ophüls melodramas such as *La Ronde* (1950), *The Earrings of Madame De...* (1953) and *Lola Montès* (1955), Deleuze argues that these patterns foreclose upon the

possibility of authentic human connections or hopeful futures. Instead they tend to isolate and enclose characters in a vicious circle of repeated behaviours, failed relationships and “theatricalized self-performances” (Davis 151) from which there is no earthly escape. Locating comparable aesthetic and narrative structures in contemporary cinema, Davis terms Gus Van Sant “the queer auteur of the glass cage, the long take, the luminous surface, and the thwarting of desire” (151): the aimless road-trip narratives of *My Own Private Idaho* (1991) and *Gerry* (2002) lead back to the same place they started, while the deathly alienation and roaming camerawork of *Elephant* (2003) and *Last Days* (2005) “chart a circular universe with “no outside” (151). He also cites *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999, Stanley Kubrick) as an intriguing example of a film where ostensibly heterosexual protagonists “repeat the same movements and the same stories, forever reencountering the same small set of characters” (152) in a manner that calcifies and benumbs their desire.

For Mishima/Osamu, the closed crystal is the mirror itself – a brilliant surface that traps their desire in a ritualistic cycle of compulsive behaviours, circular movements, and externalising projections onto other people that only ever fold back onto the self. In their special emphasis on claustrophobic repetition, closed crystal-images tend to freeze time into an endless, futureless present. Indeed, this is exactly the temporal mode that the narcissist seeks to attain in order to preserve the body at a peak of beauty, thus granting it the status of a human artwork. Having dinner with his friends (the boxer and painter characters from *Kyoko’s House*), Osamu listens quietly as the two men debate aesthetic attitudes to the human body. The boxer argues that, despite his interest in Michelangelo and Rodin’s representations of the male physique, the body itself is a work of art that does not require artistic mediation. The painter challenges his statement by highlighting the natural decay of the human body with the passage of time, and the consequent need to freeze time in order to preserve it:

Okay, let’s say you’re right. What good does your sweating and grunting do? Even the most beautiful body is soon destroyed by age. Where is beauty then? Only art makes human beauty endure... You must devise an

artist's scheme to preserve it. You must commit suicide at the height of your beauty.

Osamu's perspective on his own beauty is now haunted by the spectre of death, just as surely as Mishima's preceding acknowledgement that the male drive for beauty is fundamentally inseparable from its accompanying death drive. He is also haunted by the nagging discord between his actual self, as visible to others, and his virtual perception of himself as an exemplary specimen of masculinity (which again connects him to Julian in *American Gigolo*).⁵⁸ In the novel, we learn that the bodybuilding regime instils Osamu with the temporary sensation of inhabiting a unified subjectivity:

In the mirror now, unmistakably, he existed! The disappointed, abandoned youth of a few months ago was nowhere to be seen. Here was only strong, beautiful muscle, the proof of its existence clear. For what he now beheld was something he had created himself; moreover it *was* himself. (*Kyoko's House* qtd. in Nathan 128)

In the film, this superficially engorged sense of personal identity manifests itself through his social behaviour and body language. At the diner, he lounges in an empty booth and flirts brazenly with his mother while striking vain poses, as if before an imaginary photographer; his sunglasses, Hawaiian shirt, slouching posture and mannered smoking suggest a postwar Japanese pastiche of 1950s Hollywood bad boy iconography. Osamu's mother revels in their flirtation, which is loaded with playful innuendo and barely suppressed incestuous designs: he compares her garish makeup to "the madam of a French brothel"; they enquire teasingly about each other's sexual partners; and, in a gesture of

⁵⁸ In his analysis of Richard Gere's nude scene in *American Gigolo*, Peter Lehman briefly mentions *Mishima* as another example of Schrader's reluctance to depict male nudity onscreen despite the fact that it again "deals with a man who becomes totally preoccupied with his body" (227). For more on the relations between bodybuilding, narcissism and social constructions of masculinity, see Alan M. Klein's *Little Big Men: Bodybuilding Subculture and Gender Construction* (1993) and, in a specifically filmic context, Susan Jeffords' *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (1994).

narcissistic desperation, he seeks her approval of his newly developed pectorals and buttocks. While he does not return her (conscious or unconscious) desire, her admiring gaze functions as a virtual mirror in the familiar heteropathic mode. Just moments after he has bragged of his new musculature, however, he proves utterly unable to defend his mother from a physical assault by a loan shark, who flings a cup of hot coffee in her face as punishment for failing to repay her growing debt. As Osamu prepares to counterattack, the thug punches him in the stomach and beats him over the head, causing him to drop to the floor in a fetal ball. In a slow backwards zoom, we see Osamu take the mirror from his pocket to study his shattered ego; it is the same mirror that his girlfriend earlier used to show him his feminine side, and we hear the same musical leitmotif as that scene. The contrast between the superficial masculinity of his newly muscled body and the perceived femininity of his psyche thus highlights another queer tension between actual and virtual relations in the image. Davis explains that, within the crystalline mode in general, “the impression that an actual person or object makes in a mirror registers [...] as a virtual reflection”, and that “neither the person at the mirror nor the reflection is more actual or virtual than the other” (147). This capacity for ambivalent signification is intensified in *queer* crystal-images, where notions of orientation, desire and identity itself are liberated from prescribed social categories. But in this instance of a queer, *closed* crystal-image, we see the full extent of Osamu’s entrapment within the glass cage of autoerotic narcissism. In an extraordinary piece of mise-en-scène, the theatrical diner set slowly dismantles of its own accord: the green stage flats are opened by runners on visible tracks, the camera continues to zoom backwards, and Osamu lies spot-lit on the floor, shrinking into blackness while gazing into the mirror. He is the very embodiment of narcissism, isolated from all possibility of human connection.

Forbidden Colour: The Masochistic Contract

Osamu’s autoerotic impulse is enacted to its fullest degree through an affair with his sinister and seductive middle-aged patroness, Kiyomi. Their first meeting is a formal interview in the private back room of a restaurant. Against a painted

screen of emphatically clitoral orchids, Kiyomi sternly informs Osamu of her intention to repossess his mother's business before challenging him with a more personal set of observations: "You're like me. My beautiful shadow. You're vain and bored. Full of yourself. You like to play childish games. You're an actor, aren't you?" Smiling wryly at her prescience, he begins to reciprocate her icy flirtation but is rebuffed by her warning that she has no interest in men pretending to love her. He responds with what seems like an admission of homosexuality, but is rather an acknowledgement that, for him, desire is a one-way street: "As for me, I don't love women much. They make me feel emptied out." Kiyomi here reveals herself as his heteropathic dream woman when she gives a knowing smile and replies "All the better". Presenting him with a contract, she offers to cancel his mother's debt if he agrees to let her purchase him as an object: "Write: 'I hereby certify that my life and body belong to Kiyomi Akita.' I want to buy you." The notion of the contract – which clearly thrills Osamu – firmly locates their affair within the familiar aesthetic structures of Deleuzian masochism, as identified in his influential essay *Coldness and Cruelty*. Evaluating the psychosexual dynamics of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's novella *Venus in Furs*, Deleuze posits that the term masochism does not connote the obverse of sadistic sexual practice but instead designates a ritualistic and performative transaction between a submissive man and a cold, powerful, dominant woman whom he installs as the "oral mother". As such, the masochistic contract enacts a symbolic castration that is facilitated by the psychic eradication of the paternal imago and the simultaneous investiture of the oral mother with the phallus:

A contract is established between the hero and the woman, whereby at a precise point in time and for a determinate period she is given every right over him. By this means the masochist tries to exorcise the danger of the father and to ensure that the temporal order of reality and experience will be in conformity with the symbolic order, in which the father has been abolished for all time. Through the contract ... the masochist reaches towards the most mythical and most timeless realms, where [the mother] dwells. Finally, he ensures that he will be beaten ... what is beaten, humiliated and ridiculed in him is the image and likeness of the father, and

the possibility of the father's aggressive return.... (*Coldness and Cruelty* 58)

The masochistic contract thus appears to carry implicitly queer connotations for both parties. As Deleuze explains, the pact to eradicate the paternal imago and grant the mother a total monopoly on power and privilege authorises a phallic exchange: *both* the submissive male and the dominant female agree to suspend and disavow their “actual” genders in favour of “virtual” gender roles that honour the terms of the contract. Furthermore, as Gaylyn Studlar argues in an especially rich gaze theory that draws on *Coldness and Cruelty*, the drive for symbiotic fusion with the oral mother restores the male masochist to a pre-oedipal fantasy realm before sexual differentiation takes place (612). These role-playing, gender-bending dynamics are vividly animated in a shot of Osamu reclining on a couch in the iconic St. Sebastian pose, arms folded behind his head as Kiyomi worships his body. She softly traces a razorblade along his torso until it makes a superficial cut, evoking Sebastian's midsection pierced by arrows. “Your skin is so beautiful”, she explains, “I just had to cut it”; upon hearing this confession, Osamu rolls his head back in rapture. Even more than the bodybuilding, the masochistic contract – in which he absolves all pretence towards heteronormative masculinity, phallic authority and, presumably, penetrative sex – finally allows him to visualise himself within the desiring gaze of an Other who wants nothing but to worship him: “A thought just occurred to me,” he begins. “This is the woman I've been looking for. I've finally found her.” I don't need a mirror anymore. I feel clearly that I exist.”

In assessing this chapter's potentiality to articulate a queer sexuality that troubles the social order, we must also evaluate how it stages its *mise-en-scène* of desire. In this regard, the most obvious element to consider is the way in which Osamu's autoeroticism is formalised in a near-constant suffusion of pink colour design that gradually accumulates affective potency (see Fig 3.7). In the theatre scene, he stands against a shocking pink wall that encodes him as sexually ambivalent, while in the motel scene he lies corpse-like under a transparent sheet in a composition almost exclusively designed in different shades of pink. The strange room in which he and Kiyomi enact their fantasies exhibits a similar

clash of rose, salmon and magenta tones that bleed into each other and suggest an erotic space outside the bounds of conventional sexuality. Pink here expresses the non-normative, evoking David Batchelor's oft-quoted thesis that any colour that exceeds its boundaries is typically deemed "the property of some 'foreign' body – usually the feminine, the oriental, the primitive, the infantile, the vulgar, the queer or the pathological" (22). For Rosalind Galt, too, colour that escapes the borders of line to register as pure affect has an implicitly queer potential; it mirrors the refusal of queer sexuality to accept normative structures of identity or orientation, and hereby triggers "patriarchal fears of overwhelming femininity, formlessness, and the loss of straight male subjectivity" (82-83). Schrader thus plays on our Othering conceptions of the colour pink to atomise a queer aesthetic of desire, dispersing it across the frame until it threatens to engulf it. In terms of sheer affective force, this pink intensity collapses distinctions between homosexuality, femininity and narcissism in an effort to map the forbidden colours of Osamu's – and Mishima's – psyche.

Figs 3.7 and 3.8 (overleaf)





But while saturated colour has the potential to “propose a visual and erotic economy of engulfment” (Galt 86) that repudiates conventional notions of heterosexual mastery, dominance and detachment, Schrader also works to contain these elements within the borders of Deleuzian masochism. Silverman reminds us that *Coldness and Cruelty* presents “a “utopian” rereading of masochism” (211), one whose erotic power is thoroughly dependent on mutually understood vectors of disavowal, fetishism and transference. Its role-play temporarily suspends the actual in order to flirt with virtual fantasies of castration, but its formal and narrative structure ultimately “constitutes a feminine yet heterosexual male subject” (212). Citing Amber Musser’s study of Deleuze, Galt claims that while this aesthetic initially “seems useful for a queer reader... it falls apart both in its project of reconstituting heterosexual male subjectivity and in its dependence on the female dominant as merely a prop to that subjectivity” (273). Of course, the emphasis on artifice and performance within Deleuzian masochism fully extends to the staging of *Mishima*. The pink room in which Osamu and Kiyomi’s fantasies unfold is a bizarre set that Schrader described as a “little glowing flower... without a door” (Director’s Commentary), spot-lit and fringed by black spaces that designate it as a heightened theatrical arena (see Fig 3.8). The emphasis upon an enclosed stage space thus evokes the *Romeo & Juliet* fantasy of a lovers’ suicide that haunts Osamu’s psychic life, and which is fully born out in his final encounter with Kiyomi (to which I will later return). More interesting, though, is the use of a

high-angle overhead establishing shot that constructs the room as a female reproductive system. Even more so than the golden pavilion, Schrader here figures desire as an enclosing and deathlike Oedipal trap. While the uterine architecture materialises a male heteropathic identification with femininity that defies the social order and its biological mandates, it also signals the basis of the castration fantasy in a more conventional desire for merger and fusion that Galt associates with “the heteronormative and patriarchal decorative order of Deleuzian masochism” (273).

This formal recuperation into heterosexuality amounts to a final, nagging incoherence between the desiring relations of Mishima and Osamu. Writing about the uncanny parallel between Mishima’s own life and the fictional character of Osamu in *Kyoko’s House*, Nathan claims that:

In the youth who is a narcissist because he can never be certain that he is real, in the narcissist who discovers in pain a sweet proof of his existence and is therefore also a masochist, in the masochist who anticipates only pleasure in his painful death and who expects from it a consummate verification of his existence, Mishima rendered an unmistakable portrait of himself. (166)

Schrader effectively captures a great deal of the psychosexual phenomena that unite Osamu and Mishima in this chapter, particularly through crystalline editing that closes the gap between actual and virtual registers of desire. Yet there is also a sense in which he repeatedly projects his own neuroses onto his subject: “I came to Mishima because his story is part of my fantasy world”, he once told interviewer Tony Rayns. “If I’m going to do a film about my own death wishes, my own homoerotic, narcissistic feelings, my own over-calculation of life and my own inability to *feel*, well, here’s a man who has repeatedly stated those identical problems” (Rayns “Truth with the Power of Fiction” 256). His assumption that his and Mishima’s problems are identical yields an anthropomorphised and invaginated mise-en-scène of desire; this marks the film as an ambitious if compromised queer text, one that inadvertently demonstrates the difficulty of representing truly fresh modes of desiring-production onscreen.

Perhaps fittingly for a filmmaker whose characters are defined by their inescapable narcissism, the recurrence of these images often makes *Mishima* feel more like an “unmistakable portrait of himself”.

Harmonising Pen and Sword in “Action”

In his analysis of *Mishima*, James King describes the film as a portrait of “a man who is deeply afraid that he is not sufficiently masculine” (79). For the first two chapters of the film, Mishima’s tormented relationship to his masculinity emerges through what I have characterised as implicitly queer formal strategies: crystalline editing patterns, intensification of colour, and set designs that evoke distinct sexual anxieties that appear to belong to Schrader as much as Mishima. The film’s final two chapters, “Action” and “Harmony of Pen and Sword”, traverse a rather different path, in which any pretence of desire directed towards an identifiable Other (whether male/female, human/nonhuman) thoroughly evaporates. Within these two chapters – which overlap in intricate ways that require me to discuss them together – Mishima’s narcissism transgresses the private, psychosexual realm to take up residence on the much larger stage of Japanese politics. Discussing the bizarre turn of personal and professional events in the decade leading up to Mishima’s death, Nathan claims that “Mishima’s suicide by hara-kiri was driven by a longing for death that he had been in touch with, and intermittently terrified by, since his childhood”, and furthermore, “that the “patriotism” he formulated during the last ten years of his life offered him a route to achieving the martyr’s death that was his obsession” (ix). It is thus necessary to take a brief detour into the traditional Japanese philosophy that provided the basis for his suicide – one that resonates with a number of Schrader protagonists.

In his essay “Bushidō: Mode or Ethic?”, Roger T. Ames uses Mishima’s choice of death by seppuku as a case study for inquiring into the belief system that has most closely shaped cultural thought on traditional Japanese ritual suicide. According to Ames, bushidō is a complex and ambiguous national code whose frequent misunderstanding by outsiders – and particularly Westerners – extends

to the differing interpretations of the word itself: bushidō has been “variously translated as “the way of the warrior,” “the way of the samurai,” and even as broadly as “the traditional Japanese social ethic” (281). Ames thus traces the history of bushidō thought back to its canonical literary source: the *Hagakure*. This document was written in the early eighteenth century during the relative peacetime of the Edo period, which was Japan’s last feudal military dictatorship and was characterised by its rigorous social order, economic expansion, and fruitful developments in arts, culture and intellectual life.⁵⁹ Compiled from the observations of a former Nabeshima samurai-turned-monk named Tsunetomo Yamamoto, the *Hagakure* operates as a spiritual guidebook on the function of the samurai warrior in a peacetime society where his role is less clearly defined than during periods of conflict. It is precisely for this reason that Yamamoto’s account of the bushidō way was “taken by some, Mishima included, as a veritable bible of this philosophy” (Ames 282). While the *Hagakure* emphasises the value of maintaining an ascetic lifestyle, acquiring martial arts expertise, and demonstrating selfless loyalty to one’s master at all times, it is undoubtedly the text’s approach to death that most directly influenced Mishima, who kept the book by his bedside during the Second World War and later dictated a book-length commentary on it. Discussing the fundamental readiness to die at any moment best exemplified within the pages of the *Hagakure*, Ames explains that “bushidō is not a willingness to die, not a once-off decision to die, but is rather a *resolution to die*” (283).

The emphasis on death as the structuring principle and logical endpoint of bushidō thought cannot be overestimated for my current purposes, but also significant is the manner in which this death resolve is firmly rooted within traditional Japanese contexts. The “Action” chapter of Schrader’s film opens with the Shield Society, led by Mishima, chanting a traditional Japanese warrior song that espouses the importance of maintaining a core of samurai mentality while driving to the headquarters of the National Defense Forces. From here, the

⁵⁹ Interestingly, *Mishima* represents the second time that Schrader and his co-screenwriter brother Leonard Schrader (a noted expert on Japanese culture) had cited the *Hagakure*, the first occasion being their screenplay for *The Yakuza*.

film effects the established crystalline transition into the fictional world of Mishima's literature through a fadeout from one of the cadets gazing purposefully and warrior-like into the camera. The edit transports us to a scene from Mishima's 1969 novel *Runaway Horses*, which was written within a year of his dictation of the *Hagakure* and formed the second instalment of his epic final tetralogy, *The Sea of Fertility*. In the confines of a vast, spartan *dojo*, a group of cadets practise kendo, a modern martial art that uses bamboo swords in an acknowledgement of the traditional swordsmanship skills so prized in the samurai era. Their sparring takes place against the backdrop of a giant red-and-white flag of Japan, known as a *hinomaru*, which according to Ishioka "signifies clearly that this is a place where right-wing ideology reigns" (40). The foregrounding of physical action and the privilege accorded to the *hinomaru* in the composition marks a stylistic shift from the flamboyant formal regime of the previous two chapters. The dazzling gold and feminising, homoerotic pink of "Beauty" and "Art" are now supplanted by a comparatively muted colour palette of black, white and orange, and stripped-down set designs whose primary function is to express "more traditional aspects of Japanese culture" and reflect the unobtrusive minimalism of "traditional Japanese set-building techniques" (Ishioka 15). The shift away from aesthetic choices that might be more easily read in terms of sexual symbolism or queer significance also suggests that Mishima's – and his fictional protagonist(s)' – lifelong quest to attain immortal beauty and transform the self into a living artwork has now been displaced onto the more conventionally masculine arena of action and conflict.

In the space of a few truncated extracts from a characteristically dense novel, the "Action" chapter relates the narrative skeleton of *Runaway Horses*, its semi-autobiographical relationship to Mishima's own burgeoning militarism and, most vividly, the sense that he is now transposing the narcissistic discipline of his ongoing bodybuilding regime onto the realm of politics. His fictional alter ego is Isao (Toshiyuki Nagashima), a master swordsman and fiercely dedicated patriot who fully subscribes to the bushidō ethos and dreams of restoring 1930s Japan to the perceived purity of imperial rule. As with the angel-of-vengeance mission undertaken by Schrader's definitive male protagonist (Travis Bickle), Isao's naïve vision of a prelapsarian society spurs him to develop a psychotic

plot in the name of an ostensible higher purpose. At the *dojo*, a colleague enquires covertly if he will proceed with his still-secret plans; Isao simply answers, “The emperor is not pleased. Japan is losing her soul.” When another comrade asks “But why you?”, he replies – much as Travis might – “I was lucky enough to be chosen.” The palpable sense of hunger for violent action is compounded when Isao’s sensei asks him why he has withdrawn from a forthcoming kendo tournament, and he explains that “I lost interest in wooden swords, sensei. They have no real power.” Here we are reminded not only of Travis’s death wish but also of the narcissistic young actor Osamu’s proclamation in the previous chapter that, due to his inability to feel alive unless he is in pain, “Stage blood is not enough”. We thus quickly get a sense of a young man who has thoroughly absorbed the personal code of the samurai warrior to the point where he must live out the terms of his fantasy, which obviously includes the crucial bushidō resolution to die at any moment. During a secret interview with a right-wing lieutenant, Isao feverishly confesses his plot to assassinate a group of wealthy industrialists, burn the Bank of Japan and restore power to the emperor. Significantly, the exchange unfolds in an icy white military office whose walls feature cherry blossom and chrysanthemum patterns; both of these flowers represent classic emblems of Japanese nationalism, though their symbolic import is often lost on Western viewers unfamiliar with Japanese aesthetics (Ishioka 36). Also interesting is the manner in which Isao blatantly aestheticises the imagined aftermath to the terrorist act he plans to undertake with a group of twenty rebel cadets: “At sunrise, on a cliff, paying reverence to the sun, looking down on the sea, we’ll commit seppuku.” His use of vividly descriptive imagery while rhapsodising about an idealised samurai death suggests that his desire to commit violence in the name of patriotism is not entirely a social and political endeavour, but also a means of pursuing a private, sensual and aesthetic experience of death. The blurred boundaries between the ostensibly political and the intensely personal evoke Ames’ argument that bushidō represents not a distinct ethic but rather a conceptual approach to life and death that can be applied – for better or worse – to any given scenario. While bushidō’s chief historical proponents, namely samurai warriors, grounded their death resolve in a wider set of moral values and convictions, these are not intrinsic conditions of the bushidō way:

the resolution to die that lies at the heart of the *bushidō* matrix has provided the framework for the people of other ages as well. The resolution to die of *bushidō* can therefore be seen as a constant while the cause it serves is a historical variable. (Ames 284)

This sense of attaching one's identity to a broader philosophy resonates with the obsessive drives that fuel so many of Schrader's protagonists.⁶⁰ We have seen how Julian's commitment to the activities of dressing, training and sculpting his persona in *American Gigolo* betrayed a rigorous degree of discipline that bordered on the warrior-like, but there are other Schrader protagonists for whom the notion of the personal quest or spiritual task is enacted with a more suicidal intensity: consider again Travis's death mission in *Taxi Driver*, Jake's frantic search for his missing daughter in *Hardcore*, or Wade's self-destructive investment in the paranoid conspiracy theory of *Affliction*. In each case, the task is undertaken with a death drive that borders on religious, regardless of how morally misguided or violent the consequences. Similarly, the resolution to die that defines *bushidō* has been appropriated by political extremists, kamikaze pilots, the troops of the Red Army, and many more (Ames 284). According to Ames, this degree of cooption by unlikely and often unstable forces reflects *bushidō*'s stipulation that the proponent simply engage in their chosen duty *as if* they were a samurai warrior; as such, the death resolve

can be attached to any cause or purpose, no matter how trivial or contrary that might be to prevailing morality. The morality, the cause, the purpose determines the action – *bushidō* simply describes the manner in which that action is carried out. (Ames 284)

In the story of Isao, the amoral action that he seeks to carry out in the manner of *bushidō* is an act of political terrorism. Yet his concern with staging an

⁶⁰ While this notion applies more broadly to his male protagonists (which, of course, significantly outnumber his female protagonists), *Patty Hearst* is an interesting example of a Schrader heroine whose identity is overtaken by the brainwashing of the Symbionese Liberation Army terrorists with whom she eventually joins forces.

improbably poetic mise-en-scène for his ritual suicide – at sunrise, on a cliff overlooking the sea – also betrays an investment in sensual, aesthetic experience which connects him to the beauty theme that haunts Mizoguchi, Osamu, and Mishima himself in the realist sections of the film. As such, it retains traces of the queer, feminine, sexually dissident desire that is more overtly expressed in the film’s preceding chapters. In her book *Myth and Masculinity in the Japanese Cinema*, Isolde Standish claims that “the construction of ideal masculine types [...] in Japanese popular film narratives is, in the majority of cases, predicated on the rejection and denial of the feminine aspects of male nature” (108). She argues that representations of masculinity in Japanese action cinema are structured around a variety of feminine occlusions: the complete absence of women in wartime films such as *There Was a Father* (1942, Ozu) or *The Life of Matsu the Untamed* (1943, Hiroshi Inagaki), the emotional rejection and/or sexual exploitation of female lovers in postwar productions such as *The Tattered Wings* (1955, Kinoshita) and *Ningen gyorai kaiten* (1955, Shûe Matsubayashi), or more generally, the suppression of feminising emotions like fear, anxiety or trepidation in the face of death in samurai films such as *Zoku Abashiri bangaichi* (1965, Teruo Ishii). In this regard, the maintenance of pride and honour in the acceptance of inevitable death enables the samurai warrior to conquer his enemies, reaffirm normative models of male heroism, and mobilise the innate bushidō qualities of “stoic masochism as a vehicle for domination” (Standish 176). But if bushidō prescribes this masochistic aspect of the death resolve as a means of attaining heroic masculinity, the familiar crystalline shift between actual and virtual footage in *Mishima*’s “Action” chapter allows us to read Isao’s warrior ethos as ultimately operating in the service of a more familiar type of male masochism. The black-and-white sections of both this third chapter and the film’s final chapter concern the author’s rather abrupt embrace of right-wing nationalism in the decade leading up to his suicide. Scenes of Mishima forming the Shield Society, conducting training drills with his cadets, marching in an army parade and devoting fastidious attention to the details of military fashion all serve to contextualise his appropriation of warrior masculinity in more recognisable terms; specifically, they reinscribe it within the specular, fetishistic and exhibitionistic realm that we already associate with his more overtly feminised literary creations, such as Osamu. In keeping with the queer

crystalline interplay of associations that congeal across the body of the film, Mishima's newfound militarism is shadowed by our lingering memory of all these other past, fictional and semi-autobiographical Mishimas, all of whom close the gap between traditional gender roles in an innately queer drive to transform the body into a human artwork. The accumulation of actual/virtual juxtapositions inevitably mediates our reception of a scene that transpires at a government social event, when Mishima solemnly declares onstage that the Shield Society is not a group of "toy soldiers" (as they have been suspected), but a purely "spiritual army". He claims that they "oppose the corruption and the modernisation of the Japanese spirit", and that their ultimate "goal is to restore the noble tradition of the way of the samurai", but his attempts to demonstrate any coherent politics are swiftly undercut by his blatantly exhibitionistic presentation of the Society's stylish new uniforms. Similarly, when a government official enquires why the troop should be permitted to train at a national army base, Mishima frames his response in the familiar aesthetic terms of rampant narcissism: "Up there I create action in the sunshine. Here I create art in the dark. Isn't it perfect? Who'd have thought you could still combine them? Byron did it. He had 300 men." As with bodybuilding, politics is figured as simply one more manifestation of his psychosexual impulses.

The decision to cast Mishima's militarism in a sceptical light is clearly a self-conscious strategy employed by Schrader. In interviews about the film, he reads the author's politics as an indisputable product of the narcissistic death drive that conditioned his whole life:

One of the ways you can define narcissism is the constant search for a reflection of the body in the form you most desire to project upon it. For men steeped in a military tradition, a glorious uniform is the ultimate crown of beauty... The idea that the body is a limitation to be overcome, through whatever means you can master, is inherent in my upbringing. (Jaehne 14)

In its rigorous focus upon meditation, swordsmanship and the development of mental and physical harmony necessary to attain the death resolve, bushidō also

treats the body as a kind of limitation to be overcome. As such, it almost invites perverse appropriations. Isao's mastery of the sword during his duel with a lieutenant is paralleled in a scene of Mishima, now in his early forties, practising kendo alone at home; though his concentration on the actions and movements of the samurai warrior is undoubtedly as intense as Isao's in the fictional passages, his accompanying conception of death is as queer as Osamu's in the film's previous chapter. "The average age for men in the Bronze Age was 18, in the Roman era 22", Scheider's narration informs us as Mishima parries and thrusts gracefully with the bamboo sword. "Heaven must have been beautiful then. Today it must look dreadful. When a man reaches 40 he has no chance to die beautifully. No matter how he tries, he will die of decay. He must compel himself to live." This telling passage is adapted from Mishima's autobiographical essay *Sun and Steel*. Even more directly than most other Mishima texts, this memoir chronicles his tormented relationship to his body, starting from his humiliating childhood failure to connect with other boys through the sporting activities that constitute the most typical bonding rituals of the patriarchal order. In the essay he contrasts his precocious intellectual development, nurtured by feminine influence through his early interest in poetry, theatre and writing, with another realm of experience that is visceral, immediate and unmistakably rooted in the physical world. For Mishima, this order of bodily reality is something that he felt painfully denied until he started to practise bodybuilding, boxing and kendo as an adult. Describing his need to reconcile the values of intellectual life and physical experience that ultimately led to his suicide, Nathan explains that it was during this mid-late 1960s period – around the writing of *Sun and Steel*, the *Sea of Fertility* tetralogy (including *Runaway Horses*) and his deepening involvement with the Shield Society – that he "[discovered] that the pen alone could not satisfy him, that his need for an alternative to what he experienced as the lifelessness of peace, an alternative symbolized for him by the sword, had been building implacably inside him" (220). Strenuous physical activities both appealed to his aesthetics of bodily fascism and functioned as reactionary, overcompensating outlets for a lifelong history of feeling overly attuned to his intellect and alienated from his masculinity: "Facile cynicism, invariably, is related to feeble muscles or obesity,

while the cult of the hero and a mighty nihilism are always related to a mighty body and well-tempered muscles” (*Sun and Steel* 39-40).

Schrader draws on potent extracts from *Sun and Steel* throughout the last two chapters of the film, fusing excerpts from the memoir with footage of Mishima interacting with the Shield Society to crystallise the relationship between his private fantasies and political convictions. Discussing his depiction of the author’s militarism, Schrader acknowledges that he was less concerned with the political climate of postwar Japan than with delineating “the progression from Mishima’s admiration for images of metaphysical suffering like St. Sebastian’s to the actual physical training that would perfect Mishima’s own body and put it to a test that, of course, he alone could divine” (Jaehne 14). To this end, he finds it significant that “the Shield Society, with its ostensible social-religious-militaristic purpose, accomplished none of those objectives” (Jaehne 14). Rather than functioning in any real-world political sense, the homosocial bonding rituals of Mishima’s military life – enacted with the gruelling intensity of the bushidō way – are revealed as a seductive extension of the same bodily drives that fuelled his passion for bodybuilding, boxing or kendo; they represent another opportunity for Mishima to feel physically alive, self-aware and connected to a primal masculinity that he long felt was stifled and misunderstood. This dynamic is especially evident by the final chapter, “Harmony of Pen and Sword,” when we briefly cut from Mishima’s terrorist act at the National Defense Forces to a black-and-white montage of the private army conducting their drill. As Mishima bonds with the young cadets through shared physical exertion, Scheider’s narration from *Sun and Steel* frames this private, sensual and affective relationship to his body in the terms of a mythic nationalism:

Running in the early mist with the members of the Shield Society, I felt something emerging as slowly as my sweat: the ultimate verification of my existence. Our members were allowed to train in the facilities of the regular army. I flew in a combat fighter. These privileges were granted us because of the symbolic significance of our society. Even in its present weakened condition, the army represented the ancient code of the samurai.

It was here, on the stage of Japanese tradition, that I would conduct my action.

Mishima's evocation of the stage as an arena for performing the samurai warrior role resonates with Silverman's account of male masochism as a fundamentally performative pathology in which "an external audience is a structural necessity" and "the body is centrally on display" (197). The masochistic male subject's need to be seen by an Other in states of crisis also features heavily within the psychoanalytic theories of Theodor Reik, who claims that *all* masochism is at its core a type of performance that demands to be witnessed:

In no case of masochism can the fact be overlooked that the suffering, discomfort, humiliation and disgrace are being shown and so to speak put on display... In the practices of masochists, denudation and parading with all their psychic concomitant phenomena play such a major part that one feels induced to assume a constant connection between masochism and exhibitionism. (72)

If we consider Mishima's embrace of bushidō in terms of a masochistic performance that demands as wide and attentive an audience as possible, we can also understand it as the fullest expression of his original heteropathic desire. In bushidō, Mishima's childhood urge to evacuate the self and identify with the beautiful dying martyr finally finds a suitable philosophical framework and a practical method to obtain "the painful "heroic" death his lifelong fantasy prescribed" (Nathan xv). Furthermore, the closer he moves towards death, the more intensely he seems to need an external audience to bear witness to his virile suffering. In the extracts from *The Temple*, Mizoguchi's driving urge was simply to envision *himself* in the frozen, timeless beauty of the pavilion, while in *Kyoko's House*, Osamu's narcissism demanded the gaze of an Other whose gender was less important than the desire it reflected. These psychological dynamics also felt consistent with Mishima's own "real-life" arc in these chapters. A slightly different effect is at play in the "Action" chapter: Isao's fanatical, one-note nationalism in the *Runaway Horses* scenes feels more authentic, less dependent on an external gaze, than the corresponding sections

from Mishima's real life, where his bushidō-inspired performance of military heroism clearly requires a broader, collective gaze. For instance, when Isao's secret cabal of rebel students meets at a Shinto shrine to discuss his assassination plot, Schrader emphasises the men's mutual readiness to die for a shared cause by rendering them blank, indistinguishable and affectless as they pledge allegiance to the communal vision of a prelapsarian nation: "One: We vow to go forth to death to purge our nation of capitalist evils. Two: We hereby vow to forge eternal friendship among ourselves. Three: We hereby vow to restore His Imperial Majesty". In the next scene, Mishima and his private army pledge a similar allegiance to restore Japan to prewar imperialism, but in contrast to the distinct lack of identity ascribed to Isao⁶¹, the emphasis is placed on Mishima's self-consciously performative, ritualistic and ceremonial cooption of bushidō spirit. "Now let's sign with our blood," Mishima declares, rather too gravely to be taken seriously; "This paper could be lost in the wind, but these vows will be eternal in our hearts". Slicing his finger over a cup, he signs the paper in blood and passes it around for the "toy soldiers" to follow his lead: "After the signatures, we'll drink a blood toast to our new Shield Society". In place of a unified political vision, we see Mishima's deep need to inhabit the samurai warrior persona before the approving gaze of impressionable young hero-worshippers. His heteropathic drive to vacate the self and assume another corporeal identity thus finds a worthy project: to cast himself as a model military hero who disciplines the body through training, embodies rarefied bushidō values of stoic masculinity, and is prepared to literally sacrifice his self for the greater good of his beloved nation.

It gradually becomes evident that it will not be enough for Mishima to be seen – or, rather, to *see* himself being seen – by the members of his army in a heroic light. The masochist's drive to expose the self in states of mental and physical anguish incites him to acquire larger audiences. A striking example of this search for a wider collective gaze occurs in a short black-and-white passage on

⁶¹ This may be a function of the novel rather than the film. Edward Seidensticker has criticised the character of Isao as "an unconvincing abstraction" and a mouthpiece for Mishima's own suicidal fantasies: "he is too close to Mishima to take on a life of his own" (142-3).

the making of Mishima's controversial silent short film *Patriotism* (1966), which he produced, directed and adapted from his 1961 short story of the same name. Unsurprisingly, he also played the lead role: a young lieutenant who commits seppuku in a grisly double suicide with his wife. As with the short story, the film revels in sensually aestheticised bloodshed as Mishima disembowels himself with a samurai sword on a plain Noh stage over the "Liebestod" ("erotic death") theme from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. For nearly four minutes, we see him convulsing, drooling, bleeding onto the white floor, and dragging the sword across his abdomen before finally retrieving it to stab himself through the jugular while his wife weeps at his virile stoicism. Clearly, both the writing and filming of *Patriotism* represented "one of Mishima's many rehearsals for his actual seppuku" (Rayns "*Patriotism*"). Schrader does not recreate scenes from the film in *Mishima*, but instead shows Mishima yelling "Cut!" to the cameraman on the film set just as he is about to penetrate his flesh with the sword (see Fig 3.9). He glibly jokes to the crew that he needs an artier lighting design as he hopes to hold the premiere in France, where "they love shadows". As the set clears, he remains seated in the seppuku position and practises digging the retractable blade a few inches into his abdomen; obviously he is pondering how a real sword would feel, but he is also imagining how the film's viewers will visualise him in the moment of his onscreen death.

Figs 3.9 and 3.10 (overleaf)





According to Silverman, the masochist's desire to be witnessed in moments of bodily crisis also discloses what she terms a heterocosmic impulse – a desire to “remake the world in another image altogether, to forge a different cultural order” (198). This desire tends to pit the masochist “against the society in which he or she lives, makes of that figure a rebel, or even a revolutionary of sorts” (198). The extent of Mishima's urge to transform reality and be viewed as a nationalist martyr by everyone around him – the Shield Society, the wider Japanese culture, the prospective European audience of *Patriotism* – is reflected in the note of mythical intensity on which Isao's storyline concludes (see Fig 3.10). After having a secret meeting raided by the police, lost his cabal and escaped from incarceration, Isao stealthily creeps through a sapling forest whose trees have been visibly spray-painted in the manner of *Red Desert*, ranging from fluorescent green to dazzling crimson. Tearing his samurai sword through a wall-sized painting, he magically materialises inside the house of one of Japan's leading industrialists, whom he swiftly and fatally stabs in the stomach before fleeing through the forest. As he races to the edge of the cliff, strips to his loincloth and prepares to disembowel himself over the escalating tempo of Glass' majestic score, we notice a crop of scarlet foliage on the ground, and the sky turns a glowing, almost radioactive shade of red. As with the powerful sense of a denatured and derealised environment in the *Temple* scenes, there is a symbolic exchange between the body of the fictional protagonist and a natural world that suddenly appears to be bathed in blood. In staging the mise-en-scène

of masochistic desire, Schrader again uses the landscape as an expressionistic mirror of Isao's – and, of course, Mishima's – revolutionary drive to transfigure reality and cast himself as “the very picture of earthly divestiture and loss” (Silverman 198).

In reading the film's stylised surface as an expression of its protagonist's fractured interiority, King claims that Mishima deliberately “constructs a highly artificial symbolical world to hold himself together”, and thereby consciously “makes himself into an iconic object in order to evade the pain of his own subjectivity” (88). In the context of the film – but also Mishima's real life, if we are convinced by either *Sun and Steel* or Nathan's biography – this attempt to avoid the self explains his choice of seppuku as a method of suicide. While the act of ritual disembowelment occupies a privileged function within bushidō mythology, it carries additional resonance within the death drive of the masochist. The pain inflicted upon the body by penetrating the lower abdomen with a samurai sword, while excruciating in itself, is intensified by the stipulation that the samurai must then drag the sword across his guts from left to right in order to complete the act – something which apparently requires the “enormous upper body strength” generally available only to bodybuilders (Director's Commentary). We can thus understand the appeal for a masochist such as Mishima in choosing a death that is at once “a fair test of a person's mental fortitude” (Ames 285) and a demonstration of superhuman physical virility. Yet even during the film's climax, Schrader retains a coolly detached approach to Mishima's embodiment of bushidō as a dramatic performance that he carefully scripted, staged and acted out until the bloody end. When General Mashita invites Mishima and the chosen members of the Shield Society into his office, Mishima proudly displays the object that served as the original pretence of his visit: a seventeenth-century ceremonial sword which the general praises as “a true museum piece”. Until its use in the act of seppuku, its function as a weapon matters less than its formal beauty, its mythic status in traditional Japanese samurai culture, and its capacity to symbolically endow the swordsman

who wields it with phallic virility.⁶² Similarly, the general compliments his visitors on wearing such “handsome” and “splendid” new uniforms, upon which Mishima boasts that he designed them himself, “with some help from De Gaulle’s tailor”. His fetishistic investment in the details of military costume as a privileged signifier of virility continues after they have gagged and bound Mashita, and a crowd of military officers attempts to break through their makeshift barricade: “Put your *hachimaki* on”, he orders his second-in-command Morita, aggrieved that the soldier has neglected to wear the samurai headband that symbolises masculine courage and national pride in Japanese culture. Schrader’s construction of Mishima’s militarism as performance is here conveyed by another distinct formal shift: the rich colours of the previous chapters are desaturated to a flat, ugly monochrome, and Bailey’s fluid camera movement is supplanted by jerky handheld coverage inspired by the quasi-documentary aesthetics of *Z* (1969, Costa-Gavras), thus linking the film to more directly political cinema and highlighting the comparative artifice of Mishima’s politics (Director Commentary). Indeed, even as the 1,000-strong garrison assembles outside the headquarters to hear his address, he still interprets the whole event as an exemplary performance of bushidō spirit: “Our little drama has attracted quite an audience,” he tells Morita, smiling wryly at the impressive turnout. Before walking outside to the balcony to address the crowd, he straightens his own *hachimaki* – a gesture that consolidates the essential theatricality of his behaviour even as he approaches death. Far from the rousing political speech that he anticipates, however, his chaotic and incoherent harangue is ultimately drowned out by the jeers of a bewildered garrison that sees through his bluster and is unmoved by the apparent shallowness of his nationalism:

I thought that the army was the last hope of Japan, the last stronghold of the Japanese soul, but the Japanese people today think only of money. Where is our national spirit? We thought the army was the soul of national

⁶² See David Desser’s *The Samurai Films of Akira Kurosawa* (1983) for an interesting analysis of sword mythology and classical Hollywood Western genre motifs in Kurosawa’s work. For a demystifying take on samurai culture, see *Harakiri* (1962, Masaki Kobayashi).

honor! The nation has no spiritual foundation. What will you do when you are just a big soulless arsenal?

Conclusion

In foregrounding the performativity of Mishima's suicide, Schrader appears to agree with Ames' assertion that, in adopting bushidō as a political device, he was undoubtedly "more concerned with death as his own vehicle to self-fulfillment than as a means to furthering his stated cause" (292). Indeed, this is evident from the film's first chapter, "Beauty", when we learn in flashback how the 18-year-old Mishima "dreamed only of joining the war and dying for the emperor", how he "wanted to explode like a rocket, light the sky for an instant and disappear". His death drive is figured as a need to attain beauty and illuminate the world in the act of dying for a heroic cause, albeit one whose politics are secondary to a desire that is "in essence private, not social, erotic, not patriotic" (Nathan xv). The turn to bodybuilding of the film's second chapter articulates the necessity of dying at the right moment if he wishes to leave behind a beautiful corpse, while the third chapter explores his need to harmonise intellectual and physical realms of experience through the dubious appropriation of bushidō mythology. Fittingly, at the exact moment Mishima plunges the sword into his abdomen, Schrader avoids showing his actual death and instead cuts to three fleeting shots of his literary creations at the climax of their respective stories: Mizoguchi standing defiantly inside the flaming pavilion after setting it alight; Osamu's cut, bruised, bound and naked corpse lying next to the body of Kiyomi (who has killed him and drank poison); and Isao disemboweling himself against the bloody sunrise over a familiar line from *Runaway Horses*: "The instant the blade tore open his flesh, the bright disk of the sun soared up behind his eyelids and exploded, lighting the sky for an instant". The crystalline interplay of editing, voiceover narration and Glass' rousing theme thus recuperates the "different Mishimas" within the same lifelong fantasy of glorious self-annihilation. In this regard, the climax of *Mishima* may seem like a departure from the endings of *American Gigolo* and *Cat People*, whose tormented protagonists remained alive but imprisoned. Yet the only possible

release Mishima finds from the prison of his body is suicide. Discussing the quest for transcendence that led Mishima to choose this ending for himself, Schrader makes an observation that feels equally true for his own body of work:

Within the struggle for [that] transcendence, a metamorphosis of the body goes on, as one tries to transform the body into something it can never be. The escape from the body becomes an obsessive devotion to it, which is really the discovery of something through its opposite. Narcissism is simply an extension of hatred of the body. (Jaehne 14)

Conclusion

The release of *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters* marked the apex of a particular phase of Paul Schrader's career, in which the quest to express ideas about identity, embodiment and Self/Other relations found increasingly stylised, complex and elaborate visual representation through the formal structures of mise-en-scène. Kouvaros feels that *Mishima* "marks the end of one key thematic strand – Schrader's concern with suicidal glory" (55) in part because the making of the film coincided with the period in which he married the actress Mary Beth Hurt (who has since appeared in four of his films) and became a father for the first time: "Perhaps more than anything else, this event tempered Schrader's identification with the destructive behavior of his protagonists" (54). Yet *Mishima* also stands as a transitional picture in Schrader's filmography because it represents the end of his intensely formalist exploration of the theme of embodied crisis, a phase in which his own glaring anxieties about the human body were articulated through his increasingly bold and revealing stylistic choices about the filmic body – colour, lighting, editing, camerawork, production design.

It is helpful, at this point, to recapitulate the stylistic and thematic journey that Schrader took during the five-year period (1980-1985) I have chosen to examine in this thesis. *American Gigolo* is undoubtedly the first film in this overtly formalist period, whereby he sought to establish himself not merely as a writer of words but also as an artist who thought in terms of visual images. With his openly confessed new comfort in placing and moving the camera, this film signified an explicit progression from the quasi-documentary minimalism of *Blue Collar* and the awkwardly realised attempts at expressionism in *Hardcore* into a new conception of cinema as a primarily visual medium, one that carried the potential to express the kinds of ideas he had theorised with words in his early essays on film *noir* and transcendental style. Drawing upon his deep-rooted identification with the Bressonian 'man-in-a-room' character type, he assembled a style-oriented team of collaborators (Bailey, Scarfiotti, Moroder, Armani) to frame his study of a sexually and emotionally alienated loner within a set of high-gloss, surface-driven aesthetics that channeled neo-*noir* allusions, MTV-

style flamboyance, and the auteur-driven European formalism of Bertolucci and Antonioni. But as I have argued, these stylistic choices do not merely locate Schrader in relation to his preferred lineage of sophisticated visual thinkers; they also disclose a range of problematic attitudes about the politics of identity, particularly within the volatile and unavoidably body-centric categories of race and sexuality. The blue-neon stylisation of the gay nightclub as an otherworldly, borderline science fiction space of sexual difference demonstrates an uneasy mixture of titillation and distaste with gay culture, and this palpable anxiety about perceived difference is intensified by the visual representation of the film's gay, black villain, whose own corporeal surface is rendered monstrous by highly self-conscious formal decisions in the areas of framing, staging and lighting.

Cat People is in some ways the most revealing of the three films: a then-unusual case of Schrader not being the originator of the material, but instead an unlikely director for hire on a big-budget, special effects-driven remake of a 1940s B-horror classic for which he felt little affinity. His disconnection from both the atmospheric subtlety of the Lewton-Tourneur original and the generic contexts of 1980s body horror freed him to approach the film as almost a blank slate of pure style without meaningful content, a technical exercise in the expressive potential of colour, lighting and camera movement that could further his development as a visual thinker without demanding the same personal connection that fuelled his previous work. As such, he reassembled his core stylistic team from *American Gigolo* to visualise this story of sexual transgression and bodily monstrosity as an homage to the nonrealist fantasy worlds created by 1920s German Expressionist cinema, the French poetic tradition of Cocteau and Franju, and the modernist art cinema auteurs he had already mined in the previous film. Yet Schrader's attempt to approach cinema as pure form gave way to unexpectedly deep investments at the narrative level: his development of a close identification with the lovesick hero, his offscreen affair with the leading actress, and his introduction of the Beatrice complex theme meant that the film's extravagant style – its overdetermined symbolism, bloody red and deathly green colour palette, and obsessive stylisation of the

female body through projections of darkness and light – serves to formalise his own neuroses about woman as desirable but monstrous sexual Other.

Schrader's highly individual "insistence on identifying his own place within his films" (Kouvaros 47) finds its fullest expression in the experimental biopic format of *Mishima*, which not only concerns a historical figure who *feels* like a character that Schrader could have created, but also allows him to incorporate both the authorial anxieties about homosexuality evident in *American Gigolo* and the personal neurosis about female bodies apparent in *Cat People*. In this case, the unsettling ambivalence towards identities and bodies perceived as Other is not located within the traditional genre contexts of the previous two films, but a more abstract, philosophical character study about a man whose deepest desires – artistic, erotic and psychological – are wholly autoerotic and suicidal in nature. Uniting the stylised design principles of modernist European cinema with the nonrealist emphasis on heightened theatricality in both classical and postwar Japanese cinema, *Mishima* remains both the most formally challenging and unflinchingly body-oriented film of Schrader's career. As with all his work, it is a study in contradiction at the level of style and theme: while the film's crystalline editing patterns effectively express the fundamental queerness of Mishima's sexuality, its uterine production design feels like the filmic materialisation of corporeal anxieties that belong to Schrader rather than his subject.

The films that Schrader has directed since *Mishima* have largely continued his interest in themes of identity and alienation, yet they have been neither as consistently focused on bodily crisis nor as obsessively concerned with the expressive potentialities of visual style. The film he made directly after *Mishima* was *Light of Day*, a low-key drama that chronicles the relationship between a working-class brother and sister (Michael J. Fox and Joan Jett) who play in a barroom rock band. In treating the film as a photographed play, "a Kammerspiel, about unflashy people who live unflashy lives" and shooting it in a "meat-and-potatoes style" (Jackson 188), Schrader deliberately adopted a quieter, less self-conscious approach to mise-en-scène. His analysis of this shifting approach is instructive with regard to my thesis investigation, and thus worth quoting in full.

John Bailey, who's been my cinematographer on four films, was working with me on the film and every day we were finding ourselves in situations where I was saying, 'Look at this shot. We start slowly across the ceiling reading the graffiti, then we come down and everyone thinks they're upside down and then you realize they're right side up. Wouldn't that be a terrific shot?' And John would say, 'Yes, it would have been a terrific shot for *Mishima*, but we're not making that movie.' I learned a lesson from *Light of Day*, which was that I had been growing film by film in my visual intelligence. I had progressed from being a person with a literary vision to being someone with a visual vision, and with that film I tried to back off, I tried to suppress my new literacy. (Jackson 188)

We cannot be sure exactly why Schrader decided to take a step back from this newly refined visual intelligence, beyond taking onboard Bailey's suggestion that an obtrusively high-style approach to visualising the lives of "unflashy" characters represents an awkward disharmony of form and content. In fact, Schrader has continued to experiment with visual style, albeit on a much smaller scale, when the projects have required a formalist approach. As noted in my first chapter, the opening half hour of *Patty Hearst* perhaps comes closest of any Schrader film to his own criteria of transcendental cinema: we are rigorously denied any of cinema's traditional "screens" by being sutured into Patty's subjective nightmare of isolation and sensory deprivation. The film thus represents a more convincing match between its first-person representation of female consciousness and Schrader's chosen visual style than the overblown, sexist semi-expressionism of *Cat People*. Indeed, his strongest work since the 1980s has tended to demonstrate a more measured, integrated approach to style and content, whereby *mise-en-scène* is treated as merely one of several expressive elements in a film – alongside dialogue, performance, narrative structure – rather than a fetishistic priority valued above other concerns. As Jackson notes, the fact that Schrader's three most critically acclaimed films of the past two decades – *Light Sleeper*, *Affliction* and *Auto Focus* – "all deal with different versions of the kind of pain or dislocation or bewilderment that may hit men in their forties and fifties" (xiv) suggests that he still operates best when

examining issues of masculinity in crisis.⁶³ While each of these films warrant substantial further analysis beyond the scope of this thesis, *Light Sleeper* represents an especially rich example of an elegant yet understated visual style delineating the core authorial themes that have haunted his career from the beginning. In his analysis of the film, Kouvaros describes its melancholy, introspective, and almost exclusively nocturnal atmosphere as a formal evocation of the protagonist John LeTour's overarching sense of personal regret and wistful longing for a falsely romanticised past. He notes its spiritual unity with the anxious, fatalistic *noir* style that Schrader conceptualised in his essay, as well as the continued influence of directors such as Ozu and Antonioni in the film's "still life" compositions of depopulated spaces and inanimate objects, which reaffirm his penchant for "telling the story through the spaces and settings surrounding the characters" (94). What I find most interesting about *Light Sleeper* is the fact that its sensuous, floating camerawork, rich palette of pastel and earth tones, and use of cool blue/green lighting gels all work to support its narrative of urban loneliness and midlife anxiety, but without necessarily evoking the earlier films' bodily neuroses at the level of race, gender or sexual identity. At one point, LeTour casually and tenderly plants a platonic kiss on the forehead of a gay friend, a fleeting indication that he does not suffer from the same reactionary fears of homosexual contamination that Julian exhibited in *American Gigolo*. Similarly, the film's ending unfolds as a far more mature and credible variation of *American Gigolo*'s Bressonian climax: LeTour, in prison after a botched drug deal, receives a visit from his long-time friend and now-reformed drug associate Ann (Susan Sarandon), and they quietly exchange optimistic sentiments about the future. They note how they have never consummated their friendship, but we sense that their separation has awakened some unexpected new tenderness between them. When LeTour tells Ann that he looks forward to making love after he is released from prison, she simply replies "Me too" and softly grabs his hand before adding a wry, *Pickpocket*-inspired closing line: "Strange how things work". In contrast to the oddly robotic

⁶³ With his later films, Schrader also established himself as more of an "actor's director": *Affliction* won a Best Supporting Actor Oscar for James Coburn and a Best Lead Actor nomination for Nick Nolte, while Willem Dafoe in *Light Sleeper*, Greg Kinnear and Dafoe in *Auto Focus*, and Woody Harrelson in *The Walker* all earned critical acclaim for their performances.

“transcendental” passion that Julian supposedly feels for Michelle at the end of *American Gigolo* – exemplified by his awkwardly poetic and out-of-character assertion, “It’s taken me so long to come to you” – we are left with a disarmingly low-key observation about the minor miracle of human connection. For once in Schrader’s oeuvre, there is a sense of love being accepted graciously rather than seized triumphantly, whether it occurs in the form of an anxious defence against racial and sexual Otherness, a neurotic performance of a misogynistic Beatrice fantasy, or an autoerotic mirror held up to the self.

Light Sleeper’s harmonious resolution of Schrader’s key stylistic and thematic tropes makes it a rather tempting note to finish on. Yet the raw pain and self-loathing neurosis of both *Affliction* and *Auto Focus* serve as a reminder that, while Schrader may not be quite as consistently focused on either the human body or as fetishistically invested in mise-en-scène, he certainly retains his affinity for the kinds of dysfunctional, isolated and tormented characters that have defined his career since *Taxi Driver*. Perhaps for this reason, he has increasingly worked outside the margins of mainstream distribution and the Hollywood studio system. *The Canyons* (2013) was partly cast through social media website Let It Cast and financed by the crowd funding website Kickstarter, and it was promoted during its production as a high-profile collaboration with screenwriter/novelist Bret Easton Ellis and a comeback vehicle for troubled star Lindsay Lohan, but the finished film received less critical attention than the widely publicised accounts of Schrader’s stormy on-set relationship with Lohan (Rodrick).⁶⁴ Between making new films, Schrader has continued to produce fruitful work in the intersections between film theory, criticism and pedagogy, teaching a fifteen-week course at Columbia University titled “Films That Changed Filmmaking”, and publishing a series of journal

⁶⁴ Schrader’s most recent film, the Nicolas Cage espionage thriller *Dying of the Light* (2014), has proven a similarly troubled experience; he recently posted on his Facebook page that the film “was taken away from me” by Lions Gate Entertainment, alleging that the studio re-edited, scored and mixed the film without his input (Kilday). Schrader also had a notoriously bad experience directing *Dominion: Prequel to The Exorcist* (2005), on which he replaced the late John Frankenheimer at short notice only to have the film temporarily shelved by its distributors, who then hired Renny Harlin to direct a more mainstream-friendly alternate version of the film using the same plot, locations and sets as Schrader’s film.

articles based on his Columbia lectures (“Game Changers: Editing”) as well as an extended essay on his research into the necessity of film canons (originally planned as a book-length study for Faber and Faber).

The continuing focus upon issues of *mise-en-scène* in Schrader’s recent scholarship and teaching also serves as a reminder of the unusual critical value that he places upon the concept of intellectual imagery, and of that early period of his career when he sought to push his filmmaking process beyond the limitations of literary thinking into the “kind of nonverbal world of images” (Kouvaros 129) that he had first discovered through his interaction with Charles Eames. In choosing to examine this period of Schrader’s career through a methodology that unites formalist and cultural modes of analysis, I hope to have shed some new light on both his creative process and his core authorial themes, which have traditionally been studied under the broad rubric of masculinity in crisis, but without focusing so closely on how such crises are experienced in and through the body or – even more importantly – considering how they are expressed at the level of visual style. In focusing upon the elements of colour, lighting, editing, costume and production design that constitute the material body of these films, I have followed Bordwell’s assertion that “film style matters because what people call content comes to us in and through the patterned use of the medium’s techniques”, and his fundamental belief that – as scholars of *film* – “style should claim a lot of our attention” (*Figures* 32). Yet I have also found that in the case of a filmmaker like Schrader, whose visions of identity, embodiment and Self/Other relations are invariably fraught with problematic attitudes towards social categories of race, gender and sexuality, it is not sufficient to simply locate his image-making practice within clearer stylistic traditions and aesthetic contexts (*Figures* 266). In fact, it becomes even more important to attend to his films at the level of style *and* theme, and to integrate close analysis of *mise-en-scène* with the more traditional cultural approach in order to better understand the ideas being expressed by these images. By intervening in the existing critical discourse on Schrader in this manner, I hope to have offered some new approaches to theorising his work and potential avenues for further research. I also hope to have asserted my belief that the ongoing analysis of *mise-en-scène*, while less popular now than during the early

days of film studies, remains a vital part of our discipline, and that it need not be opposed to other methods of understanding cinema.

Works Cited

The Absent-Minded Professor. Dir. Robert Stevenson. Buena Vista Distribution, 1961. Film.

Against All Odds. Dir. Taylor Hackford. Columbia Pictures, 1984. Film.

Alien. Dir. Ridley Scott. 20th Century Fox, 1979. Film.

Ali: Fear Eats the Soul. Dir. Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Filmverlag der Autoren, 1974. Film.

Alighieri, Dante. *La Vita Nuova*. Trans. David R. Slavitt. Introd. Seth Lerer. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2010. Print.

Altered States. Dir. Ken Russell. Warner Bros., 1980. Film.

An American in Paris. Dir. Vincente Minnelli. MGM, 1951. Film.

An American Werewolf in London. Dir. John Landis. Universal Pictures, 1981. Film.

Ames, Roger T. "Bushidō: Mode or Ethic?" *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture: A Reader*. Ed. Nancy G. Hume. New York: SUNY, 1995. 279-94. Print.

Andrew, Geoff. Rev. of *American Gigolo*. *Time Out Film Guide*. Ed. John Pym. London: *Time Out* Guides, 2004. 35. Print.

Angel. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Paramount Pictures, 1937. Film.

Angel Heart. Dir. Alan Parker. TriStar Pictures, 1987. Film.

Arnheim, Rudolf. *Film as Art*. Berkeley: California UP, 1957. Print.

Author unknown. "Paul Schrader Talks the Talk, Walks the Walker". *Comingsoon.net*. Web. 29 Dec. 2014.
<<http://www.comingsoon.net/movies/features/39910-paul-schrader-talks-the-talk-walks-the-walker>>

Author unknown. Rev. of *American Gigolo*. DCP Film. Web. 29 Dec. 2014.
<<https://dcpfilm.wordpress.com/2012/01/23/american-gigolo-schrader-1980/>>

Avedon, Richard. "Nastassja Kinski and the Serpent". 1981. Photograph.

Bailey, John. *Masters of Light: Conversations with Contemporary Cinematographers*. Eds. Dennis Schaefer and Larry Salvato. Berkeley: California UP, 1984. Print.

---. "Robert Bresson: Notes on the Cinematographer". *The American Society of*

Cinematographers. Web. 29 Dec. 2014.

<<http://www.theasc.com/blog/2011/05/09/robert-bresson-notes-on-the-cinematographer/>>

Ballad of Narayama. Dir. Keisuke Kinoshita. Shochiku Company, 1958. Film.

Bansak, Edmund G. *Fearing the Dark: The Val Lewton Career*. North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2003. Print.

Barbarella. Dir. Roger Vadim. Paramount Pictures, 1968. Film.

Basic Instinct. Dir. Paul Verhoeven. TriStar Pictures, 1992. Film.

Batchelor, David. *Chromophobia*. London: Reaktion Books, 2000. Print.

Beau travail. Dir. Claire Denis. Artificial Eye, 1999. Film.

Beauty and the Beast. Dir. Jean Cocteau. Lopert Pictures, 1946. Film.

Belle de Jour. Dir. Luis Buñuel. Allied Artists, 1967. Film.

Bell-Metereau, Rebecca. *Hollywood Androgyny*. New York: Columbia UP, 1985. Print.

Benshoff, Harry M. *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1997. Print.

The Big Easy. Dir. Jim McBride. Columbia Pictures, 1987. Film.

The Big Sleep. Dir. Howard Hawks. Warner Bros., 1946. Film.

Bingham, Dennis. *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?: The Biopic as Contemporary Film Genre*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP, 2010. Print.

Black Narcissus. Dir. Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. General Film Distributors, 1947. Film.

Black Widow. Dir. Bob Rafelson. 20th Century Fox, 1987. Film.

Blade Runner. Dir. Ridley Scott. Warner Bros., 1982. Film.

Bliss, Michael. "Affliction and Forgiveness: An Interview with Paul Schrader". *Film Quarterly* 54.1 (2000): 2-9. Print.

The Blob. Dir. Chuck Russell. TriStar Pictures, 1988. Film.

Blood and Roses. Dir. Roger Vadim. Paramount Pictures, 1960. Film.

Blood of the Beasts. Dir. Georges Franju. Criterion Collection, 2004. DVD.

- Blood Simple*. Dir. Joel Coen. Circle Films, 1984. Film.
- Blue Velvet*. Dir. David Lynch. De Laurentiis Entertainment Group, 1986. Film.
- Body Heat*. Dir. Lawrence Kasdan. Warner Bros., 1981. Film.
- Border Incident*. Dir. Anthony Mann. MGM, 1949. Film.
- Bordwell, David. *The Cinema of Eisenstein*. New York: Routledge, 2005. Print.
- . *Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging*. Berkeley: California UP, 2005. Print.
- . "Salvation through self-punishment". *Davidbordwell.net*. Web. 6 Nov. 2014. <<http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2008/04/28/the-show-goes-on/>>
- Bordwell, David and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. New York: McGraw-Hill Humanities, 2012. Print.
- Boss, Pete. "Vile Bodies and Bad Medicine". *Screen* 27.1 (1986): 14-24. Print.
- Breathless*. Dir. Jim McBride. Orion Pictures, 1983. Film.
- Bremer, Arthur. *An Assassin's Diary*. New York: Pocket Books, 1973. Print.
- Bresson, Robert. *Notes on the Cinematographer*. California: Green Integer, 1997. Print.
- Bringing Out the Dead*. Dir. Martin Scorsese. Buena Vista International, 1999. Film.
- The Brood*. Dir. David Cronenberg. New World Pictures, 1979. Film.
- Brooke, Michael. "Robert Bresson: Alias Grace". *Sight & Sound*. Web. 29 Dec. 2014. <<http://old.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/feature/49407>>
- Brophy, Philip. "Horrority: The Textuality of the Contemporary Horror Film". *Screen* 27.1 (1986): 2-13. Print.
- Bruzzi, Stella. *Men's Cinema: Masculinity and Mise en Scène in Hollywood*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2013. Print.
- . *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies*. New York: Routledge, 1997. Print.
- Burt, Jonathan. *Animals in Film*. London: Reaktion Books, 2004. Print.
- The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. Dir. Robert Wiene. Goldwyn Distributing Company, 1920. Film.

Calavita, Marco. "MTV Aesthetics" at the Movies: Interrogating a Film Criticism Fallacy". *Journal of Film and Video* 59.3 (2007): 15-31. Print.

Carrie. Dir. Brian De Palma. United Artists, 1976. Film.

Carroll, Noel. *Interpreting the Moving Image*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. Print.

Cat People. Dir. Jacques Tourneur. RKO Radio Pictures, 1942. Film.

Chatman, Seymour. *Antonioni, or, The Surface of the World*. Berkeley: California UP, 1985. Print.

Children Shouldn't Play With Dead Things. Dir. Bob Clark. Geneni Film Distributors, 1973. Film.

Citizen Kane. Dir. Orson Welles. RKO Radio Pictures, 1941. Film.

Clover, Carol J. *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1992. Print.

Coates, Paul. *Cinema and Colour: The Saturated Image*. London: British Film Institute, 2010. Print.

Cocktail. Dir. Roger Donaldson. Buena Vista Pictures, 1988. Film.

Coma. Dir. Michael Crichton. United Artists, 1978. Film.

Combs, Richard. "Patty Hearst and Paul Schrader: A Life and a Career in Fourteen Stations". *Sight and Sound* 58.3 (Summer 1989): 196-201. Print.

Conflagration. Dir. Kon Ichikawa. Daiei International, 1958. Film.

The Conformist. Dir. Bernardo Bertolucci. Paramount Pictures, 1970. Film.

The Conversation. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Paramount Pictures, 1974. Film.

Craig, Robert and Carol L. Fry. "'Even a Girl Who is Pure at Heart...': Patterns of Symbolism in Val Lewton's *Cat People*". *Illinois Quarterly* 42 (1979): 5-12. Print.

Crash. Dir. David Cronenberg. Fine Line Features, 1996. Film.

Creed, Barbara. *Darwin's Screens: Evolutionary Aesthetics, Time and Sexual Display in the Cinema*. Melbourne: Melbourne UP, 2009. Print.

---. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.

Crimes of the Heart. Dir. Bruce Beresford. De Laurentiis Entertainment Group, 1986. Film.

Cruising. Dir. William Friedkin. United Artists, 1980. Film.

Curse of the Cat People. Dirs. Robert Wise and Gunther von Frisch. RKO Radio Pictures, 1944. Film.

Custen, George F. *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP, 1992. Print.

Dalle Vacche, Angela. "Michelangelo Antonioni's *Red Desert*: Painting as Ventriloquism and Color as Movement (Architecture and Painting)". *Color, the Film Reader*. Eds. Angela Dalle Vacche and Brian Price. New York: Routledge, 2006. 183-191. Print.

Davis, Nick. *The Desiring-Image: Gilles Deleuze and Contemporary Queer Cinema*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013. Print.

Day of Wrath. Dir. Carl Theodor Dreyer. Filmcentralen Palladium, 1943. Film.

Dead Ringers. Dir. David Cronenberg. 20th Century Fox, 1988. Film.

Death by Hanging. Dir. Nagisa Oshima. Art Theatre Guild, 1968. Film.

Deathdream. Dir. Bob Clark. Quadrant Films, 1974. Film.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. London: Athlone Press, 1986. Print.

---. *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. London: Athlone Press, 1989. Print.

---. *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*. Trans. Jean McNeil. London: Zone, 1991. Print.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. London: Athlone Press, 1989. Print.

Denby, David. "Puss in Boots". *New York* 12 April 1982: 60-61. Print.

Deranged. Dir. Alan Ormsby and Jeff Gillen. American International Pictures, 1974. Film.

Desser, David. *The Samurai Films of Akira Kurosawa*. New York: Rochester UP, 1983. Print.

Diary of a Country Priest. Dir. Robert Bresson. Brandon Films, 1951. Film.

Diary of a Shinjuku Thief. Dir. Nagisa Oshima. Art Theatre Guild, 1969. Film.

Dodes'ka-den. Dir. Akira Kurosawa. Toho Company, 1970. Film.

Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *Notes From Underground*. London: Vintage Classics, 1994. Print.

Double Indemnity. Dir. Billy Wilder. Paramount Pictures, 1944. Film.

Double Suicide. Dir. Masahiro Shinoda. Toho Company, 1969. Film.

Doyle, Jennifer, Jonathan Flatley and José Esteban Muñoz. "Introduction". *Pop Out: Queer Warhol*. Eds. Doyle, Flatley and Muñoz. Durham: Duke UP, 1996. 1-19. Print.

Drawing Restraint 9. Dir. Matthew Barney. IFC Films, 2005. Film.

Dyer, Richard. "Don't Look Now: The Male Pin-Up". *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*. Ed. Mandy Merck. London: Routledge, 1992. 265-276. Print.

---. *White: Essays on Race and Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1997. Print.

Early Summer. Dir. Yasujiro Ozu. Shochiku Eiga, 1951. Film.

The Earrings of Madame De... Dir. Max Ophüls. Gaumont, 1953. Film.

Ebert, Roger. *Scorsese by Ebert*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 2008. Print.

Eisner, Lotte. *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*. Berkeley: California UP, 1974. Print.

Elephant. Dir. Gus Van Sant. HBO Films, 2003. Film.

Elsaesser, Thomas. "The Pathos of Failure: American Films in the 1970s; Notes on the Unmotivated Hero". *The Last Great American Picture Show: New Hollywood Cinema in the 1970s*. Eds. Thomas Elsaesser, Alexander Horwath and Noel King. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2004. 279-292. Print.

---. "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama". *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*. Ed. Marcia Landy. Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP, 1991. 68-92. Print.

Empire of the Sun. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Warner Bros., 1987. Film.

The Exorcist. Dir. William Friedkin. Warner Bros., 1973. Film.

Eyes Wide Shut. Dir. Stanley Kubrick. Warner Bros, 1999. Film.

Eyes Without a Face. Dir. Georges Franju. Lux Films, 1960. Film.

- Fame*. Dir. Alan Parker. MGM, 1980. Film.
- Fatal Attraction*. Dir. Adrian Lyne. Paramount Pictures, 1987. Film.
- Fellini's Casanova*. Dir. Federico Fellini. Universal Studios, 1976. Film.
- Five Easy Pieces*. Dir. Bob Rafelson. Columbia Pictures, 1970. Film.
- Flashdance*. Dir. Adrian Lyne. Paramount Pictures, 1983. Film.
- The Fly*. Dir. David Cronenberg. 20th Century Fox, 1986. Film.
- Floating Weeds*. Dir. Yasujirō Ozu. Daiei Motion Picture Company, 1959. Film.
- Foner, Eric and John A. Garraty. "Civil Rights Movement". *History.com*. Web. 12 May 2015. <<http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-movement>>
- Forgacs, David. Audio commentary. *The Conformist*. Arrow Films, 2012. DVD.
- Foster, Jodie. "Interview with Nastassia Kinski". *Film Comment* (1982): 20-23. Print.
- The Fourth Man*. Dir. Paul Verhoeven. Rob Houwer Productions, 1983. Film.
- Frankenstein*. Dir. James Whale. Universal, 1931. Film.
- Fraser, Peter. "American Gigolo and Transcendental Style". *Literature Film Quarterly* 16.2 (1988): 91-100. Print.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Economic Problem of Masochism". *Essential Papers on Masochism*. Ed. Margaret Ann Fitzpatrick Hanly. *Trans.* James Strachey. New York: New York UP, 1995. 274-85. Print.
- Fujiwara, Chris. *Jacques Tourneur: The Cinema of Nightfall*. North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998. Print.
- Gallagher, Sharon. "Cat People Director Paul Schrader: From Urban Grit to Erotic Fantasy". *Bay Area Monthly* 9 April 1982: 16-18. Print.
- Galt, Rosalind. *Pretty: Film and the Decorative Image*. New York: Columbia UP, 2011. Print.
- Gerry*. Dir. Gus Van Sant. THINKFilm, 2002. Film.
- Gibson, Pamela Church. "Queer Looks, Male Gazes, Taut Torsos and Designer Labels: Contemporary Cinema, Consumption and Masculinity". *The Trouble With Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema*. Eds. Phil Powrie, Ann Davies and Bruce Babington. London: Wallflower, 2004. 176-186. Print.

The Godfather Part II. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Paramount Pictures, 1974. Film.

Grease. Dir. Randal Kleiser. Paramount Pictures, 1978. Film.

Greven, David. *Psycho-Sexual: Male Desire in Hitchcock, De Palma, Scorsese, and Friedkin*. Texas: Texas UP, 2013. Print.

Grosoli, Marco. "Drying Blood: De-sexualization and Style in Paul Schrader's *Cat People*". *Roman Catholicism in Fantastic Film: Essays on Belief, Spectacle, Ritual and Imagery*. Ed. Regina Hansen. North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2011. 140-152. Print.

Hansen, Miriam. "Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship". *Star Texts: Image and Performance in Film and Television*. Ed. Jeremy G. Butler. Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP, 1991. 266-298. Print.

Harakiri. Dir. Masaki Kobayashi. Shochiku Company, 1962. Film.

The Help. Dir. Tate Taylor. Walt Disney Studios, 2011. Film.

Higashi, Sumiko. *Virgins, Vamps and Flappers: The American Silent Movie Heroine*. Montreal: Eden Press Women's Publications, 1978. Print.

Hirsch, Foster. *Detours and Lost Highways: A Map of Neo-Noir*. New York: Limelight Editions, 2004. Print.

Hollinger, Karen. "The Monster as Woman: Two Generations of *Cat People*". *Film Criticism* 13.2 (1989): 36-46. Print.

Hornaday, Ann. "12 Years a Slave, Mother of George, and the Aesthetic Politics of Filming Black Skin". *Washington Post*. Web. 29 Dec. 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/movies/12-years-a-slave-mother-of-george-and-the-aesthetic-politics-of-filming-black-skin/2013/10/17/282af868-35cd-11e3-80c6-7e6dd8d22d8f_story.html>

Horwath, Alexander. "A Walking Contradiction (Partly Truth and Partly Fiction)". *The Last Great American Picture Show: New Hollywood Cinema in the 1970s*. Eds. Thomas Elsaesser, Alexander Horwath and Noel King. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2004. 83-106. Print.

Hosoe, Eikoh. *Ba-ra-kei: Ordeal by Roses*. New York: Aperture, 1995. Print.

The Howling. Dir. Joe Dante. AVCO Embassy Pictures, 1981. Film.

The Hunger. Dir. Tony Scott. MGM, 1983. Film.

Inose, Naoki and Hiroaki Sato. *Persona: A Biography of Yukio Mishima*. California: Stone Bridge Press, 2013. Print.

- In the Heat of the Night*. Dir. Norman Jewison. United Artists, 1967. Film.
- Invaders From Mars*. Dir. Tobe Hooper. Cannon Pictures, 1986. Film.
- Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Dir. Philip Kaufman. United Artists, 1978. Film.
- Ishioka, Eiko. *Eiko on Stage*. New York: Callaway, 2000. Print.
- I Spit on Your Grave*. Dir. Meir Zarchi. Cinemagic, 1978. Film.
- Ivan the Terrible, Part II*. Dir. Sergei Eisenstein. Janus Films, 1944. Film.
- I Walked with a Zombie*. Dir. Jacques Tourneur. RKO Radio Pictures, 1943. Film.
- Jackson, Kevin. *Schrader on Schrader & Other Writings*. London: Faber and Faber, 2004. Print.
- Jaehne, Karen. "Schrader's *Mishima*: An Interview." *Film Quarterly* 39.3 (1986): 11-17. Print.
- Jaws*. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Universal Pictures, 1975. Film.
- Jeffords, Susan. *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP, 1994. Print.
- Jenkins, David. "Kith and Kinski". *The Daily Telegraph* 8 Jan. 2001. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4720944/Kith-and-Kinski.html>>. Web. 9 Oct. 2014.
- Kaes, Anton. *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 2009. Print.
- Kagemusha*. Dir. Akira Kurosawa. 20th Century Fox, 1980. Film.
- Kaplan, Michael. "Questions for Paul Schrader: The Art of Darkness". *New York Times Magazine* 24 Oct. 1982: 35. Print.
- Karney, Robyn. *Who's Who in Hollywood*. London: Bloomsbury, 1993. Print.
- Kilday, Gregg. "Paul Schrader Says His New Nicolas Cage Movie "Was Taken Away From Me". *The Hollywood Reporter* 16 Oct. 2014. <<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/director-paul-schrader-says-his-741590>>. Web. 4 Jan. 2015.
- The Killers*. Dir. Robert Siodmak. Universal Pictures, 1946. Film.
- King, James. "A Portrait of the Artist as Narcissist: *Mishima*." *Under Foreign Eyes: Western Cinematic Adaptations of Postwar Japan*. Hampshire: Zero Books, 2012. 79-90. Print.

King Kong. Dir. Ernest B. Schoedsack and Merian C. Cooper. RKO Radio Pictures, 1933. Film.

Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye. Dir. Gordon Douglas. Warner Bros., 1950. Film.

Klein, Alan M. *Little Big Men: Bodybuilding Subculture and Gender Construction*. New York: SUNY, 1993. Print.

Klevan, Andrew. *Disclosure of the Everyday: Undramatic Achievement in Narrative Film*. Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 2000. Print.

Klinger, Barbara. *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture and the Films of Douglas Sirk*. Indiana: Indiana UP, 1994. Print.

Kolker, Robert. *A Cinema of Loneliness*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011. Print.

Kouvaros, George. *Contemporary Film Directors: Paul Schrader*. Urbana and Chicago: Illinois UP, 2008. Print.

Kovács, András Bálint. *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 2007. Print.

Kracauer, Siegfried. *The Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1997. Print.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1982. Print.

The Lady from Shanghai. Dir. Orson Welles. Columbia Pictures, 1947. Film.

Last Days. Dir. Gus Van Sant. Fine Line Features, 2005. Film.

The Last Detail. Dir. Hal Ashby. Columbia Pictures, 1973. Film.

The Last House on the Left. Dir. Wes Craven. Hallmark Releasing Corp., 1972. Film.

The Last Laugh. Dir. F.W. Murnau. UFA, 1924. Film.

The Last Temptation of Christ. Dir. Martin Scorsese. Universal Pictures, 1988. Film.

Last Year in Marienbad. Dir. Alain Resnais. Cocinor, 1961. Film.

Late Spring. Dir. Yasujiro Ozu. Shochiku Eiga, 1949. Film.

L'avventura. Dir. Michelangelo Antonioni. Janus Films, 1960. Film.

L'eclisse. Dir. Michelangelo Antonioni. Times Film Corporation, 1962. Film.

Lehman, Peter. *Running Scared: Masculinity and the Representation of the Male Body*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP, 2007. Print.

Lenne, Gérard. "Monster and Victim: Women in the Horror Film". *Sexual Stratagems: The World of Women in Film*. Ed. Patricia Erens. New York: Horizon, 1979. 31-40. Print.

The Leopard Man. Dir. Jacques Tourneur. RKO Radio Pictures, 1943. Film.

The Life of Matsu the Untamed. Dir. Hiroshi Inagaki. Daiei Studios, 1943. Film.

Lindsay, Vachel. *The Art of the Moving Picture*. New York: Liveright, 1970. Print.

Lippit, Akira Mizuta. *Electric Animal: Towards a Rhetoric of Wildlife*. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2008. Print.

Little Shop of Horrors. Dir. Frank Oz. Warner Bros., 1986. Film.

LoBrutto, Vincent. *By Design: Interviews with Film Production Designers*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992. Print.

Lola Montès. Dir. Max Ophüls. Gamma Film, 1955. Film.

Looking for Mr. Goodbar. Dir. Richard Brooks. Paramount Pictures, 1977. Film.

The Lower Depths. Dir. Akira Kurosawa. Toho Company, 1957. Film.

Luhr, William. "Gender Representation in Paul Schrader's *American Gigolo*". *Gender: Literary and Cinematic Representation; Selected Papers From the Eleventh Annual Florida State University Conference on Literature and Film*. Ed. Jeanne M. Ruppert. Gainesville: Florida UP, 1994. 25-32. Print.

Lukes, H.N. "*American Gigolo*". *America First: Naming the Nation in US Film*. Ed. Mandy Merck. New York: Routledge, 2007. 177-198. Print.

Macnab, Geoffrey. "I was in a bad place". *The Guardian*. Web. 29 Dec. 2014. <<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2006/jul/06/features.geoffreymacnab>>

The Magnificent Ambersons. Dir. Orson Welles. RKO Radio Pictures, 1942. Film.

Malkiewicz, Kris. *Film Lighting: Talks with Hollywood's Cinematographers and Gaffers*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986. Print.

The Maltese Falcon. Dir. John Huston. Warner Bros., 1941. Film.

A Man Escaped. Dir. Robert Bresson. Gaumont, 1956. Film.

Manhunter. Dir. Michael Mann. De Laurentiis Entertainment Group, 1986. Film.

Mank, Gregory William. *Hollywood Cauldron: Thirteen Horror Films From the Genre's Golden Age*. North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 1994. Print.

Marchetti, Gina. *Romance and the "Yellow Peril": Race, Sex and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction*. Berkeley: California UP, 1994. Print.

Martin, Cybel. "The Art of Lighting Dark Skin for Film and HD". *Indiewire*. Web. 29 Dec. 2014. <<http://blogs.indiewire.com/shadowandact/the-art-of-lighting-dark-skin-for-film-and-hd>>

Mayne, Judith. "King Kong and the Ideology of Spectacle". *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 1 (1976): 384-90. Print.

McDonald, Keiko I. "A Cinematic Creation: Ichikawa Kon's *Conflagration* (1958)." *Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts*. Eds. Alastair Phillips and Julian Stringer. New York: Routledge, 2007. 137-151. Print.

Mercer, John and Martin Shingler. *Melodrama: Genre, Style, and Sensibility*. London: Wallflower, 2005. Print.

Metropolis. Dir. Fritz Lang. UFA, 1927. Film.

Miami Vice. NBC. 28 Sept. 1984-21 May 1989. Television.

Midnight Cowboy. Dir. John Schlesinger. United Artists, 1969. Film.

Midnight Express. Dir. Alan Parker. Columbia Pictures, 1978. Film.

Miller, Mark Crispin. *Seeing Through Movies*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1990.

Mishima, Yukio. *Confessions of a Mask*. London: Peter Owen, 2007. Print.

---. *Forbidden Colors*. London: Vintage, 1996. Print.

---. *Kyoko's House*. [Currently unavailable.]

---. *Patriotism*. New York: New Directions Publishing, 1995. Print.

---. *Runaway Horses*. London: Vintage, 2000. Print.

---. *Sun and Steel*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1971. Print.

---. *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*. London: Vintage, 2001. Print.

Miyao, Daisuke. *Sessue Hayakawa: Silent Cinema and Transnational Stardom*. Durham: Duke UP, 2007. Print.

The Mosquito Coast. Dir. Peter Weir. Warner Bros., 1986. Film.

Munsterberg, Hugo. *The Film, a Psychological Study*. New York: Dover, 1970. Print.

Murphy, Ian. "Feeling and Form in the Films of Claire Denis". *Jump Cut* 54 (2012). Web. 23 Aug. 2014.
<<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc54.2012/IanMurphyDenis/text.html>>.

Murphy, Ian and Gwenda Young. Editorial on "Corporeal Cinema". *Alphaville* 7 (2014). Web. 29 Dec. 2014.
<<http://www.alphavillejournal.com/Issue7/HTML/Editorial.html>>

Musser, Amber. "Masochism: A Queer Subjectivity." *Rhizomes* 11-12 (2005-2006). Web. 23 Aug. 2014.
<<http://www.rhizomes.net/issue11/musser.html>>

My Own Private Idaho. Dir. Gus Van Sant. Fine Line Features, 1991. Film.

Naremore, James. *More Than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts*. Berkeley: California UP, 2008. Print.

Nathan, John. *Mishima: A Biography*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2000. Print.

Neale, Steve. "Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema". *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*. Eds. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark. New York: Routledge, 1993. 9-20. Print.

Newman, Kim. *Nightmare Movies: Horror on Screen Since the 1960's*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011. Print.

Die Nibelungen: Siegfried. Dir. Fritz Lang. UFA, 1925. Film.

Nichols, Bill. "American Gigolo: Transcendental Style and Narrative Form". *Film Quarterly* 34.4 (Summer 1981): 8-13. Print.

9½ Weeks. Dir. Adrian Lyne. MGM, 1986. Film.

Ningen gyorai kaiten. Dir. Shûe Matsubayashi. Shintoho Film Distribution Committee, 1955. Film.

No Mercy. Dir. Richard Pearce. TriStar Pictures, 1986. Film.

La notte. Dir. Michelangelo Antonioni. United Artists, 1961. Film.

Nosferatu. Dir. F.W. Murnau. Film Arts Guild, 1922. Film.

Nosferatu the Vampyre. Dir. Werner Herzog. 20th Century Fox, 1979. Film.

Obsession. Dir. Brian De Palma. Columbia Pictures, 1976. Film.

O'Donnell, Ruth. "Performing Masculinity: The Star Persona of Tom Cruise". Web. 29 Dec. 2014. <<https://repository.royalholloway.ac.uk/file/3a20ea8f-3065-319a-f899-43bb39bb9655/9/2012odonnellraphd.pdf>>. PhD thesis.

An Officer and a Gentleman. Dir. Taylor Hackford. Paramount Pictures, 1982. Film.

Old Boyfriends. Dir. Joan Tewkesbury. AVCO Embassy Pictures, 1979. Film.

One From the Heart. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Columbia Pictures, 1982. Film.

Orpheus. Dir. Jean Cocteau. DisCina, 1950. Film.

Out of the Past. Dir. Jacques Tourneur. RKO Radio Pictures, 1947. Film.

Paige, Linda Rohrer. "The Transformation of Woman: The 'Curse' of the Cat Woman in Val Lewton/Jacques Tourneur's *Cat People*, Its Sequel, and Remake". *Literature/Film Quarterly* 25.4 (1997): 291-99. Print.

The Parallax View. Dir. Alan J. Pakula. Paramount Pictures, 1974. Film.

Paris, Texas. Dir. Wim Wenders. 20th Century Fox, 1984. Film.

Parkes, Graham. "Ways of Japanese Thinking." *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture: A Reader*. Ed. Nancy G. Hume. New York: SUNY, 1995. 77-108. Print.

The Passion of Joan of Arc. Dir. Carl Theodor Dreyer. Société Générale du Films, 1928. Film.

Patriotism. Dir. Yukio Mishima. Toho Company, 1966. Film.

Peary, Danny. *Cult Movie Stars*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991. Print.

The Phantom of the Opera. Dir. Rupert Julian. Universal Pictures, 1925. Film.

The Piano. Dir. Jane Campion. CiBy 2000, 1993. Film.

Pickpocket. Dir. Robert Bresson. New Yorker Films, 1959. Film.

Pipolo, Tony. *Robert Bresson: A Passion For Film*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010. Print.

Porky's II: The Next Day. Dir. Bob Clark. Astral Films, 1983. Film.

The Postman Always Rings Twice. Dir. Bob Rafelson. Paramount Pictures, 1981. Film.

Price, Brian. "General Introduction". *Color, the Film Reader*. Eds. Angela Dalle Vacche and Brian Price. New York: Routledge, 2006. 1-10. Print.

Prince, Judge Dennis. Rev. of *Cat People*. *DVD Verdict*.
<<http://www.dvdverdict.com/reviews/catpeoplehddvd.php>> Web. 9 Oct. 2014.

Prince, Stephen. *A New Pot of Gold: Hollywood Under the Electronic Rainbow, 1980-1989*. Berkeley: California UP, 2002. Print.

Quinlan, David. *Quinlan's Illustrated Directory of Film Stars*. London: Batsford, 1996. Print.

Rabid. Dir. David Cronenberg. Cinépix, 1977. Film.

Raging Bull. Dir. Martin Scorsese. United Artists, 1980. Film.

Rall, Veronika. "'This Isn't Filmmaking, It's War': A Gendered Gaze on the Tom Cruise Phenomenon". *Visual Anthropology Review* 9.1 (1993): 92-104. Print.

Ran. Dir. Akira Kurosawa. Orion Classics, 1985. Film.

Rascaroli, Laura. "Modernity, Put Into Form: *Blowup*, Objectuality, 1960s Antonioni." *Antonioni: Centenary Essays*. Eds. Laura Rascaroli and John David Rhodes. London: BFI/Palgrave, 2011. 64-79. Print.

Rayns, Tony. "*Patriotism: The Word Made Flesh*." Criterion DVD liner notes. Web. 23 Aug. 2014. <<http://www.criterion.com/current/posts/517>>

---. "Truth with the Power of Fiction." *Sight and Sound* 53.4 (Autumn 1984): 256-60. Print.

Rebello, Stephen. "The Making of Paul Schrader's *Cat People*". *Cinefantastique* 12.4 (1982): 28-42. Print.

Red Desert. Dir. Michelangelo Antonioni. Rizzoli Film, 1964. Film.

The Red Shoes. Dir. Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. General Film Distributors, 1948. Film.

Reik, Theodor. *Masochism in Sex and Society*. Trans. Margaret H. Beigel and Gertrud M. Kurth. New York: Grove Press, 1962. Print.

Repulsion. Dir. Roman Polanski. Compton Films, 1965. Film.

Rhodes, John David. "Pasolini's Exquisite Flowers: The "Cinema of Poetry" as a Theory of Art Cinema". *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*. Eds. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010. 142-163. Print.

Richie, Donald. *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film*. Foreword by Paul Schrader.

New York: Kodansha, 2012. Print.

---. *Japanese Cinema: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990. Print.

---. *Ozu: His Life and Films*. Berkeley: California UP, 1977. Print.

Rising Sun. Dir. Philip Kaufman. 20th Century Fox, 1993. Film.

Risky Business. Dir. Paul Brickman. Warner Bros., 1983. Film.

The River Fuefuki. Dir. Keisuke Kinoshita. Shochiku Company, 1960. Film.

Rodrick, Stephen. "Here Is What Happens When You Cast Lindsay Lohan in Your Movie". *New York Times Magazine* 10 Jan. 2013.

<<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/13/magazine/here-is-what-happens-when-you-cast-lindsay-lohan-in-your-movie.html>>. Web. 4 Jan. 2015.

Rolling Thunder. Dir. John Flynn. American International Pictures, 1977. Film.

Romney, Jonathan. "New Ways to Skin a Cat: Paul Schrader's *Cat People*". *Enclitic* 8.1-2 (1984): 148-55. Print.

La Ronde. Dir. Max Ophüls. Commercial Pictures, 1950. Film.

Rosemary's Baby. Dir. Roman Polanski. Paramount Pictures, 1968. Film.

Rosen, Rebecca J. "A Glimpse Into 1970s Gay Activism". *The Atlantic*. Web. 12 May 2015. <<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/02/a-glimpse-into-1970s-gay-activism/284077/>>

Rosenbaum, Jonathan. *Essential Cinema: On the Necessity of Film Canons*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2008. Print.

Russell, Lawrence. Rev. of *American Gigolo*. *Culture Court*. Web. 29 Dec. 2014. <<http://www.culturecourt.com/F/Noir/AMG.htm>>

Sacher-Masoch, Leopold von. *Venus in Furs*. Rockville, MD: Tark Classic Fiction, 2008. Print.

Le Samourai. Dir. Jean-Pierre Melville. S.N. Prodis, 1967. Film.

Sarris, Andrew. "Old Movies, Old Times". *Village Voice* 13 April 1982: 43. Print.

Saturday Night Fever. Dir. John Badham. Paramount Pictures, 1977. Film.

Scanners. Dir. David Cronenberg. Avco-Embassy Pictures, 1981. Film.

Scarface. Dirs. Howard Hawks and Richard Rosson. United Artists, 1932. Film.

- Scarface*. Dir. Brian De Palma. Universal Pictures, 1983. Film.
- The Scarlet Empress*. Dir. Josef von Sternberg. Paramount Pictures, 1934. Film.
- Schrader, Paul, dir. *Adam Resurrected*. Image Entertainment, 2008. Film.
- . *Affliction*. Lions Gate Films, 1997. Film.
- . *American Gigolo*. Paramount Pictures, 1980. Film.
- . *Auto Focus*. Sony Pictures Classics, 2002. Film.
- . *Blue Collar*. Universal Pictures, 1978. Film.
- . *Cat People*. Universal Pictures, 1982. Film.
- . "Cat People: An Intimate Portrait". *Cat People*. Universal Studios, 2002. DVD.
- . *The Canyons*. IFC Films, 2013. Film.
- . *The Comfort of Strangers*. Skouras Pictures, 1990. Film.
- . Director Commentary. *Cat People*. Universal Studios, 2002. DVD.
- . Director Commentary. *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters*. Criterion Collection, 2008. DVD.
- . *Dominion: Prequel to The Exorcist*. Warner Bros., 2005. Film.
- . *Dying of the Light*. Lions Gate, 2014. Film.
- . *Hardcore*. Columbia Pictures, 1979. Film.
- . *Light of Day*. TriStar Pictures, 1987. Film.
- . *Light Sleeper*. Fine Line Features, 1992. Film.
- . *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters*. Warner Bros., 1985. Film.
- . *Patty Hearst*. Atlantic Releasing Corporation, 1988. Film.
- . *The Walker*. THINKFilm, 2007. Film.
- Schrader, Paul. "Budd Boetticher: A Case Study in Criticism". *Schrader on Schrader & Other Writings*. Ed. Kevin Jackson. London: Faber and Faber, 2004. 45-57. Print.
- . "Canon Fodder". *Film Comment* 42.5 (2006): 33-49. Print.

---. "Game Changers: Editing". *Film Comment*.
<<http://www.filmcomment.com/article/game-changers-editing>>. Web. 4 Jan. 2015.

---. "Notes on Film Noir". *Schrader on Schrader & Other Writings*. Ed. Kevin Jackson. London: Faber and Faber, 2004. 80-94. Print.

---. "Paul Schrader's Film Class: Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Conformist*". Public lecture. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICFuTZRL5bg>>. Web. 29 Dec. 2014.

---. "A Postscript From Paul Schrader". *Film Quarterly* 34.4 (Summer 1981): 8-13. Print.

---. *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*. Berkeley: California UP, 1972. Print.

The Searchers. Dir. John Ford. Warner Bros., 1956. Film.

Sebastiane. Dir. Derek Jarman and Paul Humfress. BBC Worldwide, 1976. Film.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. "Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1.1 (1993): 1-16. Print.

Seidensticker, Edward. *This Country Japan*. New York: Kodansha, 1979. Print.

The Seven Year Itch. Dir. Billy Wilder. 20th Century Fox, 1955. Film.

Shakespeare, William. *Romeo and Juliet*. London: Harper Press, 2001. Print.

The Shining. Dir. Stanley Kubrick. Warner Bros., 1980. Film.

Shipman, David. *The Great Movie Stars 3: The Independent Years*. London: Macdonald & Co., 1991. Print.

Shivers. Dir. David Cronenberg. Cinépix, 1975. Film.

Silverman, Kaja. *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*. New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.

Simon, Alex. "Paul Schrader: Dominion of the Dark." *The Hollywood Interview*. Web. 25 Aug. 2014.
<<http://thehollywoodinterview.blogspot.ie/2008/01/paul-schrader-hollywood-interview.html>>

Sisters. Dir. Brian De Palma. American International Pictures, 1973. Film.

The Skin I Live In. Dir. Pedro Almodóvar. Sony Pictures Classics, 2011. Film.

- Southern Comfort*. Dir. Walter Hill. 20th Century Fox, 1981. Film.
- Stagecoach*. Dir. John Ford. United Artists, 1939. Film.
- Standish, Isolde. *Myth and Masculinity in the Japanese Cinema: Towards a Political Reading of the Tragic Hero*. London: Routledge, 2000. Print.
- Staying Alive*. Dir. Sylvester Stallone. Paramount Pictures, 1983. Film.
- Stern, Lesley. *The Scorsese Connection*. London: British Film Institute, 1995. Print.
- Stokes, Henry Scott. *The Life and Death of Yukio Mishima*. New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000. Print.
- Studlar, Gaylyn. "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema". *Movies and Methods Volume II*. Ed. Bill Nichols. Berkeley: California UP, 1985. 602–16. Print.
- The Tattered Wings*. Dir. Keisuke Kinoshita. Shochiku Eiga, 1955. Film.
- Taubin, Amy. *Taxi Driver (BFI Film Classics)*. London: British Film Institute, 2008. Print.
- Taxi Driver*. Dir. Martin Scorsese. Columbia Pictures, 1976. Film.
- Teeth*. Dir. Mitchell Lichtenstein. Roadside Attractions, 2007. Film.
- Telotte, J. P. "'Dark Patches': Structures of Absence in Lewton's *Cat People*". *Post Script: Essays in Film and the Humanities* 2.1 (1982): 40-57. Print.
- . *Dreams of Darkness: Fantasy and the Films of Val Lewton*. Illinois: Illinois UP, 1985. Print.
- . *Voices in the Dark: The Narrative Patterns of Film Noir*. Illinois: Illinois UP, 1989. Print.
- Tess*. Dir. Roman Polanski. Columbia Pictures, 1979. Film.
- There Was a Father*. Dir. Yasujirō Ozu. Shochiku Eiga, 1942. Film.
- They Live by Night*. Dir. Nicholas Ray. RKO Radio Pictures, 1948. Film.
- Thief*. Dir. Michael Mann. United Artists, 1981. Film.
- The Thing*. Dir. John Carpenter. Universal Pictures, 1982. Film.
- The Thing From Another World*. Dir. Christian Nyby. RKO Radio Pictures, 1951. Film.

- Thomson, David. "Cats". *Film Comment* 18.2 (1982): 49-52. Print.
- THX 1138*. Dir. George Lucas. Warner Bros., 1971. Film.
- T-Men*. Dir. Anthony Mann. Eagle-Lion Films, 1947. Film.
- Tokyo Story*. Dir. Yasujirō Ozu. Shochiku Eiga, 1953. Film.
- Top Gun*. Dir. Tony Scott. Paramount Pictures, 1986. Film.
- To the Devil a Daughter*. Dir. Peter Sykes. Hammer Film Productions, 1976. Film.
- Two-Lane Blacktop*. Dir. Monte Hellman. Universal Pictures, 1971. Film.
- 2 or 3 Things I Know About Her*. Dir. Jean-Luc Godard. New Yorker Films, 1967. Film.
- Ueda, Makoto. "Zeami and the Art of the Noh Drama: Imitation, Yugen, and Sublimity." *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture: A Reader*. Ed. Nancy G. Hume. New York: SUNY, 1995. 177-92. Print.
- Union Station*. Dir. Rudolph Maté. Paramount Pictures, 1950. Film.
- Varley, H. Paul. "Culture in the Present Age." *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture: A Reader*. Ed. Nancy G. Hume. New York: SUNY, 1995. 295-340. Print.
- Vampyr*. Dir. Carl Theodor Dreyer. Vereignigte Star-Film GmbH, 1932. Film.
- Vendredi soir*. Dir. Claire Denis. Metro Tartan Distribution Ltd., 2002. Film.
- Vertigo*. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Paramount Pictures, 1958. Film.
- Visiting Hours*. Dir. Jean-Claude Lord. 20th Century Fox, 1982. Film.
- Wagstaff, Christopher. *Il conformista (The Conformist) (BFI Film Classics)*. London: British Film Institute, 2012. Print.
- Williams, Linda. "When the Woman Looks". *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*. Ed. Barry Keith Grant. Austin: Texas UP, 1996. 15-34. Print.
- Williams, Linda Ruth. *The Erotic Thriller in Contemporary Cinema*. Indiana: Indiana UP, 2005. Print.
- Willis, Sharon. "Seductive Spaces: Private Fascinations and Public Vices in Popular Cinema". *Seduction and Theory: Readings of Gender, Representation, and Rhetoric*. Ed. Dianne Hunter. Urbana: Illinois UP, 1989. 47-70. Print.
- Wilson, John Howard. "Sources for a Neglected Masterpiece: Paul Schrader's

Mishima.” *Biography* 20.3 (Summer 1997): 264-83. Print.

The Wizard of Oz. Dir. Victor Fleming. MGM, 1939. Film.

Wolfson, Nancy. “The Loves of Lauren Hutton”. *Cigar Aficionado*. Web. 29 Dec. 2014. <http://www.cigaraficionado.com/webfeatures/show/id/The-Loves-of-Lauren-Hutton_7640>

Wood, Robin. “An Introduction to the American Horror Film”. *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film*. Ed. Barry Keith Grant. London: Scarecrow Press, 1984. 164-200. Print.

---. *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan... and Beyond*. New York: Columbia UP, 2003. Print.

---. *Personal Views: Explorations in Film*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP, 2006. Print.

Wyatt, Justin. *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood*. Texas: Texas UP, 1994. Print.

Xtro. Dir. Harry Bromley Davenport. New Line Cinema, 1983. Film.

The Yakuza. Dir. Sydney Pollack. Warner Bros., 1974. Film.

Yamamoto, Tsunetomo. *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*. Trans. William Scott Wilson. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2012. Print.

Young, Gwenda. “The Cinema of Difference: Jacques Tourneur, Race and *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943)”. *Irish Journal of American Studies* 7 (1998): 101-19. Print.

Yourcenar, Marguerite. *Mishima: A Vision of the Void*. Trans. Alberto Manguel. Chicago: Chicago UP, 2001. Print.

Z. Dir. Costa-Gavras. Cinema V, 1969. Film.

Zoku Abashiri bangaichi. Dir. Teruo Ishii. Toei Company, 1965. Film.