

A TRUTH NOT PERFECTLY VISIBLE:  
COGNITION AND CULTURE IN THE BORDERLINE NARRATIVE

by

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Under the Direction of

Drs. Joel Black and Nelson Hilton

ABSTRACT

*A Truth Not Perfectly Visible: Cognition and Culture in the Borderline Narrative* brings contemporary cognitive psychological theory together with film and literary narratology and cultural studies to describe an emerging genre, the Borderline narrative. Section One lays out a description or Primary Theory of narrative cognition. As a basic cognitive function, all persons in all cultures imagine themselves as the main characters in the story of their lives. All stories have similar features and all interpreters of stories use similar strategies. By defining these features and these strategies, we can expand existing narratology to a fuller understanding of narrative logic which is the way the mind makes choices and judgements based on narrative (not strictly logical) associations. One way narratives work is in the way a specific a culture constructs its narrative logic. In the creation of stories, a culture is narratizing its social order and social change, and when interpretations describe this process, I call it Secondary Theory. The Borderline Narrative, of which Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989) is a prototypical example, currently narratizes the change in American culture from an Eurocentric masculinist culture to a multi-culture.

Section Two uses the tools set out in Section One to generate an evolved Primary Theory of narrative genres based on cognitive schema theory. My case studies then illustrate Secondary Theory uses of Primary Theory tools. By comparing James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* to Michael Mann's 1991 film adaptation, I demonstrate how the text contains a version of history reflective of the producing culture, not to the historical circumstance of the story-world. I then consider the way existing cultural narratives and their narrative logics shaped the reception of Roland Joffé's 1996 adaptation of *The Scarlet Letter*.

INDEX WORDS: Cognitive theory, Cultural studies, Genre, Multicultural, Western, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Do the Right Thing*, *Last of the Mohicans*, History, Reception, Narratology, Identity, Structure, Reader response.

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### **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my father, who was tough, fair, and generous, and to my mother: without her support and encouragement this project would never have been realized. Her liveliness, her depth, and her curiosity have been a constant source of inspiration.

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A dissertation isn't so much a project as it is a lifestyle choice. My friends in Athens and from previous lifetimes have been a source of great strength and encouragement throughout this ordeal, but particularly when I was misdiagnosed with

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## Table of Contents

	Page
Acknowledgments .....	v
Chapter	
1 Introduction: Culture, Cognition, Meanings .....	1
Section One—	
2 The Right Thing? Cognitive Tools and The Borderline Narrative . . . .	32
Section Two—	
3 Schema, Genre, the Borderline .....	134
4 Instructions Included: <i>Mohicans</i> Schematize History .....	159
5 Reception at the Borderline: The New Puritans and Interpreting <i>The                 Scarlet Letter</i> .....	213
6 Conclusion: Hybridities .....	261
Endnotes .....	268
Bibliography .....	289

## **Chapter 1:**

### **Introduction: Culture, Cognition, Meanings**

As a man is So he Sees.

As the Eye is formed, such are its Powers.

—William Blake

Man is mind, and the situation of man as man is a mental situation.

—Karl Jaspers

### **Borderlines**

This dissertation addresses two basic constructs of human logic, borders and narratives. Indeed, if there is a simple truth I hope to make visible, it is that we know the borders that define ourselves and our cultures and even our artifacts primarily by the cognitive operations of narrative logic — which is an innate faculty, but it not always perfectly “logical.” Most of the concepts we have and many of our governing values, both personal and cultural which we manipulate in our minds as if they were closed and bounded sets of information are not strictly bounded at all, but held in place by various narrative forces.

When the narrative is changed, borders change. In this study, I will address various border relationships on various conceptual fields: the borders between certain

historical periods, the borders between the academic and the non-academic worlds, the borders between academic disciplines, the border between literary and cinematic narrative comprehension, the borders between generic forms, the border between Humanism and the human, the border between cognitivism and culturalism, the mental borderland between consistency-building and novelty-seeking, and finally, I hope to inspect the borders between cultures: between ethnicities, genders, classes, and historical eras. In this last effort, I will also be illuminating those areas of the “borderland” that are shared as well those areas in dispute.

To do this, I will first try to tell the story of narrative itself — a Primary Theory — to present a comprehensive model of all the narrative processes that should be basic to a narratological understanding of identity, culture, and cognitivism. From this very general story — which to date has been only partially told by narrative theorists — I will then tell the specific stories, the narrative logics, of interpretive methods that are to some degree culturally determined — a Secondary Theory. In the process, I will use several actual narratives as exemplars and case studies. Let me take this first moment to make my overall structure transparent as a narrative, in cognitive terms, to *prime* the reading experience.

Because I am presenting a version of narrative logic, I am also attempting to arrange my narrative examples logically. I begin with my first example, John Ford’s 1956 Western, *The Searchers*, because it is a classic Western that, as generic texts will, reflected its historical moment. *The Searchers* is on the cusp of the American Civil Rights movement and is also on the cusp of the emergence of the Borderline Narrative — it is not yet a Borderline text, but in its characters, setting, and depictions, it shows the

beginning of a transition that is also active in the a culture at large. I use it as a first example because of its place in history; its narrative differences from preceding Westerns foretold a sea-change in the American understanding of ethnicity, so I mobilize it briefly at the beginning to foretell a sea change in narrative studies. Just as the United States has shifted from white centric apartheid in the 50s to a multicultural respect in the new century, so narrative studies (and I believe the Humanities generally) will shift from its current pastiche of methods to embrace cognitive theory as the driving force, much the way Ethan (John Wayne) embraces Debbie (Natalie Wood) at the end of *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956). But, currently narrative studies, like Ethan at the start of his search, is currently regarded as a renegade by the Sheriffs (Ward Bond) of the Academy. *The Searchers*, then, is an appropriate example by which to outline the current state of narrative studies and the problem matrix the innovations of this dissertation will seek to address.

From *The Searchers*, however, the narrative structure of the dissertation itself will move on to describe a full blown cognitive theory of narrative and so I have chosen the fully emergent and historically controversial Borderline Narrative, Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989) as my case study. *Do the Right Thing* was a film that in its historical moment was so radical and socially insightful, that excited the disputes on the borderlines of American ethnicity so exactly that its release was delayed for fear it would provoke widespread rioting. I select this text as my prototype example and exercise it to demonstrate Primary Theory because of this important historical position. In 1989, it offered a point of view that had heretofore been foreclosed, obscured by social and mainstream narrative practices. In a much humbler way, this impact is similar to the

possible impact of cognitive studies on the Humanities and narrative studies. Unlike other top-down theories, cognitivism is built on a solid foundation of bottom-up observation and has already bridged the borders of previously separate academic areas. Indeed, just as the tropes, structure and alignments of *Do the Right Thing* were naturalized by more Hollywood mainstream texts — demonstrated by my exemplars of Secondary Theory, *The Last of the Mohicans* (James Fenimore Cooper, 1824-36), *Last of the Mohicans* (Michael Mann, 1992) and Roland Joffè's adaptation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1995) — so cognitivism will be, in the foreseeable future, naturalized across academic boundaries.

### **Searching**

Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers*, is a figure for the problem matrix this dissertation will investigate. As a character, Ethan presents a culturally double-constructed identity; although ethnically white, the narrative clearly signals that he has been acculturated both in white and in Native American ways. As a cultural being, Ethan is in a borderland psychic space, neither white nor Indian. Yet, because he lives on the white side of the classic Western's cultural White/Indian borderland — a border that in constant and violent dispute — Ethan is severely disconcerted by his inability to reconcile his bi-culturality, and as a result, he shows a violent disregard for both cultural systems. As a white man, he displays sincere family affection and seems, at first, to be a principled man; however, as the plot progresses, he also appears to be a probable felon, adulterer, and unrepentant ex-Confederate ("I don't believe in surrenders"): if he is principled, his principles are, as is typical of the Western and Borderline hero, personal;

he knows white culture, but he cannot respect its rules. Similarly, although Ethan seems to have been inculcated in American Indian culture — he knows Plains Indian religion, sign language, warfare, tracking, trading, and ritual; he affects Indian scabbards for his Winchester and knife; and he even takes scalps<sup>1</sup> — he is viciously racist to the point that he spends most of the plot searching for his kidnaped nieces in order to murder them under the peculiarly American rationalization: "Better dead than red." Furthermore, Ethan seems to hate his mixed-blood partner in the search, "one-eighth-Cherokee" Marty (a very tan Jeffrey Hunter). Although Ethan rescued Marty as an infant and despite Marty's sincere efforts to respect him as his putative "Uncle," Ethan responds with irritation, racial epithets, mockery, contrived humiliations, and, when it serves his purposes, he uses the lad as live bait.

In his character construction, Ethan figures irreconcilable cultural difference. He is on a cultural borderline; his psychic space as well the physical space he inhabits are frontiers between two cultures, white and Indian, and the life-or-death stakes of frontier life exacerbate his conflicted sense of identity to the point that he responds with anger and confusion because each culture seems to have rules which mandate the murder of the other. While this fury is clear enough in Ethan's bitter and manipulative relationship with Marty, the actual extent of Ethan's cross-cultural rage is not directly presented, but implied in the scene in a manner that critics of *The Searchers* have missed in their close-readings. Early in the search, after tracking a small party of raiders who had taken Lucy (Pippa Scott) into a secluded valley, Ethan returns visibly upset; he dismounts and immediately begins digging his knife in the dirt. This digging activity is a culturally-determined sign that indicates the unspeakable extremes that Ethan's conflict has driven

him to. However, criticism of *The Searchers* — due to the acculturation of academic critics generally — has missed the disturbing significance and narrative implications of Ethan's gestures. In a hunting culture, hunters dig their knives in the dirt to clean blood from the blade.<sup>2</sup> If Ethan had found Lucy raped and *already* dead as he later implies ("What do you want me to do? Draw you a picture? Spell it out? Don't ever ask me! Long as you live, don't ever ask me more!"), he would have no reason to use his knife and then, no reason to clean it. If, however, he found her raped and abandoned, he would use his knife to kill her rather than bring her back to the white world in such a "polluted" state (possibly pregnant with a half-Indian child). Yes, he buried her, as he says, in his Confederate coat, but, perhaps appalled at what he's done, he immediately leaves the grave site, only remembering his bloody blade on his furious ride back to camp. For audiences who may have been unclear about this scene, Ethan's lethal intentions are later made abundantly clear in several dialogue scenes in which Marty — who witnessed the knife-cleaning — reveals that his purpose in accompanying Ethan — at considerable personal risk and interrupting his courtship of Laurie — is to prevent Ethan from murdering Debbie (Natalie Wood).

I offer this interpretation of the knife-cleaning to point out this gap in the criticism which demonstrates a substantive difference in interpretive communities. It's one thing to hear suspicions voiced by other characters, as academics have seen the film, and quite another to see a murderer busily cleaning the sticky residue of his slaughter as interpreters from hunting cultures see it. In the abstract, this example shows how important it is to have cross-cultural interpretive conversations (NRA to MLA) if we are to fully vet the potential formal meanings of a text. In the specific, as we consider

Ethan's character as a meaningful analogue for the problems of this dissertation, we see that he is a personification of identity confusion and foreclosed intercultural communication, and in his willingness to murder the child he has loved, he represents the potential consequences of unreconciled border conflict and the necessity of having a mechanism for understanding.

However, from this beginning point of confusion and hatred, Ethan's character ultimately takes a trajectory that, in his years of searching, enacts the reconciliation of his cultural vexations. With Marty steadfastly at his side, Ethan engages in various intercultural exchanges in Hispanic, Indian, Federal Army, and settler worlds, and building on a growing and genuine affection for Marty, despite the lad's Indian genes, he becomes more comfortable and conversant with the modulations in his world. Ethan gradually stops referring to Marty as "blanket-head" and making him the butt of cruel jokes; indeed, he learns to love the young man and makes him his heir. Five years pass, and at the end of the search, when he finds Debbie, a reluctant wife to Chief Cicatrice (Henry Brandon), instead of killing her as he did Lucy, he joyously lifts the full grown woman as easily as he had lifted the child at his homecoming celebration. With this embrace of the white/Indian woman, Ethan, as a figure for the borderline conflict, finally reconciles his violent discontinuities; he has successfully negotiated his cultural contradictions so that he accepts both. As a "searcher," he has found and saved Debbie and has also found and accepted himself.<sup>3</sup>

In his personal conflict with identity and culture, Ethan's character mirrors the threefold problems of borderlines this dissertation will address:

1) Just as Ethan experiences inner division and conflict because of both his acculturations, in the post-national global village, differing interpretive identities often disagree about the connotations of narrative information; this is the central problem that cultural studies addresses, and, somewhat ironically, it also demonstrates the need for an apparatus of, if not reconciliation, at least interpretive conversation. I will propose that contemporary cognitivist psychological theory may present a non-ideological and interdisciplinary basis for such a conversation, a basis that describes the processes of how we think about narrative texts.

2) However, like Ethan and Marty at the beginning of the search, cognitive science and cultural studies, as distinct approaches searching for meaning in narrative texts, are in a dialectical relationship with apparently irreconcilable (and sometimes violent) differences. Nevertheless, this dissertation's search for a potential fulcrum of common terms will offer a method of reconciling the two different academic "cultures" in one approach by demarcating Primary and Secondary Theories.

3) Finally, I will argue that double-constructed identities like Ethan are the particular focus of an emergent genre: *the Borderline Narrative* — which narratizes intercultural conflicts, and to some degree, offers models of conversation and conciliation. As such, it offers an ideal generic field on which to focus the issues of cognitivism and culturalism and the hybridity of cultures, academic discourses, and narrative awareness.

## **A Method and a Focus**

At first, a method which joins cognitivism and culturalism may seem an attempt to reconcile two mutually exclusive modalities. Indeed, cognitivism — which defines a base transhuman psychological model — and cultural studies — which investigate social constructions of identity and the varieties of interpretive experience — do not seem to share any base domain concepts. Although it is true that cultural studies and cognitive theory, as programs, have heretofore been used in ways that seem to be diametrically opposed to each other, I will argue that cognitivism and culturalism, rather than being distinct or even opposed critical practices, can and should perform as different ends of one critical spectrum. While cultural studies, on one extreme of this hypothetical spectrum, does investigate the very specific and intricate ways that cultures and/or identities emerge out of social and textual experiences, cognitivism, at the other extreme, by providing an understanding of the way all human minds function, actually might supply a base vocabulary for better articulating these important cultural differences. I will argue that an understanding of what Noel Carroll has called the "cognitivist stance" in the humanities — and in narrative study in particular — may lead, not only to a fuller articulation of cultural studies' critical concerns, but also to an understanding of the perceptual and conceptual experience from which cultural difference emanates (*Post-Theory* 62).

This Introduction will now offer a very brief definition of the project of cultural studies as a historical and critical phenomenon, focusing in particular on the shift from Humanist paradigms of interpretation to the culturalist strategies. Then I will present a rationale for a cognitive approach, outline the cognitive method I will use, and address

the perception of cognitivism as Humanism *redux*. Lastly, I will introduce the Borderline Narrative as an emergent genre that narratively enacts the particular problematic of cultural conflict in an increasingly globalized environment and which will therefore provide an appropriate and limited focus for the use of cognitive tools.

### **Cultural Studies**

The brain we grow, the self we generate, the language we speak — are all functions of our unique history and culture. Language, thought and ways of experiencing the world can be culturally relative and very different for those living in Western industrial cultures and those belonging to isolated Stone Age tribes in Borneo. None of us can claim to have a "God's eye" view of an objective external reality.

—M. Derek Bownds

Cultural studies, like cognitivism, is more of a stance than an exact program of study; however, as a stance, it frames much of the critical practice of the contemporary humanities and certain social sciences. Because critical practice has a history which is constructed as a narrative, for the moment let me postulate that distinctive figures — characters, issues, conflicts — emerge in history, as they do in narrative, as metonymic sites connected to a particular problem or problem cluster. In the history of critical practice, the theme that the emergence of cultural studies metonymizes is increasing cultural heterogeneity. During the 1970s and 1980s, as cultural studies practices arose in the humanities from competing methods and purposes of interpretation, its advent

suggested that Marshall McLuhan's prediction of "the global village" — the various human world made small by technology, trade, and communications — had begun to appear. In this "village," a kind of socio-ethnic Brownian motion enabled and accelerated by newfound ease in transportation and communication brought about intermingling of world cultures, and, in the microcosm, a growing diversity of populations at academic institutions. One concise and immediate outcome of these changes was that, at these newly diverse academic institutions, feminists, intellectuals of color, gay, and working class critics began to undermine the prevailing Humanist paradigm that one interpretive position could, like a magically elastic suit woven of Euro-American, white, male, middle class, and heterosexual fibres, fit all textual meanings.

Stuart Hall's essay "Cultural Studies" attempts to encapsulate the implications of this paradigm shift. Hall argues that the emergence of cultural criticism is a "significant break" in the basic worldview of twentieth-century Humanist interpretive practice, and that the ideological import of this shift is in its recognition of the effects of historical context and its acknowledgment of, potentially, several very different critical responses. Against the "Humanist" conception that the literary text was an exemplar par *excellence* of, in Matthew Arnold's familiar phrase, "the best that has been known and thought," Hall claims that cultural studies has switched from believing in an ethereal "best" of "the human" (which had inevitably pointed to certain Western ethnocentric, classist and phallogocentric values) to explicating how textual form and meaning are actually created by and within social activity (*Media, Culture, and Society* 57). Hall explains that under the Humanist paradigm, the "meaning" of any particular text was "self-sufficient" or intrinsic

to the formal features and poetic systems of that text which then implied certain inevitable moral conclusions which were simply not accurate appraisals of meaning-constructions outside the "Humanist" culture. Another critic of Humanist critical practice, Wolfgang Iser, whose work in reader response is part of the theory base for contemporary cultural studies, refines Hall. Iser critiques the Humanist paradigm as misunderstanding the very mechanism of communicated meaning:

This 'transfer' of text to reader [was] often regarded as being brought about solely by the text. Any successful transfer however — though initiated by the text — depends on the extent to which this text can activate the individual reader's faculties of perceiving and processing.

(107)

Mary Poovey in "Cultural Criticism: Past and Present" extends Iser's point, asserting that "concepts we treat[ed] as if they were *things* are seen as the *effects* of representations and institutional practices, not their origins" (italics mine, 10).

At root, such "effects" are actually in the circulation of meanings between reader and text. The experience of finding meaning in a text is the result of the play of a specific reader's values in processing the textual signals. As Antony Easthope extrapolated in *Literary Into Cultural Studies*, under the emerging practices of cultural studies, meaning-making is produced by an active interpreter who makes judgements about textual information based on personal experience and cultural norms (11). Easthope clarifies the insights of the previous critics by emphasizing that the features of a text can be both culturally and personally framed, and that any interpretive act is therefore linked to previous interpretive acts — by which activity we are acculturated — and is also really

only a provisional or hypothetical present-tense meaning because, in our continued interaction with texts, we may retroactively alter previous interpretive responses.

Easthope claims that "value is a consequence not of the text but of the local discourses and institutions in the present within which the text is *constructed in the present reading*" (italics Easthope's, 44). Therefore, the propulsive insight driving cultural studies is the evolving notion that textual interpretation is an activity of individuated, intertextual, and ongoing value-construction. In the contemporary climate of cultural heterogeneity we can see the necessity for this critical stance as a basis on which to build dialogues about the effects of narrative.

Poovey and Easthope point out that, to date, narrative interpretation under the cultural studies aegis has been focused on the particular "institutional" implications of texts — how institutional ethos and practices are embedded in texts and how historical context reveals and affects such traces — yet for the individual interpreter, the activity emphasized by all these critics is a complex, yet heretofore mostly ignored, act of cognition, and it is around this act of cognition that dialogue needs to be established. For actual dialogue to take place, however, interpreters need a common language to express personal experience in shared terminology. As Derek Bownds' epigraph to this section suggests and as Mark Turner declares in *Reading Minds: The Study of English in the Age of Cognitive Science*, "the cognitive and the cultural go hand-in-hand" (21). The next turn in cultural studies criticism needs to be the description of a cognitive-interpretive apparatus. While an interpreter's institutional identity as an historical, ethnic, gendered, and classed person vitally influences the interpretive engagement with a narrative text, all

readers have certain basic equipment by which they construct and mobilize this vital identity.

### **Why Cognitivism?**

Structuralists and semioticians have demonstrated that the terms of poetics and rhetoric which critics have used to describe our responses to narrative texts are essentially descriptors of psychological reactions to sign activity; textual interpretation is, finally, a description of psychological response, and the terms and protocols of poetics and rhetoric once were — and often, even in a cognitive usages, still are — the terms and protocols of psychology. Effective interpretation of narrative and poetic texts is, as Norman Holland has argued, “hearing ourselves think” (*Brain* 154). However, classical methods and terminology, while they connect us with critical history, can be explicated, augmented, and sometimes replaced by contemporary psychological terms. The ancient dyad of metaphor and metonymy, for instance, which Roman Jakobson presented as hermetic categories in *Fundamentals of Language* (incidentally working with cognitive studies of aphasics) are entrenched and important poetic classifications. Yet, as categories, Paul de Man has deconstructed their hermetic qualities convincingly in “Semiology and Rhetoric” (*Allegories*). Such deconstructive logic is both illuminating and entertaining in parsing a complex response to texts, but, using a cognitive understanding of framing, Gestalt category forming, and schemas, we can explain why deconstructive processes are effective ways of “hearing ourselves think” by breaking down the implicit limits of classical terminology into more discrete operations which, once revealed, connote in their structures and connections, conflicting meanings.

Indeed, deconstruction, properly understood, has in important ways, made the world safe for cognitivism because it has revealed the shortcomings of traditional critical methods and modes.

In the American-European critical tradition, however, “psychological criticism” has, until recently, meant “psychoanalysis.” Yet, Norman Holland has asserted that “We ought to rest our criticism on the best psychology we have,” and Holland in his recent criticism has gone from a psychoanalytic model to a cognitive model (*Brain* 13). Why the shift from psychoanalysis? David Bordwell in “A Case for Cognitivism” raises two arguments as to why psychoanalysis may not be the “best psychology” we can utilize. A significant

shortcoming of psychoanalysis is the focus on the “neurotic symptom.”

On the whole, cognitive theory focuses on a different set of core phenomena. It is, in general more concerned with normal and successful action than is the Freudian framework. (12)

Clearly, in describing a critical reaction, the better formulation will be normative rather than aberrant. Moreover as both Bordwell and Holland argue, that while cognitivism may assert that all human have the capability to telling and understanding stories, not all humans are bound to undergo certain basic formative narrative experiences like the mirror phase or the oedipal struggle. Bordwell observes that the appeals of psychoanalytic and related “theory-based” criticism is that, in an institutional setting which demands “new’ readings for career advancement, such story-based theory almost always

allow[s] an interpreter to “read” a film in a new way. Theoretical doctrines [like psychoanalysis] that themselves are cast in narrative form — complete with agents, struggles, journeys, and more-or-less unified resolutions are special favorites. Psychoanalytic doctrine [supplies] macrostories (from the *hommelette* to Oedipus and beyond) and its microstories (the case studies) [...] and vivid metaphors (e.g. mirrors, the act of writing). (17)

All of which, provide an almost infinite palette for critical flourish. As my first section will demonstrate, such a storytelling critical strategy enabled the “Big Theory” generation a vast associative repertoire for creating career-boosting criticism because of the nature of “narrative logic”; however, such critical practice often digresses from describing a consistent critical vision of a text to what Noel Carroll has called, “argument by bricolage” which patches theory on storytelling-theory to create an effect of a labyrinthine narrative rather than precise explication. Often the “story” of the critique legitimizes or rationalizes an ideological position but provides little or no inductive force. Furthermore, such critical tales, no matter how “liberating” they may purport to be, are located in Euro-American mythological moral universe, and at their worst, are merely tautological reconstructions of a motivating complaint: workers/women/gays/people of color/subalterns/colonials are oppressed by phallogentric culture; therefore [supply any text] demonstrates the oppression of workers/women/gays/people of color/subalterns/colonials (*Post-Theory*).

Cognitive theory avoids the pitfalls of the various schools of psychoanalysis and is a method by which we can describe the appeal and actions of the “narrative logic” that

psychoanalysis employs but doesn't self-reflexively examine. To be clear, "Cognition" refers to all the activities of human information processing applicable to any human in any culture. In *The Mind's New Science: A History of the Cognitive Revolution*, Howard Gardner defines "cognitive theory" generally as

a contemporary, empirically based effort to answer long-standing epistemological questions-particularly those concerned with the nature of knowledge, its components, its sources, its development, and its deployment. (6)

As this relates particularly to narrative studies, Edward Branigan, formulating the theory base for *Narrative Comprehension and Film*, argues that narrative is itself a fundamental cognitive structuring of knowledge demonstrably shared across all cultures, and thus it is useful in the explication of epistemological issues (Chapt 1). If narrative is one of the basic structures determining how we know what we know, then the overall logic of adapting a cognitive approach to discussing narrative interpretive action is simple enough: human cognition utilizes a general model of narrative as an information processing paradigm.

This bottom-up relationship of cognition and narrative offers presents certain signal advantages. A cognitive-based understanding of narrative interpretation would create a base for interdisciplinary conversations, mobilizing contemporary psychological concepts and terminology. As Valerie Gray Hardcastle, in *How to Build a Theory in Cognitive Science*, observes:

The disciplines currently involved to some degree or other in cognitive science include: anthropology, biology, computer science, engineering,

linguistics, mathematics, philosophy, psychiatry, psychology, neuroscience, and sociology. And the list keep [sic] expanding as we realize that information processing is more complicated than artificial intelligence personnel originally thought and how many disciplines actually study this in some guise or other. (8)

Moreover, as Branigan, Bordwell, Mark Turner, and George Lakoff have begun to demonstrate, a cognitive approach can be developed so that it extends many of contemporary narratology's existing inquiries and methods which potentially offers new precisions in describing narrative nuance. Such an approach might offer a lexicon to more closely describe the often confused differences and similarities in literary and cinematic narrative effects which are problems correctly addressed by psychology and perception. Finally, by making these interdisciplinary connections, we send down roots to empirical research traditions, by which, in an increasingly science-based intellectual environment, we argue for the intrinsic importance and centrality of narrative studies to information-age curricula and counteract many of the historical trends that are spinning English Literary studies in an arc following Classics as an arcane and marginal discourse.

As Turner argues in *Reading Minds*, professing English at the college level

is at a critical fragmentary point, calling upon us to contemplate what we profess, our idea of the humanities, our place alongside other researchers, and our contribution to the future. [...] An attempt to reintegrate the study of language and literature as grounded in human cognition, is, I suggest, the most likely path to restoring our profession to its natural place as a central cultural and intellectual activity. (23-24)

In fact, there are already three strong strains of cognitivism at work in narrative criticism today. David Bordwell in *Narration and the Fiction Film* and in *Making Meaning* along with Wolfgang Iser, in *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, have used cognitive schema-theory in very similar ways to explain how interpreters engage the formal features of texts. Iser's models are definitive paradigms in reader response criticism, while Bordwell's work has inspired various cognitive-based studies in cinema including Branigan's *Narrative Comprehension and Film*, Kristen Thompson's *Breaking the Glass Armor*, Murray Smith's *Engaging Characters*, and several works by Noel Carroll. Coming from linguistics and philosophical backgrounds, George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, and Mark Turner have examined the way that the shared experience of the human body determines certain conceptual and linguistic relationships and then subsequently, the way that "language and literature reflect the nature of cognition" (Turner 239). And Joseph Anderson and Torben Grodal have independently derived their theory base from "ecological" perceptual psychologists, and using an evolutionarily inflected "eco-logic," they argue that narrative experience is part of perceptual adaptation of the species and is systemized in relationship to survival strategies and "real" phenomena. While these critics' conclusions are not always neatly symmetrical — particularly as regards the effects of "style" or the place of emotion in how narrative is comprehended — their tools, terminology, and basic assumptions about how the mind organizes itself are all similar enough to provide a basic cognitive toolbox derived directly from cognitive constructivist psychological theory.

While the central insight of cultural studies that interpretation is a local and ongoing experience is supported by a cognitivist position, a cognitive shift would also

represent a disruption of certain other assumptions that contemporary cultural studies criticism espouses. In particular, the conception that identity is exclusively a social construction comes into question. Social constructionism postulates the individual as *tabula rasa* on which only cultural or social action writes. Such a metaphorical conception relies on classic Cartesian mind/body dichotomy by which an individual's mind receives the impress of the social, and then the body does the mind's bidding. However, George Lakoff has observed that Cartesian mind/body dichotomy is the first familiar paradigm of traditional Western thought to fail under cognitive scrutiny (*Women* 9; see below), and if cultural studies is to offer true dialogue between cultural systems, it should be purged of such tenacious elements of Eurocentrism. In fact, according to cognitive theory, perception, memory, emotion, conscious, and preconscious thought are activities which we may conceive of as "mental," yet they are neither located exclusively in the brain, nor are they entirely available to self-aware examination. As cognitivists construct it, mind is not, as it seems on the Cartesian model, a governing-knowing awareness that, like a clever puppeteer, logically directs the dumb-animal bodily apparatus. Instead, mind is the holistic brain-body inter-working of the whole human being not confined to the experiences of awareness or "logical" thought. Cognitivist psychological research has demonstrated that the body *in toto* sources "mental" activity, and, as I will address in the Section One, the *cogito* experience of self-awareness that Descartes ontologically revered is a vital but mostly bodily inflected outcome of massive preconscious cognitive activity. Because, as a species, we share a bodily apparatus, we share certain constructions of mind, so the belief in the

exclusive action of social construction forming a primarily mental being and identity is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the limited but potent processes of acculturation.

As David Bordwell pointed out in the Keynote Address at the 1999 Film and Literature Conference, the shared human bodily source of mind is revealed when spectators from very different cultures glean similar information from a filmed narrative. Certain features of the narrative are comprehensible transculturally simply because they depict actions and emotions of human bodies in a shared physical world. While this base-level cinematic comprehension may be distinctly limited to comprehending *what happens* to people as opposed to *why it happens*, cognitivist-anthropologists have demonstrated that the ability to recognize fundamental emotions and behaviors is human capacity, active in early infancy, and is not a factor of social construction nor of conscious will (Ekman, Guenther, Reed, Bownds).

Indeed, the working premise of psychological cognitive constructivists is that the organization of the human mind can be inferred from observing the way that our bodily structured perceptual faculties engage the material world; because the species-shared neurological structure connects everyone to the physical world with similar perceptual faculties, because thought is a way of conceptualizing the elaborations of perception, we will share certain basic mental constructs. The ecological rationale takes the cognitive perceptual and bodily orientation one logical step further based on an evolutionary model: the mind has been designed by evolution for engaging and predicting the physical world in order to optimize survival chances. Survival will be optimized if perception — and therefore, logically, cognition — respond accurately to the contingencies of that world; therefore, a perceptually based mental orientation and structure keeps us

survivally fit. By deductively observing the capacities, tendencies, and organization of the mechanisms of perception, we tap into Ur-patterns that help describe the more complex conceptual activities of the mind. Add to this the commonplace anthropological observation that all tribes of *Homo sapiens*, can, with a good faith effort, learn to communicate with each other, and the case for shared cognitive apparatus is readily made.

### **Humanism or the Human?**

However, in cultural studies, discussions of trans-human similarities have been largely foreclosed. This resistance to noticing the intrinsic capabilities and tendencies of "a human apparatus" is rooted in the evolution from "Humanistic criticism" into cultural studies that I have just described. Contemporary critics have habitually resisted notions of trans-human qualities in favor of governing conceptions of social construction for fear of a new, inflexible and potentially ethno- or cultural-centric model. Yet, while social construction is a powerful and infinitely creative force — as demonstrated by the astonishing variety of human cultural systems — in our global village where we can, for the first time, actually begin to quantify all of humanity, cognitive-based research has revealed some consistent similarities in human activities with certain shared limits and kinds of the human experience. As David Bordwell insists in his conclusion to *Making Meaning*, if interpretive criticism is to have real use-value, critics need to establish a common ground based in such similarities (266-74). Moreover, because such similarities offer a common basis of orientation to the world from which to begin interpretation, and because they are based in the shared psychological constructs that have given rise to the

great varieties of world cultures, they are not the ideologically inflected protocols of Arnoldian Humanism.

Robin Horton, a cognitive anthropologist writing on "Tradition and Modernity Revisited" suggests that there is a "cross-cultural" basis for the intrinsically human experience of the self and how the self constructs certain signs and sign-relationships. Horton proposes a *duplex theory base* for discriminating between:

- a) that which concerns the trans-species *human* modality, from
- b) that which occurs in a specific *cultural* modality.

According to Horton, "Primary theory" would be the account of a trans-human base of experience potentials, which "really does not differ very much from community to community or from culture to culture." Primary theory could, "provide the cross-cultural voyager with his intellectual bridgehead" (228). Referring to the strains of postmodern or poststructural conjecture that rely exclusively on social construction models, Horton reflects,

Thus after a long period of flirtation with a *tabula rasa* model of higher brain centers, the human biologists seem inclined by more recent evidence to think that the brain has elements of genetically-programmed structure and physiology particularly fitted to seeing, thinking, and talking in primary-theoretical terms. (234)

Branigan makes a distinction between bottom-up perceptual processes ("utilizing little or no associated memory") which "automatically" organize "such features as edge, color, depth, motion, aural pitch and so on" and "top down" perceptual processes "based on acquired knowledge [...]" (*Narrative* 37). Primary cognitive theory might provide a

"bottom up" base from which to better understand and discuss secondary "top down" cultural action and interpretation. "The differences of emphasis and degree" of certain base perceptual organizations between specific cultures which are accounted for in Primary Theory "give place to startling differences in kind as between community and community, culture and culture" (Horton 228). Secondary Theory then, would be the account of perceptual and symbolic interpretative actions that are culture-specific. In this role, Secondary Theory could use the bottom-up features of cognition to describe the actual site of social construction at which "hidden" entities and causal assumptions determine a specific cultural worldview (such as gods and spirits, paper money, atoms, chi, string theory, karma, etc.) and which can only be explained in terms of cultural systems of meaning. Horton cites the example of his profoundly spiritual Nigerian students who are alarmed at the Western mechanistic worldview. "This idea of the 'hiddenness' of the entities and processes of secondary theory is as central to African thought about gods and spirits as it is to Western thought about particles, currents, and waves" (229).

This critical differentiation between Primary and Secondary Theory is one that is easily obscured in the rush to expand a version of Primary Theory ideas to reinvent a reductive Humanism and universalize "human nature and human values." This tendency is evidenced by some contemporary scholars whose acculturation in western narrative logic enables them to disparage out-of-hand the driving narrative logics of Other cultures, for example, the work of Steven Pinker who, in *The Language Instinct*, makes universalizing claims based on the work of a single anthropologist which seem to me to be suspiciously phallogentric. But despite these possible excitations, we need to ask:

Because cognitivism as Primary Theory does postulate certain fundamental human experiences, is it therefore somehow a sneaking Humanism redux? Murray Smith, in his cognitive-based study *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema*, anticipates this question, so he carefully qualifies "humanism." According to Smith, cognitive theorizing

is a 'humanistic' approach, in that it rests upon the assumption that humans share certain capacities, and that cultures share certain features. It is not a humanism, however, which assumes that History unfolds to reveal an ideal human essence, nor a humanism which seeks to overlook the social differences between humans. It is a humanism which argues that while individual agents are far from the masters of their own lives, neither are they hopelessly subjected to structural determinism. (236)

Rather than give us "human nature," in the sense that *homo sapiens* all share a biologically determined world-view or moral understanding, a cognitive Primary Theory gives us a *human base*: an understanding of the way the mind works and how those workings generate a shared set of attributes on which competing and conflicting cultural world-views are built.

Indeed, George Lakoff in *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind*, asserts that by defining and mobilizing cognitive models, "A number of familiar ideas" — including this panoply of Humanist and positivist assertions — "will have to fall by *the wayside*":

—Meaning is based on truth and reference; it concerns the relationship between symbols and things in the world.

—Biological species are natural kinds, defined by common essential properties.

—The mind is separate from, and independent of, the body.

—Emotion has no conceptual content.

—Reason is transcendental, in that it goes beyond the way human beings, or any other kinds of beings, happen to think Mathematics is a form of transcendental reason.

—There is a correct, God's eye view of the world—a single correct way of understanding what is and is not true.

—All people think with the same conceptual system. (*italics mine, 9*)

Clearly, in many points, Lakoff's cognitivist understanding is consonant with the cultural studies' stance as I have defined it.

It is the next step in cultural criticism to begin to consider what the "shared human features" of Primary Theory are and how they construct the secondary effects that drive us both as individuals and as cultures. Such an approach connects narrative and cultural studies meaningfully to the paradigms of other cognitive disciplines, a connection which both legitimizes and extends narrative and cultural studies in useful and powerful ways.

### **The Borderline Narrative: Cultural Conflict Narratized**

Literature offers one of the most significant ways to express new perceptions, [...] [T]hose writers today who straddle geographic and cultural boundaries can help us understand how people experience linguistic and cultural fragmentation.

—Isabelle de Courtivron

As this dissertation seeks to extend cultural theory, I will argue that the problem focus of cultural studies is indexed by the particular interpretive issues offered by an emerging genre narrative that in effect, is narratizing the postmodern tendency of national cultures to be less ethnocentric and more self-consciously multicultural, the Borderline Narrative. Examples of such generic emergences are staples of twentieth-century critical history in which narrative forms have responded to social disruptions or rapid technological and media changes. In the nineteen-twenties, the disillusioned or cynical antiheroes of the modernist novel figured a narratized response to the ideological doubt following The Great War. In the thirties, pulp crime fiction and the gangster movie thematically and figuratively reflected economic hardships in an era of rapid urbanization; at the same time in screwball comedies, the powerful women characters were evidence of the newly “independent” women who, in the urban economic culture, worked outside the home, while the wild comic form was an antidote to harsh depression realities. In the immediate postwar period, Italian Neorealism used wartime newsreel innovations in camera and film technology to transform the cinema style with its "realistic depictions" of the problems common people in devastated post-fascist Italy. In

the forties and fifties, the *femmes fatales* of American *film noir* acted as cautionary tales for independent woman and morally compromised men as GIs returned from apocalyptic theaters of Europe and Asia shadowed by war's nightmarish brutalities, needing the jobs Rosie the Riveter had taken and desperate for stability. Since the seventies, just as cultural studies as an academic disposition emerged to contend with social conditions created by cultural heterogeneity, the Borderline Narrative as an identifiable genre has simultaneously emerged to narratize the anxieties and inevitable conflicts that accompany these same changing conditions. To date, no critic has recognized this particular genre, yet, as I will show, it is a popular and important paradigm in contemporary film and literature with utility in a cognitivist analysis of narrative action.

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha suggests "the borderline," as a generic distinction, is of pivotal importance in understanding culturalist issues or, in his terms, comprehending "Postmodern space, postcolonial times and the trials of cultural translation" (212). Bhabha traces the generic origins of this kind of borderline to the complexities and anxieties originally arising in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Just as the African continent and its cultures were penetrated by nineteenth-century colonial efforts and imperial rationales, so contemporary national and ethnic cultures have been penetrated with an imperial globalist impulse and its rationales: border-crossing trade, travel, and communications proliferate along with ideologically rich narratives and their implications (212-14). Bhabha suggests that "the Horror, the Horror!" at the heart of *Heart of Darkness*, expresses a "truth that is not perfectly visible on the 'outside [...]" but is an experience only available at the intercultural nexus, that is, either within the story-world of the novel as the characters understand it, or, for readers, in the

discontinuities that are offered between the narration as cultural expression and our own cultural identities. This complexity is the reason that narrative provides the necessary vector for such an imperfectly visible "truth"; understanding the conceptual potentials of narrative cognition offers a ground for understanding cultural actions and conflicts.

In the twentieth- and twenty-first-century Borderline Narratives, however, the experience of cultural contradictions is no longer Marlowe's spectral "horror"; instead, the genre has emerged as a cultural intervention that focuses on and unmasks the horror, and in its depictions, its characters and their interpretive crises, the Borderline Narrative faces directly problems of cultural difference. Certain features of *Heart of Darkness* demonstrate the "borderline" structures of setting, character, and event that I will argue typify the Borderline Narrative. The Borderline Narrative presents settings that are culturally shared or in active dispute so that, within the story-world, different cultural groups and their sets of cultural, ethnic, religious, or economic values compete for hegemonic power. The focus of the narrative is a "double-constructed" main character or characters who perform(s) interpretive activities in both or all the competing cultural systems of meaning construction and who sometimes vacillate(s) in identity affiliations. In terms of plot action, these characters ultimately experience a personal crisis that leads to a conscious choice which then radically effects the narrative outcomes in cultural terms. Thematically then, these formal facets of the Borderline genre collectively enact issues related specifically to the cultural studies' concern with how identities construct value out of textual information. As such, the Borderline Narrative is narratively reflecting the contentions, values, and negotiations that take place specifically — in Homi Bhabha's phrase — at "the borderline conditions of cultures and disciplines," and it

is a rich site for mining and defining the cognitive activities and interpretive conflicts inherent in cultural or identity difference, both within the story-world of the narration and in the critical world that must interpret narrative events and outcomes (214).

Indeed, both within and without its story-world, the Borderline Narrative demonstrates the potentials and performances of certain cognitive activities that result in “narrative logic.” Like the characters in the Borderline Narrative, as citizens in contemporary globalized culture, the stories that we tell ourselves about who we are and what we believe are increasingly infiltrated with the exotic — images, possibilities, and attractions that bring with them culturally unforeseen associations and connections. In this borderline climate, alliances, values, and identity can undergo significant new potentials because of shifting contexts. According to Bhabha, such descriptions of “the act of living on borderlines”

depict *initiatory* interstices; an empowering condition of hybridity; an emergence that turns 'return' into reinscription or redescription; an iteration that is not belated, but ironic and insurgent. [...] [S]urvival depends, as Rushdie put it, [...] on discovering ‘how newness enters the world.’<sup>4</sup> The focus is on making the linkages through the unstable elements of literature and life [...] . (227)

Cultural Studies, as a paradigm shift in the humanities, is itself “a newness that has entered the world,” and, while I begin this study of the Borderline Narrative in formal terms that may seem to run counter to Bhabha's Marxist-historicist project, by my conclusion, I will have examined “the linkages” between “the unstable elements in literature and life,” and by mobilizing cognitive tools to genre- and identity-construction,

*A Truth Not Perfectly Visible: Cognition and Culture in the Borderline Narrative* will argue that the Borderline Narrative is a vehicle through which conceptions of "hybridity" — as opposed to assimilation — have begun to enter the world.

### **This Dissertation**

Because the Borderline Narrative is thematically oriented to the problems of characters — like Ethan — located on the border between two conflicting cultural systems, as an emerging genre in both literature and film, it should prove especially significant to a cultural studies. In order to better understand the narrative effects of Borderline texts — both as they depict conflicts and characters within their story-worlds and in the challenges they present to interpreters — I will use Section One to develop cognitive concepts for a *Primary Theory* toolbox of transhuman norms or potentials with which to assemble cultural or *Secondary Theory* interpretive positions. Using Primary Theory tools, I will then closely define the Borderline Narrative as a narrative of hybridity. In Section Two, I will outline contemporary problems in genre criticism and demonstrate the how cognitive schema theory is a useful antidote and how the Borderline can be used as a critical tool. Building on current cognitive theory, I will show the relationships between textual forms and historical understanding, as in the adaptation of James Fenimore Cooper's protoWestern novel, *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826-34) by Michael Mann in 1992, and how a cultural climate creates a prevailing "narrative logic" that can effect critical perception as in *The Scarlet Letter's* (Roland Joffè) reception in 1995-96.

## **Chapter 2:**

### **Section One— The Right Thing? Cognitive Tools and The Borderline Narrative**

The events of inner experience, as emergent properties of brain processes, become themselves explanatory causal constructs in their own right, interacting at their own level with their own laws and dynamics. The whole world of inner experience (the world of the humanities), long rejected by 20<sup>th</sup>-century scientific materialism, thus become [sic] recognized and included within the domain of science.

—Roger Sperry

The ability to design and enjoy narrative is a shared human trait, common to all cultures. But the narrative instinct goes deeper than story-telling or story-comprehension. As I will shortly demonstrate in more detail, our ability to understand fictions is founded in the fact that humans tend to understand themselves, their lives, their goals, and their relationships in narrative terms. Clearly then, the task of understanding narrative and formulating a narrative-specific Primary Theory tool-box will be, in the terms of the contemporary academic world, an inter- or even multi-disciplinary undertaking, based in cognitive-constructivist psychological theory, but drawing from anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, and other cognitive-inflected work on narrative.

Such interdisciplinary theorizing, however, begs careful parsing. The range of applications that cognitivism now covers — from psychology to neuroscience to philosophy to the examination of narrative — will not yet enable a minutely structured theoretic inquiry consonant with all the differing disciplinary demands. Instead, the cognitive disciplines operate as a progressive series of related-but-separate sets, like beads on a string, in which any one discipline’s concerns shares certain central premises — the way the string organizes and holds the beads — while the employment of these premises in specific discipline involves a special utilization of the base model, giving each disciplinary “bead” its own apparent identity. Gray Hardcastle addresses this issue head on:

A multidisciplinary approach [...] means that we may use another discipline for collateral support, inspiration, and to help set the parameters of inquiry, but we cannot simply borrow data wholesale from other theories over the same state space [...]. [Cognitive theorizing] will function as an overlapping set of related modes whose explanatory power is based on a sort of etiological story telling of the development and occurrence of some attribute. [...] [T]he resultant theory, which is but a set of models and a list of general principles, maintains its coherency in virtue of these common principles. (10- 11)

Therefore, the “common principles” I will use to develop this Primary Theory tool box will offer the terminology, basic definitions, and many of the strategies taken from cognitive research which other narrative critics have covered, and I will develop a conceptual script — a specific configuration of what these tools do — building on these

other narrative critics but generating a different emphasis.<sup>5</sup> Other critical renditions of cognitivism — many of which have begun with *schema theory* emphasizing *consistency-building* — have not clearly made the case for *narrative (fuzzy) logic* and *novelty-seeking*. Both narrative logic — which is not a strictly “logical” processes — and novelty-seeking are of central importance in understanding Primary Theory narrative cognition and can be used to better explain volatilities in the cultural studies problematic of identity and interpretation.

David Bordwell, explaining the bottom-up nature of cognitive theory, declares

“Cognitive” here carries no doctrinal weight. It demarcates certain kinds of mental activities: information-gathering, argument-framing, deliberation, reasoning, inference, debate, and comparable activities. You can grant that these are cognitive without subscribing to any particular theoretical explanation of them. (*Narration* 98)

If this is so, Primary Theory cognitive explanations may — or should — often resemble, extend, or illuminate extant critical approaches to “reasoning, inference, and debate,” and this utility will both subscribe the value of cognitivism generally and also stand as an example of its specific use in extrapolating and clarifying existing theory. Indeed, if Primary Theory cognitivism does demarcate human patterns of thought, it will, in some ways, figure in existing interpretive patterns. Part of the following discussion will incorporate issues and strategies from classical poetics, narratology, structuralism, and semiotic theories (and these are admittedly, overlapping categories) and will demonstrate how an interdisciplinary cognitivist framework drawn from contemporary psychological

paradigms generally enables a more nuanced and clear-cut discussion of how we think and feel about texts, identity, and culture.

Unlike other critics who have used parts of cognitive theory on an *ad hoc* bases, this section will present a more comprehensive bottom-up description of a Primary Theory of narrative cognition. I will begin with a brief discussion of genetically determined reflexes, then offer a description of how more complex innate abilities interact to create the capacity for symbolic association, and finally, I will describe how higher order cognition — including imagination, play, interpretation, and consciousness — create the “narrative logic” of identity and culture. In my presentation of these processes, I will add to work of current literary and cinematic cognitivists by extending their presentations of categorical consistency-building — schema theory — with discussions of novelty-seeking and fuzzy categories. To illustrate my arguments, I will use both the characters in the fictive story-world of *Do the Right Thing* and my own responses as an imaginative interpreter of that story-world. Finally, I will build to a cognitive understanding of the Borderline Narrative, the effects of its generic constraints, its use as an interpretive tool, and its potentials for both describing and catalyzing cultural hybridity.

### **Primary Theory: Innate Responses**

The mind is not a machine that works on objects, but rather a process that involves activating many linked subprocesses that are themselves composed internally of the activation of links.

—Mark Turner

Primary Theory will describe the constructs of perceiving, experiencing, and thinking that all humans share by virtue of shared cognitive apparatus — our basic neurological structures which we conceptualize as “mind,” that we experience consciously as awareness, but which is in actuality, many discrete and often competitive bodily processes. A Primary Theory of narrative should show how these processes interact to generate for all persons a sense of self and an ability to think in terms of narrative. Primary Theory can thereby form a basis for critical conversation about texts and their effects and meanings between differing cultural orientations. Primary Theory offers tools which we can use to break down the processes by which we interpret texts and our lives — way we understand texts and how texts affect our understanding.

As a rough preamble to laying out the tools on the workbench, however, I should note that when addressing the interpretive experience, we need to recognize that personal and textual understanding — both varieties of interpretation — are a cumulative process: we are a sum of narrative experiences which we use as lexicon for understanding both ongoing narrative problems both personal and fictional, and also for reviewing — and sometimes reforming — past experiences. But this interpretive persona — this identity — is not entirely narratively constructed.

One of the lessons of the transition from literary to cultural studies is that who an interpreter feels herself to be is partially the result of genetic factors. Human beings are 99.9% genetically identical; however, in the one-tenth percent of variation, innate genetic information controls or influences such individuating traits as ethnicity, gender, intelligence, style of thinking, temperament, talent, risibility, and sexual preference; therefore such innate yet various characteristics may determine a variety of dispositions towards texts and may be causally connected to various interpretive responses within a particular culture. Any honest account of interpretive action needs to acknowledge these genetic differences may result in influential differences over which an interpreter has no control, yet for which s/he may be responsible within a cultural group and which, to some degree, may guarantee a variety of interpretive responses to any particular signal information within a particular culture.

This effect of genetic variety should stand as a first principle that begins to define human experience and Primary Theory. Keeping in mind the variety of identity experiences that can exist even within a shared culture serves to focus on the problem and importance of textual interpretation; interpretive positions within any culture must be, to some degree, variously dependant on factors outside the control of specific persons held in place by their belief systems — the narrative logic — of a particular culture. Throughout Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989), Buggin' Out (Giancarlo Esposito) constantly reminds Mookie (Spike Lee) to "Stay black."<sup>6</sup> Certainly one of the thematic questions that the film text asks a contemporary American audience is, What, in fact, does it mean to be black, much less to "stay black"? Yet, because the film presents young black men and a young black woman who are very differently endowed by their

genetics, I see that Mookie, Smiley (Roger Guenveur Smith), Jade (Joie Lee), Radio Raheem (Bill Nunn), and Buggin' Out, each for reasons of their physical or mental make-up contend with their blacknesses in very different ways. As I begin an examination of Borderline Narratives like *Do the Right Thing*, it will be increasingly clear that, under the aegis of cognitivism, interpretive response is a personal experience that has cultural overtones and is not necessarily a monolithically cultural reaction.

### **Innate and Universal Contingencies**

Before looking into the complexities of signal conceptualization and textual interpretation, however, we need to first define the shared human reflexes, perceptual dispositions, and affective capabilities which form the innate basis for other cognitive operations. These innate response fields, constructed by species-wide evolutionary processes, range from simple flinch response to our primal emotional potentials and their expressions to our ability to think symbolically and to understand the great symbolic systems of narrative construction (Bownds, Damasio, Hobson).

Examining the most fundamental response level, startle reflex, Robert Baird in “Animalizing *Jurassic Park*'s Dinosaurs: Blockbuster Schemata and Cross-Cultural Cognition in the Threat Scene” makes a claim for the transhuman understanding of on-screen emotional tension because of a shared flinch-startle reaction. Baird asserts that, in visually oriented humans,

[...] the mind is overwhelmingly and continuously devoted to monitoring space and the major features of this spatial monitoring are *extraconscious* operation, running *parallel* with consciousness, through *modular*,

*encapsulated* systems that are neurologically hard-wired to negative affects systems, predominantly fear and startle. (italics Baird's 83)

Because of these “hard-wired negative affects,” the narrative images of *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) will provoke certain transcultural reactions: spectators of every social construction involuntarily jump in reaction to the onscreen presentation of dinosaur menace. And there are other “hard-wired” affect systems that may have some basic determining action in narrative response. According to Deric Bownds in *The Biology of Mind*, “All humans show dietary preferences for salt, fat, and sugar” (105) — by which we might transculturally understand Buggin’ Out’s desire for Sal to put more cheese (salt and fat) on his pizza — and “[w]e appear to have an innate predisposition” to “about two dozen common elicitors of phobic reaction, such as insects, snake shapes, heights, looming large objects, and growling noises, all of which would have been relevant to the survival of our ancestors” and all of which may provoke a specific response when included in a plot, such as Radio Raheem’s looming threat in the camera angle of his Love/Hate monologue (234).

Yet, we also share more complex emotional capabilities that are a basis for this common experience and more directly effect narrative comprehension. Anthropologist Paul Ekman has convincingly demonstrated in *Emotion in the Human Face* that all humans have an innate attraction to faces. Bownds suggests that, like our innate fear-response to spiders, snakes, growls, and heights, we may have genetically determined “icon detectors” that “also might dispose us to a certain innate fascination with human facial features” (235). Moreover, of particular importance to narrative cognition, Ekman connects this facial fascination to the experience and communication of affect. Ekman’s

research strongly suggests that we all experience certain basic primal emotions — observable in infancy — and we transculturally recognize the facial expressions that signify these feelings.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, just as our brains are three times larger than any proportionally constructed primate — a neurological advantage which may enable our symbolic and narrative abilities — so our faces are more richly muscled than any other species which permits both expressability and visibility of feeling. This muscular complexity is continued in the adjoining muscles and organs of vocal sound production enabling the transcultural practices of speech and song.

These innate cognitive factors combine with non-hard-wired but learned “universal contingencies” of our physical experiences to form a common basis of human understanding of experiential reality. Bordwell point this out in *Post-Theory* as a base of assumptions we all live by, which must thereby effect our understanding of ourselves and our narrative, yet which have generally gone unacknowledged in narrative theorizing — understanding of gravity, sunlight, cycles of day and night, the behavior of light, shadow, fluids, gases, and solids (36).

Also one of our innate narrative abilities is our faculty to project our understanding of our own abilities onto characters other than ourselves. I will elucidate this more fully below as excerption and person schema, but for the time being, when thinking narratively, humans assume that, unless cued otherwise by the narrative, that characters — even animated characters — have basic human cognitive capabilities and operate in a world that works on the same universal contingents as our phenomenal world. However, this understanding of character leads to two kinds of interpretive understandings, those of characters and those of narratees, both of which have roots in

genetic dispositions and are also determined by our acculturation and personal experience.

In the story-worlds of narrative texts, characters struggle within their cultural codes to achieve their personal ends and in the process come to better understand their natural and cultural limitations and possibilities. Because we understand characters (as I will discuss more fully below) as human or human-like, our assumption about these interpretive actions is that these characters must respond to their fictional world as we might in a “real world”: where survival is at stake and often we observe characters forced into “fight or flight situations” by narrative crises. Indeed, as the character within the story-world, Mookie — as a character concept sharing my innate abilities — experiences increasing limitations which will force him into interpretative actions which result in life or death stakes. However, as a human narratee of *Do the Right Thing*, I know I am watching a fiction. As I create Mookie’s story by inference of perceptual information knowing that it is only a story, I am freed from the fight or flight constraints that make the story-world interesting. In the imaginative play of narrative comprehension, I may explore heretofore areas of experience inaccessible to our limited “real world” personae. I can observe Mookie behaving in ways that are unfamiliar to me, yet, because he is the main character in a narrative that interests me, I will trust my understanding of him as person and I will infer that he has a logic to what he does, and that his logic will ultimately be revealed. Although I am white, I can get a sense of Mookie’s problem in “staying black.” This imaginative latitude accounts for the human fascination with stories and story-telling. In the following, I will use characters of *Do the Right Thing* as examples of cognitive operations; although they are artifacts — not real persons — they

are still useful exemplars because the narrative logic required to make them lively in my understanding of the text is still symptomatic of real cognitive processes.

### **Crossculturality**

The purpose of Primary Theory will be to reveal the shared innate response features and the universal contingencies of sharing the same geo-sphere that make characters and narrative comprehensible trans-culturally. This commonality is also why there is a basis for (admittedly unnuanced) translations of languages from different parts of the world. I can imagine a distant human cultural group that, upon viewing *Do the Right Thing*, might not understand the ethnic differences that thematically inform the film, nor would they understand boomboxes or sneakers or pizza delivery, yet working with an innate understanding of human base emotions and of universal human contingencies, they would perfectly comprehend the progression from irritation to belligerence to rage that Sal (Danny Aiello) and Radio Raheem undergo in the film's penultimate conflict, and given a translation of the scene, such spectators would understand that Sal is enforcing a regulation and Raheem is willfully violating it. The images in *Do the Right Thing* may portray a conflict and a cultural world specific to 1990s United States, but the depictions of humans eating, making love, feeling extreme heat, playing and arguing will have universal cognisance in much the same way West African tribesmen are able to offer interesting critiques of a rough translation of *Hamlet* described in "Shakespeare in the Bush" (Bohannon). On the other hand, issues and images of ethnicity that inform *Do the Right Thing* are specific to American culture so

that the Borderline Narrative, as a genre requires Secondary Theory for full explication and understanding.

### **Primary Theory: Signal Response**

All human cultures recognize signs, sign associations, and use language as a regularized sign system. Whether this aptitude is the result of a general semiotic-sense of the world or if we possess an actual genetic imperative to construct language is the source of some debate: While Steven Pinker has often made the claim for a genetically determined “Language Instinct,” Bownds maintains, that “There are no obvious ‘language genes’ whose appearance might have correlated with the evolution of language competence [;]” nevertheless, because of our innate sociability and complex symbolic potentials, humans who “grow up in the company of other humans” learn to use language (280). Terrence Deacon, in *The Symbolic Species* asserts that semiotic abilities and impulses are the precursors to language, and, in passing, this is an important distinction to make. Unlike linguistically-based semiotic theory, which asserts that sign systems worked like languages, cognitivism observes that language works like sign systems; language is a special case in the general operations of signs, and signs can operate in non-linguistic ways. Is the comprehension of a film symbolically enabled? Yes. Is it necessarily a linguistically organized experience. No, however, rendering a conscious linguistic response to a film, adds linguistic organizations to the experience and coordinates cognitive activities in ways that the initial experience may not have.

Another innate factor that enables a specific semiotic sense of the world is that we all understand ourselves as individual identities: discrete beings who have symbolic value

and roles in our cultural systems. Frank Putnam and Susan Shanor observe that while “a number of cultures don't have a [...] word for ‘self’ [because] the group, family or clan is considered more important than the individual,” still, “human beings feel a general uniqueness and separation as well as an integration of their various moods, roles and experiences into a unified self” (“Emerging”). As George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, and Antonio Damasio have demonstrated, this sense of self as a discrete individual is the locus of and guiding sensation in experiential reality. Lakoff and Johnson have built on this to conclude that because of our vision-heavy perceptual apparatus and forward-biased locomotive faculty, all cultures use a fundamental image of a person as an integral being, facing forward in space as the basis for constructing universal conceptual metaphoric models. In our conceptual constructions of physical reality, all human languages share certain container, direction, and time/space metaphors. In addition, we all use similar prototypes of scale by which we gauge perceptual wholes against this integral human form (*Metaphors and Women*).

Finally, all of these shared attributes are mobilized in the largest human communicative sign construct, narrative; as Edward Branigan maintains, all cultures make complex, yet structurally similar narrative scripts which we use to assist memory and as conscious models for our own lives (14). These complexities of human reflex, selfhood and symbol construction are what Primary Theory cognition will more fully explain to better demonstrate the impact and importance of narrative on whole cultures and individual interpreters.

### **Primary Theory Tools: Goals, Frames, and Modalities**

To understand both the power and the fuzziness of narrative logic, we need to recognize that the fundamental nature of cognitive action is *goal-oriented* and employs *various associative modalities* in order to generate meaning. Indeed, meaning is almost always an assembly of stimuli correlated by various meaning-making strategies and engaging associations of more information than is organized by any one strategic formulation.

While from a philosophical distance, human experience may occur in a context of imponderable or seemingly random patterns, human *cognitive* activity is not random nor accidental, but is *always focused on* goal achievement and goals are projections of cognitive models, often narratively organized. This first principle is derived from the perceptually based models of early cognitivists, the Gestalt School, who observed that any basic act of perception had to be organized around a default goal: we organize our perceptual information into whole figures by which we recognize spatial relationships, and in that process, we build complexity to be able to think symbolically about relationships in time and space. Therefore, all cognitive activities proceed from this primary orientation to a goal or goals, and the assumption that all cognitive operations conform to this goal-orientation serves as a useful foundation on which to build a model of cognitive action in understanding narrative.

However, in the process of accomplishing any particular cognitive goal — whether we are simply recognizing a cardinal flit past during a walk in the woods or, in a more complex mode, organizing the images and sounds of *Do the Right Thing* into a logical narrative — we may simultaneously utilize several cognitive *strategies* or

*modalities* which, although working on one goal, may coordinate or even compete with each other. As I noted above, although we may have an experience of an ongoing, univocal awareness, this cognitive phenomenon is actually not a single brainy, conscious, linear and “logical” succession of thoughts, but is, in fact, many *inter-related body-brain activities* which can occur either as *parallel* or *interdependent processes*. Built into our cognition is the ability to mobilize a vast array of perceptual, conceptual, or memory information in competing inferences in order to find the “goal” of a single main percept or concept. This ability to unify diverse sources of information and cognitive activity is illustrated in a cognitive approach to narrative. The orienting goal of “making sense” of narrative data by constructing a coherent story is, as Bordwell and Iser have illustrated, accomplished by the narratee mobilizing simultaneous competing interpretive strategies each of which offers an hypothesis which would organize narrative information according to the reader's perception, memory, and sense of self (*Narration and Act*).

These conflicting hypotheses which may not even be part of our conscious awarenesses, still account for narrative tension and interest on the part of the narratee. Ultimately, the hypotheses that best bind the raw narrative data — the *plot* information — into a comprehensible narrative design are the result of a specific reader's use of her *personal and cultural narrative logic* to create a *story* (to use the Russian Formalist distinction between *plot/syuzhet* and *story/fabula*).<sup>8</sup> “Narrative logic” then, is a term of art for how each person's cognitive mechanism goes about the process of story-formation, and such story-formation is central to our understanding the logic of our identities and cultures as well as to how we process and formulate narrative. Narrative interpretation, as I will

shortly discuss, is laying bare the processes of story-formation by which an interpreter's or a culture's logic may be revealed.

As a first step in understanding how narrative comprehension requires different cognitive/perceptual strategies in narrative logic, we need to reflect briefly on the processes of inference needed for fictional story construction. We use real world experience to organize perceptual or conceptual information in the observed story-world in order to create characters, settings, and events. We can use several distinct cognitive modalities toward constructing an experiential sensation of the characters in plot action from sometimes rather incomplete — compared to our real experiences — information. As Branigan points out, we organize the plot information of the material text into a story, the “story-world” of our experience of the text, by two interdependent actions: comprehending “the imagined world” of the *diegesis*, is first, most obviously, understanding the plot of the story, but then also making an accompanying set of inferences about the world of the plot as well:

the spectator presumes that the laws of such a world allow many events to occur (whether we see them or not), contains many objects and characters, contains other stories about other persons, and indeed, permits events to be organized and perceived in nonnarrative ways. The diegetic world extends beyond what is seen in a given shot and beyond even what is seen in the entire film [...]. The diegesis, then, is the implied spatial, temporal, and causal system of a character. (35)

While Branigan's commentary is specific to film, it is nevertheless true for literature as well; based on what we read or spectate<sup>9</sup>, we construct not just the story of a single group

of characters, but an imaginary diegetic world — using the same cognitive tools we use in our experiential world — that is consistent with the depicted events and characters of the narrative text and which may permit powers unknown in our experiential world.

These story-forming abilities, however, also take in information from outside the actual world of the characters' experiences, the *diegesis*, to amplify our understanding and imagining of the story-world. In film more than literature, we are aware of extra- or “non-diegetic” narrative elements which are textual cues outside the “spatial, temporal, and causal system” of the characters' understanding which, nevertheless, ramify on the spectator or reader's goal of organizing and interpreting the text to construct a story. (Branigan uses the term “nondiegetic”; however, this seems to me inaccurate, because “non” implies negation and such information *adds* to the construction of the story-world; therefore, I argue, Latinately *extra*-diegetic). Music in a film score that the characters don't hear is the most obvious example of an influential extra-diegetic source of information, but as our cognition seeks to use narrative logic to unify all available associations, various perceptual and contextual information modalities in and around a narrative text may have an impact on interpretation. In *Paratexts*, Gerard Genette has demonstrated that the context or container of print text also has extra-diegetic (or “paratextual”) force: we do judge books by their covers (and their flap copy, their authors' biographies, and their authors' photographs!). As I will more fully discuss in Chapter 5, advertising, star or author biography, current events, a personal crises can all supply extra-diegetic force to any interpretive act. Of critical importance, however, is the interpreter's ability to reveal and articulate these associative connections in a description of the interpretive experience.

As we consider the discrete steps to this organizing activity, we see that the goal of story formation is accomplished in a tripartate process of inter-relationships:

- 1) distinguishing perceptual signs of the material text to infer plot information and to imagine a diegetic world
- 2) which are then influenced by extra-diegetic information that creates the “story-world” of which contextualizes the experienced narration
- 3) which is then acted on by each interpreter’s narrative logic to synthesize a coherent story.

This the process of narrative logic. While achieving the goal of imagining a complete story involves using an innate sense of character and of narrative structure mobilized with specific cultural codes, still, this process depends on an individual’s particular discriminatory talents and abilities. In my description, cognitive interpretive response is ultimately personal; it differs from other critical strategies in that it recognizes that the result of these story-forming operations using personal narrative logic is *not* a mathematics-like conscious computation of objectively observable textual codes deciphered by correlating perceptions, ideology, and acculturation. Roland Barthes defined the structuralist/semiotic position when he introduced the term “narrative logic” in *The Semiotic Challenge*:

the logic to which the narrative refers is nothing more than a logic of the *already read*. The stereotype (proceeding from a culture many centuries old) is the veritable ground of the narrative world, built altogether on the traces which experience (much more bookish than practical) has left in the reader’s memory and which constitutes it. Hence we can say that the

perfect sequence [of actions], the one which affords the reader the strongest logical certainty, is the most “cultural” sequence, in which are immediately recognized a whole *summa* of readings and conversations [...]. Narrative logic, it must be admitted, is not other than the development of the Aristotlean *probable* (common opinion and not scientific truth) [...].

(Italics Barthes' 144)

Barthes' model, however, demonstrates the central problem of structuralist and semiotic-influenced theories: the “already read” is a false limit. Indeed, there must be more to narrative logic than the “already read” if we are to account for both change and interest in narratives. As Robert Scholes observes in *The Rise and Fall of English*,

if we truly saw everything only in terms of our existing beliefs and practices, we would never find any reason to change those beliefs and practices. That is, we could never understand or consider anything that did not “fit” with what we already knew. (52)

Narrative logic then, isn't as simple or as “logical” as many critics, culturalist and cognitivist, have portrayed it, and it is through a cognitive understanding of narrative logic that we come to understand how texts and interpretation go beyond the “already read.”

### **Primary Theory Tools: Consistency-Building and Novelty-Seeking**

In the semiotic and schematic renditions, the logic by which we understand narrative is pre-eminently a factor of *consistency-building*, by which we associate perceptions with what we already know. However, cognitively speaking, the “already-read” of building-on-consistencies is only half of our perceptual — and by learned ability, conceptual — practice. Once we orient ourselves to a particular goal, the ways we recognize information can fall into two different frames of understanding either *consistency-building* or *novelty-seeking*, each of which will precipitate different, yet parallel or simultaneous protocols of comprehension. A Primary Theory model of narrative logic needs to accommodate both frames if we are to understand identity-based interpretations, cultural change, and issues of hybridity.

Ecologically — looking at cognition as a symptom of evolutionary change — we understand the survival value that comes from building consistency, for, out of consistency-building, comes predictability. As schema theorists correctly assert, the simplest act of perception relies on consistency-building; even a protozoan with limited perceptual ability recognizes variations in its nutrient medium and will locomote in the direction of a healthy consistency. On a somewhat larger scale, human evolutionary success is founded on our species-wide ability to make long chains of potentially consistent associations so that we connect the world's complex consistencies into usable causal relationships, or, in cognitive terms, so that we can formulate more complicated predictive *scripts* than any other species. The ability of human mentation to formulate accurate and complex hypothesis narratives explaining our own and other species’

behaviors or the causal relationships in the physical world is no doubt the reason for the success of our otherwise puny and naked kind.

Protozoans, however, given their very simple nervous systems and survival mechanisms, are not capable of novelty-seeking. For humans, because of the complex competitive nature of cognitive parallel framing, we not only look for causal consistencies, but we are also alert for information that conflicts with the consistent or scripted procedure. Indeed, in this ecological argument, human success is also based on an adaptability to, or even fascination with, the *new*. On a perceptual level, the new often preempts the consistent — we automatically focus on novel movement against a consistently still or predictable background just as we are distracted by a sneeze during a symphony.

When we orient to the new, we navigate the novel situation using several hypothesis-building strategies. We can use familiar strategies in trial and error and make microadjustments, or we can design a fresh approach — not using the “already read” patterns — but in an associative action perhaps best understood by dreaming (which, in its “autocreative” activity, may be a kind of reflexive novelty-seeking response) to accommodate new information by imagining novel situations. In either case, the intrinsic processes of novelty-seeking are an important part of human narrative logic.<sup>10</sup> While Bordwell in *Making Meaning, Narration and the Fiction Film*, and his numerous essays relies largely on schema models of consistency-building for his rendition of cognitivism, he also begins to explore an important dichotomy between consistency-based algorithmic processing — “determinate procedures that necessarily produce a solution” — and novelty-comprehending heuristic processing — “more probabilistic, strategic, open-

ended rules of thumb” which sets the stage for understanding novelty-seeking (“Case” 23). However, novelty-seeking goes beyond heuristic maneuvering to learn and make adjustments inasmuch as it is the frame for curiosity, a cognitive disposition important not only to our species’ success but to understanding imaginative interpretive actions in a cultural studies context. Again, thinking ecologically, the more curiosity directs us to find and use the new, the better and faster we can adapt, which in part explains our fascination with the complex causalities of narrative and why all humans like to hear new stories. If my experience of *Do the Right Thing* were only a consistency-building activity, it would generate limited, if any, interest; however, its novel challenges to the “already read” images and procedures of my life both intrigue and alarm me, intensifying my interest in the narrative. When I first saw the film, Mookie’s decision to throw the ashcan through Sal’s window stunned and confused me, although I felt an intuitive honesty in his choice. My novelty-seeking/consistency-building dialectic kept me interested in the film and its characters, and so it figures in our interpretive processes on several levels as we perform the goal of story-formation. However, before going deeper into specific cases, we need to consider how schema theory defines categories and how the many varieties of associative strategies function in our perception, abstraction, and narrative logic.

### **Primary Theory Tools: Schematic Activity**

*Schemas* are mental prototypes that we use to infer whole perceptual or conceptual figures from perceptual data. A few schemas are, as I mentioned above, are probably innate: faces and emotions, taste preferences, and fear or flinch triggers all probably work as basic categories of perception to engender species-wide responses. Most schematic associations and interactions, however, are more complicated. Narrative logic becomes clearer when we understand how these prototyping schematic activities are learned and then work to guide our behaviors, interpretive decisions, and identity constructions.

As I have outlined, Gestaltists determined that human perception specifically and cognition generally were goal-driven activities by noticing that perception is primarily structured around a single default goal of organizing neural information — the report of the senses and the operations of the mind — into a single focus on whole forms or shapes. Without this disposition to organize perceptual information into wholes governed by schematic prototypes, our consciousness would be awash in an undifferentiated flow of enormous amounts of neurological information from our sense organs. Imagine, for a moment, that you were unable to organize colors into areas of light and shadow, to recognize continuities, or to clearly separate the report of each of the separate senses. Not only would you be lost in a cloud-world of continuous neurological abstract expressionism, but you would lose your ability to comprehend spatial relationships, and lost with it would be your knack of understanding time; finally, you might very well lose the sense of your own being as a differentiated person.

But with the possible exception of a developmental period from neo-nate to infancy, this is not the case because, by using both the innately impressed and experientially established schematic categories held in memory, our preconscious minds are able to use consistency-building to sort out separate sense information and then to associate this perceptual information with memory schemas by which we can localize whole forms. Once we recognize whole forms, we can then use spatial schemas (an operation that computers, to date, cannot do) to construct the whole forms in relationship to ourselves and to each other, first in space and then, using spatial relationships as an analogy, in time relationships, and finally in epistemic causal chains (Damasio). In this complex but transhuman time-space experience, our sensations create a specific whole self-schema of awareness or “being”: we feel we are integral selves bounded by skin, supported by the body, and existing at a perceptually rich center. From this sense of individuated and centered being arises a consciousness-of-self schema and the central “now” experience that enables concepts of past and future (Lakoff *Women*).

A *schema*, in this description, is a mental model which guides our preconsciousness or consciousness to organize and then recognize the massive numbers of neurons excited by our sensations into a limited focus on a few definite objects and a concrete goal. Our schematic abilities are constructed bottom-up beginning in our innate abilities and developing along personal and cultural lines. However, schemas — like other cognitive operations — can have distinct but parallel or overlapping associative potentials. By understanding and then extrapolating schematic action, we can begin to examine the limits of narrative logic and interpretation. Edward Branigan, echoing Barthes, provides a rudimentary definition of this prototyping action: “A schema [i]s an

arrangement of knowledge *already possessed* by a perceiver that is used to predict and classify new sensory data” (italics Branigan's, 13). Yet, to understand how we construct the associations necessary to arrive at a sense of narrative causality, we need to explore the implications of “*already possessed*” along with “predict and classify” more thoroughly to better conceptualize the potentials and complications of schematic action.

Schematic goals fall into three innate generalizable — yet still interdependent — *format* recognitions:

*Object* schemas help us with the perception and evaluation of specific objects, sounds, flavors, odors, textures, or other concentrated or localized sense data;

*Spatial* schemas orient us in the world of object and event relationship and help define space/time conceptualizations;

*Script* schemas which are episodic models that sequence events and behaviors in causal relationships.<sup>11</sup>

As I mentioned earlier, these formats are progressively inter-related: an object perception is *a part* of a spatial organization; a spatial schema is the organizational relationship which is the Ur-figure for a script sequence. Simply put: shoe laces are *objects* that are organized *spatially* to hold shoes on feet if the *script* of shoe lace-tying is enacted.

To keep in mind applications to narrative studies, we can see how these distinctions respond to the formal features of a narrative text:

Recognizing a character or a stylistic motif relies primarily an *object schemas* — although Mookie goes through various costume changes and is shown from a variety of camera angles, some of which distort his features, I use an object schema to consistently and more or less instantly recognize him; I also recognize

the motif of violence in the script by hearing object-schematic similarities ranging from Buggin' Out's comic threats to "fuck up" Clifton (John Savage) for smudging his new Air Jordans, to Mookie's serious advice to Vito (Richard Edson) to "kick Pino(John Turturro)'s ass," to Radio Raheem's *Night of the Hunter* "LOVE fights HATE" monologue-homage.

An interpretive analysis of setting, *mise en scene*, or sequencing will rely primarily on *spatial schematics* — Sal's Wall of Fame is not simply a wall in his pizzeria, but it acts as a background to many shots, displays the photographs of famous American-Italians (and Italians), and it literally supports and defines the pizzeria in the physical space of Bed-Sty; as I will show below, its spatial schema relationships construct its connotative signals;

*Script schemas* are causal or consecutive relationships that enable us to project story-hypotheses from plot information — when I see Sal give Da Mayor (Ossie Davis) money to sweep the sidewalk I hypothesize that — within the diegetic world — Sal might continue as a sensitive and beneficent character; this hypothesis gains support in other event scripts like Sal's flirtation with Jade or his chastising Pino for narrow-mindedness. Or, in a slightly different scripting operation from the personalities in the photographs on the Wall of Fame, I understand that each personality represents an "American-Italian" success story to Sal, and as such, they signify scripts with hagiographic weight by which he proudly gauges his own success and "Italianess"; to Buggin' Out, however, the

same photographic array, lacking any black faces, implies a completely different script whereby whites collude to maintain white-exclusivity and white superiority.

Schema formats are important to a cultural studies approach to narrative because they help to localize and organize personal perceptions that, in the act of interpretation, limn out or connect to cultural significances and value systems. Indeed, once schemas have been formatted, A. L. Wilkes, in *Knowledge in Minds: Individual and Collective Processes in Cognition*, suggests that they then have five different, potentially inter-dependent, functions which can be performed consciously — in our self-aware minds — or preconsciously as habitual, cultural, or intentional guides that determine what perceptual objects will emerge in consciousness:

Schemas are said (1) to provide for the interpretation of events, (2) to make available a mnemonic framework for organizing incoming information, (3) to assist in abstracting gist from peripheral detail, (4) to allow for prediction ahead of what is to come, and (5) to serve as a guide for reconstructive recall. (46-47)

Clearly, with these models of schematic activity, which express the organizing of perception in narrative terms and as narrative problem-solving, we continue to build on the intrinsic relationship between perception, cognition and narrative logic.

### **Cognitive Tools: Associative Strategies and Fuzziness**

Most importantly, however, as we continue to consider how “logic” is narratively structured, we need to note that these various potentials of basic schematic activity do *not* work as we conventionally think of category formation but instead rely on “fuzzy” relationships. In this regard, I need to expand on the understanding of schema offered in current narrative theory. Branigan’s expression of schematic-action is, more or less, the one offered by Bordwell, Turner, Iser, and Smith, which works well-enough for comprehending certain acts of immediate interpretation. However, Branigan also argues that “formal logic has been shown to have limitations as a descriptive model for human thought,” and he observes how cognitivist

models of human language emphasize [...] the dynamics of a perceiver's interaction with a text — i.e., pragmatic situations — by studying a perceiver's use of “fuzzy” concepts, metaphorical reasoning, and “frame-arrays” of knowledge. (9)

Schema theory applications often veer toward “formal logic” explanations, and we need to more clearly define how the mind works in using schemas as fuzzy concepts and for “logical” processes that are more dramatically associative and volatile than we may be aware of. Psychologist Perry W. Thorndyke offers a definition of schema that extends the “already read” limit of reductive schema-theory. To Thorndyke, the schema is

a cluster of knowledge [that] provides a skeleton structure for a concept that can be “instantiated,” or filled out, with the detailed properties of the particular instance being represented. (58)

In understanding how our minds “logically” construct value and significance from narrative, we need to look more carefully at how our minds work in “filling out” schematic information. What goes undiscussed by schema-narrativists is “the skeleton” which is suggestive of a wide variety of potential bodies that might hang from the same basic bones. To understand the potentials of how schematic action structures narrative effects which in turn structure experience, we need to consider the various ways that such a schematic skeleton may be fleshed with fuzzy logic beyond the oversimplified category-confines of schema-theorists or computer-based models of category action.

The computer-based notion of a (nonfuzzy) category is as an either/or distinction, a binary-function which promotes definite assessments based on exclusive limitations, and this is the kind of category that is

- 1) preferred by logicians and mathematicians in elementary set theory
- 2) implicitly used in many rhetorical constructs, and
- 3) to some degree, implied by unnuanced definitions of schema narrative theorists.<sup>12</sup>

In fact, schematic categories are *only occasionally* limited by such exclusive constraints; the mind is more likely to use — as the interpretive strategies of classic poetics have suggested — other kinds of association tasks that rely on less strict prototyping functions. Furthermore, just as we saw in schema formatting where the perception of an object schema enables understanding spatial schema which effects script schema, so we may mobilize several schematic associative actions in interdependent parallel. We may use as many as four potential Gestalt (figure forming) principles *only one* of which has the exclusive action conventionally regarded as “a logical category”:

- 1) proximity (a tendency to notice information bits that are close together),
- 2) similarity (grouping according to resemblance or resemblances),
- 3) closure (the tendency to find or infer “complete” figures or strictly limited categories), and
- 4) good continuity (the tendency to notice or infer continuation of “line” as in linguistic phrasing, visual figure outlines, melody, the texture or surfaces, voice timbre, or projectile trajectory). (Hampson and Morris 67)

What this means is that, as we associate perceived information to schemas in memory in order to generate the strong associations that go with hypothesis-building, we can align or associate that information along several relationship axes. Like the New Critics who valorized metaphorical relationships to the neglect of other powerful poetic tropes, most schema theorists — Bordwell, Branigan, Smith, Iser, et al.<sup>13</sup> — treat schematic associative cognition as if it were only a similarity function. However, here are examples of the range of potential schematic qualifications Gestalt strategies enable ranging from simple perception of whole figures to formulating narrative meaning constructs:

- 1) Proximity. As a signal, proximus-based schema organization is similar to what literary critics understand as synecdoche; proximity relationships are centripetal, acting around a central figure; if I regard a table leg, I also see the table top, the floor it stands on, other legs, items on the table, on the floor and so on in infinite regress; however, because I centrally focus on the leg its function as support will figure in the construction of category relationships, the table top which is supported and the floor on which the leg rests will figure more importantly than items on the table; in his scene with Pino, Sal constructs his role in the

community as emanating centripetally from the pizzeria, a place where the neighborhood can congregate, take nourishment, and from which they grow and change.

2) Similarity. A schematic relationship based on similarity is metaphorically conceived, with elastic and inclusive boundaries determined by strong-weak similarity associations built on strength of perceived similarity but including potential partial similarities. For instance, all the objects in a room that can be gripped by a hand are in a similarity relationship. Although the narration never states it, we may use similarity relationships to infer that Sal sees the faces on the wall as varying degrees of Italian and varying degrees of macho, given the pre-eminence of Italian-Americans and male sex-symbol tough guys—actors and athletes—as opposed to only two woman (Sophia Loren and Liza Minnelli), one classical musician (Luciano Pavarotti), and one politician (Mario Cuomo).

3) Closure. A schematic relationship can be exclusive with strict criteria and firm or exclusive borders, a “closed” set with strict limits as categories are presented are in basic set theory in classical logic, or as we think of binary categories: all the hammers in the room; *Buggin’ Out*, in contrast to Sal, views the faces on the wall not so much as varying degrees of macho Italiano, but as exclusively white.

4) Good continuation. These schematic relationships are based on continuousness. They work like metonymy as an associative calculation based on a shared part, quality, function, outline or series relationship which carries, by virtue of continuation, a particular meaning and from which various strong/weak distinctions can emanate. If we focus on a quality, locating all the heavy objects in a room will begin a progressive calculation, first locating the heaviest objects — of which some will be dense and heavy, some large and heavy — and then into a series of assessments about what “heavy” is; even a small frail object has a bit of “heaviness.” In a much more complex use of good continuation schematics, I recognize Mookie, Pino (John Turturro), Stevie (Luis Ramos), Officer Long (Rick Aiello), and Sonny (Steve Park)’s racial slur sequence as extra-diegetic because their shots are grouped together and stylistically similar to each other, yet stylistically dissimilar — discontinuous — to the logic of the story-world. This series of single shots — addressed directly to camera, seen through a wide-angle lens, and delivered by emotionally overwrought characters in dialogue inappropriate to the story-world and the plot up to this point — by virtue of their good continuation with each other which seems discontinuousness with the rest of the film, suggests a purposeful montage. This montage breaks with the story-world to suggest a special, extra-diegetic significance, presenting an interpretive problem that I will return to.

Our use of these schematic associative actions, like the way we engage simultaneous yet competitive frames of consistency-building and novelty-seeking, is part

of the heuristic nature of narrative cognition and narrative logic. In the processes of engaging perceptual or conceptual information to construct narrative logic, we can mobilize *all, or a few, or just one* of these potentials to create extensive and simultaneous schematic hypotheses depending on the parameters of our goal schema. Anyone who has had to drive a nail without access to a hammer knows the sensation of scanning the objects in a room and exercising several simultaneous and competitive schema strategies at once (gripped by hand, heavy but controllable, hard with a smooth surface) before selecting a frying pan or a bust of Socrates or an andiron. Furthermore, anyone who has been in an ethnically charged situation, knows how stereotyped reactions of our shared cultural logics can sometimes compete with our conscious attempts to see the conflict in terms of fairness or law.

To summarize, the hierarchy of decision-making in schematic organization is framed by both consistency-building and novelty-seeking and can mobilize three interdependent schema formats, the fact that each of these categoric strategies can use a *different* relationship logic and that they are enacted simultaneously and competitively, we see how “narrative logic” is actually, competitive *logics* and can become quite fuzzy. Consider the racial slur montage with Mookie, Pino, Stevie, Officer Long, and Sonny. I use good continuation to group the shots together into a montage, but although they are proximus to plot scenes in the story-world, I know by the shots’ stylistic (dis)similarity with plot-driving shots that I should organize the sequence as outside the actual plot occurrences of the story.<sup>14</sup> Because of this disjunction, in my on-going perception of the film, I hold the sequence in memory to see how it will fit into the plot or style logic. Once the experience of the narration concludes, however, closure of the story-world

enables me to correlate the specific shot qualities as emotional intensifiers — the zoom-in, direct address, distorted by wide angle and delivered at near hysterical pitch — and I can formulate interpretive similarity strategies that justify these stylistic devices as I attempt to formulate the narrative as complete and efficient story-figure. As first person statements delivered solo directly to camera and the distortion of the image by camera movement and the fervent, irrational pitch of the actors' deliveries suggest an inappropriateness which I then logically construct as not of the story-world: the sentiments are their respective, suppressed, ethnic fears and frustrations, not their real-life coping strategies. In this way, I interpret the montage as extra-diegetic narrative information — these expressions of stereotyping may be emotionally true for each speaker as a hidden part of their narrative logics, but other characters in the diegesis don't see them.

However, the racial slur montage does more than provide subtextual emotional values; it enables an interpretation of Sal's fight with Radio Raheem. I can apply this montage information to interpreting why Sal — who is generous to Da Mayor, indulgent and even affectionate with Mookie, flirtatious with Jade, and impatient with Pino's overt racism — “loses his cool” and attacks Radio Raheem's prized boombox, calling him a “Nigger.” By including characters from every ethnic group depicted in the film, the montage suggests that in the story-world of *Do the Right Thing* — which, in most ways, is constructed to present an unvarnished depiction of contemporary America — racial stereotyping is a potential default mode of rationalization about complex problems. It is what happens when we are faced with “fight or flight” situations. Is Sal a racist? Probably not in his most self-aware choice-making frame of mind which we observe

throughout most of the plot. Indeed, we know that when he chooses consciously, Sal wants to be a contributing member of the multiracial neighborhood. However, the choices that Sal makes — as many Americans make — are informed by a narrative logic in which different scripts compete, including those represented by the racial slur montage, and under duress or in the throes of fatigue or emotional crises, seeking to justify other script constructs regarding private property or even cultural hegemony, these stereotypes — however “illogical” or inconsistent with the logic of our conscious identity choices — are available as a weapon and a rationalization.

### **Cultural Schema and The Borderline**

In the Introduction, I stated that Borderline Narrative is set on a “frontier” between two cultures, and is thematically focused on the contentions, values, and negotiations that exist in that borderland. As I begin to build a cognitive definition of the Borderline genre, I will argue that Borderline Narratives — as most narrative genres — share certain script-schemas. In the Borderline script-schema, one of the genre-defining plot events is the diegetic depiction of a conflict over the interpretation of a single sign. As an interpretive operation, the schematic construction of a particular signal inevitably involves cultural narrative logic, and intra-cultural difference in narrative logics can be easily discerned based on the way characters contend over meaning. For instance, in *Do the Right Thing*, Sal and Buggin’ Out have an interpretive disagreement over The Wall of Fame which demonstrates how differently their narrative logics can schematize even apparently prosaic information.

In many ways, Sal and Buggin' Out have a great deal in common. They are both working class, male, American-English speaking Brooklynners, yet, because of the difference in their genetic and cultural make-up which construct their ethnicities, they schematize themselves and American culture very differently. *Do the Right Thing* as a Borderline Narrative, is examining the "border" between black and white American cultures and identities. Buggin' Out and Sal, both focused on The Wall of Fame, enunciate very different perceptions although they both see the same spatial arrangement of photographs. This is because they perform radically different conscious and preconscious inferences of the implications of the Wall's significance. Their disparate evaluations, guided by consistency-building and novelty-seeking processes in response to object, spatial, and script schema, create the interpretational dispute that proves to be an initiating event in the plot.<sup>15</sup>

Already annoyed at Sal over the lack of cheese on his slice of pizza, Buggin' Out engages in novelty-seeking to extend his assault on Sal's authority and fixes on The Wall as a new site connected to and significant of Sal's inappropriate use of power. Seeing only white faces in the many portraits and action shots, Buggin' Out suggests that Sal should have "some brothers on da Wall!"<sup>16</sup> Sal sarcastically uses consistency-building and a closure schema of ownership to suggest that Buggin' Out buy his own pizzeria and put "brothers [...] or any of your relatives on the wall [...]. This is my pizzeria. American-Italians on the wall, *only*."

To this, Buggin' Out responds with good continuation and a closure schema regarding how he perceives Sal's customer base: "That's fine, Sal. You own this place.

Rarely do I see any *Italian* Americans eating here. All I see are black folks. And since we spend much money here, we have some say.”

Within the story-world, both characters are making interpretations of the same text — "The Wall of Fame" — and their interpretations are governed by their respective uses of narrative logic which is rooted in the schemas that they associate with their “identities” — who they understand themselves to be via the narratives, associations, and values that contribute to their self-construction. From Sal’s “logic,” The Wall represents resonances with what we might designate as his *identity narrative* — the complex of schemas he uses to explain who he is and how he got this way. In the way that narrative logic is fuzzy — as demonstrated above — identity narratives use narrative logic to construct the self as a somewhat elastic character. The specific focus of the dispute, the photographs of ethnic Italian-Americans, suggest Sal’s paradigms for success, beauty, talent (after all, Sal has named the pizzeria, “Sal’s *Famous Pizzeria*”). The photographs are all ethnically Italian people, most of them from working class backgrounds; they are personalities whose success in show business, sports, politics, and the arts is the stuff of legend even for non-Italian-Americans. Furthermore, as W. J. T. Mitchell notes in “The Violence of Public Art,” “The Wall is important to Sal not just because it displays famous Italians but because they are [mostly] famous *Americans* [...] who have made it possible for Italians to think of themselves as Americans [...]” (italics Mitchell’s, 110). Fundamental to Sal’s identity narrative is a conception of himself as an American evidenced by his insistent use of “Italian-American” and his several declarations that “This is America,” implying a pluralist ideology and an ethos of tolerance which he articulates in his conversation with Pino at the window table.

Buggin' Out, seeing The Wall through a different identity narrative, makes his interpretation by other schematic associations, and he constructs “logical” but dissimilar values. To Buggin’ Out, the exclusively white faces that stare down on black and brown customers seem to be a closure schema representing segregation. As Mitchell observes, “The wall is important to Buggin’ Out because it signifies exclusion [of black Americans] from the public sphere.” Because of The Wall’s presence in Sal’s Famous Pizzeria, an institution he and other African Americans sustain with regular patronage and whose product he enjoys, Buggin’ Out uses proximity to schematically link the supply of money that sustains the pizzeria to a “logical” claim on “integrating” the decor and thereby making it more congenial to the customers: hence, his rationale for the inclusion of “some brothers on da Wall.” At this point, both Sal and Buggin’ Out are aware of the logics that inform their respective interpretive positions. “Interpretation,” however, is not always a fully conscious process, but is predominantly a near-reflexive response, involving preconscious associative activities which are, in part, culturally trained and which powerfully influence choice-making and other conscious thought activities. As they join their feud more actively, their preconscious narrative logical connections lead them to feel that the dispute is connected to their essential beings, and this is how a few photographs on a wall become a matter of life and death.

### **Cognitive Tools: Preconscious Activity**

In making their interpretations, Sal and Buggin' Out don't always "hear themselves think" because they are they are building schematic hypothesis-on-hypothesis in the heat of argument, and the site of this hypothesis-building activity is not conscious awareness but is part of the *preconscious* schematic activity. I will delay this discussion of The Wall of Fame briefly to lay out the cognitive mechanisms that are involved as Sal and Buggin' Out escalate their conflict.

The frames, strategies, and modalities that effect Sal and Buggin' Out's behaviors act almost entirely preconsciously. As Bownds observes, at the preconscious level

many competing parallel streams of input and output are constantly being compared, sorted, and tested for appropriateness. The interpretations and actions that "work" or "are appropriate" rise to the surface to constitute our subjective experience. (295)

The preconscious, then, is a general term for the threshold to awareness which foregrounds whatever our premier goal is and thereby, in combination with memory and perception, filters the bulk of potentially distracting perceptual information to guide what will rise to our perceptual/conceptual awareness. Although preconscious action limits conscious focus to usually one main or "prime" goal, below the level of attention or awareness, it will also maintain other goal-activities recently in consciousness. In *Philosophy in the Flesh*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson assert that, based on what we can now measure of neurological energy to assess brain activity, this preconscious action — filtering toward a conscious goal while maintaining other goal processes — is at least 95% of cognitive activity.<sup>17</sup> Based on this neurological activity we can understand

preconsciousness as instrumental to narrative logic and regard consciousness is a special state with specific potentials.

It is through the workings of the preconscious that we are able to find a strong goal focus. For instance, preconscious focus is so powerful in the goal of story formation that, as Christian Metz observed, when I enter the story-world of *Do the Right Thing*, I experience an almost dream-like state, becoming a floating observer freed from the time/space continuum, magically situated among the sights and sounds of 1989 Brooklyn and having little awareness that I'm actually sitting in an auditorium full of freshmen watching colored lights projected on a screen (*The Imaginary Signifier*). Or, in a similar exercise of preconscious expedited narrative formation, using a repertoire of slightly different filtering mechanisms, I can read Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and imagine the story-world of Fa Mu Lan with little or no awareness of seeing words on a page in a book even as I sit on a lumpy chair in a noisy overheated coffeehouse suffering the remnants of particularly vicious upper respiratory infection after a riotous and sybaritic Christmas in Y2K South Carolina. In creating a goal of story-formation, our consistency-building and novelty-seeking frames will enable our preconsciousness to promote only percepts feeding story hypotheses so that we stay, consistently in the story-world; meanwhile, the details of our actual lives, potentially inconsistent with and certainly more ordinary than the narrative information, don't distract our conscious attention (at least until a nearby cell begins chiming "Dixie").

But preconscious filtering does more than provide focus; it is the site of assembly for narrative logic. For humans, every perceptual or conceptual whole figure — whether or not it arises in conscious awareness — is a resonant construction, part of a web of

associations preconsciously potentiating more meanings than simply the sum of its readily observed qualities. Because of this associative logic, no object or relationship, spatial or script schema exists “in mind” as an hermetic schema-category but fits into a great preconscious associative and inferential matrix, structured by the Gestalt potentials, driven by our associative predilection, and constantly cross-referencing our experience with our memories. Indeed, the connecting schematic relationships in humans are so complex that, as Terence Deacon argues in *The Symbolic Species*, no single whole perceptual figure is ever “mere perception,” but because of we are always applying narrative logic to perceptual information, each figure is always involved in “representational relationships” which factor as “internal communication” connecting with the self’s “potential relationships to past, future, distant, or imaginary things” (78). Therefore, as I preconsciously or consciously construct decisions — either in responding to fiction narrative or the narrative sense I have of my own life — my experience of “logic” is actually a schematic- associative activity whereby “the story” of my life is compared with my perception of textual information. Even when I feel that I am conscious of a “rational” or “logical” decision, it must be based on the complex interplay of various schema recognitions, value associations, emotional attachments, hypotheses about the future, and my identity and task orientations (I will discuss this in more detail in Section Two, Chapter 3). These networks of associations are generally schematized in cognitive preconscious operations where I may be utilizing an array of schema-potentials for hypothesis-building. Of the many possible explicative array potentials, I will preconsciously select only those most “consistent” with my current best identity narrative — that is those that closely associate with my identity narrative by similarity, proximity,

continuation or closure — to create a web of associational agreements; this web may not be governed by my conscious morality, but is contingent on many factors including how free I feel to play at that moment (see below) — once my preconsciousness has sorted these associations, I then have a “feeling” that I my decision, perception, or understanding is “rational.”<sup>18</sup>

Any “best identity narrative,” however, is *not* a fixed interpretive position but may engage a spectrum of possible personae depending on a range of contextual pressures from game-like playful curiosity to fear-producing stimuli. In their gentle flirtation, Jade and Sal are playfully exploring the bounds of their cultural identities, yet later, as context demand limit Sal’s ability to play, his determined integrationist identity falls away revealing a character very much capable of racist slurring when he’s hot and tired and frightened enough. His best identity narrative modulates, changing his script associations according to immediate goal orientation and how contextual problems are framed.

When whole populations mobilize similar script associations in a preconscious evaluative or decision-making action, we see the “bundles of relations” that Claude Levi-Strauss argued in *Structural Anthropology* constitute the power of “mythologies” to structure whole cultural understandings of the world. A *myth* in this structuralist understanding is a shared script schema by which cultural values are enunciated; however, in a cognitive rendition, the mythic structures of narrative logic are less monolithic — more “skeletal” — than in a structuralist approach. When Sal flirts with Jade, both Mookie and Pino — although unable to agree about anything else in the course of the plot — use a myth of macho-sexuality to interpret Sal’s behavior as inviting sexual

intimacy with Jade. In my interpretation, seeing the scene as a man of about Sal's age, I detect a certain courtly innocence in their flirtatious play. As an interpreter, I'm less sure that Sal, in Mookie's vivid phrase, "wants to hide the salami" as much as he likes to charm and reward an attractive young woman and loyal customer whom he has watched mature. For Jade, Sal is an older man with an established business and such sweet-talking puts her on an equal footing with him; she exercises her sense of herself as an adult and a person of consequence in the neighborhood through his special treatment. In my reading, their conversation may be flirtation, but unlike Mookie and Pino who are hypersensitive because their identity narratives proscribe inter-ethnic sexuality (somewhat ironically in Mookie's case), both Sal and Jade know it is flirtation for the sake of play, not as a preamble to sexual intimacy. While the cognitive project admittedly has certain (neo)structuralist or semiotic overtones — this kind of mythic analysis is part of structuralist-derived semiotic style criticism — its emphasis on how a specific interpreter makes associations provides more room for nuance.

Indeed, by understanding preconscious processes, we observe that interpretive response can say as much about the interpreter and her narrative logic as about the way the text structures meaning. Cognitive narrative logic, using frames, formats, schemas, and associative strategies, goes beyond strictly "coded" significations or binary relationships to clarify and extend the associative syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes and amplify not just signifier and signified relationships, but the very possibilities of sign, index, and icon. Therefore, cognitive potentials are extensions and clarifications of semiotics' correct intuitions about our associative capabilities, but they use a perceptually-based — as opposed to language-based — paradigm formation. While a

formal interpretation of any narrative — audio/ visual or written — will ultimately result in a language-codified rendition of narrative effects, we need to remind ourselves that, in the interpretive act, the selection and construction of conceptual schemas have a level of competitive and inferential play built into their cognition which is not linguistic, and we can arrive at a clearer understanding of narrative effects — and better interpretations — the closer we come to this interface between various potentials and interpretive certainty.<sup>19</sup>

As I continue to trace how Sal and Buggin' Out interpret the Wall of Fame, it will become clear how important preconscious resonances are to constructing the narrative logic of their interpretive responses and the sense of righteousness both men develop. Notice that Sal and Buggin' Out are not entirely in disagreement in their preconscious associations of The Wall. In Sal's conversation with Pino, we see that essentially he agrees with Buggin' Out that the pizzeria is a neighborhood institution which nourishes young — mostly black — people, and gives them a place to congregate as they grow up. However, just as black musical idioms sound like “jungle music” to Sal, his preconscious associative logic makes him tone-deaf to the actual conditions of the neighborhood. The implicit values that authorize Sal to mount the celebrity photographs are connected to his sense of himself as proprietor, pizza maker, father, employer, and citizen of the community but also to his sense of himself as a closed-schema “American-Italian.” Sal certainly spatially schematizes The Wall as a part of the enclosing building structure, containing the pizzeria and its mode of production; this connection works schematically to constellate other associations. We know from Sal's conversations during the diegesis that, for him, because the pizzeria supports the production of Italian food, it represents

Italian-based culture. Given his strong Italian identity as expressed in *The Wall of Fame*, Sal feels “Famous” in the neighborhood, and his business is a source of pride for him as well as an representation of his financial wherewithal; it’s directly associated to his sense of *himself* as central to the health and happiness of the neighborhood and to the legacy he will leave his sons. Furthermore, we know from the final scene that Sal has actually built with his “own hands” much of the actual structure of the pizzeria. The structure, including *The Wall*, is his creation, an emanation of his own body, as well as his contribution to the neighborhood.

From *Buggin’ Out*’s schematic organization, however, *The Wall* is part of proximity to and good continuation with, in Mitchell’s phrase, “the public sphere” (110): the communal sheltered area used for social congregation and connected to nourishment, economic prosperity, social interaction, and pleasure within a largely African-American context. While *The Wall* is connected, as both characters concede, to pleasure and prosperity in the black community, Sal’s hegemonic refusal to change *The Wall* acts as a segregation similarity schema for *Buggin’ Out*. He infers that whites are intentionally keeping blacks out: controlling conditions to keep them impoverished, under-represented, and invisible while imperializing their money, labor, and culture.

As I use my ability to imagine Sal and *Buggin’ Out* as complete humans, I can infer that, using my cognitive theory, at the base of both their preconscious associations about *The Wall*, they both use closure potentials to efface other associations as their conflict escalates. While Sal sees *The Wall* as closure schema that encloses and supports his life, his effort, his contribution, and his mythos of private property, to *Buggin’ Out*, *The Wall* stands as a symbolic barrier: it closes off the poor and powerless black

neighborhood from the pizzeria area of strict white control and as such; by similarity, then, it stands for for the conscious exclusion of blacks from the white-dominated American culture and power structure. Mitchell sees the metaphoric nature of this thinking and observes that “Buggin’ Out wants [...] the respect of Whites, the acknowledgment that African-Americans are hyphenated Americans, too, just like Italians” (Mitchell 111). This associative logic is behind Buggin’ Out’s call to “Boycott Sal’s!” — another closure strategy — intended to remove Sal’s profit and his ability to sustain his business. Interestingly, no one in the neighborhood initially agrees with Buggin’ Out. In fact, they regard him — as his nick-name suggests — as if he were completely irrational and possibly dangerous. Except for Radio Raheem, everyone either likes pizza or likes Sal or distrusts Buggin’ Out’s obsession with “blackness” so that they tolerate The Wall’s implications rather than give up on their more pleasant associations. However, when Buggin’ Out’s provocations lead to fury, when Radio Raheem is killed by the police, the combination of this act, the heat, the late hour, and the frustrations simmering preconsciously — as suggested by the racial slur montage — all serve to shift the neighborhood’s construction of significance of the pizzeria and to justify meeting the violence of the police force with good continuation of violence against Sal and the pizzeria.

The foregoing analysis has revealed The Wall of Fame conflict as a microcosm of the cultural studies’ problem focus particularly as it applies to the Borderline Narrative and interpretation; it demonstrates *identities* — informed by their own preconscious narrative logics — in conflict over *the values* they infer — through various cognitive operations — in a *sign*. Within *Do the Right Thing*’s story-world, the consequences of

this interpretive dispute are violence and ultimately, death, a reflection of the real world stakes that underscore the importance of being able to use common terms to promote a self-aware exploration of preconscious narrative logic and then to generate communication and possibly understanding between interpretive communities and individual identities. The success or failure of communication, however, depends on understanding how much of interpretation is a product of imaginary, preconscious activities by which we create our narrative logics. In understanding the power of preconscious associative action, we should not forget that this conflict — which will eventually kill Raheem and level Sal's Famous Pizzeria — is begun by a dispute over the amount of cheese on a slice of pizza.

### **Cognitive Tools: Imagination and Interpretation**

The structures of imagination are part of what is shared when we understand one another and are able to communicate within a community.

—Mark Johnson

Building on the frames of goal orientation and the associative imperatives of schema formation, and with a clear-cut conception of how the preconsciousness works, we can formulate refreshed definitions for two inter-related cognitive processes which enact narrative logic and which are historically central to a conceptualization of how a particular identity creates textual understanding and cultural engagement: *imagination* and *interpretation*. The Borderline Narrative offers specific challenges to imagination and to interpretive activities.

Although the concept of “imagination” has a vexed and various history in literary criticism and with literit’s next neighbor, philosophy, Mark Johnson spends much of *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*, using cognitive principles to develop a neo-Kantian Theory of Imagination. According to Johnson, “Imagination is the pervasive structuring activity by which we achieve coherent, patterned, unified representations. It is indispensable for our ability to make sense of our experience, to find it meaningful” (168). In Johnson's compelling rendition, schematic associative mentation is, in its inferential workings, a creative adding-to of perceptual information and advancing of hypothetical meaning which can only be accomplished through the image-action that is imagination. Imagination so-defined includes “fancy,” “creativity,” and “originality” — as aspects of our novelty-seeking capacity — but, more than exercises in originality, imagination is the associative operation where neural information is organized along inferential matrices that, as Deacon maintains, in human cognition inevitably includes symbolic relationships, and therefore, imaginative operations are the site of culture and identity. As it works with both frames of novelty-seeking and of consistency-building, imagination-as-inference mobilizes narrative logic in creating an experience of a “whole” world, a wholeness which is the result of experience and memory working with individual goal-seeking in the context of culture. The connections an individual activates in these schematic *imaginings* inevitably feel like “truth” and therefore structure “reason” in a cognitive activity that is the basis for story-formation (139-72). This imaginary schematization happens in three inter-referencing operations which are very similar to story formation activities:

- 1) sensory input is organized with Gestalt principles and then imaged as whole forms; these forms are then
- 2) associated with similar memory data as object-, spatial-, or script-schemas which are
- 3) guided by the problem-solving task at hand.

Most of this cognition I have designated “preconscious” inasmuch as it never comes into our conscious attention, yet, as Johnson and Murray Smith are quick to note, amplifying these particular cognitive activities as “imaginary” acknowledges how much the simplest actions of perception are dependant on inferential activity and associative connections (Smith 40-52).

Such imaginative inference based on limited information is a principal facility in perception. Even when we may think we have “full” information about figure, this is because we are inferring — and therefore imagining — “fullness” by simultaneous use of closure and good continuation schematic actions. At the most, in any one moment of visual perception — vision being our most discrete perceptual ability and the sense that mobilizes most brain area — we only see *half* of an object (the side facing us); yet, by using good continuation and similarity schematic strategies in Gestalt figure forming, we can accurately infer an imaginary whole from seeing just a recognizable part. Half a figure is a wealth of perceptual information, but sometimes, with context cues, quite a small part will activate an accurate inference: in a woodland context, we can use a similarity strategy to accurately interpret a tenth-of-a-second flash of scarlet across the trail as a cardinal swooping past. On a grander scale, in *Do the Right Thing*, the goals of perceiving first a plot and then constructing a story from the flickering images and

recorded sounds of the narrative text involves making similar, if decidedly more complicated, imaginary inferences, often with very limited information. In this process, through innate abilities, universal contingencies, and the associative networks organized by narrative logic, we activate the connections that enable us — both preconsciously and consciously — to usefully hypothesize an astonishing array of information: whole forms, spatial relationships, script schemas, entire causal chains, value hierarchies, emotional attachments or even to generate new responses all based on limited information. While we commonly regard the experience of narrative as “imaginary” activity, in fact, given the constant work of the imagination in organizing perception and given that interpretation is the act of organizing greater meanings from unclear or incomplete information, all perception *is interpretation* that relies on imaginary constructs.

The point at which interpretation becomes significant is often demarked as commencing with the level of connotative meaning. In “Film Interpretation Revisited,” David Bordwell makes the case for this focus in the interpretation of texts relying on the implicit dichotomy between denotation and connotation. Bordwell makes a distinction between “interpretation in the broadest sense” and in a narrower — more critically interesting — sense:

Interpretation [...] ascribes *abstract* and nonliteral meaning to the film and its world. It ascribes a broader significance, going beyond the denoted world and any denoted message to posit implicit or symptomatic meaning [connotation] at work in the text. (95-96)

However, in the strict cognitivist version, denotation is not so easily distinguished from connotation. In *The Searchers*, is Ethan cleaning his knife or in the midst of a frustrated

tantrum? In *Do the Right Thing*, we may agree that the racial slur montage is extra-dietetic — the shots simply don't fit with any direct causal connections — but do they denote actual events of racist outrage spoken by these characters in unguarded moments or, as I maintain, are they signifying the inner psychological extremities of polysemous identity narratives? Secondary Theory actually begins in the imaginary first associations that prompt perceptual data moving preconsciously into constructing an image of the world — either story-world or experiential world. In the Section Two, in a study of the reception of *The Scarlet Letter*, I will explore how interpretation is often not founded in textual denotations at all, but in subtle connotative actions, specific to a particular cultural viewpoint, that in a particular critical community appear as denotation.

Moreover, in continuing to develop a model of the Borderline Narrative, another trope we can establish as typical of the Borderline textual strategy, is the way that conflicting cultural positions will imaginarily interpret what seems to be denotative information. When Mookie, fed up with Pino's racism, reminds him that all his favorite Athletinment figures, Magic Johnson, Eddie Murphy, and Prince, are black (in contrast, it must be noted, to Sal's icons depicted on The Wall of Fame), Pino replies — to Mookie's open-mouthed astonishment — that they're "not black." In Pino's peculiar rationalization, their success and cultural prominence somehow efface "racial" characteristics so completely that they no longer denote African American identities although they are clearly exemplars of precisely what it means to look like, act like, talk like, and present themselves as African American. In Pino's narrative logic, persons whom he finds fascinating, admirable, or entertaining — who carry connotations of success and talent — transcend the good continuation and closure of "denotative"

blackness, and, through similarity with skills and success Pino admires, are in a schematic identity class that has no special ethnicity. Indeed, Pino seems to base his ethnic ideas largely on proximity to “the moulies” so that he understands ethnicity as competitive groups rather than culture or skin color. All Borderline Narratives present these conflicts of denotation to which the text will offer different interpretations either in explicit character debates or in implicit contrasts of reaction to a particular sign.

### **Narration, Experience, Play**

The experience of a fictional narrative is a cognitive activity in which a reader or spectator — a *narratee* — associates perceptions provided by the narrative — either in words or in audio-visual images — to formulate a plot and then a story-world. This specialized activity is actually a specific subset of imaginative-interpretive work, and because we can isolate it and examine its terms, it is particularly useful for exploring and explaining cultural and interpretive differences. Because all imaginative cognition involves narrative logic, fictional imagining as a limited action provides an opportunity to see the mechanisms of narrative logic in high relief. Torban Grodal in *Moving Pictures: A New Theory of Film, Genres, Feelings, and Cognition*, asserts that

a narrative structure is a basic mental model that directly relates to the way in which humans make models of the relationships between certain types of perceptions, memories, emotions, goals, and acts. These models need not be verbalized. Furthermore, these models need not be "representations," but functional relationships. (10)

This “functional relationship” is based on a two-fold phenomenon. First, we use much of the same cognitive apparatus — based in narrative logic — to work with processing experiential reality that we use in processing fictional information. Second, like the greater orientations of consistency-building or novelty-seeking, fictional narrative evokes a special experiential frame. As Gregory Bateson analogizes:

Psychological frames are related to what we called “premises.” The picture frame tells the viewer that he is not to use the same sort of thinking in interpreting the picture that he might use in interpreting the wall paper outside the frame [...]. The frame itself thus becomes part of the premise system. Either, as in the case of the play frame, the frame is involved in the evaluation of the messages it contains, or the frame merely assists the mind in understanding the contained messages by reminding the thinker that these messages are mutually relevant and the messages outside the frame may be ignored. (187-88)

We frame “fiction” as a kind of play: a specific experiential premise that relieves us of immediate survival pressure so that our associative networks can expand. In this fictional play, we can experiment, create, and rehearse behaviors in the imaginary space of the story-world. In her cognitively inflected *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis*, Kristin Thompson asserts that fictional constructs

plunge us into a non-practical, playful type of interaction. They renew our perceptions and other mental processes because they hold no immediate practical implications for us. [...] Art [and fiction] fits into the class of things that people do for recreation — to “re-create” a sense of freshness

or play eroded by habitual tasks or the strains of practical experience.

Often the renewed or expanded perceptions we gain from artworks can carry over to and affect our perception of everyday objects and events and ideas. (9)

Grodal takes a more pragmatic approach, emphasizing the potential “realness” of the fictional imagining.

Fiction is not an “unreal” activity, but is closely related to our ability to construct reality. Fictions allow us to try out behaviors and to imagine prototypical behaviors and settings as well as alternative equivalents. (26)

Intrinsic to both positions, however, is the notion that the narrative text provides a perceptual field on which the narratee *plays* with perceptual and conceptual faculties.

The “play frame” is a special imaginative-cognitive state which helps define the fictional experience. Joseph Andrews in *The Reality of Illusion: an Ecological Approach to Cognitive Film Theory* observes that humans are the most playful species and that play has ecological survival value:

[P]lay is an activity entered into voluntarily, for enjoyment. The fact that it is also instructive allows individuals to better cope with their world. It renders them more “fit” for survival. Evolution in this way validates the choice (to play) made by the individual: it selects for it. (116)

In relieving the limits of “immediate practical” considerations, playing requires the imaginary creation of a fictional diegetic world which will, in some specified ways, resemble our experienced world, but which will also have a specific sets of limits that will permit involvement within a certain envelope of safety.

Cognitive play framing falls generally into two categories, *game playing* and *story-creation*. What distinguishes each as play is that they both require imaginary story-world engagements. In both play categories, the fictional story-world resembles the real-world — we use the real-world as the experiential basis of imagining — yet both have special constraints which make them different from the experiential world: they have more clearly-defined foci than real-world experience and are removed from immediate real-world consequences. For example, the game of football has many similarities to real-life feudal warfare — like competitive duchies of antiquity, this year, the University of Georgia will battle rival power, the University of Florida, in a contest to establish local hegemony. The team-armies will use strategies of attack and defense, wear armor, will be divided in terms of class between lumpenprole linemen and nobility “skill positions,” will engage in hand-to-hand violence, and will contend for territorial acquisition and possession of a sacred object (the football). However, within the story-world of a football game, the rules of football focus and limit the activities of the players; while one possible goal-objective is to bring down a runner in the open field, the use of two-handed broadswords is expressly forbidden (despite the urgings of the noncombatants). When we play games, the freedom to play arises from an agreement to act within the rules to pursue specific goals; in game-playing, following the rules leads to a structured series of events — a diegesis — in which the players create a spontaneous plot by vying for the rule-governed goal of the game (which is not always “winning”; other goals may include assisting, agreeing, harmonizing, or clowning).

In the other category of play, story-creation, the goal is to play with textual information to imagine a story and a the story-world. Although we may not be actors in

the story-world improvising the plot as we are in a game, we are still active; we play at constructing a meaningful story by applying cognitive processes — perception, symbolic imagination and schematic associations, consistency-building and novelty-seeking — to systemize the texts' information. We imagine possible analogues with our own lives to the novel perceptions and situations offered by story-world constructs, and the game we then play is to make as complete and “logical” an explanation of the text information as possible. Playing with fictional story-creation permits the possibility of two-handed broadswords but guarantees that they remain within the imaginary story-world.

When we play at either games or fictions, the remove of the story-world from the real-world permits an activation of our narrative logic that is both more focused and more extended than it is in real life. In playing, we must stay within the limits of the game-narratively defined space — the rules of the game or the significances of the text — but these finitudes are limits that permit experiment: they enable a focus and a freedom for risk-taking and for testing our most elastic responses and imaginative abilities. In contrast, the more unclear limits of experiential real life offer a seemingly infinite series of considerations and interpretive actions, and the stakes are not expressed in the imaginary terms of a story-world, but are actual life and death — survival. In my life, just within the financial domain, I must be aware of the on-going and long-term consequences of loans, bills, income, taxes, purchases for survival, purchases for profession, purchases for entertainment, travel for profession, gifts, rent, dog supplies, vet bills, insurance and insurance reimbursements, automobile-, dental-, and technology-maintenance, not to mention various karmic debts for gifts, scholarships, grants, the financial help of friends and the occasional kindness of strangers. Should I fail or

miscalculate in managing these categories, consequences may be both dire and persistent. Because these stakes are fundamentally life-affecting, I may attempt extravagant novelty-seeking or test my most extreme imaginative abilities only at my peril.

In a game of *Monopoly*, however, real life imperatives like earning an income, buying groceries, or paying personal income taxes are beyond the game limits; the transactions and considerations are confined to an imaginary domain of real-estate in the story-world of an imaginary town; the finite and very simple goal is to accumulate all the property and money available; and, because all the imaginary events happen with play money in a diegesis lasting a finite time, the story-world consequences of doing well or poorly at play are generally transitory. The focus and limits of playing, therefore, provide the opportunity for far more wide-ranging strategizing and novelty-seeking than we normally use — I may dare to spend hundreds to purchase a hotel on Park Place — and yet, such strategies learned in play, may then train me to bargain, project value, manage assets, and so forth, all of which may have real world applications. Andrews refines Sue Taylor Parker’s work on play as an ecological force in his observation that such play is

not only practice of adult skills in a direct sensorimotor way, but [is] *cognitive* practice, as an activity that develops problem-solving capacity, cognitive and ideational flexibility, skill that are sufficiently open-ended to be equated with evolutionary processes. (italics Andrews’ 116)

In the same way, when playing at story-creation, I also operate with specific limits which enable a simpler focus and more wide-ranging strategizing than I would normally engage. As I begin watching *Do the Right Thing*, I play at constructing the

character “Mookie.” In imagining Mookie’s financial problem-matrix — a recurrent motif — I have just the information in the plot, which contains many references to money, but Mookie himself focuses on a two-edged goal: keeping his job and getting paid for it. Using my real-life experience to make inferences from the plot information presented as Mookie works and converses with Jade, Sal, and Tina, I recognize that Mookie needs the money to rent an apartment for Tina, Hector, and himself, to prove his “manliness” to Carmen, to become independent of Jade, and to supply the needs and wants of his little family. However, these constructs are, in part, my inferential play, my imaginary inductions based on information in the plot that I associate with my own fiscal values and constructs.

Playing in the imaginary diegetic spaces of game or narrative is useful in the ecological sense that the increased novelty-seeking can both provide and provoke insights or strategies that can then be related to real world actualities; by participating in imaginary narratives, I can test and actually extend my personal narrative logic, and in the process, as I create new, *hybrid* schemas. *Monopoly* permits me to experiment with risk and investment and perhaps train myself to invest my resources in such a way as to bootstrap myself out of debt. Watching Mookie’s struggle alerts me to the power of financial wherewithal in creating self-esteem and in fulfilling tacit responsibilities. In a culturalist mode of interpretation, I can see the comparative advantages of my class, ethnicity, and socio-cultural milieu over Mookie’s despite our mutual financial struggles.

In fact, whether we are vying within the diegetic world of a game or playing with textual information to create a story — playing precipitates a somewhat pleasurable crises of novelty-seeking: we expect that by playing, the predictabilities of real world

consistency-building may be insufficient to contend with the game context, and we will be forced to enact or encounter a new perception, script, problem, or conceptualization. In stark contrast, Sal and Buggin' Out's quarrel illustrates how imaginative interpretive action is limited in "real life" situations in which survival issues factor: they are unwilling to play, and their schema contract and solidify rather than expand and flex.

In the play of narrative experience, the Russian Formalists recognized this crises of novelty-seeking. Victor Shklovsky, in the often-anthologized "Art as Technique," uses proto-cognitive terms to describe how a work of art — such as a fictional narrative — creates this crises by "defamiliarizing" perceptual habits:

If we start to examine the general laws of perception, we see that as perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic. [...] The object [so] perceived, fades and does not leave even a first impression: ultimately even the essence of what it was is forgotten. [...] Habitualization devours work, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war. [...] The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things *as they are perceived*, and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. (italics mine, Lemon 4-5)

What Shklovsky describes as "things as they are perceived" suggests that, in the experience of perception, no schema actually appropriately fits the experience; no consistency-building strategy is effective, and we respond to this defamiliarization with

play strategy — novelty-seeking to extend or even forge new associative potentials to re-schematize the experience.

This crisis of novelty-seeking is also central to constructing a paradigm of interpretation as a cognitive cultural studies intervention. Thompson makes an intriguing argument about the impulse to perform interpretation based on the seed of defamiliarization.

I will begin by assuming that we usually analyze a film because it is intriguing. In other words, there is something about it which we *cannot* explain on the basis of our approaches' existing assumptions. It remains elusive and puzzling after viewing. [...] When we find films that challenge us, that is a sure sign that they warrant analysis. (4-5)

The impulse to perform analysis, then, is an impulse to play with the textual experience — to seek out new schemas to explain the “elusive and puzzling” aspects of the narrative which we experience as imaginary limits to our “existing assumptions.” Under the cognitive-cultural aegis, I suggest that we use Primary Theory cognitive terms to describe the imaginary constructs that motivate and formulate the interpretative experience. In brief, what we attempt to do is play with our narrative logic to describe our response to the “elusive and puzzling” which resist consistency-building and require novelty-seeking.

Thompson offers a useful ethos of interpretation based on these constraints. She jettisons a communications model of art. In such a model, three components are generally distinguished: sender, medium, receiver. The main activity is assumed to be the passing of a message from sender to receiver through the medium [...]. Hence the medium serves a practical

function, and its effectiveness is judged by how efficiently and clearly it conveys that message [...]. The implication is that the artwork [...] should be judged by how well it conveys its meanings. (8)

Although Thompson is not directly addressing cultural studies, we can see the how a communications model disrupts any cross-cultural interpretive interaction because the provocative interpretive issues will not be in the meanings sent but in the meanings received; if we are to experience the extended associations of play that we engage when we read or spectate to thoroughly explore the experience of defamiliarization, we need to focus on the cognition of the story-world and not on *ex post facto* concerns with intentionality or even with hermeneutic conceptions of history. From a cognitive culturalist point of view, the interesting interpretation will depict the critic's struggle to detect the disturbing aspect of her created story-world and how it applies to her experiential world and thereby bring to consciousness the processes and values, cultural and personal, that inform preconscious constructs. In performing interpretive close readings of texts from a specific identity viewpoint, we define and clarify how we imagine values on the grid of textual action.

However, in this interaction, we expect that our identity schema-clusters will be in some way surprised or challenged, and our response to this "elusive and challenging" experience will be a refreshed sense of ourselves or the world. When this act of interpretation is brought to consciousness and expressed in a terms of cognition, we can both illuminate how we locate and then think about textual difficulties, and in this process, we can make our specific cultural narrative logic available to someone outside the cultural group.

### **Cognitive Tools: Consciousness and Narrative Logic**

Our tales are spun, but for the most part we don't spin them. They spin us. Our human consciousness and our narrative selfhood are their product, not their source. The making of stories and myths leads humans to do something that no other animal does: to deceive themselves in a sustained way.

—M. Deric Bownds

The experience of human consciousness is inextricably interlinked with the experience of narrative and interpretation. I will soon argue that the Borderline Narrative as a textual construct, explores certain concerns in contemporary audiences and can catalyze a range of narrative-logical responses. However, as a preliminary discussion, we need to consider a Primary Theory position: what is consciousness as a transculturally recognizable function?<sup>20</sup> J. Allen Hobson, in *Consciousness*, offers a preliminary definition in terms that suggest how central consciousness is to issues of culture:

By enabling us to hold ideas, images, and impression in mind, consciousness frees us from complete reliance upon our reflexes. The enormous evolutionary advantage of consciousness thus boils down to freedom. Freedom from automatism. Freedom from pure impulse. Freedom from ignorance. But the price of such freedom is high. Conscious awareness commits us to morality, to concern for others, to fair

play, to guilt, and to indecisiveness because the choices that consciousness offers us are not always easy ones to make. (218)

Overlooking the Eurocentric tenor of Hobson's definition ("Freedom ... fair play ..."), he nevertheless provides a useful beginning conceptualization: consciousness as a choice-making apparatus which relies on an individual's ability to be aware of a social, moral self who understands the world in terms of possible alternatives which, in turn, require active — conscious — interpretation and selection. These transculturally recognizable processes include "planning, critical evaluation, unexpected invention, and health maintenance" (219).

However, all of these processes are dependant on the ability of cognition to control attention, to imagine abstractions of a self in the conceptualized narrative of "my life," and to interpret information based on projected best interest of the self. As we construct a Primary Theory-level understanding of consciousness, we will see how Hobson's observations will interlock with Branigan's observation that "Narrative has existed in every known human society," and it is therefore, "a fundamental way of organizing data"(1). Branigan continues, "*[N]arrative is a perceptual activity that organizes data into a special pattern which represents and explains experience,*" and what is then apparent is the implicit relationship between Hobson's choice-making apparatus and the imagined concept we all have: "the story of my life" (italics Branigan's, 3).

But this is not to say that attentive consciousness simply performs as the narrator of our life-stories. The cognitive activity of our conscious awareness reflects Bownds' contention that "there is no single point of the brain through which all information

funnels”(291). As consciousness works to construct a self who is the main character in her or his ongoing life-narrative, like other cognitive operations, self-aware consciousness is *not reducible to a single process* which we might experience as “I am a first-person point of view in the story of my life.” While such a conceptualization is an accurate portrayal of one aspect of consciousness, a moment of self-reflection will suggest that we consciously use several other awareness strategies. Among consciousness theorists, Julian Jaynes, in *The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, offers the most complete paradigm for how consciousness operations reflect universal narrative strategies.<sup>21</sup> Jaynes asserts that the whole of consciousness is “an operation rather than a thing, a repository, or a function,” and that the complex of mental constructs we experience as the decision-making self that Hobson described “operates” by means of several specific and systemized analogies (65). Jaynes sees consciousness as six inter-related activities, “The Features of Consciousness,” by which we systematically experience our lives in several story-making actions and through which we manifest our narrative logic. In Jaynes’ constructs we see several Primary Theory base concepts — the self as a bounded center, figure-forming, space and time conceptions, consistency-building and novelty-seeking, ongoing associative activity using any available association — emerge in complex strategic operations.

*Spatialization*: to understand the self at the perceptual center of a space/time continuum (time is universally constructed as an analogue of space).

*Excerption*: to be able to comprehend other persons as conscious selves and to excerpt or to separate strains of experience in limited categories or in specific causal threads

*The Analogue "I"*: the sensation of a first-person, present tense point-of-view in one's life.

*The Metaphor "Me"*: the ability to think about our selves and our experience from a third person point of view and to imagine past, present, and future.

*Narratization*: to assign sequential relationships and causes to experiences and observations organized around a self, a character, or characters into a story that "feels" logical.

*Conciliation*: to assign causal relationships to account for as much ambiguous or peripheral perceptual information as possible so as to coincide with narratized information. (59-66)

The cognitive/narrative implications of this array are several: conscious mind can form several awarenesses of the perceptual and conceptual experiences of life. Our cognition can imagine a spatial analogue of the world and mental acts can be analogues of bodily acts, imagining a first-person analogue "I" who observes that space, focuses attention, and moves through the mental territory reflected by the senses, coordinating movement through the actual world. Or it can understand the world in vast net of associative figure-formation-linkages by which we "excerpt" information from our environment or from our conceptual repertoire in a series of inter-related schematic operations and imagine a mental "space" with a third-person metaphorical aspect — a "me" — who reviews or rehearses imagined possibilities which can be manipulated like objects in real space and through which we will preconsciously "conciliate" information to into schematic chains (65-6). Jaynes pays special attention to the activities of narratization and conciliation. Here he elucidates Branigan's formulation:

In consciousness, we are always seeing our vicarial selves as the main figures in the stories of our lives. [...] The assigning of causes to our behavior or saying why we did a particular thing is all part of *narratization*. [...] But it is not just our own analogue “I” that we are narratizing; it is everything else *in consciousness*. A stray fact is narratized to fit with some other stray fact. A child cries in the street and we narratize the event into a mental picture of a lost child and a parent searching for it. (italics mine, 63-4)

In the activity of *conciliation* we use consistency-building to schematize novel perceptions:

a slightly ambiguous perceived object is made to conform to some previously learned schema. We assimilate a new stimulus into our conception or schema about it, even though it is slightly different. (64)

Clearly, these activities are performed by the mind in relation to perceptual information in order to formulate an experience of a conscious self who organizes perceptual data into aspects of “the story of my life.” This is then the basis for our ability to infer a story-world from the perception of plot details. Our conscious ability to imagine the story of our own lives — that is, to conceptualize complex causal chains, to understand ourselves as causal forces, and to abstract ourselves from our immediate experiences — is the basis on which we build all other narrative understanding.

Once we are narratively aware, however, we are engaged in a circulation of narratives as we compare our personal story and our understanding of the experiential world with other stories that we must narratize and conciliate. Indeed, as the previous

section suggests, the stories we engage can reinforce, extend, or even sometimes replace our actual experiences or rational responses. Our ability to understand narrative is based on the self-Ur-narrative, and so, as reader response critics like Iser, Stanley Fish, and Norman Holland have observed, we comprehend narratives in terms of our own personal narratives. Yet, this is not the whole story, as it were. Because of our symbolic and associative imaginative abilities, our narrative logics extend beyond what we personally experience to what we know vicariously, through narrative, and to what we are able to create as we narratize, conciliate, imagine, and dream.

### **Narrative and What is Real**

In fact, as we contemplate the power of narrative play and its effects, we need to recognize that when we consciously narratize and conciliate symbolic or fictional information, that conscious engagement can generate cognitive results that will reside in memory like real experience. This is due to the fact that, as we engage narrative information, factual or fictional, in normal experiential consciousness or in dreaming — which Hobson reminds us is a particular kind of “autocreative” conscious state (55) — areas of the brain that we use for perception, memory, coordination, and symbolic association can become excited by imaginative activity in ways very much *as if actual events were transpiring* (Reed 204). If I consciously recall Rosie Perez’ “Fight the Power” dance during the opening credits of *Do the Right Thing*, areas of my brain that I used to register, to systemize, and to respond to the image, the sound, the *montage* design, and lyrical content will all become active and, to some degree, as interactive as they were in perception. The more accurately I can recall the perceptual experience, the

more my brain activity will resemble actual perception. However, the more unfamiliar the perception or the more vague the recollection, the more likely I will be to rely on my narrative logic to narratize and conciliate the information, and by which I may excite perceptual or conceptual brain areas not engaged in the initial perception.

Indeed, in the play of consciousness, narrative logic, acting as a preconscious imaginary guide to experience, can be *more powerful* than actual events in determining experiential “reality.” As a preliminary orientation to these effects, we should recall that in cognitive theory, experience is a physiologically interior phenomenon. Our senses are not screens on which a total “reality” is perfectly projected, but links that connect our nervous systems to a few, very limited, vibratory frequencies that occur in the physical world and which we imaginatively understand as tactile matter, light, sound, taste, smell, and a kinesthetic self; what we “perceive” is happening “out there” is actually an experience within the bounds of our own skins, stimulated by the world around us, but occurring in an electrochemical sensory and cognitive apparatus whose features are generally shared species-wide, yet whose capabilities are individually trained, focused, and preconsciously managed. Because perceptual-cognitive resources are limited, and our ability to consciously attend is even more limited to a single goal, our established cognitive structures — preconsciousness guided by memory, expectation, and attention — use narrative logic to supply information to narratize and conciliate when we are perceptually or emotionally taxed.

One textbook example is the unreliability of eyewitness accounts. Instead of “witnessing” a novel or unexpected situation and then recalling the details of the actual events, eyewitnesses “see” through the imaginative filter of building consistency with

their existing script schemas (either from personal or narrative experience), and guided by their narrative logic rather than “objective” perception, they inevitably recall, with a stalwart belief in the truth of their “witnessing,” a version of events which is only partially (and often, only very vaguely) consonant with actual occurrences, which is partially fabricated by their imaginative/interpretive apparatus. In extreme cases, eyewitnesses do not perceive major portions of an event. In a recent Harvard psychology experiment, participating observers were instructed to watch a videotaped game with basketballs and to count the number of passes made by team dressed in white (Simons). In the middle of the game, an actor dressed in a gorilla suit walked into the middle of the game, beat her chest, and then walked away.<sup>22</sup> About half of the observers (46%), perceptually primed to attend only to basketballs, didn’t see the gorilla.

Moreover, not only can perception be incomplete or inaccurate, the conscious recollecting of perception is not a static memory but is mutable, based on the way it is remembered. As most teachers know, class discussion can actually change students’ recollected experience of a text. Two years ago, I showed a freshman class Vittorio De Sica’s *The Bicycle Thief* (1948). To begin the discussion, I asked them to respond to the film by freewriting a paragraph describing their viewing experience. In their first responses, most of the class claimed to have been “bored” by the working-class family crisis depicted in NeoRealist black and white. However, in a discussion that included a definition of chiaroscuro and a brief re-viewing sections of the film to reveal the religious imagery, acting style, and *mise en scene*, the same students who claimed to have been bored became animated and excited, correlating discussion materials with their recollections in an attempt to systemize the text. The consensus at the end of class was

that it was a “pretty cool movie” and several students spontaneously remarked that their experience of the film had changed. Although they had not seen the whole film again, the conscious systemization of the images they held in memory changed their affective reaction and their conscious understanding of the text. Their memories were mutable; their experience re-cognizable; conscious awareness and co-ordination were the actions that helped them create through conciliative discussion new narrative logical associations.

At the extreme end of this narrative-logical apparatus is the possibility that a novel narration, imaginatively integrated by conscious narratization and conciliation, can replace or pre-empt the memory of actual experience in our personal identity narratives. In *Cognition*, Stephen K. Reed relates the most extreme example of how consciousness and imagination can effect memory and interpretive experience. Investigators performed an experiment in which a group of children were repeatedly questioned about an event that was entirely fictive, yet the questioners behaved as if the “event” had happened and interrogated the children in such a way as to imply that the children had participated in it. Although at first, the children all insisted that they had no knowledge of the event, in the course of several interviews over many days, each began independently to formulate answers to satisfy their prompters, and they eventually began, not only to assert that the event had happened, but to perform detailed interpretive narratizations and conciliations of the fictional circumstances effectively knitting the “memory” into the fabric of their personal identity narratives. Later, when presented physical and logical evidence that proved they could not have participated in the event, they stubbornly held to the “memory” as truth. As Cornell psychologist Stephen Ceci concluded, “Each time you

encourage a person to create a mental image, it becomes familiar [...]. Finally, they [sic] see the imagined image as actual memory, with the same feel of authenticity” (quoted in Reed 213).

### **Character and Interpreter**

The children described above responded to the novel situation of being assured that they had done something — which in fact they had not — by narratizing and conciliating the information using memory, imagination, consciousness, and narrative logic. In the course of conscious choice-making to formulate answers — providing interpretation — about the fictional event, they built an experience that was both novel and also consistent with their available schemas — some of which were supplied narratively by their interrogators, some supplied by their own imaginary constructions — which nevertheless had the eventual net effect of re-appearing in their consciousnesses as actual memory. In this experiment, we see a potential effect of conscious interpretation on narrative experience. The children, asked to interpret a fictional experience, not only were able to formulate the details of the experience, but in the creating of these conscious imaginings, they replaced their actual experiences — which were less consciously narratized and conciliated — with their fictional formulations and interpretation.

The children in the memory experiment above, experienced a change in their recollections and in their conscious understanding of themselves because they imagined themselves as characters in a fiction that through conscious rehearsal and active associations became fact. Their character-play of interpreting and narratizing fictional information supplied by their interrogators, they ultimately reified the experience. As we

spectate or read, we engage in a similar character-play when we preconsciously or consciously wonder what will happen to a character or characters next — it is the novelty-seeking appeal of narrative — and we then, in order to assist this character-centric process, narratize the text information to create the story. Character understanding is the connection between real- and story-worlds. As a general rule, we participate in creating a story-world primarily to discover what the characters will do and why, while other details of the story-world are less prominent in our imaginations or in consciousness. While we *can learn* to appreciate narrative action through other strategies of interpretation such as the soviet-style focus on “the people” as a group-hero in Sergei Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925), or the strange lack of causality in the plot of Micelangelo Antonioni's *The Red Desert* (1964) that, by similarity, suggests a listless bourgeois life-style, or the way that Alain Renais' *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961) purposely frustrates conventional narrative consistency-building strategies to alert us to the formulaic quality of narrative; nevertheless, on the level of Primary Theory, as Murray Smith argues, “our ‘entry into’ narrative structures is mediated by character” (18), and in particular, with an important emphasis on the one or a few characters on whom the text of the narrative foregrounds.

The reasons for this proceed directly from the Primary Theory cognitive dispositions that I have outlined. As Ekman has demonstrated, from infancy our species has an innate interest in other people and particularly in their facial expressions which project their inner emotional and intellectual states. In a way perhaps cognitively related to our innate infantile preference for finding and tracking human faces, the experience of narration is, generally speaking, precipitated by finding and tracking specific characters

in the diegetic world. Part of our novelty-seeking curiosity is that we like to watch other people, and the game of story formation is a way of practicing this activity; as part of ecological survival, we are geared to notice other person's physical traits or their emotional changes which may signal danger, attraction, kinship, or difference. Because we transculturally understand our beings as selves, discrete, individual agents who are the central focus in our own life stories, we reflexively develop a central focus on — usually — a character in the narratives we encounter. In addressing the problem of how an interpreter schematizes both herself and a character, Murray Smith offers a cognitive view of “The Saliency of Character” based on David Bordwell’s “criteria for ‘personhood’” (Smith 17-39, Bordwell *Making* 151-57) Smith constructs a basic “person schema” which is both the transcultural “fundamental category of the human agent” by which, in Jaynes’ term we “excerpt” an understand other people and which will be the basic model we use embody our narrative logic as a hypothesis for a character in narrative. The critical difference important to recognize here, is that when we conceive of ourselves or other *actual* human agents, our narratizations will correspond to the experiential world as we understand it with little play allowable; however, in constructing a *fictional* human agent, we will narratize her or him playfully within the expansive terms of the story-world as we understand it. Such fictional constructions may include people who fly, talk to animals, or have other special powers; or indeed, characters in animated films from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1932) to *Bambi* (1944) to *Shrek* (Adam Adamson, Vicky Jensen, 2001) which much less perfectly fit the person schema criteria are still recognized and constructed as “persons.”

Consolidating overlapping aspects of the work of Russian Formalist Boris Tomashevsky, Anthropologists Marcel Mauss, Robin Horton, Clifford Geertz, and contemporary cognitive theory, Smith presents the person schema as including

1. a discrete human body, individuated and continuous through time and space;
2. perceptual activity, including self-awareness;
3. intentional states, such as beliefs or desires;
4. emotions;
5. the ability to use and understand a natural language;
6. the capacity for self-impelled actions and self-interpretation;
7. the potential for traits, or persisting attributes. (21)

Any one of these aspects or traits which can be expanded by good continuation and similarity to imply a whole “person.”

The important implication is that human agency has a distinctness and a saliency cross culturally; and that, by analogy, characters have a salience in our comprehension of narrative which is not merely a product of the individualism of modern Western culture. (23)

### **Character, Not Identification**

As he builds his model for how we apprehend narrative characters, Smith pointedly rejects various models of “identification” by which “We might be said to imagine *ourselves in the situation* (as distinct from imagining *being a character in a situation*)” (italics Smith’s 80). Smith critiques identification on several points important

to a cognitive understanding of the imaginative-interpretive engagement. He dismisses “hypodermic” models of narrative engagement, by which interpreters are “conceptualized as the passive subject of the structuring power of the text” because, as a cognitivist, he understands the “cooperative activity” of any interpreter in imagining a story-world from “incomplete” perceptual information (82). Moreover, picking up an important claim in Noel Carroll’s argument in *A Philosophy of Horror*, Smith refutes psychoanalytic approaches to identification. The psychoanalytic model by which we must somehow “mistake ourselves for the central character” and as that “identity” experience a direct and transparent connection to a psychological perspective, or a physical situation through “which we apprehend the fictional world” Smith marks as a “singular and monolithic conception” and unlike the intricacies of actual narrative and character engagement (78-82).

As an alternative, Smith offers a “The Structure of Sympathy” as a more nuanced model of character engagement based in an understanding of perception, cognition, and imagination. Extending Gerard Genette’s narratological work in literature, Smith presents the structure of sympathy as three levels of interpretive engagement — Recognition, Alignment, and Allegiance — which work interactively and “denote not just inert textual systems, but responses, neither solely in the text nor solely in the spectator” (82). Such a process is not “identification” because “Neither recognition nor alignment nor allegiance entails that the spectator [or reader] replicate the traits, or experience the thoughts or emotions of a character” (85). Instead, the Structure of Sympathy works from cognitive understanding of how narratization and conciliation work with perception to fully schematize narrative information. Smith’s tripartate breakdown of our

engagement with fictional characters will prove to be especially useful in understanding the potentials of the Borderline Narrative and emergent cultural hybridity.

Smith begins to build his model of character engagement by examining the process by which we discern or recognize a particular character in the story.

*Recognition* describes the spectator's construction of character: the perception of a set of textual elements, in film typically cohering around the image of a body, [in literature typically cohering around a name and/or certain good continuous traits, which are interpreted as] an individuated and continuous human agent. Recognition does not deny the possibility of development and change, since it is based on the concept of continuity, not unity or identity. (italics Smith's 82, 114)

Characters aren't people but artifacts; they don't have real existence except as signal information; they don't make choices, don't have emotions or thoughts, indeed, have no identity *per se*; these are the attributes interpreters imagine for them when we use our person schema to construct an agent from perceptual or symbolic information and then — in consciousness — register what our narrative logic preconsciously dictates are significant perceptions or descriptors. In the cognitive activity of recognizing a character by using the person schema, “We perceive and conceive of characters as integral, discrete textual constructs” that will, in their interior and exterior workings be analogous (within the fictive constraints of the story-world which may involve special powers) to persons in the real world and/or ourselves.<sup>23</sup>

Recognition is a two part process; the first part of recognition is simply the organization of a perception using good continuity, similarity, and closure into a person

schema, and the second is “individuation” (110). During the riot scene in *Do the Right Thing*, we perceive many persons in the mob and *recognize* persons-in-the-crowd by their most obvious differentiating characteristics of age, ethnicity, or gender; however, we *individuate* only those characters who have appeared prominently in other scenes, so they have developed recognizable complexity based on the impress of specific traits in our minds. Smith points out, that, because we individuate through a continuous relationship with a text, textual structures can accelerate or retard individuation by their stylistic presentation. Furthermore, as interpreters who are listening to ourselves think about a text, we need to know that individuation is the “threshold of legibility” for characters-as-agents, and how quickly and with what associative connections we go from simple recognition to individuation can key larger interpretive issues (111-15).

The next step in Smith’s cognition of character is *alignment*. While we are in the process of fully recognizing a character, we rely on textual emphases to focus and position our perceptions. Alignment is the process by which interpreters are “placed in relation to characters in terms of access to their actions, and to what they know and feel” (83). Smith parses this process into “two interlocking functions, *spatio-temporal attachment* and *subjective access*” (italics Smith’s). Spatio-temporal attachment is the textual space and time structuring by which “a narration may follow the spatio-temporal path of a particular character throughout the narrative or divide its attention among many characters each tracing distinct spatio-temporal paths” (142). In *Do the Right Thing*, spectators are primarily *aligned* with Mookie, but have significant sequences of attachment to Buggin’ Out, Sal, Mister Senior Love Daddy, Radio Raheem, Da Mayor,

and the Streetcorner Chorus. On the other hand, alignment through “subjective access” refers to “the way the narration may vary the degree to which the spectator is given access to the subjectivities — the dispositions, the occurrent states of characters” (83). The most obvious forms of subjective access are: in literature, a first-person narrator (by which we are aligned with the “analogue ‘I’” of the character); or in film, “optical POV and its aural equivalent” in film (by which we are aligned with the perceptions of a character). However these “are only one resource of the narration in controlling alignment”; other text strategies of subjective access may include, voice-over, or close-up photography, extra-diegetic depictions of fantasy (like the racial slur montage), or careful third person description of a character’s appearance or sensations; all of which bring us into alignment with characters’ subjective states without having to offer a character’s point of view or inner monologue. When Mookie seductively plays with Tina, Mookie’s off-camera commentary — “Thank God for lips. Thank God for the neck. Thank God for the right nipple...” — and the carefully lit, extreme close-ups of body parts align us with him.

In contrast to alignment, which is largely an issue of our perception of textual signals, we make emotional connections — feel *allegiance* — to characters based on our narrative logic about the significances of their persons, their actions, and how they are framed by *mise en scene* or other descriptors. “*Allegiance* pertains to the moral evaluation of the characters [...]” and is “perhaps closest to what is meant by ‘identification’ in everyday usage” (84). We may begin to feel allegiance in the first stage of recognition by registering “class, nation, age, ethnicity, and gender” which may preconsciously suggest to us tribal similarity and implicitly shared values. However,

through the play of narration, character actions, iconography, music, and various alignment strategies can all effect changes in our sense of allegiance. Smith asserts that “To become allied with a character, [the interpreter] must evaluate the character as representing a morally desirable (or at least preferable) set of traits, in relation to other characters within the fiction” (188). In this definition, Smith avoids issues of ideology because we cognitively connect emotions with a reflexive personal morality before cognisance of larger systems of value. Our moral sensibility is the personal expression of narrative-logical evaluation of human choices and actions; when we experience vicarious emotions, it is through the workings of our “logic” about what’s right, proper, fair, or appropriate for a particular character. Smith amplifies this:

I use the word ‘moral’ rather than ‘ideological’ to describe this level of engagement for two reasons. First, with respect to specific characters, ideological judgements are typically expressed as moral evaluations; and secondly, assessing the overall ideology of a text may involve factors other than those pertaining to its characterological structure. (84)

In the cognitive rendition, how a text embodies ideology is not solely an issue of a textual program, but also of how, in the comprehension and interpretation of the text, we form allegiances and make moral judgements based on the interaction of our narrative logic with textual cues. This is not to say that texts are not ideologically programatic — Manichean narratives are programs which posit “good” and “evil” through alignment and character rewards — however, not all interpreters will be ideologically disposed by their narrative logic to see the Manichean rewards as deserved or just.

### **Inside the Story-World: What Is “The Right Thing”?**

Depending on where you’re coming from, *Do the Right Thing*, is either an unflinching and cautionary look at race relations or an incitement to a riot.

— Jay Carr

In the Introduction, I offered a formal paradigm for the Borderline Narrative and, in this Section, while I have been building a very basic but comprehensive model of cognition, I have touched on how various cognitive processes, the Borderline Narrative, and *Do the Right Thing* inform each other. I will now show how *Do the Right Thing* fully enacts the Borderline paradigm and how various aspects of the cognitive theory I have been outlined assist in understanding the narrative logics of the Borderline text and help focus interpretative acts.

Before addressing *Do the Right Thing* as a generic prototype, however, I want to observe that Borderline Narratives don’t simply articulate or embody cultural borderlines, but as objects of perceptual comprehension, like certain other trans-cultural genres such as the Coming-of-Age story, they are on the borderline between Primary and Secondary Theory. A film like *Do the Right Thing* may be an idiomatically American text, and for the fullest comprehension of its significances, it certainly requires an awareness of American ethnic conflict, urban life, and popular culture of the mid and late twentieth-century. Some nuanced meanings like “Bed-Sty,” Da Mayor’s role on the block, Buggin’ Out’s sneakers, boombox duels, and references to Mayor Ed Koch may be specific to New York City or even to the Bedford-Stuyvestant neighborhood of Brooklyn. However, on a Primary Theory level of comprehending the basic events and

character-types in the narrative — including ethnic antagonism and Mookie's position between cultural groups — the images of the text clearly pit the brown-skinned tribe against beige-colored people in such a way that hypothetically naive spectator — for instance a someone from a Carribean culture in which skin color is not the socio-ethnic determining factor that it is in the United States — would be able to induce the tribal rivalries that precipitate the conflicts. Such comprehension occurs at the basic level of recognition which may work as a Primary perceptual response, and it may be a powerful enough organization so that some of the character-exceptions — like swarthy, brown-eyed, and Afro-ed John Turturro playing Pino or the presence of Black police officers at Radio Raheem's murder/manslaughter — would not disrupt the overall perception.

The Borderline Narrative, however is not always a tale of ethnicities, but explores any and all cultural group borders. The same Primary discernability would apply to the constructs and conflicts in that psychic border territory where sexual and gender issues are contended. In Roland Joffè's *The Scarlet Letter* (1995), the text aligns the viewer clearly and intimately with the character of Hester (Demi Moore) so that even a spectator unfamiliar with such various cultural significances as Puritan history, Hawthorne's original version, the Western genre, Demi Moore's *oeuvre* and public persona, or the gender politics of EuroAmerican culture in the last thirty years could nevertheless discern that the text thematically addresses issues of female power in a patriarchal culture. A text like *The Wedding Banquet* (Ang Lee, 1993) which is a mix of ethnic and sexual plots overlaying Chinese-American with gay-heterosexual cultural issues would still present large arcs of transculturally transparent meaning. In literary texts like *The Woman Warrior* or Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*, Primary comprehension of the conflicts is even

more directly addressed in first-person narrative alignments, but they require the Secondary skills of literacy and translation to mediate the perceptually related concepts. Having said this, while interpretations from outside the Secondary socio-cultural matrix which a Borderline text address may be interesting or offbeat — or indeed, as “Shakespeare in the Bush” demonstrates, insightful and freshening — interpretive offerings from persons who are in the textually represented cultural groups and share intricacies of narrative logic with the characters, will have a particular Secondary Theory authority not available to others. Because of this aspect of the Borderline text, my definitions and interpretive work will also rest on borderlines; regarding the text as a formal or a generic construct will generate both Primary and Secondary Theory issues which, to some degree, I will simply elide as I address this critique at a contemporary EuroAmerican interpretive community.

To recapitulate and refine earlier discussion, as a formal system, the Borderline Narrative can be more closely defined than, say, the *Bildungsroman* or film noir (which, despite Paul Schrader’s protestations, has generic qualities). Every Borderline Narrative takes place in a setting or territory — a spatial schema — in which two or more cultural groups employ their specific narrative logics to compete for hegemonic power. I use “cultural group” here to refer to ethnic, gender, gender-preference, or class division in which persons share a significant narrative-logical disposition and training; however, not all narratives of cultural groups in conflict are Borderline Narratives. The main character or characters of the Borderline Narrative — which we construct as object schemas determined by textual alignments — must be “double-constructed” inasmuch as they can or must operate within both or several systems of culturally specific narrative logic, and,

in this process, they are aware of and may be frustrated by their narrato-logical contradictions.

The plot of every Borderline text which will generally follow the macro-script format schema that Branigan uses (see endnote 15) and using these distinctions, invariably involves two specific *event schemas* (micro-script schemas); the first of which acts as a *complicating action* in the plot, while the second is part of the plot-closure action of an *outcome* (13-15). In the first instance, as I mentioned earlier, the plot is complicated by a conflict between cultural groups or individuals over the meaning of a signal — an artifact, ritual, symbol, institution, physical symptom, dream, natural or supernatural occurrence, personal relationship, a captive, a legend or history; like Sal and Buggin' Out's dispute over the Wall of Fame, this conflict will serve to crystalize cultural differences and often will be an opportunity for characters to offer specific narrative logics regarding the value or meaning of the sign. In the second type of event schema, all Borderline Narratives as a penultimate *outcome* of their plot's cultural *complications* also depict the main character or characters undergoing a personal crises which is resolved by a choice or choices that suggest(s) a fundamental change in their cultural understanding and modification of their narrative logic and, consequently, to their identity narrative.

My final generic criterion is in the often-overlooked stylistic design of the text. In this case, the use of language, *mise en scene*, sequencing, camera work or other alignment devices exercise *various* intra- and inter-cultural positions in such a way as to align the interpreter with several different positions in the course of the narrative however much the overall spatio-temporal alignment may seem to fix on one character.

(In Section Two, I will address this in more detail as a particular action in alignment called *slant*). What makes the Borderline Narrative most effective, and one reason to focus on it generically, is that, even in its more Manichean incarnations like the film, *The Scarlet Letter*, in which the textual alignment is so strongly feminist that, as a feminist (and somewhat sentimental) interpreter, I find my allegiances finally well controlled; still, such texts will not be mono-logical, but will align me with problems, narrative logics, and cultural dynamics that are so unfamiliar they force logical novelty-seeking and, in that process, create a sense of how other narrative logics construct different allegiances.

*Do the Right Thing* is a superb generic example not only because it perfectly matches the generic schemas as I have outlined them, but because it so directly addresses the problem of the borderline. Spike Lee's assertion that "Everyone in the film is acting according to their version of the right thing" (Carr quoted in Reid 134), is as direct a statement of the Borderline's central generic problem as can be made. Moreover, *Do the Right Thing* clearly evidences some the genre's borderline significances that I will more directly deal with in Section Two. For instance, in the cultural historical matrix of American narratizations of race, the film is on the Borderline of a significant historical progression. William Grant asserts in "Reflecting the Times: *Do the Right Thing* Revisited":

A look at the film industry's portrayals of African-Americans before *DRT* is instructive. In such films as *Cry Freedom* (1987), *Mississippi Burning* (1988), and *Glory* (1990), the African-American struggle is a subtext for

white heroism. [...] Conversely, in *DRT*, African-Americans and their experience or the major focus. (17)

In addition, *Do the Right Thing* is on an aesthetic borderline as well as it offers a Chekhovian degree of sophistication in its fresh portrayals of the African American milieu. Catherine Pouzoulet observes in “Images of a Mosaic City,” that “it is significant that Lee does not recirculate stereotypes such as unemployed, murderous, drug-dealing black youth” (35), but instead the text offers us Mookie, a working-class, entry-level *schlepper*, struggling to maintain his dignity and even a hope of upward mobility while scraping out a meager living for Tina, Hector, and himself. Mookie moves through a story-world that in its depictions and relationships never resorts to stereotyped Black America, but shows us a fresh group of individuals, a fractious, multi-generational African American community in both joking and heated debate over the meaning of African Americanness.

### **The Story-World**

The *story-world* of *BedSty* is a cultural borderland inasmuch as it is a predominantly African American community that has, for years, depended on a self-consciously “American Italian” owned business for fast food — we know that neighborhood children have grown up nourished by Sal’s food. Moreover, the neighborhood is lately seeing Latin American immigration and the appearance of a Korean greengrocer on the corner. We also observe that white police officers patrol the mixed-ethnic predominantly African American community. The conflict between these ethnicities for hegemonic control of this territory is the source for most of the drama, and

these dramatic clashes range from the ridiculous — disputes over beer brands and sneaker-scuffing, misunderstandings over battery size, drenching the rich white guy's Caddie, and African American v. Latin American boombox competitions — to the sublimely cataclysmic in the brawl in the pizzeria, Radio Raheem's death, and the sacking of Sal's Famous. This particular setting, in which cultural groups contend for power to determine control of the territory — whether it is a geopolitical area like Bed-Sty or Upstate New York during the French and Indian War, or a household or even a woman's body — the basic to the spatial schematization of the Borderline Narrative plot, and provides by similarity association, an appropriate platform for the other tropes peculiar to the genre.

### **Main Character**

At the center of these territorial disputations and cultural rivalries, the diegesis is principally aligned on one, two, or sometimes, a few, *main character(s)* who is (are), like Ethan Edwards, culturally fluent in more than one system of narrative logic and our response to the narrative will depend in large part on how we construct our allegiance to this character or these characters. Mookie serves as this touchstone in *Do the Right Thing*; and clearly, he acts as a figure for the neighborhood cross-culturalities both in his actions and in his stylistic depiction. We recognize him as the main character because he commands most of the spatio-temporal alignment, and we frequently have subjective access to him through several textual strategies: we occasionally see from Mookie's POV (with Radio Raheem); we are often close up on Mookie; he seems to be reliably speaking his mind in dialogue; and, as I have mentioned, when he seductively plays with Tina, the

stylistic blending of image and sound create a sense of his subjectivity (particularly for male spectators). Like all *Borderline* main characters, the text follows Mookie as he moves between cultural territories, and in the process, he discourses in several narrative logics. As a native of the neighborhood, he knows the signs and logic of young African American Brooklynners including handshakes, gestures, polite behavior with his elders like Da Mayor and Mother Sister (Ruby Dee), and friendly banter with peers. As Sal's employee, he must negotiate successfully with the white community personified by Sal and his sons and their various relationships with him. Because he is in love with Tina and has fathered Hector, Mookie must contend with Tina and Carmen's Puerto-Rican narrative logical assumptions, expectations, and emotional tones. And, because Jade is his sister on whom he depends, he must deal with an African American who has chosen more distinctly middle-class habits, accouterments, and aspirations than the rest of the neighborhood. In his behavior as an employee, Mookie attempts to render unto Sal only the absolute minimum of what is Sal's: he delivers pizzas hot with undisturbed cheese, but he also takes a prolonged breaks for a shower and then for sex play with Tina — which Sal notices and humorously tolerates (which I suspect from the way he baits Mookie that he knows that Tina ordered the pizza as a pretext). On the block, Mookie stands out from his peers because he has a job and a determined focus on making money. Based on what we see of his relationship with Tina and Carmen, Mookie's determination to make money is to some degree born of his narrative logic of performing as a worthy man for Tina (and I suspect to impress the imperious and disapproving Carmen) and in part, derived from his relationship with Jade.

As an interpreter, these textual alignments produce a sense of allegiance to Mookie based on his appeal to me: I construct him as a self-aware, clever, rhetorically agile, sensitive and sexy guy. Although Mookie's breaks and unreliability go against my bourgeois ethos, as I watch the film, it seems to me that Mookie — particularly in his relationship with Tina — is consciously trying to amend his peripatetic ways. As a middle-aged white man, I feel allegiances to Sal as well — in particular to Sal's policies of tolerance, generosity, and his belief in integration — yet, I still feel my principal allegiance to Mookie, particularly as the hot day turns into heated night and Sal's tolerant veneer bakes off. While these allegiances are part of the textual program of alignment — Mookie gets the most screen time, Sal gets the next largest amount — they present special problems for me interpretively. But I will postpone that argument until I flesh out the Borderline prototype.

### **The Disputed Sign**

In terms of the Borderline micro-script event schema, I have already discussed Sal and Buggin' Out's dispute over The Wall of Fame as a defining interpretive dispute. However, it is only the most significant of several interpretive disputes; one of the ironies of the title is that every time a character attempts to "do the right thing," it turns out to be the wrong thing for another character. These crises of significance appear in other conflicts: Sal and his sons disagree about "the right thing" in race relations; Mookie is trying to do the right thing for his little family, but he gets nothing but censure from his mother-in-law and regular tongue lashings from Tina; da Mayor does the right thing by saving Eddie's life, and his heroic act is both misinterpreted *and* rewarded; Smiley tries

to support himself, to make an artistic statement, and to promote African American consciousness, but even Mookie feels pestered by him, and so forth.

Furthermore, as I mentioned earlier, in the stylistic structuring of the *Borderline* narrative, the textual presentation of alignment, via camera and *mise en scene* in film or via the narrative voice in literature, either does not particularly favor one character over another or aligns us with one character, then re-aligns us with the other viewpoint to undermine a full allegiance. We see this in the *mise en scene* of Sal and Buggin' Out's fight over cheese and The Wall of Fame. This scene depicts both characters in profile, or, in longer shots, the camera sees the action from a rather neutral position in the center of the room while each character is positioned close to a wall. Without an aligning bias in terms of pov or presenting one character as larger or more frame-dominating, spectators may form allegiances based on their own narrative logics. As I watch the scene, I find myself allying with Sal at first because Buggin' Out is an obnoxious pest: he is a regular customer who tries to get special treatment by whining. But as the scene progresses, although I don't like Buggin' Out, and while I generally support Sal's right to put whatever he wants on his walls, my Marxist side thinks Buggin' Out has a point about the clientele deserving "some say." At the scene's conclusion, I think Sal is over-reacting when he reaches for the baseball bat to drive out the "trouble-maker." Yes, Buggin' Out is obnoxious — later in the diegesis we see that other African Americans regard him as a high strung jerk — but Sal's threat of violence seems to me, as a generally pacifist interpreter, to be intimidation in part for its own sake or perhaps suggesting, an overdeveloped need to control the atmosphere in his pizzeria. In any case, as Mookie — positioned on the cultural *Borderline* as the negotiator between Sal

and Buggin' Out — escorts the latter out of the pizzeria, I find my allegiance shifts to him rather than either of the combatants. He seems reasonable, persuasive, friendly to both sides, and his solution will chill tempers — Buggin' Out will miss his three times a day pizza fix, and Sal, as is often the case with minor irritants, may miss Buggin' Out's gadfly presence and maybe even regret his over-reaction. Nevertheless, the textual alignment is generally to a position of determined neutrality: indeed, the film relies more on the two-shot than most contemporary American films in large part so that such interpretive disputes are portrayed in a neutral profile. Late in the film, when Mookie and Sal argue about Jade, the camera is neutrally between them, but as tempers heat up, in a kinesthetic similarity schema for the “heating up” of emotions, instead of cutting between characters, it whip-pans back and forth from one to the other as they bicker giving the argument a frenetic quality.

*Do the Right Thing* relies on this neutral alignment strategy in various scenes, and because of this troping, it is an excellent prototype for the Borderline genre on a whole. This stylistic device is important to the genre because it offers various alignments so the spectator, in her narrative logic, becomes conscious that, as the diegesis proceeds, her “logical” inferences that create feelings of allegiance are not necessarily supported by the long term progressive alignment outcomes of each conflict. In this particular regard, most other Borderline texts, like *Do the Right Thing*, will offer stylistic alignments with several “logics” via various characters; however, unlike *Do the Right Thing*, many other Borderline texts will *tend* to work toward a final alignment of one transparent position, usually based in an ethos of American-progressivist tolerance which is personified in the triumphant romantic relationship of the central characters; the films *The Scarlet Letter*

and *Last of the Mohicans* both conclude with variations on this textual gambit. The concluding triumph of the mixed-cultural couple seems to offer a kind of closure to issues of hybridity in the implicit and inevitable cross-fertilization of groups. However, in *Do the Right Thing*, the shifting alignments in the depiction of escalating conflict over The Wall of Fame and then Mookie's choice to enflame the conflict, presents a much more ambiguous and, for me, challenging issue of hybridity.

### **Other Stylistic Effects**

However, before I consider the other *defining micro-script* in which this challenge to hybridity is played out — the way that Mookie's personal crisis of narrative logics determines the outcomes of the diegesis and so precipitates my interpretive crisis — I want to address some of the other ways in which the text uses stylistic devices to create cross-cultural alignments and their possible cognitive effects.

One of the most common stylistic devices in Borderline film texts, is to use props, costume, and gestures to figure the main character as being on the cultural borderline. Just as *The Searchers* showed Ethan affecting Indian ornamentation and behavior, *Do the Right Thing* figures Mookie's borderline character in his dress and in his gestures. As the diegesis begins, Mookie wakes up wearing a Michael Jordan Chicago Bull's jersey giving us a perceptual proximity of a Jordan-schema with the Mookie character-schema. As I consider the character schema similarity implications, I note that Jordan is also a cross-over figure, well-loved by all American ethnic communities. Possibly more importantly, this good-continuation image of Jordan's success foreshadow Mookie's personal challenges and the changes he will undergo in the course of the day; Jordan is

both financially successful and superhumanly disciplined, trajectories Mookie will be developing, if at a considerably more modest level. Later, as Douglas Kellner in “Aesthetics, Ethics, and Politics” observes:

Mookie [...] wears a Jackie Robinson baseball jersey, symbolizing a Black who breaks the color line in the white man’s world [...]. While working, Mookie also wears a shirt with his name on it and the logo of “Sal’s Pizzeria” signifying his position between the two worlds. (Reid 78)

Significantly, Robinson is an African American who painfully negotiated the borderline between black and white Brooklyn when he integrated the Dodgers and Major League Baseball, and like Mookie, Robinson had to hear the word “nigger” from racists like Pino and not lose his cool. As associative significances, Mookie’s costumes create specific schematic similarities that position him on several possible black/white borderlines and therefore suggest his hybrid acculturation. Even in the film’s epilogue, when he goes to Sal to demand his wages, Mookie is wearing his Sal’s Famous shirt, suggesting that, although he has precipitated the destruction of the pizzeria, in some way, he is still a hybrid, successfully negotiating his demands cross culturally. As further evidence of his cross-culturality, just as Ethan automatically uses Indian signs when describing Indian religion, when Mookie claims that Sal wants to “hide the salami” he reflexively makes the same fist-pumping, shoulder-slapping Italian gesture that Sal makes to signify “Fuck you” when Buggin’ Out announces his boycott. Given the modernist novel’s use of detail to emphasize theme and modernist influences on cinematic *mise en scene*, such tropes of costume and gesture are somewhat predictably part of the stylistics of Borderline texts.

However, as a genre, many Borderline texts are particularly inventive when finding ways to stylistically represent a borderline position to readers and spectators. The extra-diegetic racial slur montage is an interesting example of a *sui generis* stylistic trope. These linked monologues put the unsuspecting spectator on the receiving end of epithet-driven rages *as if* I — the spectator — were the “moulán yan,” the “jew-asshole,” the “spic,” the “slanty-eyed-no-speak-American” Korean, or the “guinea-wop” object of racist fury, and the effects of this peculiar stylistic positioning can be explained in cognitive terms. The alignment that I feel is created by the direct-address style is not with the speaker’s subjectivity even when the speaker is Mookie — usually the way we might respond to a close-up of the main character in a passionate confrontation; instead, the zoom-in camera and eye-contact anger make me I feel that *I’m* being confronted, and by schematic associations of similarity and proximity, my emotional response is in allegiance with the slurred community. Although I’m aware that I’m white in real-world contexts, in the imaginative *play* created by the extra-diegetic cuing and the narrative logics writ small in the outbursts, I feel the brunt of being hated because my analogue “I” — by which I engage the story-world — is black, Hispanic, Asian, Jewish, as well. For me as an interpreter, this stylistic positioning generates several parallel narrative logical effects that result in an interesting confusion of affect.

First as a political progressive, I’m offended by such direct statements of racism which explains why I feel my allegiance swing *against* each speaker in turn. Next, as an interpreter from an English Department with rhetorical and theatrical training, I recognize the similarities in rhetoric and affective delivery in all the diatribes: although each character believes he is exercising or implying a rationale of ethnic superiority, each

uses identical rhetorical and dramatic tropes, and this strikes me as both funny and revealing — the montage has the effect of deconstructing the position of ethnic exclusivity and superiority by revealing the barren, clichè-thought that subscribes each rhetorically identical but logically vacuous position. Also — and this is a circumstance where a cognitive model of interpretation demands a personal, rather than ideological, response — I honestly must recognize that some part of each complaint resonates with some of my real world experiential scripts and so with a portion of *my* narrative logic: black athletes do disproportionately dominate American sport; I was never a fan of gladd-handing Ed Koch when I lived in NYC; Korean green-grocers speaking idiomatic Korean-dialect English are on seemingly every other corner of some neighborhoods; Hispanic immigrants are often willing to live in crowded apartments to maximize savings; and Italian American shop owners in New York have a special love of sentimental crooning *a la* Perry Como. While in the experiential world, I try to consciously control my allegiances so that such associations don't extend into logics of stereotype, nevertheless, this montage draws to my attention and interpretive consideration the way that such currents work in my own preconsciousness. Indeed, this strange tension in feeling “I” am being hated for five *different* “logics” that are all expressed *identically* and which also tickle associations with my own experience — even reminding me of why *I* sometimes don't like white people — makes me laugh because it successfully surprises and confounds my narrative expectations while revealing the silly yet tenacious nature of ethnic stereotyping and suspicion.

Most Borderline texts explore stylistic innovation in presenting various narrative logics in such immediate and challenging ways. It is appropriate that texts which are

investigating, perhaps even promulgating, ideas of hybridity should discover stylistic devices to challenge spectators' and readers' consistencies of story-formation and enforce a degree of novelty-seeking in interpreting formal figures.

### **Cultural Choosing**

The last defining trope of the Borderline Narrative is *micro-script event schema* in which a main character or characters experiences a *personal crisis that leads to a conscious choice* which then radically effects the narrative outcomes in cultural terms. Ultimately, "The right thing" that Mookie somewhat reluctantly decides to do is to break his allegiance with Sal by throwing the ashcan through the pizzeria window. Mookie's considered response to Radio Raheem's strangulation is consistent with Borderline model because this is the choice that catalyzes the riot; the end result of which is the burning out of Sal's Famous, and this concludes the narrative with a definite shift in the ethno-cultural construct of the story-world. Up to this final confrontation, Mookie has been complicit with Sal's regime in the neighborhood because he needs his job. Wielding economic power, Sal was able to control Mookie and even to compromise his morality by forcing him to work with Pino. However, if his moral outrage is powerful enough, Mookie can shake off his economic need to keep his job and take arms against the avatar of an unjust system. The window is, after all, a good continuation of The Wall that separates black from white, that encloses the pizzeria and so symbolically supports white hegemony while upholding an exclusively white pantheon of ego-ideals. The ash can shattering the window is good continuation for bringing down the wall.

If I consider *Do the Right Thing* as a coming-of-age story — most Borderline texts can be usefully overlaid with schematic similarities to other genres — when Mookie throws the ashcan, it signifies his passage into manhood; we have heard Tina, Sal, and Jade tell us that Mookie has been a chronically irresponsible in his duties and relationships, and we see in his evasiveness with Pino that he is reluctant to meet bigotry in a head-on confrontation; however, seeing Radio Raheem killed forces him to take decisive, principled-therefore-responsible, action. But unlike the usual allegiance I would expect as a narratee in a coming-of-age narrative, as I spectate the scene, I am conscious that my allegiance with him weakens radically because such an action challenges my — bourgeois, white-centric, pacifist — notions of morality and propriety: my narrative logic proscribes this kind of an action, particularly because Mookie seems aware that he will precipitate a riot. This situation is especially troubling because, as my allegiance to Mookie dissipates, my innate impulse to find a central character in the narrative makes my allegiance to Sal (whom Radio Raheem was nearly successful in murdering<sup>24</sup>) intensify. However, once I have constructed an allegiance with Mookie, that imaginary relationship-schema doesn't simply disappear: while my allegiance and attention shift to “What will happen to Sal & sons?”, my allegiance to Mookie only drops out of consciousness, yet, as a cognitive operation, I will continue to hold it as a preconscious possibility. As I know from real-life situations, once an affiliation forms, one misunderstanding doesn't usually obliterate that allegiance's potentials.

As I watch the riot, I notice a focusing process created by the textual structure which leads to a telling series of alignments. When Da Mayor acts as Sal & sons'

protector, I'm assured that they are physically safe. When Sonny is able to talk the rioters out of destroying his green-grocery/convenience store ("I black, too!"), Sal's Famous emerges as the specific focus for Mookie's action, and it takes a particular significance clearly connected to The Wall of Fame but somewhat removed from Sal & sons as persons. This significance is underscored when we are aligned with a fire-haloed Smiley tacking his artistically enhanced photo of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X onto The Wall of Fame. I feel my alignment shift to the rioters, and my main character allegiances are sidelined.

In Mookie's choice to throw the ashcan, my narrative logic has been challenged, and I find myself in a peculiar position as narratee. As is true of all Borderline Narratives, the main character's crisis and choice precipitates an awareness in the narratee of the differing narrative logics in play and how one choice, acting as good continuation of that character's specific narrative logic doesn't offer adequate closure of all the narrative problems. No matter what the allegiance of the reader/spectator, s/he will be acutely aware — as will the main characters within the story-world — of the specificity and limits of his or her narrative logic.

The epilogue ("reactions to outcome" in endnote 15) of the plot offers some stylistic and narrative closures. As the story has come, in the course of a day, full circle, I notice the first two scenes are mirrored by the last two scenes which, by good continuation leading to closure give a impression of completion to the events. As Richard Neupert says in *The End*, "Bracketing by means of similar opening and closing sequences or combinations of elements allows a fiction film to maintain a cyclical unity for its narrative" (22). In both beginning and end, Mookie wakes up and goes to work.

As an aligning structure, the overall design of the plot offers the two events as script schemas of waking up and going to work for comparison. We can note the development of the character by the differences in the scenes, and, by recognizing character transformation, we infer thematic import. At the end of the film, despite Tina's dire prophecies to the contrary, Mookie has been as good as his word on the day before and has returned to her and Hector just as he said he would. We observe that as a result of the events of the past 24 hours, Mookie has moved from Jade's to Tina's — a more consciously responsible place for a husband and father as both Jade and Tina have commented. This provides plot closure for the coming-of-age in relationship problem that Mookie was dealing with. Moreover, although Tina has yet to recognize the change in him, because he was as good as his word, I trust that he fully intends to get paid and bring the money home to Tina as he says he will (how he knows that Sal will still be sifting through the ruins of Sal's Famous is unclear, but Mookie seems to know Sal pretty well). Stylistically, instead of sharing the camera as he did in the first wake-up scene with Jade, this scene is shot with Mookie in the foreground in a long take which creates a strong alignment with him. I note his neatly folded clothes from the night before suggesting that he is anticipating the day and has determined his strategies, beginning with a business-like presentation.

The following, final scene, also demonstrates a radically different Mookie but in the context of his coming-of-age issues with his manhood and his blackness. Where in the first scene, Mookie arrives at Sal's and falls into the desultory bickering discourse as if he were another brother, mimicking Vito's strategies in dealing with Pino, there is nothing desultory, petty, or son-like in his last day at Sal's. He is clear, direct, and

imperative; he no longer wheedles with Sal to be paid, but demands his salary and acknowledgment as an equal — which Sal finds first confounding and then slightly amusing. Unlike his arrival at work at the beginning of the diegesis, which the camera recorded in a series of moodily lit medium-long shots that tended to align with Sal, this scene is shot in much the same neutral alignment style that Sal and Buggin' Out's fight was shot. In this neutral framing, Mookie and Sal both put forth their feelings and their logics about the events of the night before, and I understand the depth of Sal's attachment to his pizzeria as well as Mookie's counter position that human life always trumps property considerations. At this point, the stylistic presentation and each character's logic moves me into a position of double allegiance: I feel a strong allegiance with Mookie, due to the previous scene and also to his new-found clarity and articulate sense of self, as coming-of-age stories have trained me to respond. At the same time, my allegiance with Sal is also strong; I feel for his loss, yet I also feel that he isn't devastated and as I watch him, I see that he has in some ways already moved past the burn-out. In contrast to my spectating of their first scene, in which I wanted Pino to shut up and sweep the sidewalk as Sal told him to, I'm not sure whose interest to favor. Interestingly, in both scenes, Sal finds a way to defuse a problem with an act of generosity.

Indeed, Sal not only pays Mookie, he doubles his salary. Granted, Sal wads up the hundreds and angrily throws them at Mookie, but their interaction is, finally, playful. As I watch it and anticipate each character's reaction to the other, I'm consciously delighted that Sal gives Mookie extra money (Tina will be knocked out, and this is good continuation of Sal's generosity in the neighborhood and affection for Mookie). I'm also consciously rooting for Mookie to pick up *all* the hundreds and accept the potential

meanings embedded in being overpaid: Sal's affection and, in my narrative logic, his absolution. From his potential narrative logics, Sal *could* have insisted that the window Mookie broke was "worth more than \$250" and "logically" refused to pay him.

However, when Sal does pay him, he is responding to another narrative logic, the logic of his long-standing relationship with Mookie from boy to man. The implications I see in this include the possibility that Sal understands — perhaps only preconsciously — that he was wrong about The Wall of Fame, that his son Pino needs to get out of the neighborhood, and reciprocally, the neighborhood needs to be rid of, if not Vito, at least Pino, as well as Sal's quick reach for the baseball bat. Ultimately, by the implications of good continuation, Sal is acknowledging that the cops were wrong to strangle Radio Raheem. As we know from the way that consciousness uses memory, the concluding contextualization of the narrative determines how the earlier events of the narrative may be construed, or, as Neupert and Mortimer put it, intuitively understanding the cognitive processes at work:

The ending stands as the final address to the spectator, the place where the story may be resolved and where the narrative discourse may close. All of these elements are subject to the perception and interpretation of the spectator, for, as Armine Kotin Mortimer writes, "Readers cannot possess a story's meaning until they know the end." (32)

The impression I have at the end, is that Mookie is no longer the irresponsible boy that he was, and that Sal is a more responsible and sensitive man than he was. In this way, the plot offers closure for both characters and the story-world contextualizes Mookie's signal

decision to throw the ashcan, so I can emotionally conciliate it even if I can't quite logically narratize it.

I must own, however, that this was not my first response to the film. The final stylistic trope is the on-screen text of the Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X quotations: the former, a call for peace, the latter, a justification of violence. These quotations compounded my initial unease with Mookie's choice and seemed to evacuate any easy resolution of the text. But this is an example *par excellence* of what a Borderline text can do. Borderline texts, in our reading or spectating of them, have the cognitive effect of challenging our narrative logic in this way. I was narratively discomfited when Mookie decided to throw the ashcan through the window: the act represented an aspect of African American experience and narrative logic unavailable to me as a middle-class, middle-aged white man. However, in effect, the cognitive challenge "hybridized" my narrative logic. As I extended my normal "logic" to play in the imagination and interpretation of Mookie's story-world, I engaged the plot and stylistic textualities in a way similar to the children in the memory experiment related above. Just as they mobilized the imaginative and novelty-seeking capacity of their metaphoric "me"s to recreate analogue "I" consistent with new information, I had to adjust my own narrative logic. The cognitive result is that, through this navigation by imaginative novelty-seeking and consistency-building through this story-world to a sense of closure, I also signal to myself a concise logic to the events, and as a result, my narrative logic develops new associative and imaginary strategies as I use in future imagination-strategies to narratize and conciliate the story-imagining experiences with my experiential world. The effect in *Do the Right Thing* was to make me see more

clearly the violence that African Americans experience simply in the course of living their lives; a violence that connects by similarity in the disturbing Malcolm X quotation. Seeing this, however, does not make me more violent, but makes my choice for peaceful — yet clearheadedly empathetic — social change the more firm. The Borderline Narrative is of special importance inasmuch as it offers us such vexatious positionings to challenge our cultural and personal narrative logics. As we engage Borderline narratives and preconsciously as we form allegiances with Other characters, we are also imagining that text's alignments and internal "logic" which we extend to our "selves." As we begin to play with other narrative logics, our own narrative logics develop more associational compass and we begin to become hybrid.

### **Chapter 3:**

#### **Section Two— Schema, Genre, the Borderline**

There has never been a literature without genres; it is a system in constant transformation, and historically speaking, the questions of origins cannot be separated from the terrain of genres themselves.

— Tzvetan Todorov

The function of schemata (particularly what schemata allow — imagination and abstraction) is *the* contingent universal of human cognition, a shared function that, in practice, individualizes through cultural and personal contexts.

— David Bordwell

#### **Section Abstract**

Just as Lakoff and Johnson have maintained that understanding the human experience of the physical self as a contained being with a forward orientation in both space and time is the basis for linguistic metaphorical constructs, so I have suggested that there is a base human understanding of life-processes in narrative activities which should be the basis for narratological arguments. I have outlined the essential features of cognition and its special relationship to narrative which has led to a model of narrative

logic. For my case study, I have offered the Borderline Narrative, an emergent genre that figures cultural hybridity in its construction of narrative logic; in turn, these terms provide a framework for textual interpretation in a cultural studies context, so I have used *Do the Right Thing* to reveal and explain the effects of that narrative as it exercises cultural tensions.

This base now supports deeper exploration of other narratological and interpretive issues. In Section Two, to draw a tighter focus, I begin by returning to the cognition of schema and addressing the problem of genre and how we can use schema theory to understand more precisely what genres can or perhaps should do in the special arena of cultural studies: how generic classes of texts carry or engage narrative logics, how they offer sites for interpretation that reveal or crystalize narrative-logical contests, and how new observations about generic categories can aid in interpretation. I will then use schema theory to suggest a new aspect of genre theory, *priming*, and I will specify the relationship potentials for schema that, by similarity, apply to genre. The Borderline Narrative genre will again supply the case study, and in the process, I will explicate cultural hybridity as a narrative and generic effect in several cognitive and cultural operations.

### **Genre, Not Genus/Species**

A central point to my argument is that understanding schematic action in the guise of genre and generic thinking is a key interpretive tool in making persuasive textual comparisons and in understanding how texts work as cultural artifacts. Tzvetan Todorov, in *Genres in Discourse*, speaks to this point when he asserts that “Genres are a meeting

place between general poetics and event-based literary history; as such they constitute a privileged object and may well deserve to be the principle figure in literary studies” (20). Yet, despite Todorov’s efforts and a recent resurgence in interest in genre-based criticism in narratology generally, many critics regard genre criticism — even when limited to reception issues — as a fragmented and inconsistent field. Alistair Fowler in *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes*, concedes that in his estimation, genre issues are a grand and various mixture of paradigms and apparatuses (55-59). Even in the microcosm of Hollywood, Tom Ryall echoing Fowler’s points observes that

[...] it is important to note that different models, different sets of assumptions, and different theories underpin the range of accounts that address the generic system of Hollywood and the individual genres in that system, and at the micro-level, account for the specificities of individual films. [...] ‘[G]enre’ itself is sometimes replaced by and sometimes situated in relation to a constellation of cognate terms such as ‘type’, ‘mode’, ‘cycle’, ‘series’, and ‘formula’. [sic] (“Genre and Hollywood” 327)

David Bordwell mocks this variety of approaches and assumptions in *Making Meaning*, complaining that

Theorists have been unsuccessful in producing a coherent map of the system of genres and no strict definition of a single genre has won widespread acceptance. A Western [movie] seems identified primarily by its setting, a science fiction film by its technology, a musical by its manner

of presentation (song and dance). Thus one could have a science-fiction musical Western, in which Martians visit Billy the Kid and everyone puts on a show [...]. [B]ecause genre markers vary and overlap, no strictly deductive set of principles can explain genre groupings. (147).

While we might note in passing that *Six String Samurai* (Lance Mungia, 1998) is a film that performs all these overlaps and even adds Samurai-genre swordplay into the genre-bending mix; still, Bordwell is making telling assumptions about what genre is and what how genre theory should perform. Bordwell draws his argument from the Russian Formalist Boris Tomashevsky — whose view has also influenced Todorov. Tomashevsky critiques the very notion of organizing texts as genres, referencing “logic” and classificatory limits.

No firm logical classification of genres is possible. Their demarcation is always historical, that is to say, it is correct only of a specific moment of history; apart from this they are demarcated by many features at once, and the markers of one genre may be quite different in kind from the markers of another genre and logically they may not exclude one another. (55)

The problem with this critical perspective is that, in Tomashevsky’s accurate assessment, the tendency of genre theorists to devise their demarcations by many features leads to an impossibility of final or “logical” exclusivity of generic categories. In “Rethinking Genre,” Christine Gledhill locates the exact nature of this critical problem when she contends that “Genre is first and foremost a boundary phenomenon” (221). This is consistent with the assumptions of all the foregoing critics and, as such, it

illustrates concisely and exactly what is wrong with their assumptions. Genre is not “first and foremost” a problem of boundaries but a problem of interpretative process.

To conceptualize the critical activities of genre as only a “boundary phenomenon” is to reduce generic issues to problems of classification and taxonomies. What we learn from cognitive models is that categorical understanding of texts — using generic constructs — is not a problem of demarking final and exclusive limits to groupings of texts; it is a method of comparisons best mobilized with a full understanding of cognitive schema-activity. Since Adam, the taxonomic impulse has proven fundamental to all cultures and languages; indeed, various aspects and logics of the sciences and mathematics would be impossible without an ability to make determinate associative relationships between names and specific discrete areas, individuals, or sets. However, in the interpretive act — which is a description of narrative cognition — insisting on such hard limits proves somewhat arbitrary and falsely obscures the real actions of generic perception, generation, and conceptual relationships. Because narrative texts signify with symbols that are by definition bearers of overdetermined meanings, and they are not the physically determined structures of biology nor the discrete features of mathematics, this symbolic nature of narrative complicates the cognition — and interpretation — of narrative relationships far beyond handy maps that work with the exclusive taxonomic methods of these disciplines. Bordwell draws a bead on this particular expectation:

[...] far from being concerned with definition or reasoning from genus to species, critics often identify the genre only to aid interpreting the particular work. The identification is transitory and heuristic, like that of

nearly all the categories we draw upon in real life. Genres, and genre function as open-ended and corrigible schemata. (148)

Clearly, the “problem” of a comprehensive genre theory is embedded in the expectation of *how we expect genre to work*. An effective theory of genre then, needs to be primarily concerned, not with outlining the closed sets of specific generic categories which would map out fixed and exclusive characteristics and into which niches every narrative text will neatly slot, but with laying bare the mechanisms by which we recognize and use categories to critically engage narrative texts and by which we offer new ideas about textual relationships. Genre theory as an interpretive tool should aid interpretation as Bordwell’s colleague and fellow-cognitivist Noel Carroll sets out in *Interpreting the Moving Image*,

We applaud certain interpreters (our academic stars) for their brilliance, because they point out and explain features of [texts] that we had failed to notice or to understand. This would make no sense if interpreters were typically persons who reported on what we already have in mind. (9)

Embedded in Carroll’s paradigm of successful interpretation is an understanding of the importance of engaging both the frames of consistency-building and novelty-seeking. Attempting to construct a theory that is only a map (and thereby, a final regulation) of genres would restrict the critic to only consistency-building. Yes, the interpretive critic must invoke consistency by communicating about the experience of a text in familiar terms, yet, in going beyond “what we already have [consciously] in mind,” she assists our own novelty-seeking by presenting a description of the text’s associative

relationships that may have been lively in our preconscious intuition, yet not quite complete enough to come to our conscious attention.

My point about a cognitive theory of genre is that generic theory doesn't and shouldn't work like genus/species exclusive taxonomies, but it *should be* an articulation of "corrigible schemata" that works like thinking works. In "Questions of Genre," Steve Neale contends — in a cognitivist understanding if not cognitive terms — that

genres are not discrete phenomena contained within mutually exclusive boundaries, but rather deal in shared and changing uses of plot mechanisms, icons, and discourses. An identity as a genre depends on the particular relationship established between a range of common elements rather than on exclusive possession of particular motifs [...]. (46)

Or as Rick Altman puts it, there is "a need to recognize that not all genre [texts] relate to their genre in the same way or to the same extent" (8). In this perspective, boundary crossings and related disputes become the productive sites of interpretive as well as cultural activity (Gledhill 224). These kinds of considerations were all part of what I offered in more general survey of schema theory and narrative logic in Section One; therefore, an understanding of the deductive potentials of how we think generically comes directly from understanding how schematic thinking works.

### **Generic Thinking is Schematic Thinking**

Other theorists have attempted to give their studies a systematic consistency with a variety of framing strategies which, as I suggest, open the problem of genre beyond taxonomic problems. In “A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre,” Altman argues that there are two distinct, yet interrelated, dimensions to genre recognition which he correlates to linguistic concepts of the semantic and syntactic. Ryall synthesizes:

The semantic perspective offers broad inclusive definitions identifying fixed and recurrent elements which cross all instances of the genre, while the syntactic perspective focuses on narrow, exclusive definitions drawing attention to particular distinctive patterns established between semantic elements in subsets of a semantic genre [...] . Semantic definitions tend to be inclusive, incorporating as many [texts] as possible, while syntactic definitions are exclusive and focused on a small number of [texts]. (333-34)

In this formulation, we see the traces of high structuralism and its obsession with signification-as-language and the appropriation of linguistics to explain semiotic cognition. However, as film critics have complained over the past decade and as Section One demonstrated, cognitive semiosis both precedes and exceeds linguistic paradigms. Neale observes that, in terms of narrative genre description, the metaphoric binary fails inasmuch as any “syntactic” description of a genre will also invoke “semantic” descriptions:

To what extent, for example is music in the musical (by no means all of which, incidentally, is diegetic, as a glance at any number of dance

sequences in the 1940s and 1950s musicals will confirm) a semantic rather than syntactic building block? (216)

Altman's analogy is weak, and while his method has definite uses, it can be accomplished with greater accuracy by using core/periphery schematic structures.

Todorov's very influential argument outlines some of the same distinctions but without suggesting the exclusive operations of a syntax and semantics. Instead, he begins by generally dividing genre criticism into two kinds: the theoretical and the historical (13-14). Todorov's extrapolation and correction of Tomashevsky is a good beginning inasmuch as it seems to set up a basic logic of synchronic and diachronic axes of understanding; however, the theoretical and historical, like syntax and semantics, are not the *most* useful frame constructs. In his historical survey of genre theory, Neale follows Todorov's lead by dividing the critical approaches in two, the "Aesthetic Theories" (theoretically-centered categorizations) and the "Socio-Cultural" (historically-oriented categorizations); this second category Neale then divides into "the ritual approach" and "the ideological approach."<sup>25</sup> However, Neale emphasizes, these groupings are inherently artificial, and by their own definitions, they have proven inadequate to a full explanation of genre-based critical problems. Neale's response is to use a thick description of the Hollywood industrial apparatus to demonstrate the polysemous nature of what some critics may want to retrospectively see as condign generic categories (231-55). His point is to locate the multiple forces driving the production of texts in order to disrupt facile categorizations and the totalizing historical assumptions that go with them.

Cognitivism, however, as an explanation of how categories work on consciousness and on cultural logic, can account for this polysemy and still mobilize genres as categories for an interpretive explanation for:

1. recognizing the new and/or change on the meta-level in the inevitable tendency of generic prototypes to appear and then modify over time;
2. addressing the micro-level as to why texts that are generically consistent, can, by focusing on their similarities and/or differences, provoke entirely conflicting interpretive reactions;
3. and finally — as Neale calls for — provide an account of the play of forces that cause texts to arise which may present information inconsistent with existing ideological or theoretical schemas.

Briefly put, a theory of how we think generically should provide an explanation for these diverse approaches in one compact — if somewhat intricate — methodology. What such a project requires however, is not formulating a critical purpose related to a specific generic category, but constructing a model for why all such categories can be critically useful. So it is my contention that a full understanding of schematic cognition can be usefully applied to generic arguments of every type.

## Schema

[T]he relationship between the individual text and the series of texts formative of a genre presents itself as a process of the continual founding and altering of horizons. The new text evokes for the reader (listener) the horizon of expectations and “rules of the game” familiar to him from earlier texts, which as such can then be varied, extended, corrected, but also transformed, crossed out or simply reproduced.

— H. R. Jauss

Proceeding in this manner, we can closely define genre as simply a special instance of schematic thought processes outlined in Section One: briefly, “a *schema* is a mental category that we use to recognize perceptual and conceptual information and to organize our memories.” In understanding the vast range of potential generic categories, we need first to understand the way schematic categories inter-relate to create perception, conception, and comprehension.<sup>26</sup>

By this formulation, however, we immediately discard one of the problems historically related to the term “genre” itself. Adhering to old debates about high and low culture that Leo Braudy has addressed in *The World in a Frame*, is the use of “genre” as a pejorative for certain fictions or films as highly formularized popular story that compare poorly to “artistically” challenging tales which are somehow more original and therefore defy categorical relationships. Despite its suspect dichotomy of low and high art, such thinking is *ipso facto* a validation of the use of generic categories: when the covert interpretive category is the “non-genre” genre of high art, it becomes clear that we

cannot escape using a critical category to recognize and then organize narrative texts.

Even a conservative critic like Fowler can succinctly make the case for the schema-genre identity when he states what has become a reader-response truism, that “The processes of generic recognition are in fact fundamental to the reading process [...]. No work, however, *avant-garde*, is intelligible without some context of familiar types” (259). It is the conceptual, technological, and historical relationships of “familiar types” that genre theory seeks to describe, and schematic action is an elegant descriptor for how we think about and interpret these relationships. We can extend Todorov’s thinking and assert that *the mechanisms of generic thinking* “constitute a privileged object and may well deserve to be the principal figure in literary studies.” Or as Jacques Derrida asserts in *The Law of Genre* — again in a cognitivist understanding of generic thinking — “Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text.” Moreover, Derrida cautions against seeing genres as genus/species when he warns that “participation never amounts to belonging”; genres are interpretive categories, not final constraints (230).

In a complete explanation that will address all the inter-relationships of genre and interpretation, we need to return to Section One’s break down of the *operations* of schematic/generic thinking. Theorists as various as the Gestaltists to Ricouer to Fowler have noted that interpretive processes have specific phases of activity. In a cognitive understanding, these phases operate in a logical sequence which, in other descriptions of genre theory are obscured or muddled:

*Framing*; genre arguments going back to Aristotle inevitably invoke a dialectical relationship between two ways of understanding the generic category in terms of both its consistency and its novelty. In processing textual signs, consistency is the basis we

connect to, but novelty is what provokes our interest; in the interpretive act, consistency establishes a ground, while novelty provides the importance of the argument.

*Types of Schema*; the textual features that an argument emphasizes in making categorical consistencies or describing novel variations determine the generic paradigm. Moreover, the type of schema that defines the category will carry with it certain associative possibilities that will figure in an interpretation.

*Associative Strategies*; the relationships of the textual features can constellate significance or “logic” in four different ways; proximity, continuation, similarity, closure.

### **Framing as Consistency-Building and Novelty-Seeking**

A member of the profession of English who believes that the concepts in a great literary work can be analyzed without analyzing the concepts that are conventional to the language in which it is embedded and the way those concepts are disclosed in the shape and structure of the language, is [...] a literary solipsist. It is like thinking that great baseball players can exist and be great baseball players in a world without baseball.

— Mark Turner

As Carroll has suggested, at their best, interpretative criticisms generally — and as I argue, genre-based arguments in particular — offer new schematic maps that both freshen and consolidate the experience of a text or group of texts. In this regard, they excite both the frames of consistency-building *and* novelty-seeking which I believe are

the most basic descriptions of a framing phenomena (and under which, other critics' frames can be subtended). As I mentioned in Section One, this is also a key dimension missing in most cognitive-inflected uses of schema theory.

Why is the problem of genre best framed in terms of a dialectic between consistency and novelty? The problem with framing genre in terms of syntax and semantics, or theory and history, or ritual and ideology is that all these (somewhat artificial) binaries are effected in the understanding of the way that categories — and therefore a range of generic potentials — exist in our cognition. In cognitive terms, problems of genre will always devolve onto how we understand the existence of the category. To draw this line of reasoning a step further, Carroll's paradigm of what a successful act of interpretation does sets up a way of thinking about what a genre interpretation should do in a way that transcends making final generic distinctions. Rather than attempting to separate texts into discrete and exclusive groups, the act of genre-based interpretative criticism needs to elucidate the relationships between texts, and in the process, the argument must appeal to both consistent "familiar types," which form the basis for schematic recognition, and must then describe "the experience of the unforeseen" in order to generate novelty-seeking interest and to establish critical value. Unlike the inevitable overlaps that will occur with the other framing binaries, "consistency-building" and "novelty-seeking" are an effective dialectical organization that will underpin every generic argument; for instance, in describing a Primary Theory of Genre, I offer a basis consistent with generic issues and cognitive theory by which I will consider new ways of constructing genre relationships and by which I offer a new genre paradigm.

## Types of Schema

When locating schemas, we recognize three general types of cognitive-semiotic organizations that may figure as intrinsic to a particular generic category. Indeed, I will argue that, in a way similar to the way we use prototypes to “prime” certain perceptual events — like our tendency to find and focus on faces in order to recognize people or their emotions — when we define a specific genre, we are locating a core aspect to the category that will prime the interpretive action. This priming aspect will be one particular type of schema organization; however, once primed, we will engage the other ways of organizing textual information into more complex chains of rationale. When thinking about film — a form in which concrete perceptual events lead to the construction of concepts — it is easy to mobilize these kinds of perceptually based schema. However, because literary thinking occurs in abstract correlative mental “space,” we must reconstruct implicit traces of perceptual action as our imaginations reify the abstract signification in order to fully understand the different strategies of category relationships each kind of schema will mobilize. The features by which we define genre (and schemas) can be separated into three kinds:

*object schema* are concentrated or localized data which may, in critical terms, include fine *percepts* like characters, character types like the Westerner, the misunderstood teenager, certain significant items like six guns or a ripped bodice, or such schema may include binding *concepts* like themes or motifs;<sup>27</sup>

*spatial schema* orient us in the world of object and event relationships which may refer directly to the spatial or the temporal setting of a text — the American west,

the contemporary city, 1940s postwar Italy — but it may also, generically, describe stylistic conceptual spaces like *film noir*, metafiction, and stream-of-consciousness, or even the dangerous-but-safe terms of the screw-ball comedy story-world;

*script schema* are episodic maps by which we recognize or create episodic behaviors or causal relationships; script schemas as genre determiners reach back to Aristotelian distinctions, but include the *Bildungsroman*, anthropological and narratological work with story structure, along with Hollywood and Proppian formulas.

Simply by naming a specific genre and implicitly priming it, we see the thinking about the interpretation is already begun. Usually, as Bordwell observed in his complaint, a key figure foregrounds the interpretive question that the genre — as an allegorical text system — is addressing. For the broadest generic distinction — comedy and tragedy — we rely primarily on script structure in which the processes of respectively, love and death, were foregrounded; however, as narrative genre theory has evolved in contemporary theory, catalyzed in part by Freud's discussions of literature, generic considerations have become more complex, fitting with more precise interpretive nuances.

Nevertheless, in the selection of a determining aspect to a category of text, we begin or *prime* the interpretive action in a way that organizes our generic project. Grodal observes how genre critiques tend to adhere to a primed and foregrounded figure, “genre-categories can be *constituted* in many different ways” depending on formal figures: narratives based in a specific bygone era (historical fictions); based on a specific place in a bygone era (Westerns); based on the future (science fiction); based on types of action

and themes (detective films, war films, love stories); and so forth (italics Grodal's 162). Indeed, the key term is usually a priming agent referring to one particular schema potential, and we see genres defined in all three terms — the Gangster Genre involves a particular kind of criminal main character, an object schema; the Western Genre is based on the spatial concept of the American West; Screwball Comedy suggests a particular kind of (improbable) script. Once the category is established, a critic may use one or several of these schematic potentials, depending on how the critic wants to focus her interpretive thinking on a particular group of texts.

What cognitive schema theory provides is a method for prioritizing and then parsing these figures. In his example of the Billy-the-Kid Martian Musical, Bordwell is objecting to the permeability of generic categories. In his argument, he simultaneously foregrounds three formal features that may all coexist in one text. This hypothetical, however, is a *reductio ad absurdum* inasmuch as Bordwell claims that such a category could exist but has no actual film nor real problem to address. By his own lights, interpretation is an answer to a specific question, and Bordwell's objection is based on an implicit problem of how to formulate hermetic taxonomies; as I have said, under the aegis of cognitive theory, this is an unreal expectation; we don't need to make hermetic boundaries between texts, but we must see how formal features provide associative navigation between texts. When faced with an actual film like *Six String Samurai* which performs all the generic transgressions in Bordwell's hypothetical, we can use schema theory to make hard distinctions about a hierarchy of figurative elements. Using Smith's theory, if we look at the alignment created by the imagery of the text, we see that, for *Six String Samurai* the post-apocalyptic story space is the most insistent feature and, except

for the historical context, responds exactly as the Western story-space; it is the logical first premise on which the other features are justifiable. With this preliminary focus, we can then critically evaluate the other features of sci-fi technological objects, the objects of Samurai swordsmanship and code, the melodramatic scripts typical of both Western and Samurai films, and the musical performance scripts. In seeing the film first as a near-Western, we have a solid preliminary basis of comparison from which to critique the tropes of all these forms, which we might naturalize if they were depicted in their conventional generic story-worlds, stand out in high relief and offer themselves for a considered re-engagement. The genre-bending is not a problem, it's the point.

In defining the Borderline, I want to make a detailed historical argument about a small but significant and growing group of texts that have remarkable formal similarities, so I will utilize all three categorical potentials. Nevertheless, the figure of the story-space takes primary significance because it effectively primes the problem of multiculturalism: the Borderline is a figure for the meeting of cultures in a disputed, "borderland" space. As my basic trope, it defines a setting of a territory which is being contested by different worldviews expressed in their respective narrative logics. Now, as I review the significance of the details of the Borderline schema in terms of object, space, and script, I will discuss implicit meaning potentials that pertain to the overall problem orientation foregrounded by the story space of the Borderline.

The Borderline relies on two particular object schemas and their accompanying associative actions. The Borderline main character or characters are "double-constructed" inasmuch as they can or must operate within two or sometimes more systems of cultural narrative logic, and, in this process, like Ethan and Mookie, they are

aware of — and may experience characteristic frustration from — their psycho-narratological contradictions. As signifying tropes, the main characters personify an overlap of cultural conceptual sets in the borderline space whether that space is the American West or a neighborhood block in Brooklyn. The other object schema that defines the Borderline is a signal that is the site of dispute between the contending cultures — an artifact, ritual, symbol, institution, physical symptom, topographical feature, dream, natural or supernatural occurrence, personal relationship, a captive, a legend or history. Although these representations — the character and the signal — are both object schemas, they carry in their structures and/or their uses in the story, the contentious value problems of the Borderline.

Borderline Narratives have two defining uses of spatial schemas. The “story-space” created by the narration depicts a territory in which two or more cultural groups employ their specific narrative logics to compete for hegemonic power. Whatever cultural disposition a particular interpreter may have, entering the fictional story space will align her or him in such a way as to draw some aspect of allegiance into question as the plot conflicts evolve. The second use of spatial schema creates a similar outcome, because however much the overall spatio-temporal alignment may seem to fix on one character or seem to present a first-person point of view, in the Borderline, stylistic devices which figure the story-space — language use, *mise en scene*, sequencing, camera work or other alignment devices — will explore *various* intra- and inter-cultural positions in such a way as to align the interpreter with several different positions in the course of the narrative.

Both of these spatial strategies present a divided world — one is the story-world itself which is the site of contest, then, within the story-world, the stylistic alignments suggests different ways of understanding the world — both the plot's presentation of contest and the medium's presentation of different points of view are arenas for negotiation of cultural value. Effectively, both these spatial strategies create a borderline experience in the structure of the text.

Finally, the plots of Borderline texts are scripted in two specific ways. The overall plot structure conforms to a conventional story macro-structure schema that Branigan uses (see Section One, endnote 15) conventionally offering episodes that reveal a setting, character, state of affairs, a disruption of that state, conflict, resolution and implicit changes. Moreover, within this paradigm, what especially distinguishes the Borderline are two specific *event schemas* (micro-script schemas) that factor in the conclusion; the first is a specific kind of *complicating action* in the plot, while the second is part of the plot-closure action of an *outcome* (13-15). In the first instance, as I mentioned earlier, the plot is complicated by a conflict between cultures over the meaning of an object schema — we have seen the example of the Wall of Fame in *Do the Right Thing*. In the second instance of event outcomes, Borderline Narratives depict the main characters undergoing a personal crisis in the final plot complication which is resolved by a choice or choices that suggest(s) a fundamental change in their cultural understanding and a modification of their narrative logic and, consequently, to their identity narratives.

Clearly, as plot structures, these events align an interpreter to see conflict in specifically cultural terms, and they present potential outcomes as issues of character choice or conscience, not as necessarily preordained by an implicit moral force.

### **Associative Strategies**

Schemas — and therefore, genres — offer four kinds of associative connections which that structure implicit critical relationships. As I mentioned in Section One, the implicit logic of these associations is not always the logic of exclusivity in boundary relationships (which is limited to closure as applied to objects), but narrative logic engages our cognition of the narrative by the way that our categorical organizations — object, spatial, script — can be extended to create value systems and logics of degree, position, and/or sequence. In making associative connections that lead to interpretive evaluations, we can conceptualize and make logical associations:

1. by *proximity* which may be a temporal or spatial groupings of objects and may have degrees of strength of association. (Early Modern narratives; any story set in Colonial New England)
2. by *similarity* which may suggest likenesses between objects, spaces, or scripts which may also carry degrees of associative logic (gangsters, disaffected youth, saloons, nihilistic urban crime narratives, coming-of-age stories)
3. by *closure* which is any exclusive grouping with a defined boundary which results in exclusive logic (only novels written by Nathaniel Hawthorne,<sup>28</sup> all Looney Tunes cartoons, National Book Award Nominees for 2003)

4. by *good continuity*, which again, suggests spacio-temporal associative action but in a progressive — possibly causal or developmental — relationship (the Western has undergone tremendous change from its beginnings in Cooper’s Leatherstocking tales as contemporary versions like Michael Mann’s *Last of the Mohicans*, Bruce Beresford’s *Black Robe*, and John Sayles’ *Lone Star*, 1995).

Certainly, these methods of organizing categories may work one with another, but in formulating a genre-based critical project, critics should be clear about how a particular organizational emphasis primes a certain understanding of the category logic. I will trace out these associative organizations work in the next chapters.

### **Intention and Schema**

Just as foregrounding a particular type of schema can prime a hierarchy of associative values, so certain narrative logics depend on the critical intention. How can schema theory be used to clarify such critical uses of genre? Fowler claims that “In reception, genre operates in at least three ways, corresponding to the logical phases of criticism — construction, interpretation, and evaluation” (256). For his part, Grodal has outlined his version of the “different ways in which the phenomenon of genre functions and the different ways in which generic analysis has been made” (162). He contends that genres can “*exist*” or find use-value in several different ways. Producers of texts may use general paradigms to serve as models for new texts; critics use general categories to guide consumers; spectators use generic models to guide narrative expectation and comprehension; researchers use generic constraints to systemize historical or other general categories. However, just as consistency-building and novelty-seeking simplify

and clarify the critical project overall, we can consider that schemas serve as intentional guides in five interdependent problem- or objective-related skills (described in Section One) which give a clear-cut base for genre uses which exceed Fowler's claim and clarify Grodal's outline.

1. *abstracting* core information from peripheral detail or *identifying central principles*. No interpretation can respond to every nuance of a narrative text any more than any map, in Barthes' famous example, can exactly account for the area it symbolizes. By identifying central generic traits for a particular group of texts, we formulate an interpretive base on which to build historical, cultural, or formal associative connotations. I have used *Do the Right Thing* to lay out an abstract model.

2. a *mnemonic framework* for recognizing and organizing incoming information. As critics as various as Jauss, Propp, Fowler, and the reader responders have maintained, we recognize narrative information by previous narrative experience. Schematic understanding of genre enables inconsistencies as well as consistencies to carry import. We will see this activity come into play both in how texts

"create" history in Chapter 2, and in the reception of *The Scarlet Letter* in Chapter 3.

3. *interpretation* of events or narratives. Schemas work in networks to provoke interpretation. In interpretive responses, the mnemonic activities are taken a step further and applied to the narratee's understanding of self and value. This is of particular significance in determining reception allegiance as Chapter 3 will show.

4. to assist in *predicting* what is to come. Because interest in texts is historically and culturally determined, narratees can experience a particular narrative, an aspect of a narrative, or implicit narrative logic as a predictive fantasy. Chapter 2 will conclude with a discussion of this schematic capability.

5. to serve as guide for *reconstructive recall* or in *organizing categories of critical relationships*. By being alert to generic similarities, interpreters can see texts as discursively pointed on a specific problem matrix which may have been below the level of consciousness because there was not schematic prototype to identify it.

These intentional guides all factor in my definition and treatment of the Borderline Narrative. In my use of *Do the Right Thing* in Section One, I have already relied principally on the *intention of abstracting core information* in order to build a prototype of the Borderline text to show how this model presented particular interpretive problems for me as narratee. In the next chapters, I will show how script schemas serve as guides for *reconstructive recall* as history, and how *memories* work with narrative logic to *determine interpretation* and thereby to determine experience. To do this, I will use the paradigms of Primary theory and areas of Smith's Structure of Sympathy that were left unexplored in *Engaging Characters* to explicate different critical uses of the Borderline. In Chapter 4, I will look at how the alignments of *The Last of the Mohicans* and *Last of the Mohicans* — both generic Westerns — create different schematic frameworks for comprehension of the texts and an understanding of history. In Chapter 5, I will consider how preconscious allegiances associated with the novel *The Scarlet Letter* influenced the reception of the film by the same title and how mobilizing the

Borderline may change even such powerful allegiant moral responses to a narrative. By making these several correlations and through a careful definition of narrative logic and hybridity, I will demonstrate cognitivism's usefulness and the importance of a Borderline Genre on the cultural studies workbench.

## **Chapter 4:**

### **Instructions Included: *Mohicans* Schematize History**

In short to talk about the western is (arbitrary definitions apart) to appeal to a common set of meanings in our culture. From a very early age most of us have built up a picture of the western. We feel that we know a western when we see one, though the edges may be rather blurred. [...] Genre is what we collectively believe it to be.

—Andrew Tudor

Genres [...] provide public imagery as the building material for the construction of alternative, fictional worlds while their overlapping boundaries and pool of shared images and conventions mean that they are ripe for reconstruction and retrospective imagination. The job that critics do, then, whether journalistic, academic, or counter-cultural, is to make connection across generic boundaries, to bring into view previously unperceived configurations and patterns [...] that were present if unarticulated in a previously figured terrain of an earlier period and which hold a different significance for us now.

—Christine Gledhill

### **Chapter Abstract**

Claims I have made previously are that genres change over time and that the Borderline is an emergent genre. In this chapter, I will begin by reviewing Murray Smith's cognitive theory of character and narrative, the Structure of Sympathy, and I will offer modifications based on extending it for use in literature as well as film. Then I will examine the change in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* from its incarnation in novel form (1826-31) to its retelling in the Michael Mann film *Last of the Mohicans* (1992). I will argue that, by using my extrapolations of Smith's theory of alignment, we can make telling historical distinctions between the texts and their respective narrative logics. Extending this argument, I will show how the Borderline has emerged from similar narrative problems and explorations as the Western, yet the paradigm and the figure of hybridity is specifically foreclosed in the Western world of the novel, whereas it emerges in the Borderline story-world of the film.

### **Recognition in the Structure of Sympathy**

As Section One noted, "our 'entry into' narrative structures is mediated by character" in much the same way that we understand ourselves as central characters in the on-going narrative-like experience of our lives (Smith 18, Jaynes). Through our cognitive ability to excerpt a generalized image of a person, we understand ourselves and other people in our real lived experiences as well as characters in fictional narratives as "person schemas": each person, real or fictive, is cognitively understood to be a discrete body, consistent in time and space, bearing persistent traits or personality attributes,

capable of normal human perceptual activity (or “normal” as defined by the story-world), intentions, emotions, language, and possessing a capacity for self-impelled actions and self interpretation. Smith theorizes that “engaging characters” as person schemas involves a three-part response to perceptual or conceptual information, the “Structure of Sympathy” — recognition, alignment, and allegiance — and through this process, we generate our responses to a particular text. *Recognition* is a two-part action both in life and fictional circumstances.

1) general recognition of persons: we first *recognize person figures* as belonging to the general category of persons (or person-like characters, i.e. the talking animals in *Bambi*); from this recognition, we infer certain basic person abilities and dispositions, a general character or person schema.

2) recognition of individual persons: then, when we associate enough information with one figure — name, face, traits, appearance, role, or rank — we *recognize a specific individual* which we can then track through time and space and see in a play of difference with other characters (or person-like individuals like *Bambi* or *Shrek*).

For example, in both *Mohicans*, we recognize the patrol that sets out from Albany to Fort William Henry only as the first stage of recognition as generalized persons in a group. In the novel, I imagine “the chosen band” of troops on the march as two recognizable clusters of persons:

The simple array of the chosen band was soon completed. While the regular and trained hirelings of the king marched with haughtiness to the

right of the line, the less pretending colonists took their humbler positions on its left with a docility that long practice had rendered easy. (15)

As the narration continues, these two columns are subgrouped with descriptions of “scouts” and “strong guards [who] preceded and followed the lumbering vehicles that bore the baggage,” but in these depictions individuals are still undifferentiated, and for the most part, the image is a “living mass” which “the forest at length appeared to swallow up [...]” Similarly, in the film, I see columns of marching men in uniform (unlike the book, they are all British Army Redcoats, no colonial irregulars). In both cases, I recognize groups of similar character schemas, subsumed by the category of “soldiers” in my limited conscious attention; however, this preliminary level of recognition holds the potential for more complicated character recognition if I were to fill in their person schema in detail, which in the film, I will soon do.

It is the details of a specific person or character that create a distinct *individuating recognition* in our consciousness. Smith notes that individuation is the “threshold of legibility” for characters-as-agents; how quickly and in with what associative connections we individuate a continuous agent can key larger interpretive issues (111-15). Once a character stands forth as an individual, that character has a specificity to his or her person schema that enables us to track him/her as a narrative element. In cognitive terms, the figure is “primed” — readers or spectators have a definite category in mind with which to match incoming perceptual or conceptual information. Once primed as a individual character schema, we can track a particular person schema and information accrues to it; subsequently, it will acquire more and more interpretive significance.

However, the mechanism of priming — moving from general to specific recognition — varies from film to literature, and in this regard, intuitions begun in Smith’s work bear further development. In film, Smith posits that we follow characters by their “performative factors: the body, the face, the voice, and the actions performed through these physical attributes” (113). Indeed, as Smith notes, we may even attach an identity to a prop like Harmonica in *Once Upon a Time in the West* (Sergio Leone, 1969). However, in attempting to develop a base-line norm on which to build, I contend that the process of individual recognition is usually engaged, as in life experience, when we develop a sense of a person’s characteristic facial features. In our cognitive framework and extending Ekman’s work in facial emotion, I would further hypothesize that this priming recognition is catalyzed when we observe the play of emotions on the face because of our inherent tendency to locate faces and mark their emotional content. An example of this kind of recognition is when we individuate the friendly soldier leading the last platoon of the troops *en route* to William Henry. We immediately individuate this soldier by his tentative smile to his supposed ally, Magua, “the Indian Runner.” Although only a moment of emotion, the soldier’s uneasy smile followed directly by Magua’s vicious attack is a far more intense experience for us because we have individuated the trooper than if Magua had struck his weapon into the back of an anonymous marching man, and the signal effect of this murder is intensified. The man smiles: he wants to be a nice guy to his ally, but Magua furiously tomahawks him to death. The tomahawking, then, stays in mind more vividly because we have “recognized” both Magua and his victim as feeling individuals, and this event gains strength as a figure in our understanding of the how the story-world is setting out its

themes. On a character level, it serves to establish Magua's utter ruthlessness and potential for treachery; on a dramatic level, the soldier's ingenuousness and vulnerability by good continuation, suggest the English military's poor adaptation to guerilla warfare and foreshadow the repeated British failures, and by similarity and good continuation, even connect to Duncan's eventual death.

In literature, however, we cannot see a character's face to catalyze recognition as an individual and thereby to suggest a consistent category which will organize character information. In fact, unlike the perceptual experience of film, we can read a fair amount about a character's traits before we have a mental organization of data that will assist in tracking the character beyond a specific scene. There is, however, one particularly adhesive attribute in the reading experience: we most easily prime individual recognition based on knowing a character's name. Smith touches on this briefly, and he quotes Roland Bathes from *S/Z*: "As soon as a Name exists (even a pronoun) to flow toward and fasten onto, the semes become predicates, inductors of truth, and the Name becomes a subject" (quoted in Smith 114).

However, the correlation between the literary name and the filmic face as priming agents needs to be clearly made. There are two contrasting episodes from the novel that will illustrate this how a name works on the imaginative cognition. The first is the "mercy killing" during the fight at the Falls where Hawkeye spends his last powder charge to end the suffering of a wounded Huron hanging above the rocks:

[...] all eyes, those of friends, as well as enemies, became fixed on the hopeless condition of the wretch, who was dangling between heaven and earth. The body yielded to the currents of air, and though no murmur or

groan escaped the victim, there were instants when he grimly faced his foes, and the anguish of cold despair might be traced [...] in possession of his swarthy lineaments. (75)

In the next instant, the Indian slips and, rather than let him suffer by being broken on the rocks, Hawkeye impulsively kills him in midair.

The lightning is not quicker than was the flame from the rifle of Hawk-eye; the limbs of the victim trembled and contracted, the head fell to the bosom, and the body parted the foaming waters, like lead, when the element closed about it, [...] and every vestige of the unhappy Huron was lost forever. (75)

On the surface, this event might seem to be directly correlated to the film event of Magua's attack on the friendly trooper: both the perceptual film victim and the novel's conceptual casualty are specifically figured by facial emotions just before they horribly die. Yet, the murdered soldier, whom we know by perceiving his actual facial features, persists in mind, recognizable if we were to meet him on the street today, while the doomed Indian, as a conceptual structure, stays on the very margin of individual recognition, and if we attend closely to the activity of our imaginations, he is never fully primed and recognized, but actually remains only one of a group of attackers. This "unhappy Huron," well-described in his suffering and therefore seemingly individuated in the text, still disappears from mind almost immediately. We could not meet him on the street, nor indeed, even in the story-world of the novel, if his corpse were to be found downriver later, we have no way of knowing it from others of his band unless the narration should identify him exactly as the Huron Hawk-eye had killed above the rocks.

His suffering distinguished him, but nameless and unprimed, he leaves in the conceptual text no residual identity: just as he is lost to “the element,” so he vanishes as a person merging with many nameless “unhappy Hurons” whom the scout and the Mohicans will dispatch in the course of the narrative.

In order to check on the individuating effect of a name, we have only to look at contrasting event later in the book, the ritual killing of the cowardly “Reed-that-bends.” In this scene, although “Reed-that-bends” benefits from a bit more description, his participation in the plot is essentially the same as the nameless wounded Indian who falls from the tree. Both characters were pursuing the Mohican allies, but where the nameless Indian is courageous, “Reed-that-bends” has been cowardly. Both men subsequently die horribly as a result of their part in the pursuit. Yet of the two, “Reed-that-bends” is the more memorable; he becomes distinct and his personal suffering is made especially terrible when we know him by name — even a name which suggesting weakness-by-similarity seems to have foredoomed him in the Indian world. The tenacious power of such inscription-by-name is underscored by the novel’s dialogue in which, as part of his punishment, the chief decrees, “Your name will never be mentioned, again, in your tribe — it is already forgotten” (242). And in fact, in the reading experience, his specific appellation is what makes “Reed-that-bends” absolutely distinguishable and easy to reference in relation to other “Mingo cowards” in the text. While the Huron at the falls is a vague figure, one of many, still on the margin of full recognition, “Reed-that-bends,” by virtue of having a name, stands out, sharply distinguished among the Huron. These two recognitions of individual characters, then, are the ground of interpretive understanding.<sup>29</sup>

### **Alignment, Memory, History**

Once a character is primed by individual recognition, we can notice the way textual emphasis focuses and positions our attention on that particular character, in Smith's terms, our *how the text aligns us with the character*. *Alignment* is in the structure of the text, and according to Smith, alignment refers to the way that an interpreter is "placed in relation to characters in terms of access to their action, and to what they know and feel" (83). The text does this through two interrelated and sometimes interdependent functions: "spatio-temporal attachment and subjective access." Spatio-temporal attachment is simply the attention the text devotes to a particular character as s/he tracks through the story-world. Clearly, we are most closely aligned with Duncan in the novel and with Nathaniel in the film simply because we spent the most story-time with them: they occupy the largest part of our story-world experience of character. This is the most obvious method of alignment. On a more subtle level, "subjective access" is how a text may then reveal a character's thoughts or feelings, and again, we are closely aligned to these same main characters in both novel and film because the texts provide us with a the range and depth of Duncan's and Nathaniel's sincere emotional complications during plot events. The particular strength of Smith's model is the use of alignment to examine issues around the textual program separated from issues of intentionality, implied author, or other sender-receiver models. Texts *are* discernibly programmatic, and they even structure implicit worldviews by similarity; however, such information is not uncomplicatedly "sent," but it is in the very complex play of cues and relationships, in the focus on a character, her choices, and the plot

outcomes within the story-world. This textual structure is important to this chapter because of the way the texts as a schematic structure work like memory to supply “a *mnemonic framework* for recognizing and organizing incoming information.” Narrative texts then, act on us like memory inasmuch as there is no “sender” to my own memories which are the determiners of my perceptions and choices, they are “in” me as I am textual. The schematic structure of my personal narrative logic is the frame through which I find my experience; in much the same way, a cultural narrative logic is the frame through which we find our history. Alignments, in a narrative text are a way of determining that text’s narrative logic as an implicit value system for the characters and events of the text, and by using alignment in popular texts, we can then index the compass of different historical periods.

### **Film and Literature**

Smith has constructed his theory of a structure of sympathy to respond to particular problems in interpretation of film. To extend it to written fiction requires some adjustment which will then — I will argue — suggest another needed extension of Smith’s theory in terms of film. Unlike the “shown” story-world of the film in which spatio-temporal attachment and subjective access are material issues of depiction by the camera/sound recording, in the “told” story-world of the novel, spatio-temporal attachment is a conceptual process controlled by the “narrative voice.” “Narrative voice” is a somewhat tricky metaphor for the delivery of written narrative information in a “telling” from a particular point or points of view. There is no actual narrator speaking in a voice, yet we tend to conceptualize the narrational monologue (whether first, second,

or third-person) as a good continuation of a specific person because of our tendency to use a person schema to mark any person-like activity, in this case the verbal structuring of a narration. In fact, in the literary fiction, “narrative voice” functions, not as an authority figure sending information, but as a specific kind of prime-moving character.

In this regard, I want to make two key points: first, the narrative “voice” should not be conflated with the voice of the author no matter what the text may proclaim (see 28: “[...] we must use an author’s privilege [...]”); there is in actual fact, no author present; the experience of the text is created by reading. Second, as a rhetorical construct, the “voice” may work more directly, or at least more obviously, than the camera to suggest conceptual qualities to the experiences of spatio-temporal attachment or subjective access to character. The narratee, however, does not, as Smith points out, “identify” with the narrative mechanism whether camera or print. I don’t mistake the diction of the first sentence of *The Last of the Mohicans* — “It was a feature peculiar to the colonial wars of North America, that the toils and dangers of the wilderness were to be encountered, before the adverse hosts could meet” (11) — as my own any more than I believe the first shot of *Last of the Mohicans* actually transports me to a distant forest mountaintop and the woods are filled with music. As discussed in Section One, I have neither suspended disbelief nor identified with a narrating persona, but I have willingly entered into imaginary play with media information to create an unfolding story-world. I don’t suspend disbelief — a weird double negative malapropism, historically important, yet a real red herring — but I expand my willingness to explore the limits of my schematic values, to consciously “play” with the narration by mobilizing a mental state similar to concentration in playing a game. If my emotions become engaged in the

course of the narration — an index of the depth of commitment to playing — it is not because I mistake imaginary character schemas for myself, but because in the committed act of imagining characters in their story-world, I feel an investment in the characters' goals — this kind of invested play creates powerful emotional engagement like placing a bet on a race horse and can create a similar degree of intense emotional engagement.

In this play of cognition with the literary text, an interpreter is aware of the character-like quality of the narrating “voice” and, as she reads, she actively compares and contrasts her own narrative-logical values to the judgements, implications, and other qualifying information supplied by the narrative presentation (see “Allegiance” below, the last step in the Structure of Sympathy). It logically follows then, that there is an activity in the alignment of the literary text that exceeds Smith’s dual criteria of “attachment” or “subjective access.” Our experience of the literary “narrative voice,” *might* be construed in Smith’s terms as a prime-moving “subjective access”; however, it has such a specific force on the experience of the text that we should extend Smith’s critical apparatus to better define the text’s alignment.

Indeed, in assessing the way a literary text creates alignment — which, in our cognitive model, is entirely preliminary to our subjective responses to the text — we need a paradigm specific to the way the text presents — and therefore inflects — attachments and access. Yet, once we acknowledge that the considerable effect of the literary narrative style is not a problem of a person (real or implied) sending information, but a problem of quantifying how the presentation inflects the experience of attachment or subjective access, we must then re-examine Smith’s theory, and in doing so, I argue that his strategy, while an excellent beginning, is incomplete. In film, our subjective

access and spatial-temporal attachments are inflected by presentational and stylistic cues as well. If we are to fully quantify cinematic alignment, we need to acknowledge that the way the narrative perceptual information is presented is a specific kind of alignment that is not described by either spatial-temporal attachment or subjective access.

So, in constructing an account of how both film and literary texts structure alignment, we need to be able to develop an account of the stylistic information (which Bordwell, working with Russian Formalist distinctions, refers to as simply “style”) that directs and frames our perceptions or conception of characters. In *Coming to Terms*, Seymour Chatman has suggested the term “slant” to encapsulate this particular stylistic influence (143-60).<sup>30</sup> If we add an analysis of how slant inflects our perception of characters to Smith’s method, we have complete description of how text structures characters before we — as narratees — form our allegiances, and we can still avoid issues of intentionality and sender-receiver models. This position of describing slant as formal function is midway between Chatman, who insists on the slant-as-teller metaphor as an “implied author [who is] the agent intrinsic to the story whose responsibility is the overall design” (132) and Bordwell, who — as part of his project to separate cinema theory from literary narratology — holds that film texts are not “told” but simply “organized” (61-62).<sup>31</sup> In my culturalist/cognitivist incarnation, I respond to Chatman, that if we can eliminate any vestige of a sender as a critical issue, we can more efficiently isolate the effects of the text by itself; we need not follow the good continuation of “telling” or “voice” into a whole new story-world of distractions that either an implied author or — that worst of interpretive complications — a real author would add. While on the other hand, in responding to Bordwell, I would maintain that we are still

attempting to determine how the text manifests and structurally presents cultural attitudes through the character mechanism, and that in narrating a character, stylistic presentation or “organization” is not neutral and must therefore be quantified. Therefore, both literary and cinematic slants — the explicit or implicit values coming from the framing by narration — are textual structures and need to be described in the structure of sympathy. By using the limited concept of slant-as-textual operation, we are using the strongest aspects of Chatman’s and Bordwell’s argument to build on and refine Smith’s existing and elegant theory.

To illustrate the effect of literary slant, we need look no further than this handy passage,

The simple array of the chosen band was soon completed. While the regular and trained hirelings of the king marched with haughtiness to the right of the line, the less pretending colonists took their humbler positions on its left with a docility that long practice had rendered easy.

The narration describes the marching troops in two groups: the British troops depicted as “trained hirelings of the king” marching haughtily and compared to the “humbler” colonial irregulars; the slant of description is part of a consistent framing by the narration of both *Mohican* texts — in the guise of a historical representation of events — which prefigures a “righteous” American Revolution, so the slant presents the British Army as arrogant and the colonists humbled by the yoke of rigorous oppression. Why is this slant and not an account of subjective access to the feelings of the soldiers? Although adjectives like “haughty” and “humble” could seem to imply a certain subjective access to the troops, a moment’s reflection reveals these modifiers express an implicit slant of

world-view rather than a trustworthy reference to how the marching men might really feel. It strains all understanding of the psychology of warfare to think that seasoned allies, marching into a hostile wilderness (that will, in moments, “swallow them up”) would be in any way occupied with thoughts like these. The information is slanted, but in such a way that the narratee can quickly separate the activity of slant from the experiential subjectivities of the soldier-person-schemas she recognizes in the story-world.

In the film, the scene in which Duncan meets Webb is stylistically slanted in a very similar fashion — a point worth noting as we refine cognitive reactions to film and literature, and as we build similarity relationships between these particular texts. The camera sees Webb from above, relaxed and bit slouched in his red and gold uniform; the lighting, naturalized to a morning-like play of golden light and deep shadow, creates a motled aquarium-effect — a sense that not everything is clearly shown despite the rich colors; and the British officers’ relaxed postures and arrogant acting choices make them seem like spoiled hirelings in contrast to the by-the-book Duncan. Again, the claim could be made that this impression is a result of our subjective access to the characters particularly expressed through their dialogue. However, can we fail to note the superior positioning of the camera creating a perceptual alignment with Duncan, the disturbing way that Magua appears from the shadows, or the inauthentic ring Webb’s comments about the voluptuous nature of his adversaries who would “rather make love with their faces than make war”? Even spectators with no theoretic background in *mise-en-scene* will note at a level somewhat akin to the awareness of the “narrative voice” of literature that the cinematic slant here creates a foreshadowing of problems with the British officer

corps. It is a strange scene in which we may not like Duncan much, but we like and trust Webb even less. As an aligning device, the specific slant of the scene foreshadows Webb's failures as a commander and Duncan's "honorable" choice to sacrifice himself for Cora and Nathaniel.

To demonstrate the power of slant, we could take the same event and dialogue information — even Webb's line about the decadent French — and slant or in a different style to create an entirely different alignment cognition. Imagine the same exchange, but with a spit-and-polish Webb, standing to salute and greet his subordinate. This Webb is lit more directly and favored by camera positioning so that we see over his shoulder looking down on the priggish Duncan; with these slant adjustments, even with the same dialogue, Webb would seem more disciplined and war-like rather than pompous and obnoxious.

In summery then, we need to extrapolate Smith's elegant and cognitively inflected model of the textual action of character alignment to a three part model: *spatio-temporal attachment*, *subjective access* and *slant* are all factors in determining how a text aligns us with its characters.

### **Allegiance**

The final stage of the Structure of Sympathy is the *process of allegiance*. When making allegiances, interpreters apply their narrative logics to the textual information, and then, in an activity that is for most spectators entirely preconscious, they make interpretive assessments about the characters as moral constructs which determine an interpretive response — we can feel a range of allegiances or antipathies to specific

characters, their goals, lives, and loves based on how our narrative logic resembles that implied by the text. Here, we can note that another value of Smith's cognitively based theory is that it provides a model by which interpreters can bring to consciousness operations that are usually preconscious, and as I noted earlier, effective interpretation always works on the edges of what we consciously know and what we preconsciously intuit.

The problem precipitated by post-structuralists and reader-responders is how do we determine what is text and what is interpretive response? At the extremes of post-structuralism, there is only the cultural event of interpretation — any and all symbolic relationships are social constructs — yet, cognitive theory suggests that there are some perceptual and conceptual constructs that are universal to human experience and therefore, preliminary to the social and preliminary to interpretation. This is the theoretic break between alignment and allegiance: alignment is what the text materially organizes while allegiance is what the interpreter infers through the application of her own, culturally based narrative logic. The rest of this chapter will compare the alignments in *Mohicans* texts demonstrating generic and narrative similarities and then pointing out telling differences. I believe that the core of my observations may persuade that the observable changes from *The Last of the Mohicans* to *Last of the Mohicans* symbolize a specific historical movement in the Western genre, and they reflect, in the emergence of the Borderline Narrative, a change in the way American culture holds in collective memory the workings of history. In the following chapter, I will discuss how allegiance works in determining interpretive response.

### Textualites

Both texts begin by setting their stories in the wilderness of colonial Upstate New York during “The French and Indian War of 1757” (both the original edition of the book and the movie offer this as a subtitle), and both refer to the actual historical characters of French General Montcalm, British General Webb, and both are loosely based on actual historical events — including the siege of Fort William Henry, the assault on the evacuating troops, and the rescue of Daniel Boone’s daughters; both texts attempt to replicate some actual natural features of Upstate New York<sup>32</sup> (Slotkin xx). Nevertheless, as critics since the novel’s publication have been quick to note, and despite Cooper’s elaborate poses as an Indian authority in his Preface and Introduction, the book is largely fictional, and many of its fictionalities are reproduced in *Last of the Mohicans*. The film preserves in name all the main characters except David and is a melodramatically structured *Ubi Sunt* or pursuit plot with many of the same events but stripped of most of the books more fanciful material. What is important to note is that both texts suggest by their resemblances to history that they *are* history, and indeed, the creators of both texts made conscious attempts at authentic period depictions of both Indian and white cultures, of dress, lodging, food, religion, warfare, and technology. Furthermore as I indicated in Section One, because such narratives present our minds with recognizable character schemas — that is, animated and feeling names and faces — and their story-worlds are detailed in description “authentically” as a specific historical period, they will tend to be held in mind *more emphatically* than actual history — a point I will return to in the next chapter — which, except for a few “great men,” is performed by characters for whom we only have the first degree of recognition. In considering how these texts schematize a

vision of events in the past, however, we must observe that the needs of storytelling — and indeed, of telling a popular story in which “good” will triumph over “evil” — consistently trump any attempt at accurate historical portrayal (to the extent that such accuracy is possible). Yet, it is the consequences of this confusion that I will be interrogating by examining the contrast in textual alignments.

Before examining the play of similarity and difference between the alignments of the texts, I want to generally review the principle differences and similarities in the respective narrative experiences. Given the media, certain aspects of difference are entirely predictable: the film version is perceptually rich while the novel is conceptually rich; as structures, the film is focused and efficient while the novel — as Mark Twain and a host of other critics have complained about Cooper’s work generally — is so fanciful imaginatively that the story-world is often a very imperfect match with the actualities of either the American woodland or with the perceptual abilities or logical behaviors of living people.<sup>33</sup> Regarding the respective story-worlds, the most obvious and significant differences are in the characters of the protagonists and in the causality of events, which I will discuss in more detail as a functions of alignment. Nevertheless, the texts are strongly linked in their thematic organizations. Both are Westerns, set in a disputed “frontier area,” in which the generic plot problem of white versus Native American culture is nuanced by two courtship subplots. In both plots, Cora and Alice are simultaneously the love objects and the material goals that protagonists and antagonists fight over. Both texts are “American” in that they are set in the colonial U.S., and they conspicuously valorize — in different ways — the “democratic and self-reliant” settlers.

And like most Westerns, both depict the natural features of, to white eyes, an “unsettled” land and the sublime vastness of the wild world.

### **Alignments in the Literary Text**

Although the texts share a good deal generally, their specific differences are marked. The novel is principally aligned with Duncan while the film aligns with Nathaniel/Hawk-eye. In the structure of these main character alignments and in the presentation of secondary alignments, we can discern differences between the texts’ implicit historical understandings and in those critical differences, we trace the emergence of the Borderline Narrative from the Western.

In the novel, the third-person narrative attaches tenaciously to Duncan after his introduction, and the narration is semi-omniscient inasmuch as it provides subjective access to only his inner thoughts in any complexity. A prime example is when Duncan has infiltrated the Huron village:

Duncan found it difficult to assume the necessary appearance of unconcern, as he brushed the dark and powerful frames of the savages who thronged its threshold [...]. His blood curdled when he found himself in absolute contact with such fierce and implacable enemies; but he so far mastered his feelings, as to pursue his way into the centre of the lodge, with an exterior that did not betray the weakness. (233)

Add to this that Duncan is consistently slanted in idealized terms like “the handsome, open, and manly brow of Heyward” and the text’s prime alignment is clear enough (23). If my previous point about the importance of recognizing emotion as a main factor in

alignment is taken, this semi-omniscient access to both Duncan's inner life as well as to his handsome and emoting exterior amounts to a consistent alignment with Duncan's feelings and thereby with his narrative logic.

This is further illustrated by the way the other characters' emotions are figured in a gradual regress from Duncan. While Duncan's subjective access will go as deep as to tell us when his blood curdles at the touch of red flesh, other characters' subjectivities are portrayed only in their observable exteriorities and dialogue. The white characters Hawk-eye, Alice, and Cora are detailed in terms of proximity; although not presented literally from Duncan's point of view, we can see the slant works in terms that we learn to associate with Duncan's consciousness: if we are not seeing through Duncan's first-person exact eyes, we are seeing what his eyes would see were he the third-person. This is evident in the depictions that relate to the degree of closeness that Duncan feels to the young women respectively. The text introduces Alice and Cora in some detail, yet the terms are such that the younger Alice — the object of Duncan's desire — bodies forth quite differently than Cora:

One, and she was the most juvenile in her appearance, though both were young, permitted glimpses of her dazzling complexion, fair golden hair, and bright blue eyes, to be caught as she artlessly suffered the wind morning air to blow aside the green veil, which descended low from her beaver. The flush which still lingered above the pines in the western sky, was not more bright nor more delicate than the bloom on her cheek; nor was the animated smile she bestowed on the youth as she assisted her into the saddle.

In this description, the third-person is peeking, Duncan-like, under Alice's veil and admiring the color of her hair, eyes, and lingering over her skin. In contrast, it notes that Duncan only "appears" to attend equally on Cora, who is, except for her voluptuousness, hidden from view.

The other, who appeared to share equally in the attentions of the young officer, concealed her charms from the gaze of the soldiery with a care that seemed better fitted to the experience of four or five additional years. It could be seen, however, that her person, though moulded with the same exquisite proportions, of which none of the graces were lost by the travelling dress she wore, was rather fuller and more mature than that of her companion. (18-19)

In this description, we actually have moments of subjective access through the text's implication, but the main effects come from the slant. In this first presentation of the "girls," the slant is mobilizing the associative formations that will figure prominently in the story's conclusions and at the same time align us with Duncan's perceptions. As Duncan is paying special attention to Alice — the text is preparing for their eventual union — she is figured as contending with a wild green veil, like the wild natural forces of the green woodland itself, and also, her complexion is connected to the natural feature of the sky so that her marriage to Duncan will, in the slant of the text's associative organization, evoke a "correct" joining of the dominant white man over the yielding American wilderness. Duncan only "seems" to give the same attention to Cora, but this is just slant implying his gallantry is diplomatically distributed — as Duncan would imagine himself. In fact, we note that Cora's description lacks Alice's colorful — and

white racial — specifics, in part because Cora is better skilled at hiding under her costume — as a result of the habit of hiding her black ancestry — and in part because the slant lingers over her poorly concealed voluptuousness, which suggests that she is a more sexualized, less infantilized figure, and is a veiled reference to her mixed racial heritage.

While the initial description of Natty is the most detailed given of any character in the book and is full of emotional information, it is still entirely “symptomatic,” delivered from the third-person exterior point of view: any emotional freight is handled by logical associations about surface characteristics.

The frame of the white man, judging by such parts as were not concealed by his clothes, was like that of one who had known hardships and exertion from his earliest youth. His person, though muscular, was rather attenuated than full; but every nerve and muscle appeared strung and indurate, by unremitted exposure and toil. He wore a hunting shirt of forest-green, fringed with faded yellow, and a summer cap, of skins which had been shorn of their fur. He also bore a knife in a girdle of wampum, like that which confined the scanty garments of the Indian, but no tomahawk. His moccasins were ornamented after the gay fashion of the natives, while the only part of his under dress which appeared below the hunting-frock, was a pair of buckskin leggings, that laced at the thighs, and which were gartered above the knees, with the sinews of a deer. A pouch and horn completed his personal accoutrements, though a rifle of great length, [...] the most dangerous of all firearms, leaned against a neighboring sapling. The eye of the hunter, or scout, whichever he might

be, was small, quick, keen, and restless, roving while he spoke, as if in quest of game, or distrusting the sudden approach of some lurking enemy. Notwithstanding these symptoms of habitual suspicion, his countenance was not only without guile, but at the moment at which he is introduced, it was charged with an expression of sturdy honesty. (29-30)

Significantly, the slant, in a clever similarity troping, notices an absence: Hawk-eye is without a tomahawk, the weapon that defines Indian hand-to-hand combat, but also, it is a cross-shaped weapon, and as we soon learn, Hawk-eye's particular shibboleth is that he is a "man without a cross," protesting — too much — that he is "genuine white" in blood — although to the slant, clearly half-Indian from moccasins to wampum belt (31).

The actual Indian characters, however, are slanted at a further distance from Duncan and generally not rendered in such painstaking terms. Although James F. Beard has claimed that the "extraordinary assimilation of information displayed in [Cooper's] fiction suggests that his knowledge of Indians was full and authentic as discriminating study of the printed sources of his time allowed," and that, in addition, Cooper took the trouble to find and interview Indians (Slotkin), these claims don't then automatically create honest or deep portrayals of Native characters. In fact, while it is possible that many of the details of Native culture, warfare, and religion may be more accurate than other Western writers of the time, this is an example of how authorial information may cloud interpretive action. When we look at the slant's depictions, the demand of the Manichean plot for Anglo-American "good guys" trumps real respect for Native culture and the texts slant either good "children of the forest" — aligned with the Mohicans who are still less-than-humanly civilized — or bad Indian "monsters" who operate beyond

any ken of civilized man, as when Cora is protecting Alice: “Any other than a monster would have relented at such a generous act of devotion to the best and purest affection; but the breast of the Huron was a stranger to any sympathy” (112).

With the exception of Magua’s burning eyes (an image, incidentally, the film consistently renders eerily with key lights), no red character is ever detailed in the emotional proximity we gain in the descriptions of white characters. The most intimate description of a central Indian character other than the “evil” Magua, is when Uncas — heretofore consistently characterized from Platonic distance as “erect, agile, and faultless” (307) — antagonizes the Delaware assembled around Tamenund. In this brief instance, the slant actually brings us close to his breast; yet, it is only to show the exotic ornament of a tattoo, and it does so through the agency of a grotesquely drawn attacker, who like Cora’s Huron assailant, is less than fully human:

Throughout the whole of these trying moments, Uncas had alone preserved his serenity. He looked on the preparations with a steady eye, and when the tormentors came to seize him, he met them with a firm and upright attitude. One among them, if possible, more fierce and savage than his fellows, seized the hunting shirt of the young warrior, and at a single effort, tore it from his body [...] and prepared to lead [Uncas] to the stake. But, at that moment, when he appeared most to a stranger to the feelings of humanity, the purpose of the savage was arrested as suddenly, as if a supernatural agency had interposed in the behalf of Uncas. The eyeballs of the Delaware seems to start from their sockets; his mouth opened, and his whole form became frozen in an attitude of amazement. [...] His

companions crowded about him, in wonder, and every eye was, like his own, fastened intently on the figure of a small tortoise, beautifully tattooed on the breast of the prisoner, in bright blue tint. (309).

While, the admiration with which the slant shows us Uncas might suggest that he is an Indian-double for Duncan, we are brought close to him only occasionally and only because of his white-like nobility of which Duncan is the ultimate exemplar.

This structure of alignment helps us understand the historical context in which the novel was written because, although it depicts Indian-Uncas as clearly uncivilizable — implicit in his inability to learn to handle the sophisticated technology of firearms despite Hawk-eye’s best efforts (68) — the description of him as “noble” enraged *The Last of the Mohicans*’ contemporary critics like W. H. Gardiner, who, while generally positive toward the book, carped at “the altogether false and ideal view of the Indian character,” and in particular: “We should be glad to know in what tribe, or in what age of Indian history, such a civilized warrior as Uncas ever flourished” (quoted in Dekker and McWilliams 113). Especially grating on the prevailing racist beliefs of the time, was this particular slant on the young Mohican, when, after the successful ambush of Magua’s band, while Chingachgook is “flaying scalps already” (114):

[...] Uncas, denying his habits, *we had almost said his nature*, flew with instinctive delicacy, accompanied by Heyward to the assistance of the females. [...] Uncas stood, fresh and blood-stained from the combat, a calm and apparently, an unmoved looker-on, it is true, but with eyes that had already lost their fierceness, and were beaming with a sympathy, that

elevated him *far above the intelligence, and advanced him probably centuries before the practices of his nation.* (italics mine, 114-15)

However, if the text aligns with Uncas's feeling physicality and admires his nearly-white nobility, then it brings us almost as close to Magua's body to curdle our blood and to render an Indian more consistent with contemporary beliefs about Native peoples.

Although in a state of perfect repose, and apparently disregarding, with characteristic stoicism, the excitement and bustle around him, there was a sullen fierceness mingled with the quiet of the savage. [Magua ...] bore both the tomahawk and knife of his tribe; and yet his appearance was not altogether that of a warrior. On the contrary, there was an air of neglect about his person, like that which might have proceeded from great and recent exertion, which he had not yet found leisure to repair. The colours of the war-paint had blended in dark confusion about his fierce countenance, and rendered his swarthy lineaments still more savage and repulsive, than if art had attempted an effect, which had been thus produced by chance. His eye alone, which glistened like a fiery star amid lowering clouds, was to be seen in its state of native wildness. (18)

Embedded in this description is the consistent position of the slant that the Indians are “not altogether” human; they lack civilized “conscious” self-control. This lack of control — thereby lack of “reason” — is figured by similarity in Magua's unkempt paint and in good continuation by Uncas' inability to learn how to properly load and shoot his

carbine. In the novel, we see the dialectical process that John Cawelti has observed, in *The Six-Gun Mystique*,

The various seventeenth- and eighteenth-century views of the Indian with their complex dialectic between the Indian as devil and as noble savage quickly gave way to the a definition of the Indian way of life as an inferior and earlier stage in the development of civilizations. (145)

This notion of the Indian as an “inferior and earlier stage of development” is troped constantly with the wild landscape, either figured in Glenn’s Falls, where we “look at the perversity of the water! It falls by no rule at all [...]. The whole design of the river seems disconcerted” (55) or in the commentary of the slant on a wild land where “the arts of peace are unknown in this fatal region” (12). Embedded in the alignment is a rationale that will be prototypical for the Western genre: the narrative will act as a progressivist rationale of history that foregrounds the land as a cultural extension of disputing groups and valorizes the group that puts the land to the “most civilized” use.

### **Imperfect Interpellation**

What is critical to recognize about the alignment, however, is that, while the text generally aligns us with Duncan, and by good continuation, with a rationale for “civilizing” the savage land, this alignment is not a unequivocal interpellation of Duncan’s world-view. Narrative logic is fuzzy logic which is, in part, due to prolific and competitive activity of human associative capabilities, and in part, the result of seeing the world in terms of conflict; in the creation of worthy adversaries and credible conflicts, the text must tender competitive world-views which may have the unintended

consequence of offering allegiances that may not fit with a concise alignment “program.”

Two examples of such tenders are Hawk-eye and Magua.

In the most fanciful moments of the novel, as when Duncan decides that the right kind of body paint will disguise him well enough to infiltrate the Huron village “to rescue her I love,” Duncan is portrayed as exceptionally clever (and the Indians as unbelievably stupid), and Hawk-eye is the rustic skeptic enlisted to the “desperate adventure” by the civilized sophisticate (228). The slant supports Duncan’s cleverness in his bizarre disguise by rewarding him with success in the plot development, yet shows it as a collaboration of Duncan’s bravery and invention with Chingachgook’s “subtle arts” of Indian painting, and so we can, somewhat playfully, accept the alignment with Duncan (229). However, when Duncan and Hawk-eye are involved in more realistic and credible adventures, like the exchange of fire from canoes on Lake Champlain, the alignment with Duncan seems to slip.

“They are preparing for another shot,” said Heyward; “and as we are in line with them, it can scarcely fail.”

“Get you into the bottom of the canoe,” returned the scout, you and the colonel; it will be so much taken from the size of the mark.

Heyward smiled as he answered—

“It would be an ill example for the highest in rank to dodge while the warriors were under fire!”

“Lord! Lord! That is now a white man’s courage!” exclaimed the scout; “and like too many of his notions, not to be maintained by reason.

Do you think that the Sagamore, or Uncas, or even I, who am a man

without a cross, would deliberate about finding a covering a skirmage, when an open body would do no good! For what have the Frenchers reared up their Quebec, if fighting is always to be done in the clearings?"

"All that you say is very true, my friend," replied Heyward; "still our customs must prevent us from doing as you wish." (207)

What is unclear in the implicit worldview of the slant is how much to value either "reason" or "nobility." If the chief rationale for civilizing the savage wilderness is in the bringing of reason to the frontier, then we must detect a potential shift in the alignment from Duncan to Hawk-eye. Indeed, throughout the novel, the advantages of native styles of warfare over the European are reiterated. In this example, it may, conceivably have been Cooper's intention — under the influence Sir Walter Scott — to align with Duncan and Munro as somehow "noble" in their posturing as unintimidated (easy) targets, but the effect of the text itself is to show Hawk-eye's better sense in the Utilitarian terms the alignment has set forth as important in effectively civilizing the land.

Also contributing to this imperfect interpellation is the character of Magua, *Le Renard Subtile*. H. Daniel Peck has claimed that Magua — although thoroughly evil in the Manichean context of the story-world — is not simply a caricature Indian villain, but

[...] the most fully and successfully delineated character in *The Last of the Mohicans*, rising above stereotypes of the bad Indian. On the one hand, his motives and feelings are rendered with focused particularity (unlike those of the more abstracted and idealized Uncas). On the other hand, his stature, especially in the second half of the novel, rises to that of the legendary malignancy; he becomes "the Prince of Darkness." (10)

Unlike all the other characters who wage war mainly out of alliances based on tribal or cultural constructs, Magua has real psychological motivation for his hatred of Munro, for his desire to subjugate Cora, and for his guerilla resistance to white culture generally. He tells Cora

Magua was born a chief and a warrior among the red Hurons of the lakes; he saw the suns of twenty summers make the snows of twenty winters run off in streams, before he saw a pale-face; and he was happy! Then his Canada fathers came into the woods, and taught him to drink the fire-water, and he became a rascal. [...] Was it the fault of Le Renard that his head was not made of rock? Who gave him the fire-water? Who made him a villain? 'Twas the pale faces the people of your own color. (102)

We learn that for being drunk in an English settlement, Munro ordered Magua publically whipped. Cora remarks that it is justice to make a law and enforce it. But Magua, who on his own report had served Munro well even against his own tribe, wonders, “is it justice to make evil [by giving whiskey] and then punish it?” (103). Later, when Magua shows his humiliating scars to Montcalm — the latter remarks in sympathy: “This! — my son, has been sadly injured, here! Who has done this?” suggesting that the punishment was particularly brutal (170). Moreover, during his drunken period, Magua lost his wife — whom he wants the dark and voluptuous Cora to replace — and his status among his people. Although he shows an alcoholic’s propensity for blaming others for choices he has made; still, it seems clear that he was given liquor by manipulative whites who had a full understanding of its potent effects, and there is certain logic to his calculus of revenge.

As a worthy adversary, Magua demonstrates agility and prowess in warfare equal to the almost superhuman capabilities of Hawk-eye, Chingachgook, and Uncas, and ultimately, he is killed only because of two rash errors: first, he hesitates in killing Cora — suggesting some real affection for her, however unrequited — and then he misjudges a leap, like the nameless Indian hanging over the falls, he makes himself an easy target for Hawk-eye.

But what elevates Magua to the level of the Miltonian “Prince of Darkness,” is his Satan-like ability, not only to rationalize his own frustrations as other’s faults, but to recognize and use his own abilities to rally others to his side (284). Like Milton’s Prince, he frequently shows his skill at oratory and debate, and his perception of the Imperial European cultures is not without persuasive force even among today’s environmentalists:

The Spirit that made men coloured them differently [...]. Some he made with faces paler than the ermine of the forests: [...] dogs to their women and wolves to their slaves. [...] With his tongue, he stops the ears of the Indians; his heart teaches him to pay warriors to fight his battles, his cunning tells him how to get together the goods of he earth; and his arms enclose the land from the shores of the salt water, to the islands of the great lake. His gluttony makes him sick. God gave him enough, and yet he wants all. Such are pale-faces. (301)

Even to a nineteenth-century audience, there must have been some protoenvironmentalist justice to this complaint.

With these assessments of Hawk-eye and Magua then, we can see that the overall alignment of the text then, is not an entirely consistent interpellation of value, but a

presentation that, in its popular appeal, represents not just the beliefs and wishes of the mainstream culture of the time, but the dialectical tensions as well, a fuzzy narrative logic with, probably, unintended implications. Martin Barker and Roger Sabin comment that *The Last of the Mohicans*

[...] constitutes a founding myth, certainly, but a myth with ambiguities.

The book is in many ways a racist book, yet it incorporates a condemnation of racism. It raises the possibility of interracial sexual relations between two of its heroic characters, yet avoids consummation. It celebrates frontier qualities, yet it mourns the passing of the frontier [...]. Hawkeye himself is a splendid and moral figure, yet his is also a loner, he is capable of real violence, he is capable of explaining and justifying scalping by the Mohicans. All in all *Mohicans* is a truly ambivalent tale.

(29-30)

The net effects of narrative and its implicit alignments are not simple, but like narrative logic itself, they can be conflicted and create disruptions in the narratee for which the act of interpretation is sometimes an antidote. However, in attempting to describe the way in which a generic text operates as a cultural schema, I am attempting to pry apart the interpretive acts of alignment and allegiance and in that process locate the traces of historical difference. In this regard, *The Last of the Mohicans* is a prototype for the narrative logic and implicit values of certain Western genre texts.

### **Alignment on Film**

What is critical in revealing historical movement is to locate elements of both texts that are similar in some respects, yet have been changed in their reconceptualization for a historically different popular context. While the names are the nearly the same in both *Mohican* texts, while both are generic Westerns, and while both texts were among the most popular of their respective times, nevertheless the plots, characterizations, and implicit alignments reveal very different narrative logics. In this shift of logics, we will subsequently see a shift in the generic Western narrative, of which *The Last of the Mohicans* is the prototype and *Last of the Mohicans* is the emergent, Borderline version.

In terms of spatio-temporal attachment, the novel's third-person semi-omniscience is welded to Duncan except for a few moments of introduction and scene-setting in the first chapters (11-37) and later, briefly, for Magua's conversation with Montcalm (167-71). Duncan's subjectivity is the only one we know from the intimate point of view of his actual conscious awareness, and the textual alignment generally is almost certainly congruent to his narrative logic. In the film, however, Nathaniel is the central character generating somewhat different narrative effects that reflect the emergence of the Borderline Western from the general category of Westerns. Nathaniel, through close-ups and dialogue, is our main subjective access and is a similar construct to Duncan in the novel; he has the bulk of spatio-temporal attention and is shown in slant to be consistently handsome, valorous, astute, honorable, and apparently invincible. With the single exception of the sequence detailing Duncan's arrival in Albany, meeting with Cora, and departure for Fort William Henry, any screen time spent in spatio-temporal attachment to other characters is part of a cross-cutting scheme in which Nathaniel's plot

line is counter-pointed with other character actions. As an aligning figure, Nathaniel works very much like Duncan: he is a personification of the premier good in the world-view of the alignment, and the plot is organized around following his desires whether they be to assist the lost party to the fort, to win and love Cora, to relay intelligence to the colonials and to organize their desertion (an addition to the film's plot, not in the novel), or to help his "father" and "brother." The film's alignment consistently celebrates his emotional engagements in a way similar to the novel's interior view of Duncan; Nathaniel's face is clearly visible and screen centered in almost every scene in which he appears, even in tracking shots in the midst of battle; in addition, in a film that uses close-ups as a punctuation in almost every scene — unusual in action filming — Nathaniel is especially featured. Both of these techniques not only slant us with him, but they provide an intensified sense of subjective access so that, if we can't be "interior" to the degree that the novel can describe Duncan's thoughts, our intense attention on Nathaniel's face brings us about as close to inner being as we can get. In addition, because he is still the character of the savvy scout although now situated at the center of the slant's attention, Nathaniel also has the knowledge of wood-lore and guerilla warfare to win every argument and take charge of every crisis.

Despite the similarities in position in the alignment, however, as a subjectivity and implicit value system revealed in dialogue and action, Nathaniel is almost Duncan's dialectical opposite. In good dialectical fashion, however, his implicit world-view is not simply an "enlightened" twentieth-century cinematic riposte to the nineteenth-century novel, but the film's Nathaniel is an amalgam of traits and values which are rooted in the novel yet dialectically amplified and reconfigured in the film. Indeed, any historical

calculation is best evidenced not simply in the contrast of obvious differences, but in the complications such differences suggest in intertextual relationship.<sup>34</sup> So, although Nathaniel fills the role of central character that Duncan does in the novel, the most obvious first degree of character intertextuality is the contrasts between Natty Bumpo and Nathaniel Poe, with added contrasts between Nathaniel and the novel's Duncan offering another degree of relationship.

The most obvious contrast, of course, are their degrees of Indian identity. Throughout the novel, up to its final scene, Natty relentlessly insists that he is "without a cross," yet by fetishizing his "pride of color," he is really protesting too much and seems self-deluding in his repetitions (199). We see that he is figured as half-Indian in dress, speaks Indian tongues with non-Anglo Native animation, and in almost every way, is a cultural Mohican which is emphasized by the novel's ending (see below). For this reason, he could not be the ideological center of the 1826 popular Western story-world. In contrast, Nathaniel Poe, as a character construct for a twentieth-century audience, is not a resisting "red" man but he consciously claims the logic of his real circumstances; he holds the Mohicans as his people, Chingachgook as his father and Uncas as his brother. For a popular audience schooled in civil rights, in the value of diversity, and, while no longer feeling, as a nation, any red menace (either Native American or communist), also aware of the genocidal policies of the white Western expansion, such a characterization is immediately acceptable, even attractive.

The classic Western as I have defined it and as *The Last of the Mohicans* is a prototype, narratizes a justification for Anglo-American imperial expansion, but the *Borderline* narratizes the inherent hybridity of any authority in the disputed territory; this

conflict is born out in the contrasting dispositions of Natty and Nathaniel toward the British military. Where Natty has real affection and respect for the military — “though I do wear a hunting shirt, instead of a scarlet jacket”(38) — and easily allies himself with the English, Nathaniel is suspicious of uniformed authority and is many ways, a working class hero, angry with the exploitation of Indians and poor settlers alike and championing both groups at personal peril. At the settlers’ meeting, when urged by a British officer to fight “for King and country!” he retorts, “You do what you want with your own scalp” and subverts the recruiting by starting a game of lacrosse. Unlike Natty who is a self-conscious Anglo-American subject of the Crown, even as he tries to outdistance any settlement, Nathaniel is not “subject to much at all,” yet he befriends the settlers whom he lauds:

After seven years indentured service in Virginia, they headed out, because the frontier is the only land available to poor people, and here they’re beholden to none, not living by another’s leave.

This attitude is reflected in one of the few outright additions the film makes to the novel’s plot: Nathaniel organizes the settler militia to disobey Munro and to desert in order protect their families, an event unthinkable in the novel’s alignment. In this regard, the film contrasts the novel’s version of nobility with its version of Duncan, who in “noble” alliance with his king, willfully misconstrues the slaughter at the cabin to give Munro a reason for refusing the militia their right to defend their homes as promised by Webb. In the novel, nobility is a construct of civilization, a key determinate of the right to rule, and necessary despite its frontier risks; in the film, however, this “right to rule” associated with British “noble” aristocracy is perverted. Munro in an apparent tacit

conspiracy with Duncan, claims that frontier realities “are subordinate to the interests of the Crown.” As a circumstance, the unspoken agreement between Duncan and Munro to frustrate the militia is an odd parallel to Duncan and Munro nobly agreeing to stand in the canoe against the Hurons’ rifles. Both instances pose Imperial ideals against frontier realities, and while standing in a canoe under fire seems a dangerously stupid if boyish behavior, perhaps necessary for the “Standing-tall” Westerner, lying for the “civilizing” rule of king and country shows the real evil of Imperial “reason.”

Finally, in moving from *Western* to *Borderline*, the film uses Nathaniel’s growth in his relations with women and whites to narratize a new historical understanding. In the novel, although Natty does ultimately seem to accept the power of his Indian acculturation, he has no growth in his relations with women — indeed, he shows little growth as a character at all. He is a guarded misogynist in middle age whose only real passion seems to be in killing Mingoes; he concludes the novel joined forever with a like-minded character in a gesture that finally acknowledges his Indian acculturation, figuratively “married” to Chingachgook.<sup>35</sup> Regarding women, Nathaniel’s character trajectory begins as a melding of Natty and Duncan. In his first character definition, he is obviously like Natty, not just in his knowledge of wood lore, but in his misogynist colors: no mention is made of his finding a wife in the matchmaking conversation in the cabin, and he is almost as irritable as Magua when dealing with women’s concerns on the trail. Nathaniel takes on aspects of the novel’s Duncan inasmuch as he is a virile, often headstrong and ethnocentric young man. Yet, in the course of the film he grows substantially. His ethnocentrism proves more flexible than either Duncan’s or Natty’s. He begins the narrative as an Indian-centric racist and separatist: telling Cora

My father Chingachgook told me, do not try to understand [white people]. And do not try to make them understand you. That is because they are a breed apart, and make no sense.

But in the course of the narrative Nathaniel learns tolerance from and then comes to respect and then love Cora (who in turn, seems to model her growing toughness and willingness to work on his). This kind of acceptance of his double-construction is what distinguishes him as a Borderline hero.

This double-construction is most curiously evidenced in a final character change from novel to film. As quoted above, in the novel, Magua asserts:

The Spirit that made men coloured them differently [...]. Some he made with faces paler than the ermine of the forests: [...] dogs to their women and wolves to their slaves. [...] With his tongue, he stops the ears of the Indians; his heart teaches him to pay warriors to fight his battles, his cunning tells him how to get together the goods of the earth; and his arms enclose the land from the shores of the salt water, to the islands of the great lake. His gluttony makes him sick. God gave him enough, and yet he wants all. Such are pale-faces. (301)

In the film, however, Magua is transformed into a calculating capitalist and it is Nathaniel who inveighs against “white man’s greed.” In the film’s scene with the Sachem, Magua argues,

When the Hurons are stronger from their fear, we will make new terms of trade with the French. We will become traders as the whites. Take gold

land from the Abenaki, furs from the Osage, and the Fox. Trade for gold.

No less than the whites; as strong as the whites.

To this, Nathaniel replies:

Would Magua use the ways of les Francais and the Yengees? ... Would you? Would the Hurons make their Algonquin brothers foolish with brandy and steal their lands to sell them for gold to the white men?

Would Hurons have greed for more land than a man can use? Would Hurons fool Seneca into taking all the furs of all animals in the forest for beads and strong whiskey? These are the ways of the Yengees and the Francais traders, their masters in Europe infected with the sickness of greed. Magua's heart is twisted. he would make himself into what has twisted him.

In this transmutation from novel to film, we see the most decisive change: Nathaniel, as a character construct, is actually a hybrid, a recombination of traits and beliefs taken from the novel's historical narratizations of Natty, Duncan, and Magua, and reorganized to align an entirely different and entirely dialectical narrative logic.

### The Narrative Logics of the Western

“Who comes?’ demanded the scout... — “Who comes hither, among the beasts and dangers of the wilderness?”

“Believers in religion, and friends to the law and to the king,” returned he who rode foremost.

— *The Last of the Mohicans* (36)

The Western generates periodic cultural interest when American identity is interrogated by contentious political processes such as the unification of the territories as states, hot wars, the Cold War, or the emergence of a more multicultural worldview as in response to civil rights inequities. As I discuss in the Introduction to Section Two, to reduce such audience interest to processes of either ritual behavior or of ideological interpellation — as Neale has pointed out above — is reductively programatic and obscures the dialectical and creative richness of narrative action. However, because narrative texts can figure more profoundly than fact in creating an understanding of selfhood or history, we are obliged to regard popular texts in their dialectical relationships with their audiences as indicators of systems of understanding that are especially significant to how their audiences think about themselves and their world(s). In this way, as we locate historical shifts between similar texts, we can detect shifting popular understandings about — if not actual history — at least the narrative logic of historical understanding.

Both *The Last of the Mohicans* and *Last of the Mohicans* are Westerns, and so as formalized schematic constructs, share some narrative-logical concerns; however, only

the latter is a Borderline Narrative. Noticing the way the Western has emerged historically, its defining characteristics, the issues it thematizes, and how it constructs alignments will serve as useful basis to seeing the effects of the Borderline. Also, focusing on the Western gives an opportunity to examine how cognitive tools and a schema approach can work with an established and historically significant genre.

As both Bordwell and Grodal observe, the primary or foreground figure in the Western in the spatial schema of “The West.” When using cognitive schema theory to organize the construction of the generic category, we focus first on a foreground or priming figure by which to organize the problem the genre is addressing; other theories have been confused in their developments of prime and subordinate significations. Yet, for the Western, clearly the most significant element is the imaginary space of the West and its many associative potentials. The first conflict in the Western territory, then, is Who will govern and by what rules? These generic questions also govern narratives seen in other cultures’s genres — the novels of Sir Walter Scott, Samurai films — but situating the story-space in the historical North American West (wherever the Indian/European frontier may be) inevitably complicates it with beliefs about American — or Canadian or Mexican — history, politics and culture. Within the conflicts over the rule of the territory, comes a host of problems other critics have thematized with the Western, like violence, masculinity, morality, and self-determination; however, they are subsumed under the framing territorial concerns. Priming the argument with this specificity gives the genre a specific but inclusive — proximus — parameter by which we can generically compare many non-obvious Western narratives that may not be centered on a Westerner (cowboy) character nor set in the American West of the 1870s-

1900s, nor rely on violence as the ultimate arbiter of right. Examples of non-obvious Western texts include the novel *Tracks* the films *Black Robe*, *Lone Star*, *The Scarlet Letter*, or even the animated film *Pocahontas* (Mike Gabriel and Eric Goldberg, 1995).

The notion of the West-as-frontier emerges as a defining schematic figure from a specific historical and geographical circumstance: North America is to the west of Europe; therefore, European movement in Canada and the United States was inevitably westward. As a fictional form, the Western first emerged to narratize and even popularize the actual Western expansion of Euro-American culture, and later the genre served to narratize received notions of history as well as to symbolize, through similarity, issues of nationhood. The first Westerns were Indian Captivity Narratives — based on actual accounts — which were later commercially, and very popularly, fictionalized in Cooper’s Leatherstocking tales which in their structure, characters, and regard for the western space offer us the prototypical features that define the genre. Using this two-culture “frontier” as a spatial schema, areas like Ontario (*Black Robe*), coastal Massachusetts (Joffè’s *The Scarlet Letter*), Virginia (*Pocahontas*), and upstate New York (both *Mohicans*) are at different times on the same Western edge of European “civilization” that will move inevitably westward to include the Missouri Breaks, Dodge City, Texas, Tombstone, Monument Valley, and California. While the woodland areas are not the wide open spaces of the “horse opera” narratives, they still share significant spatial characteristics with other Westerns: they are depicted in their respective story-worlds as vast, sparsely populated, and full of dramatic natural features as well as potentially fatal natural dangers; from the Eurocentric view of most non-Borderline Westerns, they appear wild and untamed lands.

The spatial frontier schema is, however, a feature that the Western shares with the Borderline. In both genres, the story-space is an area that is the site of hegemonic contention. In the non-Borderline Westerns, and prototypically as we have seen in the novel, *The Last of the Mohicans*, this contention has been characterized as a battle between Eurocentric “civilization” and “savagery” — with both red Indians and “bad guy” white men representing the “savage” depending on the narrative (*High Noon*, directed by Fred Zinneman, 1952, and Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence*, 1962, are examples of “bad guy” Westerns). In the Eurocentric moralizing frame, we see a narrative logic in the character alignments that builds consistency with the imperial rationale of Manifest Destiny; indeed, the manifest content of most Westerns, and clearly the alignment of *The Last of the Mohicans*, endorsed a vision of the white Europeans — as a result of victory in a Manichean plot — bringing “civilization” to “the heathen” and/or the rule of law to a wild and lawless territory. Historically, it is due to audience consistency-building by similarity that this Manichean frame aligned with “nationbuilding” periods of conflict: the period of actual Western settlement, Civil War reconstruction, and various wartimes including the Cold War.

### **Hybridity in the Narrative Logic of the Borderline**

I am Nathaniel of the Yengeese, adopted son of Chingachgook of the Mohican people.

— *Last of the Mohicans*

Near the end of the Cold War, however, as the American cultural context changed, the narratizing value of the Western also changed. Beginning with the onset of the Civil Rights movement which developed into an awareness of cultural interpenetrations, and then spurred by the fall of Soviet Communism and the elimination of a long-time Manichean “red” adversary in the cultural consciousness, new historical contingencies needed to be narratized. Therefore, a freedom to play within the national understanding of historical conflicts and historical influence emerged in the novelty-seeking of popular narratives. During this period and extending to the present, we see the beginnings of historical revisionism both in the culture at large — emergent multiculturalism — and in the Western genre — the Borderline. In the Western, at least in the narratives in which red and white civilizations compete, popular audiences now accept images of white Europeans as ruthless, greedy, incompetent, arrogant, and even delusional and images of Native Americans as warlike when need be, but living in a state of sophisticated civilization and in equilibrium with the environment. These narratives are first significant with John Ford last film *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964)<sup>36</sup> and include such white-man-as-Indian texts as *Dances with Wolves* (Kevin Costner, 1990), and *Little Big Man*, both novel (John Berger, 1964) and film (Arthur Penn, 1970). These texts are Borderline Narratives and the progenitors of Mann’s *Last of the Mohicans*. In their story-spaces, the eventual pre-eminence of Anglo-white culture is not narratized as a “civilizing” good — as it was in eras when white-centric patriarchal culture was both ascendant and menaced in some way — but is critiqued by alignment with culturally hybrid white-Indian characters.

Subsumed under the prime problem of the disputed cultural space which is the contextual organizer in both Western and Borderline Narratives are other key generic elements which we can use to correlate the *Mohican* texts: the Westerner and the double-constructed main character; conflict and crisis in the structure of the plot; and cultural slant in stylistic devices.

The Westerner is the central figure and a personification for the “civilization” that will in the narrative logic of the text “naturally” predominate in the disputed territory. In the traditional Westerns, this “natural predominance” is figured in the Westerner’s survival of the final conflict that inevitably pits the forces of the text’s implicit “good” — as aligned with the Westerner — against those of “evil” savages and lawless whites. This conflict demonstrate the Westerner’s skills — and by good continuation, his civilization/discipline — to be superior. *The Last of the Mohicans*, in its prototyping beginnings has a double Westerner in Natty and Duncan. Later texts will consolidate their traits into one character; however, through the prevailing narrative logic of alignment, Duncan is the bringer of “higher values” to the wilderness<sup>37</sup>: the plot ultimately hinges on Duncan’s “sophisticated” ruse to put the successful rescue in play and drive the action to conclusion. The alignment with Anglo-American civilization is represented most purely in Duncan, and this is born out in the image of the conclusion in which Chingachgook laments the erasure of his people and their ways making the clear implication that Duncan and Alice’s children will inherit and “civilize” the wild land.

In the film, Nathaniel Poe, represents a hybrid merging of qualities and logics of Natty, Duncan, and Magua in a Borderline persona. Where the novel concludes with the symbolic marriage of Natty and Chingachgook representing the infertility and ultimate

demise of Indian culture while the marriage of noble Duncan and child-woman Alice suggests the ascendancy of white culture, the film's final figure is a hybrid marriage *a trois*. As Chingachgook pronounces himself "the last of the Mohicans," he is joined in ceremony and in frame by Nathaniel and Cora. The grouping of these characters shows Nathaniel and Chingachgook both participating in the Indian ritual, yet all three of experiencing the same facial emotions. Then, in the last shots, the slant concentrates on Nathaniel and Cora, adding a dimension of passionate love in the midst of pain as they embrace. The implication of this alignment is that, although the actual Mohicans will die out, just as most Indians were genocidally eradicated, yet Mohican ethnicity will live on in an American hybrid of culture. This is figured in Nathaniel as Chingachgook's "adopted son" and in his permanent — and given the scene on the ramparts of William Henry, implicitly fertile — love-bond with the hearty, adaptable, and dark Cora. Indeed, unlike the racial alignment of the novel's fertile couple which joins the whitest characters, Duncan and blond, blue-eyed Alice, the final shots emphasize Nathaniel's Indian profile, and the reddish light blends all the skin tones so that they are all Indian featured: red-skinned, brown-eyed with shiny, flowing black hair. As a Westerner and as a double structured Borderline hero, Nathaniel signals the merger of white and Indian civilizations in dialectical relationship with the prototype mythos first set out in the novel. While this is unarguably still a white-centric narrative alignment; nevertheless, it represents an evolved historical understanding of Indian wars and the debt of whites to Indian civilization.

The Western is, as I have said, typically a Manichean plot that is resolved by violence; the dispute that precipitates the plot conflicts is almost always a simple issue of

raw control: who will control the territory and/or the law? A common extension of the territory, by good continuation, is a plot issue of a struggle to control an object or person within the territory. The novel uses this kind of good continuation to develop focus as the characters range through the frontier. At first the disputed territory is up-state New York which is then figured by Fort William Henry, which is then even more specifically localized to both Munro women and is finally fixed on Cora. As I have discussed them, all the character goals and values of the novel are elucidated in this series of “Western” disputations — the English and Mohicans are allied against the French and Huron and all the main plot conflicts precipitate from this conflict.

The *Borderline*, however, doesn't necessarily rely on the clear-cut Manichean strife for its central thematic development, but focuses on more closely on culture-specific understanding; the dispute that precipitates character goals, but is signified in the interpretation of a particular signal — which may be a territory or a person, but it may also include rituals, writings, diseases, totems, The Wall of Fame, or any other culturally determinable signification. This conflict serves to crystalize cultural differences and is an opportunity for characters to offer specific narrative logics regarding the value or meaning of the sign. In the case of *Last of the Mohicans*, the interpretive dispute that brings conflicting narrative logics to the surface — and begins a negotiation of these logics in the main characters — is the treatment of the slaughtered settlers on the Winthrop homestead. To the horror of Duncan, Cora, and Alice, Nathaniel and the Mohicans insist that the corpses “stay as they lay,” knowing that to disturb them in any way — especially by providing the civilized “Christian burial” the English characters insist on — would be to signal their presence to hostiles and perhaps seal their doom.

This dispute alerts the three English characters to the *realpolitik* narrative logic of the frontier and catalyzes their adjustment — a hybridization of values — to American realities in a way the novel never compasses. No such dispute takes place in the novel, and as I have argued, the slant seems to endorse Duncan’s childish ideas of “nobility.” In contrast, the pragmatic understanding of the frontier that this dispute represents through similarity, comes to effect character change in all the principle characters. In the film’s concluding scenes, Duncan uses this rationale to sacrifice himself for Cora and Nathaniel. This conflict also begins the dramatic change in Cora: she goes from willful English aristocrat to hardworking pioneer and worthy mate to Nathaniel. Because the dispute piques her curiosity about Nathaniel and leads to their conversation in the burial ground under the stars. From this conversation, Cora not only comes to lust for and then to love Nathaniel, but in a mirroring action, he shifts from his Indian ethnocentrism to a conscious understanding of his own hybridity; he first realizes that his Native mythic understanding of night sky includes his white parents, and then having shared this feeling with Cora, he comes to regard her more closely; as she changes, braving their passage and then working in the surgery, he begins to admire then to love her. Although in the dispute over the signal, the Indian values prevail, yet in the course of the narrative, the effect of the dispute is to hybridize the principle characters, and by the film’s alignments, we may narratize this hybridity.

In both the Western and the Borderline, the main character undergoes a personal crisis that leads to the conclusion of the narrative. In the Western, like *The Last of the Mohicans*, this crisis typically leads to a choice which leads to violence; the violent conflict then finally settles the chain of conflicts emanating from the initial dispute and

establishes law and control of the territory. In this choice-to-violence, the hero (in the prototype novel, the Duncan-Natty composite) is proven to be the true champion (Natty using English firearm technology) and his value system (Duncan, using civilized subterfuge) is vindicated, and at the same time the territory is cleansed of the “savage” influence. While Borderline Westerns often have violent confrontations in their ultimate or penultimate events, the crises for Borderline heroes which will, in my earlier terms, “suggest a fundamental change in their cultural understanding and modification of their narrative logic and, consequently, to their identity narrative” may not have to do with a violence, but with choosing to make a personal sacrifice by which they give up an aspect of their dual acculturation. Where the traditional Westerners representing a preordained value superiority, like Duncan and Natty, undergo little basic character growth in the course of the narrative action — their crisis forces them to rely on already established “inner resources” of value — the Borderline hero is double-constructed and must, in the course of the plot, grow to first an awareness, then to a better personal understanding of his double set of values. In the case of Nathaniel, his crises is precipitated when Magua takes Cora, Alice, and Duncan to the Sachem as a tribute. Rather than resort to subterfuge or attack — the strategies in the novel — Nathaniel chooses to openly enter the Huron village, to walk the gauntlet, and to offer his life in exchange for theirs. This represents a final step in his hybrid understanding of himself as he is transformed from a vaguely misogynist, Indian-supremacist, suspicious of all manner of white civilization and very careful with his own scalp to a man willing to sacrifice his life principally for a white woman and for her sister and her friend as well. In the violence that ultimately ensues, instead of pitting “good” and “bad” Indian nations against each other as the novel

does, the film pits the renegade Magua — so “twisted” by white-man’s culture that he execrates the Sachem as he leaves the village — against the true-Indian Mohicans and their white ally. Unlike the classic Western where as a result of the main character’s crisis, “civilized” right inevitably triumphs, the film offers a Pyrrhic victory as its penultimate event: the Mohican winner’s value system is seemingly determined to fade while the Magua’s adopted white values will become the predominant form; although these implications are modified — as I have discussed — in the final scene.

Finally, while the classic Western is slanted to narratize the values of white civilization, the *Borderline* slant offers other legitimate points of view. However much the overall spatio-temporal alignment may seem to fix on one character — in this case Nathaniel— the text still aligns with more than one cultural position — in this case showing Magua, the Sachem, Montcalm, and even Cora as “logical” in ways not exactly congruent to Nathaniel. In the novel’s “imperfect interpellations,” it consistently narratize an Anglo-American worldview, however imperfectly. In the film, however, as Diane Price Herndl comments, in “The Sentimental Gaze in *The Last of the Mohicans*,” “Magua is given a new and more understandable reason for his hatred of Munro” so that, despite his viciousness, he has even better psychological grounding than the novel’s Prince of Darkness (266). In addition, the Sachem’s deliberations are given a legitimacy by the slant’s regard for the character of the Sachem. Shot from below, clearly respected and instantly obeyed, yet making acting choices to show a sense deliberate fairness, the Sachem’s character — although advocating values that permit torture and slavery — has a *gravitas* that exceeds the novel’s condescending regard for the dilapidated Tamenund and that legitimizes his authority and judgements. Furthermore, unlike Tamenund in the

novel, his authority isn't undercut by a trick revelation — Uncas' tattoo — and, while the Sachem is hostile to the English, yet he isn't constructed as a senile savage; he has his logic and is operating in an organized, civilized fashion. Finally, the film's Montcalm, particularly as he contrasts Webb and Munro, is presented as a reasonable warrior. His relationship with Magua is direct and honest unlike the British relationship with their Indian allies, and he is utterly convincing and rational when he begs Munro to surrender. Unlike the novel, where the French troops, "the armed columns of the Christian King stood fast" during the Indian slaughter of the evacuating English, which made "an immovable blot on the, otherwise, fair escutcheon of their leader," the film's Montcalm candidly worries with Magua that he will fight Munro again; a fear we know, having been privy to Munro's rationalizations about Nathaniel and the militia and the "interests of the crown," may be a very accurate estimation. While, in the structure of the plot, the alignment doesn't relieve these characters from their status as "enemies," yet it presents them as rational, respectable and potentially viable alternatives were they outside the violent constraints of the action. Finally, in her relationship with Duncan and in her debates with her father, Cora represents an English sense of honesty and fair play which differs subtly from Nathaniel inasmuch as she clearly regards Indians and whites as equals — not "breeds apart"; moreover, when Nathaniel and Chingachgook debate at Glenn's Falls, Cora is the final and unsentimental decision-maker. With her integrity and willingness to change, she offers more to Nathaniel than simple the woman-as-prize that Alice offers Duncan in the novel; she is a worthy partner, whose ideas and behaviors effect change in her partner.

Indeed, by the conclusion of the film, we have been aligned with various rationales and world-views effectively competing and, in the characters' activities, changing each other in the territory of the Borderline. In this hybrid alignment with characters, through good continuation, we understand that the West, as a territory, is in the process of hybridization. In his role as the Westerner, Nathaniel — apparently having delayed his departure for “Can-tuck-ee” — fully inhabits this socio-ethnic Borderline — in his love both for his “father,” Chingachgook, and for English Cora, and in the couples implicit progeneration — a figure for America-to-come — is his Mohican upbringing, his American individuality, and his democratic English wife.

This hybrid alignment acts as an historical adjustment and revisionist acknowledgment on a deep associative level that the Anglo-American culture which came to dominate the country would simply not have been possible without the Indian cultural contribution. Moreover, as he grows into his hybridity during the course of the action, Nathaniel, as the best of Indian and Anglo-American traditions, is a determinedly working class hero. We can see in their narrative logics, the marriage of Nathaniel and Cora as a rejection of unexamined elitism. In the context of the story-world, this is figured in the corruption of the inflexibly imperial, “King and Country” characters, but by similarity, this offers a figurative response to a late twentieth-century capitalist America which has, like Magua in his argument to the Sachem, learned to fetishize wealth and power, and in particular the power to subjugate others for profit. The cultural hybridity that Nathaniel presents in this regard, is evidenced in his argument with Magua, in which he asserts the shared Native and Populist understanding that natural wealth is communally held, just as work, power (and by inference remuneration) should be scaled

for everyone's survival. In this respect, the text is novelty-seeking, and in its similarity relationship to contemporary culture, is itself a dialectical hybrid, a memory schema for revisioned history, and then extrapolating that vision, acting as a predictive schema, a wish for the future.

**Chapter 5:**

**Reception at the Borderline: The New Puritans and Interpreting *The Scarlet Letter***

Metaphor is more powerful than fact.

— Paul de Mann

Actually I do not think that there are any wrong reasons for liking a statue or a picture [...]. There are [however,] wrong reasons for disliking a work of art.

— E. H. Gombrich

More people dislike westerns or musicals because such film genres outrage their inherited and unexamined sense of what art *should* be than because the films are offensive in theme, characterization, style, or other artistic quality.

— Leo Braudy

**Chapter Abstract**

In the previous chapter, I argued that mobilizing the generic schema of the Borderline emerges in late twentieth-century narratives and offers a different way for schematizing — comprehending and interpreting — actual history. In this chapter, I will

use the final strategy of the Structure of Sympathy — allegiance — to consider the way that the remembered experience of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novel of *The Scarlet Letter* and its peculiar alignments as a narrative — which have been recalled as actual history — have affected the reception of Roland Joffè’s recent adaptation. Against this reception, I will contrast a Borderline strategy and outline how the former strategy effects resistance to hybridity while the latter works to expedite it.

### **Allegiance**

The *process of allegiance* may be an activity that is for most spectators entirely preconscious, yet it is our experienced allegiances to texts — our interpretive assessments about the characters as moral constructs — which most often determine interpretive response. When we actively perceive a text by inferential play with its signals, we construct consistent characters bound by implicit story-world rules. In this narrative play, we compare the characters’ narrative logics to our own values; we then develop a range of allegiances (or antipathies) to the characters, to their explicit or inferred goals, to their lives and loves based largely on simple similarity: do they play by our rules? — and as Smith observes, “our rules” can apply to aesthetic judgements about their physical attributes as well as behaviors (191-3). If, in conciliating a character schema with our lived experiences and with our narrative logic we imagine a strong similarity, we then feel an allegiance: we want our characters to achieve their goals. If, however, we infer an “immorality” to their motivations, we may feel antipathy to them. Simply put, our moral sensibilities are aroused by our inferences, and moral sensibility is the personal expression of narrative-logic; when we experience emotional responses to a

text, we do it through the workings of our “logic” about what is right, proper, fair, or appropriate for a particular character (Section One, 106).

Because this experience is preconsciously constructed, we may feel that such allegiances are inextricably part of the experience of a particular text. However, as I will shortly demonstrate, it seems possible that allegiances may be dependant almost entirely on factors *exterior* to the text itself, and it is possible that by retrospectively mobilizing other schema relationships, even after experiencing initial allegiant sensations, we may — by bringing preconscious operations to consciousness — then modify our initial impressions of texts. To demonstrate this, I will review the overwhelmingly negative reception of Roland Joffè’s 1995 film, *The Scarlet Letter*, for a register of the implicit expectations and resultant allegiances in generating the critical response. These expectations and allegiances form specific patterns of disapproval of the film which are primed by a narrative-logical assumption about adaptation that then branches into other experiences of judgement. I will compare these allegiant responses to actual textual information from film and novel and to historical fact to demonstrate how much of the narrative and its clear historical implications went unrecognized in the highly prejudiced cognition of the cultural moment. Finally, I will argue that, in reconsidering allegiance formation, mobilizing more conscious interpretive strategies, including the Western and the Borderline, might rehabilitate this much execrated text.

### Reception as Allegiance

One reason to use Joffè's *The Scarlet Letter* as a case study in reception as allegiance is the emotional tenor of almost all of the criticism.<sup>38</sup> In his review of the critical response to the film, "Bad Movie/Worse History: The 1995 Unmaking of *The Scarlet Letter*," Historian Bruce Daniels observed that reviewers "more than hated it, they despised it. Perhaps no movie was ever more widely and negatively reviewed. [...] Critics of all stripes absolutely reviled the movie" (2). In this particular regard, Daniels is absolutely right. The rhetoric of reception was that of *jihad*. Both popular reviewers and academic critics alike sought — with only four exceptions — to keep the American public from the contaminations and blasphemies of the film; and they have framed their arguments in the terms of Hester's accusers in both book and film.<sup>39</sup>

Priming this overwhelming yet determinedly allegiant response, was a critical consensus about the appropriate imaginary relationship between novel and film. Embedded in the narrative logic of the reviews were a series of related but unexamined assumptions: that the novel was a repository of truth, of historical accuracy, of aesthetic integrity, and penned by a inspired author; therefore, because the perceived script-schema and story-world of the film were not the script and story-world of the novel, the film was deemed deviant, false to history, insulting to the novel, and a product of a corrupt Hollywood corporate culture. However, it was not enough to observe this; critics were, as Daniels notes, infuriated with the film (while deeply reverential of the novel).

What is particularly disturbing about this response is that critics were righteously unselfconscious and apparently so moved that they were unable to imagine or entertain any other possible responses to the text. This is important because, as the criticism of

*The Scarlet Letter* reveals, such precipitate allegiant reactions, while possibly fun to write, can be wrong historically, reveal simplistic associational logic, and betray the critic's fears and prejudices. Is it possible to divorce emotion from response? No. But it is possible to understand that when a text inspires a passionate fury instead of simply boredom or annoyance, that there are allegiant actions at work which may point more at the text's successes rather than its failures. Indeed, in order to work on our passions, texts must engage our allegiances on a deep level in a way that the simply mediocre is incapable of. In fact, in an ecological understanding of texts where the implications of narrative response are part of survival strategy, such reactionary belief and unexamined emotional responses are dangerous to the point of delusion, and for this reason, as a critical strategy, we should learn to regard such powerful emotional responses and the rhetoric of *jihad* as suspect, and as a corrective, we can attempt other critical strategies.

### **Reception *Jihad***

As we establish the allegiances of the critics, what is important to note is the emotional tone of disdain, anger, condescension for the details of the adaptation or for the inferred motives of its star and adapters or for the film industry generally. This invective will be in sharp contrast to the quasi-religious reverence for the "classic" novel; although the novel will be consistently misrepresented. Sounding unselfconsciously every bit like the angry authoritarian Puritans both novel and film seem to warn against, James Welsh stated the explicit position of most critics in no uncertain terms. To Welsh, Hollywood was a corrupter of classics, mindless, and insulting. According to "Classic Folly: *The Scarlet Letter*":

[...] Roland Joffè's foolishly updated though beautifully photographed version of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *the Scarlet Letter* offers an insult to literature of the highest order. Only an ignoramus would advise stuffy purists to "lighten up" when confronting this film. Anyone who really cares about literature will be upset when an important novel is corrupted beyond endurance and almost beyond recognition. (299)

In the more ironic responses in the popular press, mockery and sarcasm were the weapons of choice. "Who needs Hawthorne?" wondered Richard Corliss in *Time*; instead, he advised avoid the movie and stick to "best-seller [...] Cliffs Notes version." *The Los Angeles Times*' Kenneth Turan began:

Nathaniel Hawthorne probably thought he knew something about writing, and through the years not a few people have agreed with him. But when the makers of *The Scarlet Letter* looked over his celebrated novel, it was more in pity than in admiration.

Parenthetically, there are a few nagging facts around Turan's critical assertion; in particular, that fact that Hawthorne, in his letters, explicitly worried about what he *didn't* know about writing as he desperately labored to craft a best seller. But, Turan's general point was also made by David Ansen in *Newsweek*, when he marveled, tongue firmly in cheek, "You may be amazed, watching *The Scarlet Letter*, just how little you remember of that American classic they forced you to read in high school" (87). Although Ansen has the expectation that the film should replicate the text, it's worth noting how unpleasant an experience the "timeless classic" was to at least Ansen and his classmates.

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, Liam Lacy for *The Globe and Mail* began by mocking the film's modifications in the novel's grim ending,

Film critic GOOD NEWS. The mystery concerning the meaning of the scarlet "A" stitched into the bosom of Hester Prynne's dress has been solved. Not "Adultery," as you might have been taught. No, apparently, it stands for ... "Algonquin Indians," who arrive like the cavalry, in the penultimate scene of the movie, to save Hester and her beau, the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, from the Puritan hordes who are about to string them up.

Taking the tack of reveling in the novel's greatness — while, as I will show, not really understanding the novel very well — Bruce Daniels began "Bad Movie/Worse History: The 1995 Unmaking of *The Scarlet Letter*," by conjuring the master thinkers of the past: "Henry James said it first in 1879 and critics ever after have echoed the judgement. [...] *The Scarlet Letter* is, par excellence, the classic American novel." Daniels then goes on to quote Melville's extravagant — and by every rational gauge, completely hyperbolic — comparison of his good friend Hawthorne with Shakespeare. Once established the novel's preeminence, however, he then devolved into mean-spirited assault, dismissing the "feminist recasting of the story" as "extraneous and gratuitous," and because "Indians played almost no role in Hawthorne's original" the movie's treatment of Indians is "silly" — specific points I will examine (4). Desson Howe was similarly awed by the novel, framing it in near religious terms of reverence and timelessness:

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, published in 1850, has endured as one of America's most revered novels. In this timeless call against moral hypocrisy, set in Puritanical New England, Hester Prynne and the Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale suffer a lifetime of misery when their secret, adulterous affair produces a child.

Never mind that Arthur's "lifetime" was cut rather short or that the "timeless call" would be completely meaningless were it rendered in another historical context, the book was a masterpiece, and the movie? Well...

Although nearly every review above mentioned that the movie warns that it is "FREELY ADAPTED FROM THE NOVEL BY NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE" in the opening credits, still nearly every critic believed that when the adaptation didn't conform to at least most of the particulars of the novel's script- and character-schema, it was therefore offensive, and this expectation primed their experience of the film and led, by narrative logic, to other conclusions as well.

The belief that changing the novel's plot was immoral, primed other moralizing pronouncements about the Hollywood apparatus, of which Demi Moore was especially singled out, not especially in her portrayal of Hester — less than a third of the reviews actually mention her acting and three of these were positive or mixed — but as public character schema.<sup>40</sup> In *Engaging Characters*, Smith notes that "the process by which we evaluate characters and respond to them emotionally is often framed or informed by our evaluation of the star personae of the stars who perform these characters" (193); this is born out in the responses to Moore whom the critics apparently had pre-constructed from her public persona as an overpaid, dopey, narcissist *cum* exhibitionist. In their attacks on

the star, no one was more *ad feminam* than *The New Yorker*'s Anthony Lane: "What is the point of Demi Moore? [...] [T]he sighting of her nudity has become a regular national event, like the launch of the space shuttle. If she completes a successful docking, so much the better" (114). Like Welsh, Susan Wloszczyna for *USA Today* also had a determined, if a bit ironic, Puritanical tone: "Demi Moore, scandal be thy name and prime qualification to play Hester Prynne, American lit's ultra adultress." John Harkness, writing in *Sight and Sound*, made a "witty" comparison that in his irritation, both stretched the truth and vilifies Moore as the *auteur* of the film, although Academy Award winner Roland Joffè was the director.

Think of an up-and-coming movie that features blood-spilling violence, sex, nudity, a rape scene, people dancing while wearing exotic headgear, and a female protagonist with a sneering contempt for her community. If you think *Showgirls*, you're right. If you think *The Scarlet Letter*, you're also right. Anyone who's read Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* may be confused by this, but the truth remains that Demi Moore looked at Hawthorne's dark meditation on the soul of Puritanism and conceived a potential bodice-ripper within. (The only point at which the novel and the film coincide occurs after more than an hour, when [Hester] Prynne is sentenced to wear the scarlet 'A', which is where the novel actually begins).

As the critics warmed to their condemnations, they relentlessly attacked Moore's body. Howe and Lacey both found something disturbingly contemporary about Moore's physique — "isometrically toned" and "powerful, toned, aerobicized 20<sup>th</sup>-century calf

muscles” respectively — as if, in the character’s life in the imaginary story-world of subsistence farming wouldn’t make for a strong — or God forbid — even shapely body. James Bowman, Welsh, and Wloszczyna were still carrying grudges after her controversial Annie Liebowitz photograph on the cover of *Vanity Fair*; Welsh referred to her as a “poster girl for pregnant nudity” and Wlosaczyna quipped that “*Vanity Fair*’s own Lady Godiva entices with her Stairmastered flesh”<sup>41</sup> (299). When recalling the film’s version of Hester’s sex life, Daniels complained that

This feisty feminist is naked a lot. She shows cleavage while working in the fields, she undresses slowly after a hard day’s work while the camera focuses on her breasts, she bathes more than anyone in the seventeenth-century, and, of course she makes wild crazy love with Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale on a grain pile. (3)

While this is not exactly accurate — depending on how one defines “a lot”<sup>42</sup>— still, Daniels builds on his gynophobic theme in “Hollywood’s Hester Prynne: The *Scarlet Letter* and Puritanism in the Movies.” In this venue, possibly unaware that Hester’s belly is a prosthesis, he makes a particularly telling analogy, musing that “Hollywood went too far when it reduced this great work of art to the size of Demi Moore’s breasts or swollen, pregnant belly, both of which we see in the film” (14).

And after attacks on her body, critics made inferences about Moore’s motives and her money. Lane insisted that Moore has an “urgent need to be arousing at all times”; while Jerry Adler somewhat nonsensically opined:

Playing a character with a secret would allow Moore to stretch her acting talents — but, since it was a secret that anyone who went to high school would already know, she wouldn't have to stretch them very much.

A final point that nettled critics and which was similarly entirely external to the depictions in the film was Moore's salary. Lacey mentioned Moore's "12-million-a-picture salary" which Daniels observed makes "Demi Moore [...] the highest paid actress in history" (Bad, 2), and *Rolling Stone* in "*The Scarlet Letter: Worse Than You Think*," extrapolated her wage to a vague criticism of her acting: "Moore plays Hester like an actress who gets more money than any other female star on the planet [...]." So it seems that factors that conspire to create extra-textual non-allegiance with *The Scarlet Letter* also included the character schema of the star and inferences about her motivations, body, previous history, salary, and talent, all of which might be subsumed under a more general category: "power" — or more precisely, the narrative logical associations that seem to bother the critics is watching the most powerful woman in Hollywood change a "timeless" American classic.

Adding fuel to critics' irritations was a narrative-logical construction of the very monster Hollywood. As *The Scarlet Letter* sinned, its offenses were understood, by good continuation, as the sins of the film industry writ large: liberal, hip, toadying, pretentious, but essentially ignorant. After Moore, the most visible factors of Hollywood transgressions were Roland Joffè and screenwriter Douglas Day Stewart. Barbara Shulgasser hit Joffè with, "A director who takes himself too seriously can end up inadvertently making movies which are just plain silly." Welsh, again making an

unironic connection between the novel's story-world and the film's reception, thought that Stewart specifically

should be pilloried for his vulgarization of the story, which reduces the impact of Roger Chillingworth, known in the movie only as Roger Pryne (so as not to confuse an audience of nonreaders?) [...] while turning Dimmesdale into a heroic manly figure. What Stewart does to Chillingworth is hardly less reprehensible than what Chillingworth did to Dimmesdale in the original story. (299)

Inveighing against Hollywood generally, Welsh lamented, "Maybe it's unrealistic to expect too much from Hollywood, which has corrupted many a classic in its mindless and endless quest for entertainment." In this "mindless quest," Welsh accused the film makers of cynically jumping on a Native American bandwagon: "*The Last of the Mohicans* [sic], another corrupted classic that exploited the Indian wars, grossed \$150 million. Hence warpaint is added to Hawthorne." Ansen more or less agreed, calling the picture "Roland Joffè's stupifyingly wrong-headed movie"; while more gently, Peter Stack for *The San Francisco Chronicle* said simply that Joffè

went overboard. [...] [H]e turned a profoundly intimate story of a woman's heroic silence and romantic torment, and a man's self-indulgent guilt — both caught in a prison of communal righteousness — into a plot that bulges at the seams.

Harkness spoke for several other critics posing as historians when he characterized the situation as:

The Puritan consciousness echoes down American history and Moore, Roland Joffè and [...] Day Stewart are busy fighting echoes. From the point of view of hip Hollywood liberalism. (sic)

Worse, Harkness concluded, is that the entire enterprise is the result of “the rampant human stupidity that seems to afflict Hollywood movies in direct proportion to the size of their budgets.”

Characterizing the reception then, we see the inter-related schematic constructs by which the film was damned; these constructs make up a “logic” yet, as a critical strategy, it had nothing whatever to do with the film-as-story *per se*. Critics were primarily angry that the film was not a fidelity adaptation of the novel, that is, that the plot, as a script schema, didn’t exactly fit their recollected script schema of the novel. Primed by this initial understanding and frustration, they saw the adaptation as transgressive and, in the logic of allegiance, immoral. Therefore, by good continuation, the main figure perceived in the adaptation — Moore — was selectively understood by her public persona — not her acting — as immoral. Then, by proximity and similarity, Hollywood was, as a character schema, immoral: a profit-driven entity, that will, in a cynical effort to make a buck, aggrandize a sex symbol and exploit pop ideology and nothing — not the novel and not literary history or actual history — is sacred.

Between their fantasized expectations and their conciliated perceptions of perverted story, perverse star, and profit-driven-and-superficial Hollywood, critics experienced an uncomfortable and finally irreconcilable cognitive dissonance, and the result was — as Daniels marveled — remarkable in its outright fury and its bitterly mocking condescension. This kind of fuzzy logic is often true of judgements by

impulsive narrative logic; several proximus schematic constructs, which may not have a strong relevance to each other, can work as an ensemble effect to generate a very specific emotion; an emotion which can then supplant other logical exercises. In their zeal to get the hated film on the scaffold, we can see that these critics played fast and loose with either the actual text or historical evidence. Instead of examining the text or checking history, they made convenient pronouncements they hoped would further legitimize their damnations. Some of these claims, as I observe above, were simply overdrawn pomposities. Ansen and Daniels, complained that the film has turned the novel into “a bodice-ripper,” referring to the romance novel genre (apparently unaware either that Hawthorne called his book “a romance” or that the film’s script- and character-schema actually invert various Bodice-ripper conventions). Adler managed to get it wrong on two counts calling it a “French and Indian War bodice-ripper” — the French and Indian War, of course, the context for the *Mohicans* texts is about 80 years after the movie’s 1670 context of King Philip’s War.

Such minor errors are not innocuous; they are at the symptomatic beginnings of deeper errors. The final step of narrative logic, according to these critics, was because that the film was product of “the rampant human stupidity that seems to afflict Hollywood movies,” because that it destroyed a classic novel, that finally, in getting the book wrong, the film then got history wrong. According to Stack, the film presents a “rewrite of history” because, as almost all the critics seem to think, Hawthorne’s story-world is an accurate depiction of the Bay Puritans. And this is a misconstruction that has serious narrative logical consequences.

### After Anger, Questions

Here, an anecdotal *mea culpa*, may be revealing. Even before the film's release, when I first read about Demi Moore's association with the project and its scripted ending, I was of much the same irritated and sardonic mind as the film's reviewers and academic critics. And I noticed this was generally "the buzz," even among the *hoi poloi*. At the Spring 1996 SAMLA Conference, not long after the film's release, I attended the Film and Literature panel, and I laughed long and loud as a presenter read from many of the reviews that I cite. He had shaped the quotations into a kind of logical narrative about how Hollywood — and in particular, Demi Moore — can't read, and this great failing had promoted a degenerate sensibility whereby a floozy was a minister of culture.

However Postmodern, a pastiche of mean-spirited quips and moralistic attacks on Moore are hardly the stuff of reasoned rhetoric or thoughtful critical analysis, and although I laughed along with the rest of the room, this merriment left a bitter taste in my mouth. A day or two later, it dawned on me that, against my own dearly held ethical formulations, I had constructed an opinion of a work that I had never seen. Based wholly on hearsay, prejudice, and on the rambunctious public persona of its leading actor, I hated and was ready to revile *The Scarlet Letter*. I began a personal inquiry into my reaction and determined that such were the invisible preconscious promptings of my own phallo-logocentric narrative logic that, in my kneejerk antipathy to the unseen film, I was dancing on sexist and elitist strings. I was quite chagrined when I finally saw the film and discovered that it was a gorgeously photographed woman's Western that executed, as the critics complained, a "feminist" response to, not only the Hawthorne text, but other conventions of American history. I came away actually moved by the film and

impressed with Joffè, Stewart, and Moore's willingness to challenge conventional rules about the presentation of a woman's character schema. In particular, they went boldly into areas of women's actual lives that, like the toilet or the double bed in 50s sit-coms, are taboo in American film character schemas. As I have worked on my understanding of the Borderline paradigm in this dissertation, it occurred to me that this Hester was problematic in Borderline ways and that here, at least, was a partial explanation of the volatile reception of the film. Borderline characters, after all, offer themselves to different allegiances and therefore are bound to stir emotional reactions.

Finally, as I have evolved into a cognivist, I now argue that this reception raises questions about how allegiance effects cognition and schematic understanding: I wonder how the angry allegiant response affected other critical schematics. If reviewers had mobilized other schema, would their experience of the film text have been richer? One critic who crystalized my suspicions was Peter Stack, who, after beginning mordantly about the film's infidelity to the novel (see above), abruptly switched tracks as he were thinking on paper just as I had reconsidered my knee-jerk responses:

But as long as you forget about Hawthorne, somehow *The Scarlet Letter* in its billowing 1995 form survives to become what commercial, star-driven movies are all about these days. And that's a good thing for audiences who don't mind a rewrite of history or literature as long as it works. This is a well-acted, beautiful movie. Moore, with her thin lips and cool yet reproachful eyes, was an inspired choice for Hester and plays her with a feminist flair [...]. Cinematographer, Alex Thompson, and production designer, Roy Walker, created a sumptuous tension between

the ordered English settlement and the woods that symbolized to the colonists the chaos they feared most. Oldman is the film's greatest asset. His portrayal of the sinning Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale [...] turns him into a hero of many shadings. Dimmesdale [is] self-centered and whiny in Hawthorne's hands. [...] Oldman's instinct to play him as a man knotted by love rather than theology results in one of the most beautifully tormented movie romancers this year.

While I don't agree completely with Stack — in fact, I think that the more accurately and unnostalgically you recall the actual novel, the more you will respect the film's literate attempts at Borderline intertextuality — still, he performed an important first step. Instead of holding to his priming adaptative expectations, he was able to shift his criteria and the film's narrative logic as a popular cultural construct. I will now consider the validity of this position, and then go on to consider real historical relationships and how the film might work as a Borderline Narrative.

### **Thinking About Adaptation**

In their haste to pillory the film, the critics were nearly unanimous in implying the film was dumb or irreverent because it didn't attempt to replicate the script schema of “a superior American classic.” They never considered this base theoretical assumption — an assumption that often drives response to cinematic adaptations of famous literary works. Although this view was relentlessly voiced by critics posturing as educated, theorists who study literary-to-film adaptation consider this a pedestrian understanding of

intertextual action. Brian McFarlane, in *Novel to Film*, calls this type of critique “Fidelity criticism” which

depends on the notion of the text as having and rendering up to the (intelligent) reader a simple correct ‘meaning’ which the filmmaker has either adhered to or in some sense violated or tampered with [...] . *[T]he fidelity approach seems a doomed enterprise and fidelity criticism unilluminating* (italics mine, 8-9).<sup>43</sup>

Why is the expectation of a fidelity adaptation “doomed”? First of all, the creative experiences of reading and spectating are so different. As Walter Benjamin suggests in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (and I have discussed in detail in Section One), the energetic concentration and cognitive exercise required for a mind to conjure a narrative from word-symbols over days and weeks of reading is an entirely different, more individualized effort than passively spectating a two-hours’ screened traffic of iconic images in a communally darkened theater. Reading requires a committed effort, and words, operating symbolically, must be cognitively energized to associate with the appropriate perceptions and concepts to which they refer. In this associative activity, words resonate with complex memory matrices in the creation of deeply personal imaginings. This transformation of symbolic text into a personally inflected story-world can make us cleave to our particular sense of the book when spectating the audio-visual icons of the film. The film may be more perceptually rich but we don’t experience the personal experiential webs of association that preconsciously inform our symbolic understanding when we imagine a written text. If we insist on the book’s story-world as the only schematic strategy for understanding the film, our

experience will be, by definition, comparatively impoverished. Furthermore, in *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, Christian Metz notes that the “basic formula” for a film narrative is a continuous telling and amounts to a certain “type of story” that is essentially and uniquely a “movie” and emphatically not a novel (45). Given this difference in process and “type of story,” any attempted fidelity adaptation, must be partially doomed from the start; the experience and the plot detail of the eight to twenty or more hours it takes to create a novel in a reader’s imagination can’t possibly be reproduced in two hours’ spectating of a feature film, despite the perceptual richness of the text. When critics weren’t upset with the transgressions of *Last of the Mohicans*, one reason may have been simply that they hadn’t read it, unlike *The Scarlet Letter*, which is required reading for almost every publically schooled American at a young and impressionable age.

In fact, McFarlane incisively observes that “The stress on fidelity to the original undervalues other aspects the film’s intertextuality” (21). So, let us, like Stack, hold the fidelity prejudice in brief abeyance as we begin to consider other ways of schematizing the film. Geoffrey Wagner, in *The Novel and the Cinema* concludes that there are three general adaptative approaches available to a film maker:

1. *transposition* or McFarlane’s “fidelity” — “in which a novel[’s plot and characters are] given directly on the screen with a minimum of apparent interference (222);
2. *commentary* — “where an original is taken and either purposefully or inadvertently altered in some respect [...], where there has been a different intention of the part of the film maker [...]” (224);

3. *analogy* — which is “a fairly considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art” (226).<sup>44</sup>

In these ways, an adaptation involves conscious choice about the manner to engage with the signs with its inspiring text. While the critics — both popular and academic — who operate out of a dogmatic belief in literary superiority over corrupt Hollywood are only capable of schematizing the film as a failed transposition or fidelity adaptation, in fact, the film text — “freely adapted” — is a very successful commentar text, written in considered and well educated response to the novel.

As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, Borderline film adaptations are, as constructs, commetary adaptations on the borderline between the implications of the novel and contemporary issues. What empowers this particular relationship is the way that audiences relate to story-worlds set in real historical contexts.

## **History**

In their allegiant sanctification of “Hawthorne” and condescension toward “Hollywood,” critics held to a narrative-logical series of assumptions. These “logical” associations apparently determined their vigorous and sometimes violent responses. In fact, this allegiant narrative logic enabled a misunderstanding of the novel’s actual history and in the misprision of the book-as-history, and finally led to misrepresentations of actual history.

The critical belief, for instance, that Hawthorne was operating out of some artistically inspired higher moral purpose, implied in several reviews but stated by Harkness as “wrestling with his moral inheritance, with the dark anger the Puritans

brought to North America” assumes that Hawthorne’s major conscious purpose was to write a timeless classic that would untie the knots in his soul and was not to simply to sell books while enjoying the writing and research process. Such an assumption makes two historical errors: it necessarily misconstrues Hawthorne’s probable motives as well as the appeal of the novel to its 1850 audience.

Were it possible to divine the historical Hawthorne’s actual intention in writing the book we might discover it was somewhat analogous to what our critics infer about the filmmakers’ intentions: there is ample evidence that Hawthorne was attempting to write a controversial potboiler focused on the plight of a passionate woman who, like many feminists — and certainly like the real-life Ms. Moore/and or her depiction of Hester — violates the sexual and social strictures of her culture because of the dictates of her heart and her sense of fairness. We know from a letter dated 1850 that Hawthorne delighted in the fact that, when he read his wife the conclusion of his final draft,

It broke her heart and sent her to bed with a grievous headache — which I look upon as a triumphant success! Judging from its effect on her and the publisher, I may calculate on what the bowlers call “a ten-strike” (quoted in Murfin 205).

Does this sound like a man “wrestling with his moral inheritance, with the dark anger the Puritans brought to North America”? Hawthorne was actually thrilled to see that his wife’s allegiant response was so emotionally overwhelming, suggesting to him — quite accurately as it turned out — that women would buy the book. Indeed, we do know that while Hawthorne may or may not have been wrestling with Puritan “dark anger,” he was certainly wrestling with making a living. The precipitating event for his writing of the

book, as he attempts to rationalize in “The Custom-House” was the shift in the political winds that cost him his political appointment at the Custom-House. Stanley Kauffman reports that:

[...] on June 8, 1849, Nathaniel Hawthorne went to his home in Salem Massachusetts, and gave his wife some bad news. After working three years in the Salem custom house, he had lost his job.

“Oh then,” his wife cried, “you can write your book.” When he asked her where the family’s bread and rice would come from, she opened a drawer and showed him the savings she had made from the household allowance.

After subsisting on Mrs. Hawthorne’s meager scrapings, it seems that Hawthorne quite probably hoped to “ten-strike”-it-rich with the book, which is, in fact, what happened. In the summer of 1849, Hawthorne was broke, jobless, and had a history of writing good books with poor sales; he wrote the book rapidly, borrowing liberally from actual history and family stories to the point of plagiarizing Caleb Snow’s *History of Boston* (see below), and on a topic sure to generate excitement; by 1851, he was set for life. Despite some bad reviews — shades of the movie! — the novel’s “vulgar” appeal, daring to sympathetically portray a woman’s adultery, proved to make it a sensation. “With this novel, [Hawthorne] not only earned for himself and for his family the comfortable living as a writer that had eluded him for decades, but he also established himself as one of America’s foremost literary talents” (Murfin 8). Suggesting that he was writing mainly out of a high moral purpose simply ignores the real historical information. Knowing the appeal of a woman’s sin to an oppressed female audience,

Hawthorne revealed in a letter to Horatio Bridge he thought the book “positively a h–ll–fired story, into which I found it almost impossible to throw any cheering light” (Crowley 151). The book was pointedly sensational inquiry into contemporary sexual politics and was self-consciously, even desperately, constructed to create revenue.

Furthermore, in their presentation of the novel as “a superior American classic” enunciating transparent and transcendent values, none of the outraged critics who blasted the film while adoring the novel as Great Literature ever stopped to consider the way the novel they lionize may have affected its original audience. The timeless and transcendent values they imagine were actually a bit more opaque and topical to its original readers. Hawthorne’s great literary reputation which the critics think they are crusading for was not immediately obvious but has gradually evolved — an evolution assisted, at least in part, because the book is short, deals with the founding myths of America, and is heavy-handedly symbolic, so it has proven an excellent book for to eleventh-graders for more than a century. In the novel’s 1850s reception, however, because of its controversial and politically volatile subject matter, the book was reviled with the same furvor as the movie was. According to Murfin’s exploration of the novel’s reception, the book was not regarded as an instant classic nor a bearer of penetrating insights about “the price of sin”; in fact, very much like 1990s film critics, “Contemporary reviews saw *The Scarlet Letter* as evidence of national moral decay as well as of the decline of the novel” (206). Many of Hawthorne’s critics, like Arthur Coxe in *The Church Review*, were simply “astonished” at the subject of adultery, which was simply as beyond “good taste”; Hester and Arthur were “wallowing in filth” and Coxe wondered if the book were ushering in “the French era [...] in our literature” (Crowly

176). Orestes Brownson in the eponymous *Brownson's Quarterly* wondered at Hawthorne's sense in raising an adulteress and her lover to the level of heroes. And, Brownson continued with a sensibility very like the film's critics, the work was "not fit [...] for popular literature" because Hester "suffers not from remorse but from regret" and because Arthur lacks "the manliness to avow his share of the guilt" (quoted in Murfin 206). To be sure, with Poe and Melville writing enthusiastically, the reception was not as determinedly negative as was the film's, yet, it was certainly not immediately celebrated in the way that Daniels has implied.

### **History and Story**

As I have asserted before, the commercial relationship between author and audience depends, at least in part, on the ability of the text-as-commodity to appeal to and entertain its audience. Audiences have little interest in moral education unless it provides affective excitement for them as well; what engages an audience are issues arising from *their own lived experience*. Audiences have a specific narrative logic and any text must be able to connect through association — similarity, good continuation, or proximity — with that narrative logic. Hawthorne's Victorian audience — which bought up his first printing of 2,500 copies (with pages of advertising to defray cost of production) in three days — was probably less interested in Hawthorne's heritage than they were eager to read about the very vulgar attention-getter, A(dultery) (Daniels, "Hollywood's" 1-2). In his introduction to the Bedford Case Study *The Scarlet Letter*, Ross C. Murfin astutely observes that

As a work of fiction, [...] *The Scarlet Letter* has its own reality, and that reality has a special form; like all historical novels and romances, it is itself an artifact of history, *the history of a complex nineteenth-century culture*, as well as a representation of the history of the previous culture. The very truths of the novel are sometimes conveyed by what are *historical inaccuracies*. (italics mine, 16)

The belief that a novel or a film is actual history comes from a misunderstanding of how that text of a narrative cognitively relates to real historical cultures. On the deepest level, no narrative can replicate a bygone era. The narrative logic that culminated at that historical moment is gone, supplanted by the influences of socio-technological forces that having changed over time, have changed the way that persons see themselves as “logical” beings in the world. The explosion of the atomic bomb simply foreclosed certain ways of pre-atomic thinking and become a part of every person’s narrative logic. Because we cannot simply cast off our narrative logic and put on another, when creating a story-world that references a previous era, a narrative is really using the previous era, its characters issues and events as analogues to contemporary culture, and it is in these similarity schema that a text’s meanings and appeals are manifested: as that text’s narrative logics intersect or interplay with the culture’s.

While Hawthorne was descended from Puritans, and while he researched a good deal and borrowed from both actual Puritan history and Puritan folklore — except for his protagonists, all the characters have the names of actual Puritans — the work is fiction, created to appeal to and to effect the narrative logics of a nineteenth-century American audience.<sup>45</sup> This Victorian-American audience was more profoundly influenced by the

particular mores, constraints, and sexual politics of their very vital but very repressive nineteenth-century culture than by distant Puritan ethos. What Hawthorne gets right in getting wrong is that his Puritans are as repressive and repressed as Victorians, but disguised, so the naughty story seems safely distanced in “history.” In order to appeal to such a contemporary audience, the book had to enunciate in imagery and narrative logic the concerns, anxieties, relationships, and conflict, *not* of a seventeenth-century religious movement, but of a complex nineteenth-century nation. Indeed, if it were to do this effectively, its narrative logic would resonate with issues of contemporary interest and so would excite controversy and possibly hostility as, in fact, *both* the novel and film did.

Failure to understand these narrative-logical relationships results in errors of comprehension. When Harkness insists that “Someone should have read Jonathan Edward’s sermon ‘Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God’ before going into production just to see what sort of people they were dealing with,” he demonstrates how his eagerness to condemn the movie has made him intellectually sloppy. Apparently Harkness is unaware that Edwards preached that sermon in 1741, not to Hester’s generation of Bay Puritans, but as part of the Great Awakening evangelical movement. In fact, 1741 places the sermon almost exactly 100 years *after* the novel’s Hester exits the prison door, a period of dramatic cultural change. “The people” of The Great Awakening that Harkness and all the other critics who lament the film’s historical inaccuracy want the film producers “to deal with” were as close to actual Bay Puritans as Hawthorne was to Faulkner. As Daniels notes in *Puritans at Play*, the Great Awakening movement was quite distinct and separate from the early Pilgrims; its preachers “rejected the dry, analytical, theological discourses of the earlier ministers and thundered simple

messages in fiery rhetoric” in an ineffective attempt to turn the tide of worldly pleasure in eighteenth-century post-Puritan New England (81). For a sermon more closely resembling the Bay Puritans, consult the film for Dimmesdale’s sermonizing which, in fact, resembles Bay Puritan John Cotton (see below). So the real historical problem for the film’s critics is, in Daniels’ observation:

Probably more than any other piece of literature, Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* cemented the image of the joyless Puritan into the American mind. Not content to practice mere self-denial, Hawthorne’s [and Joffè’s] Puritans opposed happiness, leisure, and recreation everywhere they found them. (italics mine, 4)

What Harkness mistakes for historical fact is exactly the kind of historical error that Murfin claims makes the novel so compelling, particularly for its first readers. The Victorians who were Hawthorne’s target audience, were the direct descendants of the narrative logic employed by Great Awakening Puritanism, a tradition that is carried on in today’s American Protestant fundamentalists.

Speaking of which, Harkness’ next positive assertion that “The [Bay] Puritans were in fact far more repressive than any of today’s conservative Protestant denominations,” contains two inter-related errors coming from a poor understanding of the narrative logics in play. The first, that in erroneously believing Hawthorne’s fantasy world Puritans as real, he knows nothing of actual Puritan drinking habits, courtship, and recreation. The second is that he is deeply uninformed about the strictures and practices of contemporary Mormon and various Pentecostal and fundamentalist sects. To “today’s conservative Protestant denominations,” such Puritan habits as the mealtime pint of ale

— which took the place of drinking infectious water for all age groups — and their tradition of “bundling,” whereby unrelated travelers and unwed couples slept together to share scarce furniture, to warm each other, or to try out intimacy, would certainly appear dangerous and damnable.<sup>46</sup> In an analysis that would no doubt astound those critics who rail against historical inaccuracy, Daniels devotes *Puritans at Play* to demonstrating that actual Puritans were not at all like the novel’s depictions; in fact, Daniels illustrates the joys, fun, and even “frolics” of Puritan culture. He quotes “the most influential minister of the founding generation” John Cotton as stating,

Life is not life, if it be overwhelmed with discouragements [...] wine is [is] to be drunken with a cheerful heart [...] thy wife beloved and she to be joyfully loved withal, all the days of thy vanity. (16)

When the film chooses to represent certain aspects of the Pilgrims as Hawthorne did — about which Daniels, wishing for films that depict actual history, complains in “Hollywood’s Hester Prynne” — it is as an commentary construct on “today’s conservative Protestant denominations.” Although he has written two essays about adaptation of *The Scarlet Letter*, Daniels fails to see that Stewart probably read *Pilgrims at Play* and uses *Puritans’* understanding of Pilgrim culture in details throughout the film — we see the mealtime pint of ale, we hear Arthur’s sermon — and particularly in the depiction of the women’s culture in the film. As Sacvan Bervovitch astutely notes in “The Scarlet Letter: A Twice Told Tale,” these women “are an incipiently progressive community under an oppressive regime, a society at odds with its most liberal possibilities” (2). Which brings us to a final consideration of the relationship of the

narrative of history and fictional narrative, how both novel and film work as commentary texts.

### **Analogy Adaptation**

The novel is not an accurate response to real history, but is a “commentary adaptation” that appropriates real historical persons and events, then radically adds to and reconstructs them, tailoring the tale for a particular audience in a specific cultural moment. What infuriated the film’s critics was that the film took identical commentary liberties with the novel, and in doing so, also changed the novel’s reconstruction of history and shifted generic conventions. If, as a critical strategy, we try to look more exactly at what the film does rather than at our expectation of what it should do, we will notice that the film is dialectically responding to the novel without slavishly reflecting it. Instead of being “mindless” or a “product of rampant Hollywood stupidity,” the Joffè/Stewart adaptation was probably too intellectually ambitious a commentary for the critical community. The only critic who began to understand this was Berkovitch, who observed that “The movie is a contemporary reader’s fantasy about everything he or she wanted to know about *The Scarlet Letter*, but was afraid to ask in class.” In fact, the film is in its way, a reverent text inasmuch as it is written in exact answer to many of the narrative and historical problems that the novel presents to contemporary readers. In an statement that might amaze the film’s detractors, Berkovitch continues, the novel

*The Scarlet Letter* clearly needs explaining. Why, where, and how, exactly did Hester and Dimmesdale get together? How did Hester manage on her own, without either child-support or day-care? What happened to

Chillingworth during his long captivity? And that's just the tip of the iceberg. (*italics mine*,1)

The fact that the novel left these silences is an index of the novel's audience. These silences correspond to 1850s women's silences and to the suppressed Native culture. In adapting the novel, the film conscientiously attempts to go everywhere the book would or could not, filling in the blanks to explain the novel. The fact that Berkovitch astutely notes the students would be "*afraid to ask*," suggests the emotional freight that narrative logic can carry (*italics mine*). As feminists have pointed out, the unnarrated issues in a culture — real experiences of women and minorities — seem proscribed by the narrative logic of a culture, and therefore their exploration feels dangerous. In order to understand how conscientious and even daring the adaptation was, we need to notice how the novel was historically and culturally adapted history and why the film then chose to modify these specific aspects of the book.

### **Adapting History**

The historical context of the novel had particular commentary meanings for most of its first audience that would be unrecognizable to today's reader or spectator. Larry J. Reynolds, in his essay "*The Scarlet Letter* and Revolutions Abroad," notices, "The opening scenes of the novel take place in May 1642 and the closing ones in May 1649. These dates coincide almost exactly with those of the English Civil War fought between King Charles I and his Puritan Parliament" (338-40). Reynolds contends that it is a deliberate synchronic scheme that has Hester led from prison — at the start of the story proper — "in the King's name" and has its story end "when Arthur is deciding to die as

a martyr,” at the historical moment when “Charles I has just been beheaded.” This relationship would have been recognized by the novel’s 1850s popular audience who were closer in time to the English Civil War, and who, acculturated to know British history, would have made critical parallels between the fictional world and real historical events and related them to their own lived experience. Reynolds sees this historical/fictional palimpsest as setting up the novel’s tragic tale as an anti-revolutionary allegory. The novel uses the frame of the calamitous English revolutionary movement to set up the theme of rebellion and civil war.

Hester’s rebellion, by similarity then, represents a small civil insurrection. To the 1850s reader, this might then also correlate with the revolutionary spectre then sweeping nineteenth-century Europe and the ripples of political changes lapping at the United States; 1848, after all, was the year of *The Communist Manifesto*. That same year in America, the victory of the Whigs over the Democrats in American had shaken entrenched political practices to the extent that it cost Hawthorne his job at the Custom-House and began setting the stage for the Republican Party in 1860, while the fissure between the slave-driven agricultural world of the south and the immigrant heavy, industrializing world of the north was widening.

Bercovitch, in “Hawthorne’s A-Morality of Compromise,” another examination of the novel’s commentary effects on its mid-nineteenth-century audience, extends and focuses Reynolds’ notion of *The Scarlet Letter* as signaling revolution to its readers. 1848 is also the year of the Women’s Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, and the nascent women’s rights crusade was closely tied to American and British abolitionist movements. Bercovitch calls the novel “thick propaganda” that in its treatment of Hester warns

against the several radical movements afoot in the New World and Old (354). In fact, there is another historical trace that extends this argument. There was an actual English Puritan revolutionary named Prynne of whom Hawthorne was surely aware: William Prynne, whose theological diatribe *Histriomastix* “so infuriated Charles I that he had Prynne’s ears cut off” (Daniels, *Puritans* 67). “Prynne,” of course, is Hester’s married name and Chillingworth’s actual patronymic, which suggests another, more obscure but even more precise anti-revolutionary similarity evocation. Bercovitch’s argument concludes that Hester is finally chastened by her scarlet A so that she then becomes an ideological model for the futility of revolution and the importance of “liberal consensus that [Hawthorne’s] novel celebrates and represents”(357).<sup>47</sup> In this way, Hester’s failed rebellion against the Puritan patriarchy is somewhat ironically tied to the Puritans’ own failed rebellion against the monarchy. For its first audience, the novel was adapting the tensions of the specific historical moment with the fictional events and persons in order to focus and contemporize the themes of rebellion. The novel is clearly an analogue with the previous era in a cautionary way that goes beyond simplistic constructions of Puritan morality. Indeed, there is an eerie prescience in the narrative logic of correlating the period of the horrific English Civil War to a discontented 1850s America already on track toward our own internecine conflagration.

While Bercovitch and Reynolds suggest that Hawthorne’s audience would have understood that, by similarity, arranging the events of Hester’s life with events in the English Civil War would be an admonition against the radical feminist and abolitionist movements at home and the red scare abroad, these correlations of historical similarity, so clear to a Victorian reading public, carry almost no meaning to a contemporary

audience with different historical sensitivities. Because its audience hadn't spent much time thinking about Oliver Cromwell, the movie is recontextualized: its plot is put in a framework of actual historical events as resonant and familiar to a 1990s American audience as the English Civil War was to an 1850s audience: trouble brewing between indigenous natives and imperial Europeans. The first event in the film is Massasoit's funeral which marks Metacom's succession to the Wampanoag sachemship which occurred in 1664.<sup>48</sup> The film concludes with a battle from 1675, one of the early Wampanoag successes against the Bay colonists in King Philip's War. Metacom as Sachem was, as the film depicts, angry with the white settlers because of their treatment of his father and his tribe. So with his ascension, the Wampanoag began a period of "troubles" between white and native culture. As described by Michael J. Puglisi in *Puritans Besieged: The Legacies of King Philip's War in the Massachusetts Bay Colony* (and depicted by the film), the Wampanoag were divided between "Praying Indians" who had been successfully Christianized and those, led by Metacom, who distrusted the whites ("Metacomet" is the name used in the film; Puglisi reports that this is Metacom's Anglicized name that appears in many history books; the Puritans called him "Philip"). As actual history — contrary to the theses of various critics including historian Daniels — the film consistently shows Native/Puritan relations as Puglisi records them. In its opening scenes, the film tells us that Indian distrust was, in large part justified; under Massasoit's leadership, the Wampanoag had saved the Puritans from starvation and taught them how to farm and what crops to raise. Puglisi states what the film implies, that the historical Puritans, generally felt themselves superior to the heathen Indians. In this cultural context, as the Puritans relentlessly encroached on Indian territory

occasionally using murder to be rid of a difficult Indian, any opportunistic Puritan breach of contract or perversion of law enforcement was instantly sanitized (Puglisi 1-11, 31-49).

This history backgrounds cinematic Hester's rebellion in a different way than the Civil War contextualized the novel's Hester. While the novel links the rebellions of the Puritan and the women's movements, the film links the oppression of Native Americans to the oppression of women by "speaking" to the novel's specific silences mentioned above. According to Puglisi, "The troubles" which catalyzed King Philip's War "basically arose because Englishmen — and Europeans in general — displayed an inability to understand native values and needs" — a situation that chimes with the gender conflicts in American patriarchal culture, particularly as depicted by both Hawthorne novel and Joffè film. While the Bay Puritans were not, in fact, as grim as the novel and film present them; nevertheless, in history, in the novel and in the film, the Puritan "fathers" were repressive moralists whose posturing as ideologues was a rationalization for determined, even violent, self-interest.

As discussed in the previous chapter, this conflict between Native and European hegemonies is familiar to most Americans today who have witnessed, in the past forty years, the revision of colonial history (and historical narratives) from the nineteenth-century triumphalist tale of the "white civilization" victorious over "red savagery," to the late twentieth-century *Borderline* depictions of Indian genocide by racist European-Americans. During the same revisionist period, Second Wave Feminism revealed the undemocratic nature of American sexist social and economic constraints to the point that today women may at least aspire to equal pay, equal rights and protections under the law,

and the social freedoms of (white, middle-class) men. So, for a late twentieth- or early twenty-first century audience, the film's adjustment of historical context has lively similarities. The serendipitous Indian attack that offended so many critics, is actually a clever pun on the Hollywood clichè of the (white, male) cavalry saving the Euro-American settlers. The just-in-time Indian attack, as an event-schema, acts exactly as the cavalry arriving in many 50s Westerns, and it serves handily to bind the feminist and Native themes: the cavalry-like Indian attack liberates Wampanoag praying-Indian prisoners held by the colonists and frees Arthur, Hester, and Pearl as well. And like many self-aware feminist tropes, it takes an unexamined device of male-centric narrative and turns it on its head, revealing the ideological wish behind it. While the novel's use of historical context, in Reynolds' and Bercovitch's view, admonishes *against* radical departure from established European phallogocentric law, the movie chooses to retell events from a context that *validates* conscientious rebellion against undemocratic racist and misogynist government.

However, because the film is in a commentary dialogue with both actual history *and* the novel, the relationship is more complex than the novel's. As the novel dialogues with history by offering its fictional world in a context of actual events, the film dialogues with both the novel and history when it creates new events and characters in both the novelistic context and an adjusted real history context. These additions, when considered *with* the novel, promote both an amplified understanding of the novel's themes and narrative logic and an expanded sense of women's lived historical realities. As Berkovitch argues, these events serve to explain parts of the novel that "need explaining." But in order to fully appreciate the complexity of the film as a

conscientious adaptation, we must, like the praying Indians departing the Puritan stockade for the plenty of the forest, be rid of the confining strictures of the “fidelity adaptation.”

### **Alternative Interpretations: A Western?**

Walsh concludes his review with:

So should we “lighten up” and enjoy the scenery and the spectacle? Can this movie be evaluated as a Colonial action-adventure melodrama involving smug and lusty Puritans and rightfully angry Native Americans, even though it fails miserably as an adaptation of a superior American classic? (300)

Implicit in his statement is that, if Walsh didn’t reflexively insist on a fidelity adaptation, he might “lighten up” and enjoy *The Scarlet Letter*. Welsh, in his preconsciousness, recognizes that if he could just relax, he could have fun, but instead, responding to his own inner Puritan by whom the law of adaptation has one rule, he decries the movie’s vivid and potential pleasures; indeed, in properly revering the Law of Literature, he must obey the novel’s depressing depictions and consciously avoid pleasure. If I were to slip for a moment from my cognitive concern with the normative to into a Freudian economy of the neurotic, I might suggest that the amount of resistance Welsh must summon to quash the pleasure he *wants* to feel in the film is directly proportional to the anger — which he fetishistically rationalizes as the only “appropriate” emotion — that he *does* feel. A pity. Of course in a true feminist retelling, *jouissance* trumps all other emotions, and so the answer to Walsh’s revealing rhetorical question — should he “lighten up” and

enjoy himself? — is “Yes!” Why would anyone chose to be annoyed and angry when we might chose to be instructed and amused?

In fact, if we rethink the titles’ warning of “freely adapted,” we might consider it as implying or even urging other interpretive strategies than seeking fidelity; we can see the film text as carefully encoded with both a serious response and with gently mockery of the novel’s often heavy-handed *drang und strum*. Consider *The Scarlet Letter* film as Welsh suggested, an action-adventure melodrama. Typically, historical action-adventure with a female protagonist might be, as so many critics insisted, “a bodice ripper,” but the prime genre paradigm of this particular kind of Romance would require that the protagonist would be rescued by an intrepid (male) anti-hero who would also, at some point, do some bodice-ripping. But the female-as-victim is clearly not the framing issue of the film; instead, *The Scarlet Letter*, as several other critics suggest *en passant*, is best primed for understanegding as a Western. But, by designing a parallel between Indian and women’s world, it finally works best as a Borderline Western.

### **As a Western**

As a Western, the priming generic issue is setting: the story-world of the film is set on the Western American frontier and the plot involves rival concepts of good. In this case, we get a Western double whammy not unlike the situation in *Stagecoach* (John Ford, 1939) in the presentation of two Western problems, the Indians and the “bad guys.” The recognizably Western warfare between native and colonial culture is a context for good- guy colonial women v. bad-guy Puritan men. From this priming, the story uses the character-conflicts of the Westerner — a person who operates out a sense of personal

morality — as a similarity construct that narratizes and rationalizes the settling of the country generally, and, by narrative logic, endorses the Westerner's values. Typically, the Western plot — even in its contemporary phase — has centered on men like Natty or Nathaniel or even the novel's Duncan, who have nearly superhuman skill, smarts, and an overwhelming sense of personal integrity, who must fight for their beliefs on the frontier. At the same time, Western texts have generally relegated women to the margins of the narrative as two-dimensional types: sex-prizes, wives, whores, and mothers.

*The Scarlet Letter's* reworking of the genre presents a reversal of roles in ways both witty and revealing. While set on the western frontier in the midst of Native/European conflict, it then follows a single playful adjustment to break with the Western genre by locating its images of "settling," not in the world of male activity, but in a heretofore ignored, women's world. Moore's Hester is a larger-than-life, plain-spoken, two-fisted woman-Westerner who is the law unto herself, and Arthur is the sex-prize, although he has a character depth not usually permitted women in traditional Westerns. This single gender-bending of the Western genre might repeatedly frustrate male-hegemonic narrative expectations because the typical tropes of male-centric Westerner character are now enacted by a woman. Hester is perceived as despicably "feminist" simply because she does what men do. The central issues for this female Westerner — like those of a man — are problems of personal integrity; however, as the text follows the narrative logic of the feminine shift, the conflicts by which these issues will be decided are not expressed in terms of territory, money, freedom from capture, or revenge, but in terms of child-rearing, loving, the threat of rape, and emotional responsibility. Instead of relying almost entirely on threats and fights to give the plot

turning points, *The Scarlet Letter* also turns on love-making, Pearl's birth in prison, and a witchcraft trial. By making these shifts in the classic Western, *The Scarlet Letter*, also critiques the implicit narrative-logical values of Westerns generally, and by its emendations to the form, the film suggests the ideological dangers in unselfconscious acceptance of the genre. Indeed, as we consider *The Scarlet Letter's* Borderline commentary constructs on the generic Western's plot and character structure, we might consider that its freshening of the genre is not a hideous failure but a provocative success.

### **Borderline Meanings**

In its Borderline narratization of hybridity, the film takes on its most interesting resonances. To be a Borderline, as I have defined it, the action must take place in story-world setting that is in cultural dispute, a borderland (true for both Western and Borderline); the main character is culturally fluent in more than one system of narrative logic; and our response to the narrative will depend in large part on how we construct our allegiance to this character. The precipitating event is a dispute over a sign that then continues to move the plot. Ultimately, this dispute causes a crisis in the main character which catalyzes a personal choice which then, in the plot's outcomes, results in a shift in the main character's cultural terms. Finally, while the text alignment will favor one character, it will also offer alignment — and particular slants — on other characters so that readers or spectators may form allegiances based on their own narrative logics.

In its ambitious commentary, *The Scarlet Letter*, offers complex tropings of Indian and feminine. Like *Stagecoach* or *The Searchers*, the context of Native warfare is not fully examined but is a surrounding emergency that raises the stakes in the story-

world relationships among whites. In overlaying the feminine and Indian, the prime Western question of “Who governs and by what rules?” takes place in two disputed “territories.” In the background is Native/Puritan wrangling for control of the real estate on which the action takes place, but foregrounded is the wrangling — from several sectors, the elders, Arthur, Prynne/Chillingworth, Dunsmuir (Malcolm Storry), and of course Hester — for the control and meaning of Hester’s body and by continuation, of Pearl. At the same time as the Puritans are attempting to bring “civilization” to the “heathens” by converting the tribesmen to “praying Indians,” the various males are attempting to “civilize” Hester’s impulsive and sensual nature. Control of the “territory” then, is presented in the parallel of Hester’s main plot about a woman’s body which is contextualized and then converges with the Indian troubles.

In her actions, Hester, of course, is the double structured Borderline-Westerner, on the cultural borderline between the Puritan civilization’s laws and the promptings of her own woman’s experience and sense of morality (“I speak to God, and I believe He answers me.”); a cultural perspective that has been hidden by history and the novel. Hester is fluent in the Puritan ways and can quote scripture and social law to justify her independent ways (interactions seen by some critics as “wisecracking” or “sneering contempt”: Daniels, *Bad Movie 3*, Harkness). The plot, in typical Western form, focuses on misunderstanding and injustices done to the hero, and in Borderline form, it develops these misunderstandings around a signal: Hester’s body. In fact, in the Borderline paradigm, Hester’s body serves the dual purpose of territory and the disputed sign which is the catalyst for the plot conflicts by which the various Borderline ideologies are identified. In the film’s story-world, the precipitating conflict is over the meaning of

Hester's pregnancy: is it a good continuation of damnable adultery or precious love? Is it an expression of god's anger at unlawful mating or his bounty rewarding mutual devotion? During the course of the narrative, several narrative-logical alignments on this issue are depicted, and the great irony in the reception is that — although the text ultimately aligns with Hester — most critics' conciliated their allegiance with Prynne and the sadistically devout Puritans: she is damnable, evil, too powerful, disrespectful, and in need of punishment.

What the film text offers as Borderline innovation is the unfamiliarity and intimacy of seeing a serious fictional character from “a superior American classic” — a legendary pioneer woman — with the innuendo removed. In its Victorian-passing-as-Puritan narrative logic, the novel proscribed certain areas of woman's experience. Readers who feel a reactionary allegiance to the novel's plot, then accept the implicit narrative logic embedded in the plot's proscriptions; as a result of this felt allegiant construct, they may feel today a sensation very much like Victorian censoriousness in seeing what the film exposes: these “secret” realities of historical womanhood that the novel — and American historical understanding generally — overlooks.

In operating on the adaptive borderline, *The Scarlet Letter*, like *Last of the Mohicans*, draws directly from the novel for its changes. In presenting a narrative logic that illuminates the “secret” questions the novel leaves open and which we may have been “afraid to ask,” this adjustment — perceived as a justification for angry or sarcastic allegiances — is in better keeping with a historical understanding of the novel than any literal reading of the text. Just as no serious American novel had dealt so directly with a woman's feelings and adultery until *The Scarlet Letter*, in an apparent *homage* to the

novel's first telling of Hester's story, the film — in exposing the borderline between male and female historical experiences and indicting the way we remember gender — attempts what no serious American film has dared: to depict the complete range and physical consequences of female passion.

When the film offers us subjective access to these intimate experiences and then slanting on the intensity of Hester's emotions, it is attempting as revolutionary a depiction of women as the novel had. According to the novel, Hester has an "impulsive and passionate nature" (60), so the film depicts a woman with an intense and sensual understanding of her body. However, as a commentary on the novel's obsessive attention to Hester's psychological suffering, the film offers a woman with a physical being. Yet, instead of the conventional depictions of a woman's body that come from Hollywood — as might be found in a Western or even a Bodice-ripper — which might foreground only the flirtation, infatuation and lovemaking facets of a woman's experience of her body, experiences in the phallogentric canon because they include a man, the film explores a complete trajectory of a woman's sensual and romantic life and so challenges the reigning phallogentric narrative logic. The film does show us Hester's flirtation, infatuation and lovemaking, true, but it clearly slants these events in women's terms, and in addition, it shows us those parts of a woman's intimate life unaccessorized by a man. We see her bathing, and in film's only extra-diegetic slant, we see her fantasy/memory of Arthur, and then, briefly, her masturbation. Later, in her lovemaking with Arthur, the slant is carefully constructed to suggest the woman's experience instead of eroticizing male power: we are close to the female erogenous zones as she guides his hands; the camera moves to her POV above his body, and the soundtrack is of her

breathing and her movements. And in unusual and innovative moments of subjective access, we observe the consequences of passion: her prebirth discomfort when, hugely pregnant and desperate she almost signals Arthur, her baby visibly kicking in her belly; then, we see her in labor and the pain (if abbreviated) of giving birth; and later, we even observe her frustration, when breastfeeding, Pearl refuses the nipple. All of these scenes and their interpersonal dynamics are entirely consistent with the novel's events and the depictions of Hester, who is willful, stubborn, and who struggles with Pearl, and in that regard are an elegant, contemporary, and imaginative *homage* to the novel's "vision."

### **Borderline Conclusion**

In fact, when the film then changes the events of the novel's ending — a modification fidelity critics found especially annoying — it's a comment on the oppressive atmosphere of novel and constructed as an antidote to the narrative forces Reynolds and Bercovitch describe. While, in the novel, Hester's final choice to return to the colony and again take up the scarlet A may have been the depiction that broke Mrs. Hawthorne's heart "and sent her to bed with a grievous headache," its heartbreaking dramatic impact lies in the particular way it is presented in the text, and the film's strongest comment works in responding to the novel's effectiveness in its conclusion. In the novel's plot, after Arthur's revelation and death, Hester and Pearl actually leave the colony for some years and are finally freed from the repressive Puritan fathers. While away, however, the scarlet A finally "does its office" from outside the ken of the narrator's informants and somehow chastens Hester so that she returns to her "cottage by the sea-shore," not for explicit reasons, but as a result of some concession — repentance

or obligation — to the patriarchal order. If, in the course of imagining the novel, we have come to feel powerful allegiance with — respect and love for — Hester, we have hoped for her escape from the site of her heartbreaks and suffering, so that her unexplained return effectively arouses both pity and frustration. This is another “silence” that is particularly effective, cutting us off from knowing Hester’s feelings when she makes her most intimate decision about her “crime” and chooses to leave her daughter and return. The implication, as Reynolds and Berkovitch induce but don’t state, is that the patriarchal order finally *must* be obeyed whatever the circumstance, even irrespective of survival instinct.

Our allegiant empathy is further teased, when, with compassion born of her deep, loving nature, Hester then acts as a counsel to people and “Women, more especially,” who

in the continually recurring trials of wounded, wasted, wronged, misplaced, or erring and sinful passion, — or with the dreary burden of a heart unyielded, because unvalued and unsought, — came to [her] cottage, demanding why they were so wretched, and what the remedy! Hester comforted and counselled them, as best she might. She assured them, too, of her firm belief, that, at some brighter period, when the world should have grown ripe for it, in Heaven’s own time, a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on surer ground of mutual happiness. Earlier in life, Hester had vainly imagined that she herself might be the destined prophetess, but had long since recognized the impossibility that any mission of divine and

mysterious truth should be confided to a woman stained with sin, bowed down with shame, or even burdened with a life-long sorrow. (201)

There is a double irony in this narrative situation which makes this passage so achingly tragic to a allegiant reader. On the one hand, the narration has minutely observed Hester in her rebellion, in the nuances of her decision to keep her love a secret, and in her relationship with Pearl, the text is silent regarding her decision to return; a decision that inexplicably reverses her admirable and courageous stance against the patriarchal Puritans. Compounding this silence however, is that, while Hester appears to be working to, if not perpetuate, at least abet the cruel patriarchal order, in fact, on a metanarrative level, readers outside her context can see that *she is* “the destined prophetess,” but humiliated by her circumstances, she tragically unaware of her own beauty and wisdom. In mid-nineteenth century America, a context in which husbands effectively owned their wives and gender roles were more severely prescribed, the distance preventing a “relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness” was institutionally enforced, and the painful irony of Hester’s fate was all that much more tragically effective as it connected with women’s lived experiences and lived frustrations.

As the film comments on this as a Borderline paradigm, it addresses a different audience of women (and men). Hester’s personal crises comes when her friend, Harriet Hibbons (Joan Plowright) is to be tried as a witch, due to the secret machinations of Prynne. Hester has endured the shame of the scarlet A and her ostracization, but the threat to her friend and midwife is too much, and, against Arthur’s heated advice, she puts her life — the disputed site of her body — in jeopardy when she speaks out against the elders in open court, allies with Hibbons, and in so doing, is also condemned as a

witch and Pearl is taken from her. As is typical of the *Borderline*, her crisis-driven choice then moves events toward a conclusion that readjusts the cultural balances in the story-world. Arthur sends for Metacomet, and then, on the scaffold, he confesses his love, also risking his life. Instead of dying on the scaffold, however, as in the tragic Romance, in the Western commentary, the Indians arrive with the timing usually reserved for the cavalry, and in the ensuing battle, Pearl is recovered, Hester and Arthur united, and the Puritans (satisfyingly) chastened. In adjusting this powerful ending to the allegiant potentials of a twentieth-century audience, the film suggests that in our better feminized historical context, strong-willed women *can* find a “surer ground” if they dare to trust in their own worth and integrity.

### **Film, Novel, Narration and History**

The conclusion, then, in which Pearl drops the A under her parents’ cartwheel as Hester, Arthur, and Pearl leave Boston behind is only the last of the film’s commentary choices. If, as we have been taught, the A is a flexible and overdetermined symbol standing for the sin of adultery/love, the rule of Puritan law, the power of society, the shame of a woman without a man, then what better, more delightful address to the symbol than to leave it in the mud of history? The changes in the novel’s script are not irresponsible tamperings with the literary classic, but an answer — even an antidote — to the novel’s ironic and bifurcated conclusion to the tale that both Trollope and Henry James called a “hate story” (Leverentz 265). Rather than working as the novel did, as a cautionary tale warning against radical social change, the film is an inspirational and celebratory conclusion to a *love* story which is playfully if self-consciously tying up the

ruined circle of love imagined in the novel — Hester, Arthur, and Pearl — and delivering them out of their repressive circumstances. Yes, this may be a feminist retelling of a familiar tale in the terms of “hip Hollywood liberalism,” but what’s wrong with that? Beginning with Nina Baym’s pioneering work in the early nineteen-eighties that “revisited” “Nathaniel Hawthorne as a feminist,” numerous contemporary critics have noticed that, from the novel’s opening image of “The Prison Door” and its references to Ann Hutchinson to the closing which includes the paragraph quoted above, *The Scarlet Letter* addresses issues of gender and in particular Hester’s subversive role (53-4, 201).<sup>49</sup> To make a contemporary adaptation that overlooked these themes, or that in a fidelity adaptation would present a narrative logical justification for phallogentrism, would be a significant failure; indeed, would fail to understand the novel’s relationship to its audience and even its most progressive implications

For critics expecting a fidelity adaptation of the novel, the Joffè/Stewart/Moore *The Scarlet Letter*, challenges the the phallogentric narrative logics of the novel and of conventional understandings of history and the Western. To understand the reception, we can observe that such revisions must have created considerable — and uncomfortable — cognitive dissonance for critics, who like me, may be unaware of the penetrating sexism and logocentrism embedded in “classic” texts and historical depictions. The righteous anger, instead of logically critiquing a narrative text, revealed the tenacious power of sexist morality encoded as narrative. In challenging the narrative logic the film attempted to honor the characters of the novel, but to challenge the narrative and gender role expectations; the critics’ frustrations and fulminations were, finally, an index of their commitment to the dubious narrative logic of the text.

To put this in perspective, consider the critical reception if the same cast and production team had attempted a fidelity adaptation which would have created many of the cognitive consonances the critics yearned for in their reviews. Imagine “hunky” Gary Oldman dithering and at last dead on the scaffolding while uppity Demi Moore, fully clothed throughout, is finally chastened and humbled by her Victorian-Puritan scarlet A and returns, Pearl-less, to Boston to work for the fathers. Clearly, a compelling version of this kind of adaptation was within the abilities of this team. But what would be the logic of making such a film? Once the commentary relationships are brought to critical consciousness and the residual hierarchies articulated, *The Scarlet Letter* did what critics both popular and academic constantly complain “stupid” Hollywood doesn’t do enough of: it took risks. This film was carefully constructed as a Borderline commentary adaptation, and as such, it dared to challenge adaptive and narrative conventions and received values regarding gender, history, narrative, genre, and authority. By making its adaptive changes in narrative, it offered a different narrative logic; in place of the Victorian tragedy of womanhood, it offered a hybrid version of a familiar tale which enunciated the silent experience of women and, in so doing, offered a refreshed understanding of both history and the novel. Yet, despite its intelligent and revisionist risks, the film was certainly killed with poor reviews. Ultimately, the film took the novel more seriously than the critics. When rendering its adaptation, the Joffè adaptation clearly revered Hawthorne’s words, crossing a gender borderline to imagine a

brighter period [...] in Heaven’s own time, [when] a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on surer ground of mutual happiness.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Hybridities: Conclusion and Questions**

#### **Summery**

As my preliminary argument, I have followed Robin Horton's suggestion that a Primary Theory of cognition might present a base of generally agreed-upon scientific conceptions of cognition from which bottom-up arguments about the perception and meaning of texts might be built. The culturally specific interpretation of texts, then, would represent a Secondary Theory by which differences between cultures may be explored using the terms and paradigms of Primary Theory.

Primary Theory, as I have developed it, is based on the premise that every person has similar neurological structures which are the basis similar cognitive abilities. By observing how humans perceive and then how they organize their perceptions, cognitivists have induced a complex psychological model of human thought and identity structures. Julian Jaynes and other cognitivists have demonstrated that because we understand ourselves as the main characters in the story of our own lives, all cultures are fascinated by narrative and create stories as a method of knowing the world and knowing ourselves. In our narrative orientation to the world, we are novelty-seeking and consistency-building beings who use categories — schema — to perceive and conceptualize, and we have a special imaginative ability to use our skill with narrative to play with schema. I have then extended this model on several fronts.

First, in constructing a basic model of how we interpret, I have suggested that our understanding of our selves as personal experience is always being correlated to the cultural narratives we have been exposed. In the tension between our story and the stories we have been told, we build a “narrative logic” which performs a double role: it is the associational mechanism by which we know and operate in our experiential world — a value system and choice-making script — but it also is the model-system which we use for inferential play when interpreting narrative information. I have maintained that good interpretation of literary or film narrative is necessary in intercultural conversation because in good interpretation we “hear ourselves think”: we effectively lay bare our preconscious workings, exposing our specific narrative logic, our hierarchies of value, how we imagine culture or history is embedded in a text, and how a text has captured our attention. The best interpretations make connections that expose a portion of narrative logic that had been previously unexamined.

Second, I have used my Primary Theory to extend the work of Murray Smith, Edward Branigan, Seymour Chatman, and David Bordwell who have used cognitivism as a logical extrapolation of the historical development of Russian Formalism, Semiotic narratology, and reader response theories. In this regard, I have mobilized Primary Theory to articulate a better understanding of how narratological genre concepts should work as schema theory. As innovations, I have paid special attention to the cognitive actions of priming and novelty-seeking which have been neglected in previous narratological uses of cognitivism. I then demonstrated how schema cognition is an excellent model for Genre Theory generally. Secondary Theory and the Borderline Genre are useful tools in understanding both how familiar genres generally work and

also, in the alignments of *Last of the Mohicans* texts, how the narrative logic of texts are presented as and even shape an understanding of history. In an effort at greater clarity of method, I have tried to refine Smith's model of narrative alignment offering the use of slant as a construct for addressing the effects of presentational style. Then, in my analysis of the reception of *The Scarlet Letter*, I have shown how cultural allegiances determined a narrative logic to the critical response to the film which proved to be more context-driven than textually responsive.

Finally, as a subtext throughout, I have continued the very problematized project of differentiating and then reconciling film and literary narratology. While film spectating and literary reading experiences are not the same, and while the old dogmas of sign systems working like languages are wrong, still, I note emphatically that languages *do* work like sign systems, and perception is the cognitive predecessor of conception: all narrative experiences are cognitively linked by certain brain operations which organize narrative logic, and when we utilize our narrative logic in life or in understanding a narrative text — particularly when we work by consciously priming — we engage very similar cognitive strategies regardless of how we acquired our narrative models. The narratological project must address how we think in similar fashion about differently mediated narration. Yet, in order to sharpen our awareness of the experience of textual acquisition, our narratology must continue to make key differentiations between film and literary understanding, as I do when I argue that in the activity of recognition, faces are signal devices in film, while names are the schema foundations in literature.

## Possibilities

This work opens the door on several new arenas of inquiry.

The Borderline Narrative as a genre is proliferating rapidly in many postmodern cultures which must narratize the experience of multiculturalism. Literary examples in English include such multicultural survey staples as Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*, Chang-Rae Lee's *Native Speaker*, *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*, by Oscar Hijuelos, any number of novels by Michael Ondaatje or V. S. Naipaul, and Charles Johnson's *The Middle Passage*. But the phenomenon is not limited to academic attention. In the past few years, nearly every book awards or best-seller list includes a Borderline, most recently Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*, *Snow Falling on Cedars* by David Guterson, or Adhaf Soueif's *A Map of Love*. In the world of film, I have shown that the American Borderline may have its roots in the Western and particularly the work of John Ford, but it has proliferated wildly in the eighties and nineties, including John Sayles' *Lone Star*, Bruce Beresford's *Black Robe*, Mira Nair's *Mississippi Masala* (1991), Mina Shum's *Double Happiness* (1994), Stephen Frears' *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987), Damien O'Donnell's *East is East* (1999), Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever* (1991), Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), and most recently John Woo's *Windtalkers* (2002). Now that we know a genre is there, we need to address it as a genre, to trace its history, its roots, and its possible interpretive actions. We might demonstrate the different strategies of hybridization different ethnic groups employ or note the reception of such films, not only by mainstream press, but by critics and scholars from the ethnic communities they address. There are historical connections that need to

be made in order to trace the changing American [multicultural] logic more clearly. Two possible connections that come immediately to mind are the novels of William Faulkner, which are often based in and sometimes articulate a hybrid understanding of American southern culture. Indeed, *Absalom, Absalom* subversively dares to personify a racially hybrid “white” aristocracy. Moreover, if the Borderline — as I have argued that emerging genres do — narratizes America’s evolving understanding of itself as hybrid, logically, there may be an as-yet-undefined genre, the Assimilation Narrative which preceded it by which the values of Euro-, particularly Anglo-centric, bourgeois society were valorized. Immediately, I think of Sidney Poitier movies as possible prototypes: these films narratized American blacks assimilating to white culture by showing a black man who is, in his narrative logic, a better exemplar of white bourgeois ideals than the white characters (*To Sir With Love*, James Clavell, 1966; *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* Stanley Kramer, 1966; and *In the Heat of the Night*, Norman Jewison, 1966).

Another implication of this dissertation is the need for disciplined experimental work in the new discipline of Narrative Studies. In the hybrid area of cinema, English, cognitive, narratological, and cultural studies, the time is fast approaching when we will be able to test narratological ideas and questions of cultural narrative logic by experimentation. In formulating this dissertation, I was brought to a better understanding of the film *The Scarlet Letter* by informal polling of a population unfamiliar with the novel who had thoroughly enjoyed a film that I had been primed to hate. In my narratological claims about the nature of the face or the name as a primer of recognition, I would like to be able to test my thesis with experimentation. Moreover, as we come to expand the cognitive constants of human experience — in the way that the cognition of

faces and names suggests that such understandings may be universal contingents — we may begin to see certain universal semiotic images and/or codes.

There is a dangerous side to this argument, which is that the eventual evolution of a consiliated narratology and cognitive science could be shaped into effective mind-control. We already see this developing in our political discourse as the political parties and policy strategists, working “scientifically” to assemble public images, attempt to control the political narrative. Increasingly “spin doctors” rely on focus groups and attempt to exploit demonstrable effects of certain kinds of narratives in order to orchestrate the flow of information to create political capital and/or to match candidates’ personal narratives with the narrative logics of the populace. Although still the stuff of science fiction, the potentials of such an evolution are clearly set out above. As the Bruce Robinson's 1989 satire, *How to Get Ahead in Advertizing* wryly observes: “Big Brother doesn't need to watch us; we're watching Big Brother.” However, like Jedi Knights, we need not give in to the Dark Side; there is a positive potential as well. Harvard sociobiologist Edward O. Wilson in his groundbreaking, “Back From Chaos,” has projected an eventual unification of all forms of knowledge, a project he refers to — with the same sense as Jaynes’ use — as *consilience*. Wilson asserts that “The greatest enterprise of the mind always has been and always will be the attempt to link the sciences and the humanities.” Wilson argues, as I suggested in my Introduction, that “the existing disciplinary demarcations in the higher education are not reflections of the real world but artifacts of scholarship” and that, given the direction of contemporary thought, an eventual hybridization of arts and sciences was inevitable. By following the most vital contemporary trend in the humanities — the integration of cognitive science into the

interpretive mechanism of a humanities discipline — this dissertation has been an small step in that greater project of consilience, and the very notion of hybridity — particularly hybrid thinking — has been the dominant theme of this work. This new hybrid discipline with its demonstrable utility may bring Narrative Studies to central importance in the academic culture. Turner claimed earlier and Wilson adds his voice: “In education, the search for consilience is the way to renew the crumbling structure of the liberal arts.” Integrating the science of mind with the project of the humanities — to contemplate what it is to be human — could prove to be a platform for cross-cultural understanding and for more nuanced teaching of history, narrative logic, and narrative generally. Well disseminated models could lead, not to mind control of the many by the few, but to cross-cultural cognitive understandings, tolerance, and cooperation. A narrative logic that articulates how truth is never perfectly visible, yet is a tool for the acceptance and even the encouragement of hybridity, and with it, an ethos of engagement and exchange.

### Endnotes

1. Taking scalps, in the American cultural lexicon, is popularly constructed as an exclusively and defining Indian cultural practice — at least in part because of cinematic depictions of Native culture. However, for accuracy's sake, the practice, while probably Indian in origin, was actually accelerated and disseminated by whites. Early European colonists used scalps as a way of determining bounties to be paid for killing Indians. For a full bounty a proper scalp had to include both ears (Anderson, lecture, *The Pioneers*, June, 1998. UGA.).
2. I was treated to this insight in a moment of serendipity. I had been teaching *The Searchers* when, one night, Clai Rice, my then roommate — the grandson of one of the NRA's founding fathers and a great hunter and eater of meat — was describing the butchering a deer, and he mentioned how "Ya clean yer knife off by stabbin' it into the dirt, 'cause dryin' blood is slippery-sticky stuff," and suddenly, Ethan's actions — which I had been puzzling over — were clear. To test this hypothesis, I played the scene to my American Multicultural Survey class — we had watched the film to compare its portrayal of Indians to that in Bruce Beresford's *Black Robe* (1991) and Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* — and I asked why Ethan was using his knife like that. Fortunately, the University of Georgia has a student body rich in deer hunters. While most of the class were flummoxed by the query, my young hunters all immediately pushed back their baseball caps and agreed that Ethan must be cleaning blood from his blade citing exactly Clai's

reason. I then asked the class whose blood Ethan would be cleaning off, and in a moment or two — given this key significance — they all arrived at identical conclusions. Nelson Hilton has objected that such digging would be hard on the edge of the blade, but, again according to my venison-loving informants, hunters routinely whet their blades before and sometimes during every hunting trip; a clean blade is always better than a gooey, slippery blade.

3. *The Searchers*, it should be noted, may end with Ethan reconciling to Debbie's "Indianess"; however, their reconciliation happens in the midst of cavalry sneak attack on Chief Scar's village, and while in the terms of the story-world the clan of Chief Scar are "bad Indians" coded as "murdering renegades," the plot still clearly suggests that women and children are slaughtered by the cavalry.

4. The Rushdie is from *The Satanic Verses*. London: Viking, 1988. 272.

5. This section draws primarily on four sources of cognitive theory: *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain* by Terrence W. Deacon, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning- Imagination, and Reason* by Mark Johnson, *The Biology of Mind: Origins and Structures of Mind, Brain, and Consciousness* by M. Deric Bownds, and Stephen K. Reed's *Cognition*.

6. Dialogue is transcribed from the film and is sometimes at variance with the printed text of *Do the Right Thing: A Spike Lee Joint* by Spike Lee with Lisa Jones. This is probably the result of actors' improvisations and/or rewrites on shoot.

7. Ekman's anthropological research verifies Affect Theory begun by Sylvan S. Tomkins. Most recently Ekman has written: "I now distinguish nine innate affects" (354). Ekman divides the innate affects according to a facial gestural code visible in

infant behavior transculturally. The nine visible coded behaviors fall generally into two categories:

*Positive:*

interest or excitement — fixed stare tracking object;

enjoyment or joy — smile;

surprise or startle — eyebrows raised, blinking;

and *Negative:*

distress or anguish — crying response;

fear or terror — eyes wide open in fixed stare, or moving away, turned to the side;

shame or humiliation — eyes and head lowered;

contempt — sneering upper lip;

disgust — lower lip lowered and protruding;

anger or rage — frown, clenched jaw, red face.

The book includes research and essays justifying Tomkins theories. Ekman's research demonstrated affect identification agreement across "literate cultures," as well as high positive correlations between "preliterate" New Guinea and contemporary European culture and also between sighted and blind children's facial responses and gesticulations. In the narratological project, we must note that such a universal facial code is the beginning of a universal semiotic code.

8. Kristin Thompson, in *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis*, warns that "plot" and "story" "carry the burden of all the other senses in which non-Formalist critics have used them[...]" (fn 38); however, my experience is that reliance on the Russian terms results in more reading confusion than making a clear-cut logical

distinction about the English terms. Therefore, for purposes of this dissertation, the *plot* is simply the events in the order the narrative text presents them, while the *story* is the mental construction of a “logical” sequential order and motivations for these events.

9. Richard Neupert and Elizabeth Kraft have both questioned the term “spectate” and have wondered how is spectating different from “watching” an audio-visual narrative. It seems to me we live a world of almost constant audio-visual information; television screens are referred to as “wallpaper”; Jumbotrons compete for our attention at Times Square; video terminals are increasingly ubiquitous, appearing in the airport, the health club, the minivan, and so forth. In this environment of a/v image saturation, I believe we need a term that reflects the same kind of concentrated attention to a/v narrative we devote to reading a novel, a term that will reflect narrative engagement. I like “spectate” for several reasons. Nelson Hilton hit intuitively on the best connection when he punned “speculate.” We spectate at a level of attentive commitment that we speculate or actively wonder about outcomes. Indeed, sports spectators have an avid, even betting interest in the games they watch, so I offer “spectate” as being a level of active playing participation in an a/v narrative (see also the section on “Narration, Experience, and Play” below).

10. In fact, this activity of novelty-seeking presents a significant difference in human intelligence to the artificial intelligence model which is too often the default analogy for human thinking (which is not “computation”). One important benefit of using cognitive models is that they present a prophylaxis against the computer models which so infect thinking about thinking that “computer models” of education slide down our collective throat like arsenic in marmalade. However, as Berlin and Kay comment in their classic

study of *Basic Color Terms*:

Well behaved computers of today just turn down information which does not come in a required format [consistency-building]. Human beings on the other hand, need not and cannot afford to be so choosy. Rather than reject information which they cannot support propositionally, they try to salvage it by using semi-propositional representations [novelty-seeking]).

(163)

11. In *Narration and the Fiction Film*, Bordwell suggests three different categories of schemata for narrative interpretation based on Reid Hasty's work in "Schematic Principles in Human Memory": "prototype schemata" which perform like the *object schemas*, "template schemata" by which we recognize "canonical" story format or how the story as a whole is structured, and "procedural schemata": operational protocols "which dynamically acquire and organize information" (36). Because all schemas work by promoting inferential categories, what Hastie and Bordwell see as separate template and procedural schemata are, in the current psychological designations, script schemas, while *spatial* schemas offer a conceptual method for discussing "the purely stylistic patterns" which Bordwell claims are "difficult to notice or recall." This disjunctions in cognitive theory, however, demonstrate the newness of the discipline and are even anticipated by the theory premises: fuzzy categories may overlap or be incomplete in descriptions based on what need they are generated to meet.

12. George Lakoff notes that, on top of fuzzy-schematic tendencies, we can classify logical sets or categories which "have rigid boundaries and are defined by necessary and sufficient conditions" (*Women* 153). In Lakoff's discussion of categorical "cognitive

models," he sees distinct types of schema depending on how the categories' boundaries or criteria are structured. In my discussion, in order to usefully extend the notions of schema in circulation in narrative theory, I incorporate these tendencies both in the description of base model capabilities and as learned adjustments. See my discussion of "closure schema."

13. Smith, 57, "The prototype of a category is the norm against which other members are judged...."

14. Until Section Two, when I will define and address problems of textual style as issues of "slant" which are alignments offered by the text, I will use "style" for film as Bordwell defines it in *On the History of Film Style* as the

film's systematic and significant use of the medium. These techniques fall into broad domains: *mise en scene* (staging, lighting, performance, and setting); framing, focus, control of color values, and other aspects of cinematography; editing; and sound. Style is, minimally, the texture of the film's images and sounds, the result of choices made by the filmmaker(s) in particular historical circumstances. (4)

15. At the risk of getting a little ahead of myself, I use "initiating event" in Edward Branigan's cognitive/narratological sense. Branigan forcefully argues that we recognize, interpret, and remember a specific category of information delivery-construct known as the *narrative schema* by particular formal event-features. Nearly all researchers agree that a narrative schema has the following format:

- 1 introduction of setting and characters
- 2 explanation of a state of affairs

- 3 initiating event
- 4 emotional response or statement of a goal by the protagonist
- 5 complicating actions
- 6 outcome
- 7 reactions to the outcome (35)

In a footnote to this *script schema* description, Branigan cites Car, van Dijk and Kintsche, Bower and Cirilo, Gulich and Quasthoff, and Pleh as his sources for this model, apparently exclusively on work in cognitive psychology, memory and text processing.

16. Following Julian Jaynes, I have used the term "preconscious" to discuss what many other critics call "unconscious cognition" (Lakoff, Johnson, Turner, Bownds, et. al.) I chose to make this distinction because preconsciousness, as a linguistic expression of a fundamental concept, creates an implicit good continuation in which all of cognitive activity — whether we are aware of it or not — can have conscious implications, and may even be, under particular circumstances, subject to conscious control; whereas, the term "unconscious" implies a foreclosure of consciousness and makes the consciousness implicitly subject to unknowable forces. While I will argue that, in fact, preconscious fuzzy narrative logics do regulate conscious decision making, I resist figuring it as a chimerical force, but based on recent research in narrative therapy, I see preconsciousness and consciousness as existing in a circulation of imaginary constructs of identity and selfhood.

17. Lest this model seem too deterministic, however, the associative action of real-life decision-making is almost infinitely complex and subject to what J. Allen Hobson, in

*Consciousness*, calls "autocreative" influence (demonstrated in dreaming) as well as conscious intervention using more firmly structured logical boundaries (demonstrated in psychoanalysis and other psychological therapies). In order to engage either autocreative or more defined logical methods, such a procedure needs to be a part of the critical scripts in an individual's schematic repertoire. But this is a point I will return to.

18. For an expanded discussion of the importance of cognitive theory in communicative theory, the failure of semiotics-as-code, and the problems of communicative comprehension see Dan Sperber and Dierdre Wilson's *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*.

19. Many theorists hierarchize conscious operations. Bownds distinguishes between "consciousness," "self-consciousness," and "reflexive self-consciousness." In Bownd's very useful distinctions, "basic consciousness" is the condition of animals or infants by which they can perceive and perform choice-making operations without conceptualizing a distinct self. "Self-consciousness" is the next level of conscious complication, by which we understand ourselves to be agents and to have an "I" identity (5-7). "Reflexive self-consciousness" "consists of the internal simulation of self-reference — of thinking about thinking — that appears to be unique to humans" (300). It is the last category that is of interest here.

20. Although much of Jaynes theorizing about "the origins of consciousness in the breakdown of the bicameral mind" has been, according to Hobson, contradicted by "the fieldwork of cultural anthropologists," Jaynes schematic of the features of consciousness is certainly consistent with the consciousness-as-narrating-presence models of other theorists like Dennett, Hobson, and Hunt, and in fact, Jaynes version is by far the best

articulated, most concise and most useful to the narrative theorist (307).

21. Recognizing this phenomenon helps us — on the level of Primary Theory — to sort out a reason that cinematic and literary narrative devices should be addressed in narratologically similar terms. While there are clear-cut differences in the brain modalities we imaginatively engage — audio-visual cinematic narratives are perceptually rich and convey significances in immediate demands on our “reality-based” perceptual-to-conceptual actions, and literary or verbally expressed narratives are symbolically rich and engage personal conceptual-to- perceptual imaginings — nevertheless, both mechanisms are reified in our experiencing apparatus by similar cognitive connections of narrative-making, all of which are based in our own experience of conscious as a narratively based process and are, therefore, both factors in the structuring of an individual’s narrative logic.

22. To view this videotape go to <http://www.usd.edu/psyc301/Gorilla.htm>

23. Smith notes that many films play on the activity of recognition in various ways: *That Obscure Object of Desire* (Luis Bunuel, 1977) uses two actors to portray one character (83). Also, Nabokov’s novel *Invitation to a Beheading* and the film version (R. W. Fassbinder, 1986) both depict a main character unable to accurately imagine his own person schema and who then mis-recognizes another man whom he believes to be his double.

24. In considering the effect of Radio Raheem, I notice that he is the only character consistently represented from a low and often wide angle POV shot. If, as I suggested earlier, we have an innate fear of looming shapes, it is clear that the text in its style or *slant* is depicting Raheem as a threatening presence. Furthermore, in an analysis using Ekman’s prototypes, Raheem facially and gesturally represents anger and aggression —

with occasional traces of humor. In this way, the film works cognitively and transculturally in a language-like manner to invest Radio Raheem with a constant threat of physical violence. How this threat is evaluated, however, depends entirely on the way a specific spectator's narrative logic associates allegiances.

25. For a fuller discussion of the many historical threads in genre criticism see Gledhill, Ryall, and Neale. Neale's book length survey, *Genre and Hollywood* is the most comprehensive including chapters "Definitions of Genre," "Dimensions of Genre," and "Genre Theory" which discuss literary and cinematic cross fertilizations.

26. "Genre," in this context, is any critically useful grouping of texts from Aristotelean designations of Tragedy, Epic, and Lyric to Talking Dog Science Fiction Buddy Film. Steve Neale notes that "[G]enre as a term, has been used in different ways in different fields, and that many of its uses have been governed by history of the term within these fields — and by cultural factors at play within them — rather than by logic or conceptual consistency" (28). However, cognitively, we tend to work with all categories in similar ways, so that cognitivism may offer a kind of "unified field theory" for this difficult critical project.

27. One historical approach to genre has been centered solely on the qualities and recognition of object schema. Derived from Erwin Panofsky's "Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study or Renaissance Art" (*Meaning in the Visual Arts*. Hammondswoth: Penguin, 1970), and first systematized by Lawrence Alloway in "On the Iconography of the Movies," then later used in studies by Edward Buscombe, in "The Idea of Genre in the American Cinema" (*Screen*.11/2: 33-45) and Colin MacArthur's *Underworld USA* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1972). Clearly, these

studies hit on important constructs within specific genres (Buscombe is especially interested in the Western; MacArthur in the Gangster) and help explain the way that object schema carry associative information that goes beyond the story-world context, but they are incomplete as a method for studying all genres or even for the fullest explanations of the Western or Gangster texts.

28. In this description, we can see that author-centric criticisms, although generally regarded in contrast or even opposition to genre criticism (“In his long career, Howard Hawkes proved himself a master of many genres....”), in fact, are simply a specific kind of genre strategy. Our critical tradition has located this author-centric criticism outside conventional notions of genre in part because the set of potential texts is so easily closed, in part because of the Foucauldian historical logic (“What is an Author?”) that shape our conceptions of authorial responsibility and economic reward, in part, because of the special, residual Romantic regard for artistic agency or “genius” which the critical community affords creators, and in part due to traditions of psychoanalysis. However, once a set of texts has been schematized, we see that, although the prime is an exterior consideration to the forms of actual text — the author— nevertheless, the category is then organized around other schematic potentials which figure typically in other kinds of generic textual reasoning: there are certain schematic *similarities* by which we can recognize a Hawkes film (strong woman characters); we can use *proximities* for focus (Later Hawkes); or we can mobilize *good continuity* to thematize change in the artist’s work (Hawkes’ evolving use of light and shadow). The points I wish to make are first, that author or *auteur* criticism is simply a special case of genre criticism — not an opposition or even a contrast — but more importantly, that in any genre critique, there

are hierarchies of schematic selection at work in defining a genre, and yet, we should still be clear in revealing our thinking about how the subordinating schematic concepts are factored.

29. Joel Black has observed that a painterly author can make us “see” a character’s face through elegant description. While this is absolutely true to the extent that many of the same neural networks that would be excited by a visual perception can be excited by a verbal description, yet we will not consistently conjure the entire imagined face every time we happen on the character in a written narrative unless the text repeatedly offers the entire description. Instead, our brains use consistency-building to engage in a nominative shorthand: even if a facial feature, like Natty’s small nervous eyes that constantly search his surroundings for danger were always the way the text signified that character, our character schema will be activated by those words acting *like a name* in the written text; after a few mentions, we will no longer envision his “hawk-like-eyes” (our visual neural networks will not be excited), but instead, we will simply refer to our entire character schema in which more important traits — like his unfailing marksmanship — will have supplanted the literal meaning of “Hawk-eye” in our narrative logical sense of the character. My point is that the *single most efficient priming mechanism* for activating an entire character schema in film tends to be a face, while in literature, it is almost always a name.

30. Smith discusses stylistic organization using some terms from Chatman in his “Chapter 5: Screens and Filters,” but he does not fully address how the factor of information organization works apart from subjective access and spacio-temporal attachment. Chatman, however, is constructing his argument around the problem of

narrative Point-of-View in literature and film, and he ably parses how narratees receive information from the narration in the media. In his description, however, Chatman maintains a communications model, and while his differentiating between the effects of film and literature is insightful, Smith's work, based in cognition helps the culturalist dispense with the problem complex built around the sender, the author, or the implied author, and instead, frees us to focus on how the text presents its information. The other part of Chatman's model is the action of the "filter," a term he coins to describe how a narratee receives information directly from non-narrating characters in the story-world (narrators, Chatman rightly asserts can never be in the present of the story-world, 115-18), but this issue is better framed by Smith as "subjective access"; and Smith improves on Chatman, influenced no doubt by Genette's *Narrative Discourse*, by adding spatio-temporal attachments.

31. Bordwell carefully qualifies his claim that the filmed narrative does not seem to be "told" saying, "Most films do not provide anything like a definable narrator, [...]" and certainly *most* contemporary styles of film making do stylistically seek to efface or neutralize narrative markers through continuity editing, vernacular dialogue, adherence to generic conventions (which can naturalize even Indian Bollywood musical productions), and/or naturalistic acting styles (*History* 62). However, many film makers, from Eisenstein and Dreyer, through German Expressionists and Welles, to the brothers Cohn and Wachovski, make directorial choices that serve to provoke a conscious awareness and recognition of a "sender" who has actively constructed our perceptual information during spectating. My point, however, is that, slant is still a method by which either the naturalized or highly stylized text can be considered without recourse to imagining an

*author* and all critical impedimenta that such imaginings have historically entailed.

32. For detailed discussions of actual historical events as well as Cooper's research on and interviews with actual Indians also see "The Lesson of the Massacre at Fort William Henry" by Robert Lawson-Peebles, *Plotting America's Past: Fenimore Cooper and the Leatherstocking Tales* by William P. Kelly, *History, Ideology, and Myth in American Fiction, 1823-1852* by Robert Clark, "James Fenimore Cooper and Fort William Henry" by David P. French, *The French and Indian Wars* by Edward P. Hamilton, Thomas Philbrick's "The Sources of Cooper's Knowledge of Fort William Henry," *Betrayals: Fort William Henry and the "Massacre"* by Ian K. Steele, and Richard Van Der Beets' *Held Captive by Indians: Selected Narratives, 1642-1836*.

33. Twain's essay, "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," is mainly an attack on *The Pathfinder*, but the "offenses" Twain visits can easily be applied to all the Leatherstocking tales; this essay marked the modernist break with self-styled Romantic fictions; a critical opinion which grew in the mid-twentieth century to a movement to disregard fictions in the romance style and formula of Cooper as "low art," and the same brush tarred Dickens as well as English and American Gothic writers. Other critics, chronicled in *Fenimore Cooper: the Critical Heritage*, edited by George Dekker and John P. McWilliams, beginning with the first reviews, attack Cooper's claims to Indian accuracy in his first Preface, and therein is the longer and more convoluted debate, vacillating from anger over Cooper's sympathetic depictions of "savages," to seeing his red characters as mere caricatures, to Cooper boosters like James F. Beard and H. Daniel Peck. Beard felt that Cooper worked with all available information to provide authenticity (Peck 8); while Peck claimed that Magua was not simply a caricature Indian

villain, but

[...] the most fully and successfully delineated character in *The Last of the Mohicans*, rising above stereotypes of the bad Indian. On the one hand, his motives and feelings are rendered with focused particularity (unlike those of the more abstracted and idealized Uncas). On the other hand, his stature, especially in the second half of the novel, rises to that of the legendary malignancy; he becomes “the Prince of Darkness.” (10)

34. Michael Mann’s *Last of the Mohicans* is actually the most recent entry in a long line of adaptations and is much beholden to the 1936 adaptation, *The Last of the Mohicans*, directed by George B. Seitz, written by Phillip Dunne. For an excellent study of the movement of the *Mohicans* myth, see *The Lasting of the Mohicans: History of an American Myth* by Marin Barker and Roger Sabin.

35. The film concludes with a funeral ceremony in which Chingachgook closes the narrative declaring himself eponymously to be “the last of the Mohicans”; in the novel, however, his eulogy is interrupted by Hawk-eye:

[...] My race has gone from the shores of the salt lake, and the hills of the Delwares. But who can say the serpent of his tribe has forgotten his wisdom! I am alone—”

“No, no,” cried Hawk-eye, who had been gazing with a yearning look at the rigid features of his friend [...]. God has so placed us as to journey on the same path. I have no kin, and I may also say, like you, no people. [...] The boy left us for a time, but, Sagamore, you are not alone!”

Chingachgook grasped the hand that, in the warmth of feeling, the scout has stretched across the fresh earth, and in that attitude of friendship, these two sturdy and intrepid woodsmen bowed their heads together, while scalding tears fell to their feet, watering the grave of Uncas, like drops of falling rain. (349)

Certainly, it is difficult to read this as a homoerotic union, yet the implications are clear enough: the funeral “weds” Cora and Uncas in death and in the imagery of the ritual. At the same time, the slant cements Duncan and Alice in life. Chingachgook and Hawk-eye are also paired in a death-defying bond as close to marriage as two nineteenth-century men can get.

36. In the course of Ford’s career, his films generally show a development toward a deeper appreciation of Indian culture. In *Stagecoach* (1939), the red characters are no more than clichéd bloodthirsty savages; by Ford’s last film, *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964), Indian characters emerge as deeply human, civilized, and tragically victimized by genocidal white culture. Apparently as Ford made Westerns, in an effort at developing authenticity, he learned more about Native American culture and history and came into contact with more actual Indians. Although a personally conservative man, Ford showed an unmistakable shift toward a real respect for the multicultural historical realities in his later films’ depictions of the West.

37. Even in the final scene in which Duncan is the fertile central survivor and to be married to the ethnically pure white Alice, still, the interpellation is incomplete. The Indian funeral — modeled on Achilles’ rites from *The Iliad* — demonstrates a high degree of “civilization” in the exact terms the slant valorizes and draws into question the

ultimate “good” of Anglo civilization.

38. Almost certainly due to poor critical response, *The Scarlet Letter*, budgeted at 50 million, performed far below studio expectation at the box office, grossing 10.4 million domestically / and 26.2 million in world wide rentals; numbers completely dwarfed by Robert Zemekis' *Forrest Gump* (303.6/ 628.9) which had a similar production cost, 55 million, and was released eight months before (1994). Anecdotally, however, video rental clerks (at least in Athens, Ga, and somewhat to my surprise) seem to like this movie and have recommend it unprompted. Moreover, an informal poll of students who had not read the book but had seen the movie showed me that some very bright students thought highly of the film. This discrepancy suggested to me a possible slippage between the reactions of critics schooled to love literature and the spontaneous reactions of less well lettered audiences and the possible potency of more deliberate criticism as a cultural force.

39. *Variety*, Oct 23-30, 1995: 10, listed forty-six reviews, 40 con, four mixed, and 2 pro (quoted in Daniels, 2). Only one academic critic has been remotely positive, Brecovitch in “Twice-Told Tale.”

40. However, I think that in the not-too-distant future, Demi Moore’s career and public *persona* will be of particular interest to critics given her central role in films that focus on the cultural images and values of womanhood. Her role selection has had an interesting evolution in the 90s, particularly *G. I. Jane* (Ridley Scott, 1998, the first female Navy SEAL), *Striptease* (Andrew Bergman, 1996, for which, in an intertextual dialogue with Robert De Niro’s famous body changes for *Raging Bull* — Martin Scorsese, 1980 — Moore had her breasts enlarged), *Disclosure* (Barry Levinson, 1994, as a powerful

executive, her character demands sex from a male subordinate), and *Indecent Proposal* (Adrian Lyne, 1993), her character, with her architect husband's (Woody Harrelson) consent, has extramarital sex for a million dollars to bankroll his dreamhouse). While contemporary intellectuals in literary studies may see these films as too popular, too aesthetically inconsistent, too banal, politically incorrect, or stylistically flawed for serious consideration — an attitude in some ways reinforced by Moore's public persona — Moore is actually making daring and controversial career choices in ways that few other women in the industry have. Compare these roles to those selected in any ten-year period by more highly regarded actors like Meryl Streep, Sissy Spacek, Jessica Lange, Sharon Stone, or even Julia Roberts. Certainly, this “feminist” adaptation of *The Scarlet Letter* would never have been made without Moore's active interest and participation. Although not an *auteur*, Demi Moore, in a peculiar way, may evolve into a John Wayne-type figure for feminist thinkers of the future. Wayne, who according to Garry Wills is the most influential American in the twentieth century, was also much maligned as an actor by his contemporary critics and had his share of flops, yet as a cultural force, his role selection, success, personal politics, and actor-character integrity have come to symbolize an American era and a certain male American identity. Moore's evolution as a popular feminist icon, may ultimately resemble Wayne's macho influence.

41. Moore's offending *Vanity Fair* cover, photographed by Annie Leibovitz, was August 1991; she also appeared nude on the cover again in August 1992, her body painted in a *trompe l'oeil* design of a man's vested pin-stripe suit. Images available:

<http://www.great-actress.com/demi/mag3.html>

42. The effect of nakedness on the critics who mention it seems somewhat

disproportional to the actual story-time spent on revealing flesh. The “focus” on Hester’s breasts seems particularly overblown: total breast time in the film is less than eight seconds even if we include the shots of Arthur’s nipples; whole body nakedness is less than a twenty seconds, twenty-eight if we include Arthur’s bathing interlude and the extra-diegetic memory sequence; and “wild crazy” lovemaking is almost entirely kissing and caressing with a few seconds of simulated intercourse during which the characters have their clothes on.

43. Nevertheless, fidelity criticism is a particularly tenacious — and often unexamined — paradigm for evaluating adaptation. Dudley Andrew, who in other contexts (see note 11, below) recognizes a range of adaptive possibilities, still gives it primacy, and as recently as 1994, Ben Brady in his adaptation “cook book,” *Principals of Adaptation for Film and Television* (Austin: U Texas Press, 1994), focuses exclusively on how to render a near-exact transposing of plot, characters, and conflicts from page to screen.

44. Other critics also recognize three similar general distinctions in adaptive method based roughly on these same distinctions, particularly Dudley Andrew in “The Well Worn Muse: Adaptation in Film History and Theory” (in Syndy Conger and Janice R. Welsch, eds. *Narrative Strategies*. Macomb, Ill.: West Illinois UP, 1980 (10), and Michael Klein and Gillian Parker, eds in *The English Novel and the Movies*, New York; Fred. Ungar Publishers, 1981 (9-10).

45. Bruce C. Daniels in “Hollywood’s Hester Prynne: The *Scarlet Letter* and Puritanism in the Movies” details Hawthorne’s research and suggests that certain documents were of particular influence. In fact, although the thesis of his essay is that film adaptations play too fast and loose with actual history, Daniels somewhat nonsensically states that

Hawthorne borrowed heavily — too heavily if judged by the canons of modern scholarship — from the work of an Historian: *Dr. Caleb Snow's History of Boston* which was published in 1825. The use of detail from Snow is so copious and careful that it suggests Hawthorne had a copy [...] on his desk when he wrote *The Scarlet Letter* [sic] (4).

Perhaps Daniels wished that Hawthorne had footnoted his borrowings.

46. Daniels reports that *The Mayflower* stocked an ample supply of beer (which her captain feared would be entirely consumed by the Pilgrims on the journey over, leaving none for the sailors on the way back), and that the Puritans — men, women, children, ministers and plowmen — habitually consumed alcoholic beverages rather than risk infective drinking water; they believed beer and fermented juices helpful in warding off disease (141). In this regard, the film is probably inaccurate in depicting a tee-totaling Hester, while the depiction of Mistress Hibbons. Moreover, Daniels cites Webster's early nineteenth-century dictionary as defining

two types of bundling that took place in colonial New England. The first “an expedient practiced in America on a scarcity of beds, where, on such occasions, husbands and parents frequently permitted travelers to bundle with themselves, their wives, and daughters.” The second was quite different. Men and women in advanced stages of courtship, but not yet married, bundled together in the same bed [...]

in order to get a sense of intensified intimacy (131).

47. Bercovitch pursues this in a more evolved form in “*The Scarlet Letter: A Twice-Told Tale*” in which he compares the novel's theme of “civic democracy” to the film's

retelling of the tale as an allegory for “individualist democracy.” Berkovitch’s reading is interesting and his argument partially compelling. Furthermore, he begins to see the film’s intertextual value as a “context appropriate to our times” (1). Although a literary critic, he at least begins — possibly because he actually knows both the book and actual history well and so doesn’t rely on misty recollections of “the classic” — to see the film’s traces of meaning in relation to the novel. However, he still is a literary critic who believes firmly in Hawthorne’s genius, and in a statement much of his argument seems to undercut, he wants to dismiss the film as “a collage of contemporary clichès” (2).

48. This is a slight historical inaccuracy. Massasoit was actually succeeded by his elder son, Wamsutta; however, Wamsutta’s sachemship was brief and uneventful while Massasoit and Metacom are the more significant and longer reigning leaders. Massasoit was probably responsible for the first wave of Pilgrims’ survival as he chose to feed and protect them, teach them how to farm, and ignored their insensitivity to his cultural values. The Pilgrims repaid him with treaty violations, summery law, and liquor, which Metacom is on record as railing against (Puglisi 1-10).

49. See Nina Baym’s “The Significance of Plot in Hawthorne’s Romances.” *Ruined Eden of the Present: Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe*. Ed. G. R. Thompson and Virgil Lokke. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 1981. 49-70. “Thwarted Nature: Nathaniel Hawthorne as Feminist.” *American Novelists Revisited: Essays in Feminist Criticism*. Ed. Fritz Fleischmann. Boston: Hall, 1982. 58-77.

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