

Melancholy Criticism: Primary Identification, the Film and the Critic

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This article will explore the relationship between film critics and the text, a nexus, which has not received as much attention in Film Studies as that other relation, the spectator and the screen. It will trace a mimetic bond in a certain criticism of Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* and Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven*. These films may be read in terms of melancholia, but there is certainly something melancholic about the criticism of them. Several *Vertigo* critics walk the streets of San Francisco in perennial search of Madeleine and her surrogates, while various critics of *Unforgiven* reach out to heal the scars of Clint Eastwood, or damn him, as the sheriff of Big Whiskey did. These critics both mime or repeat the text, but engage in a melancholic denial of it at the same time.

In order to theorise the critic/text relation this article will employ concepts from psychoanalysis and literary deconstruction. The melancholic bond between critics and the film can be characterised as a form of primary identification. This tie has a performative quality that exceeds the text. The performance of *Vertigo* and *Unforgiven* criticism discussed below operates via what Neil Hertz (1989) calls a "lurid" rhetorical figure. This figure functions as a "symbolic graft" (Kristeva 1989) through an act of interpretation that is discursively productive, but which also repudiates the ambivalence of the text. The model of the critic/text relation formulated here has some similarities to the way in which Peter Brooks has used the psychoanalytic concept of the transference to explain the reading process in literature. However, I will argue that Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen's analysis of Sigmund Freud's inability to differentiate transference from suggestion problematises Brooks' work.

Let us begin with psychoanalytic accounts of melancholia. Freud theorises melancholia as an extreme or pathological form of mourning in which the patient loses all interest in the external world and engages in self-loathing. He argues that his self-hatred disguises repressed aggression towards the lost object, which has been internalised psychically in an identification that sustains the relationship at the level of the unconscious (Freud 1915: 249). Julia Kristeva extends Freud's work by arguing that there is a second, more narcissistic type of the illness that involves a crisis of subjectivity and language. The patient's sadness is "the most archaic expression of an unsymbolizable, unnameable, narcissistic wound so precious that no outside agent ... can be used as a referent" (Kristeva 1989: 12). Instead, the melancholiac mourns

what she calls the "Thing", the real that resists signification (Kristeva 1989: 13). The Thing is "inscribed within us without memory, the buried accomplice of our unspeakable anguishes" (Kristeva 1989: 14). She contends that the patient can be cured of melancholia through "a genuine 'graft' of symbolic potential" (Kristeva 1989: 52). The analyst offers the patient forgiveness in the form of an unquestioning love, and consequently the chance for psychic rebirth: "My unconscious is reinscribable beyond the gift that an other presents me by not judging my actions" (Kristeva 1989: 205).

The concept of melancholia can be used to interpret *Vertigo* and *Unforgiven*. *Vertigo* appears to construct Scottie and Madeleine as an ideal heterosexual couple and melancholic object for the audience through its textual strategies. Madeleine represents an opportunity for Scottie to heal his narcissistic wound. The frequent use of subjective narration and POV shots encourages audiences to share his fascination with, and frustrations about, her. We often ignore warnings against this alignment, such as Midge's humorous skepticism and her alternative narrative perspective. We reject Midge as Scottie did, and we become ensnared in the murder plot accordingly.

After Madeleine's death, Scottie is diagnosed with "acute melancholia, together with a guilt complex". His subsequent behaviour becomes more understandable. His efforts in transforming Judy into Madeleine are not entirely sexual: they are also an attempt to sustain his relationship with the lost (melancholic) object. Melancholia, though, turns on an ambivalent identification with the other: the lost object is loved and hated (Freud 1915: 246-247). Scottie's guilt and despair are externalised into hostility towards Judy. His latent aggression becomes overt after she dons Madeleine's necklace. The return to the tower and the accompanying interrogation kill off his affection for Madeleine.

Madeleine's death also traumatises viewers. Despite Judy's flashback detailing her complicity in the crime, arguably we reserve our judgement of her. We hope, as she does, for the couple's reconciliation. As Scottie's cruelty towards her increases, we begin to judge him. Even when they reach the tower platform we cling to the faint possibility of a happy ending. Judy's death is just as shocking as Madeleine's. Although this tragedy has been foreshadowed, viewers are as inconsolable as Scottie because of their melancholic longing for the

(return of the) romanticised couple.

The ambiguous melancholic object in *Unforgiven* is less obvious: it is Claudia Feathers Munny's gift of forgiveness to her husband in the period before the film commences. William Munny had been "a known thief and murderer", but his wife's love enabled him to become a sober, peaceful farmer and family man. Munny rejects or loses forgiveness by deciding to return to crime. This loss is anticipated in *Unforgiven* from the opening shot (in which he buries his wife). It is also figured consistently by the film's mise-en-scene, particularly through lighting and the use of shadows. Munny's physical and mental condition deteriorates the closer he moves towards Big Whiskey, the locus of his temptation. After a severe beating from the town sheriff, Munny hallucinates that his wife's face is "all covered with worms", indicating that her influence over him has died. Munny's self-loathing is transformed into murder for hire shortly afterwards. When he receives news of the death of his partner Ned Logan, he resumes drinking, openly acknowledging his loss of forgiveness. Although his revenge mission is somewhat justifiable, he acts more like the angel of death in the ensuing gunfight. Just as his damnation seems assured, the film's ending suggests that he remains, in some way, forgiven. This reinforces the uncertainty of his forgiveness.

Primary Identification and the "Face" of Film Criticism

In theoretical terms, both Freud and Kristeva typify the melancholic attachment to the lost other as a wound that will not heal. (Freud 1915: 254 Kristeva 1989: 12). The melancholiac's relation to the other appears to turn on an identification, whether through psychical incorporation (Freud) or a merger with the Thing (Kristeva). The patient's affective fusion with the object erodes subjective boundaries, enabling the patient to remain in "a past that does not pass by" (Kristeva 1989: 60). The patient lives with the encrypted object as if it were the present through an affective identification. This process resembles primary identification, the first bond with an other that forms the subject (Freud 1921). Borch-Jacobsen asserts that primary identification is what Freud calls the *Gefühlsbindung*, the social or emotional tie. This bond does not involve an identification of an ego with a discernible figure such as the father or mother. Rather, it is an indissoluble, mimetic coincidence of self and other reminiscent of hypnosis (Borch-Jacobsen 1993: 60). This tie is entirely beyond memory and representation, and can only be discerned as identification (Borch-Jacobsen 1993: 61).

Primary identification can serve as a model of the relationship between the critic and the text in film criticism. This relation manifests itself as a process of affective and rhetorical identification or "reading"

in which critic and text mime each other. As a result, they bring each other into existence as a stable critical identity and a reading of the film. It is via the textual identifications of critics that the performative dimension of film criticism can be traced. This is because the power of affect, understood as both emotion and rhetorical influence, does not come from sympathy or empathy, nor is it conveyed through language (Borch-Jacobsen 1993: 73). Instead, "Affect as such is identificatory, mimetic" (Borch-Jacobsen 1993: 73). The other affects me because "'I' am that other. . . My identity is a passion. And, reciprocally, my passions are identificatory" (Borch-Jacobsen 1993: 73).

This affective and rhetorical identification centres on a "lurid" rhetorical figure. This figure is the foundation or "face" of the film critic's discourse on the film. Kristeva theorises primary identification as the instigation of both subjectivity and the sign (Kristeva 1987). The infant interprets the gestures of maternal care as something more than a fulfillment of its needs. The child reads them as indicators of the mother's desire for the imaginary father, the loving, pre-Oedipal paternal figure that embodies primary identification (Oliver 1991). Primary identification with the imaginary father therefore has a deictic function: it points the infant elsewhere, towards individuation and symbolisation.

Cynthia Chase argues that this act of reading or interpretation "inaugurates the possibility of meaning" for the child (Chase 1987: 1006). She uses the work of Paul de Man and Neil Hertz to elaborate on Kristeva's theory of primary identification. Chase claims that the imaginary father also functions as a rhetorical figure for "the specular relation between figure and grammar, or between the cognitive and performative dimensions of language" (Chase 1990: 124). Paul de Man contends that the disjuncture between a text's performance and its cognition "is the wound of a fracture that lies hidden in all texts" (de Man 1984: 120). According to Neil Hertz, it is at the site of this wound that the lurid rhetorical figure emerges in criticism (Hertz 1989: 91).

The abject woman in *Vertigo* criticism and the wounded male in *Unforgiven* criticism are examples of a lurid rhetorical figure. Film critics elucidate and identify with such figures in act of interpretation that provides an apparently ambivalent text with a (temporary) stability that is discursively productive. Kristeva's reading of melancholia in Dostoevsky's work can help us to understand how this occurs. She contends that forgiveness has a creative role in melancholia. Forgiveness provides the patient with a symbolic graft that enables the subject to overcome the symbolic collapse associated with melancholia through reconciliation with the paternal ideal. It operates as a form of primary identification. "Forgiveness emerges first as the setting up of a form. It has the effect of an acting-out, a doing, a poiesis" (Kristeva 1989: 206). In film criticism the affective identifications of critics are transformed

into a discursive effect (Kristeva 1989: 217). The mimetic repetitions of the text by critics are an “acting-out” that transcends the film’s seeming ambivalence in a way that gives “shape to signs – harmony of the work, without exegesis, without explanation, without understanding” (Kristeva 1989: 206).

The patterns of these identifications are evident in the melancholic performance of *Vertigo* and *Unforgiven* criticism. Susan White argues that prominent *Vertigo* critics such as Mulvey (1975), Modleski (1988), Wood (1989), Rothman (1987), and Wexman (1986) display a “melancholy identification with female suffering” that risks “overidentification and boundary confusion” with the maternal figure in the text (White 1991: 925). Accordingly, they “produce not only Judy/Madeleine as a ‘real woman’ but Carlotta Valdes as a ‘real’ historical figure, as well” (White 1991: 918). Critical desire for the “real” woman of *Vertigo* leads to the identification of this figure with the site of narrative truth (White 1991: 919).

White’s argument can be extended. Critics also identify with Scottie through their “melancholy identification with female suffering”. He is coded as “feminine” by his physical and mental impairment early in the film, his identification with Madeleine, and through his victimisation by Gavin Elster. Woman thus “becomes the ultimate point of identification for all of the spectators” (Modleski 1988: 99). The identification of critics with Scottie extends to their mimetic repetition of his narrative project of rescuing the distressed woman. They also frequently parallel Scottie’s rejection of Midge in the film through neglect (Rothman 1987 Keane 1986 Poague 1994). Elisabeth Bronfen, for example, devotes over 5000 words to a feminist reading of *Vertigo* but does not mention Midge once (1988). Other critics treat her with remarkable hostility:

Midge is a woman playing with life, denying intimacy and her own womanhood, a sardonic hedonist whose casual response to Scottie’s remark about brassieres reveals a deep-seated and cruel debasing of feminine values. When Midge sees Madeleine leaving Scottie’s apartment, her cynical comment to herself is yet another sign of her shallow realism.... She will draw life, not live it, because what is suggested in the real portrait of Carlotta is something mysterious and beautiful that the Midge of this world cannot understand or even attempt to understand (Poznar 1989: 60).

Critics also appear to regard her as an inappropriate or undesirable object-choice, constructing her as maternal or boyish even though the film indicates differently. Robin Wood claims that Midge is both “too explicitly the mother” but too independent to be dominated by men like Scottie or Gavin (Wood 1989: 385). Karen Hollinger argues that Midge is “first of all, a boyish

figure who wears plain sweater with masculine-type collars and dark skirts. As a commercial artist, she makes her own living and seems to represent an independent, practical career woman, yet she is also a mother figure to Scottie” (Hollinger 1987: 21). Each of these different interpretive gestures permits critics to preserve Scottie and Madeleine as the romanticised heterosexual couple.

Unforgiven critics who forgive Eastwood or the film enact a tacit melancholic identification with the figure of Claudia Munny in their redemption of a “man of notoriously vicious and intemperate disposition”. Instead of creating a family man and farmer, critics manufacture a figure that is critically productive. This occurs through an affective embrace of the cinematic icon that is transcended in a tendency towards metonymy: through forgiveness the film is affirmed as a significant generic and artistic contribution. For example, some critics have classified *Unforgiven* as a revisionist western and read it as a form of cultural contrition for the (violent) excesses of Eastwood’s previous films (Andrew 1992 Corliss 1992 Tibbetts 1993). “*Unforgiven* questions the rules of a macho genre, summing up and maybe atoning for the flinty violence that made Eastwood famous” (Corliss 1992: 62). In claiming that *Unforgiven* is Eastwood’s attempt at redemption, critics treat it as a finale to his career that alters its trajectory and meaning. Critics who treat the film as a return to the classical western “forgive” Eastwood for questioning generic conventions in previous films. They now regard him as the guardian of a tradition, a successor to John Ford and Sam Peckinpah (Frayling 1992 Sheehan 1992). “Clinton Eastwood Jr is crucial to the genre’s survival in its purest form” (Andrew 1992: 28). Still other critics have argued that *Unforgiven* is a new type of western, a postmodern or post-revisionist film. According to Maurice Yacowar, “In remembering the neglected western, Eastwood presents one that has been deconstructed and reconstituted, dismembered then rebuilt, to express a contemporary understanding of what the west and the western now mean (and have done) to America” (Yacowar 1993: 247). Critics thus “forgive” him because his work generates a new phase or tradition within the genre (Babiak 1998 Dowell 1992 Grist 1996).

Eastwood and *Unforgiven* have also been strongly criticised by some writers. Paul Smith argues *Unforgiven* is implicated in the representation of violence it seeks to question (Smith 1993). A conventional revenge narrative and the sheriff’s death undercut the supposed critique of western mythology. “The claims for the complexity and ambiguity of the film are a little hard to fathom” (Smith 1993: 266). However, Smith and other critics who have “abjected” Eastwood or *Unforgiven* appear to conflate actor and role in a manner that implies they also have an affective relation to the cinematic icon or the text. They connect William Munny to the Eastwood screen persona, and *Unfor-*

given to previous Eastwood films considered as violent and regressive (Hinson 1992 McReynolds 1998). "Eastwood persists throughout the movie in telling anyone who will listen, including the audience, that he ... isn't The Man With No Name of the Sergio Leone films, that he isn't Dirty Harry ... He ain't like that no more. But he is, of course. He has to be" McReynolds 1998: 50). These critics argue that *Unforgiven* is a continuation of such films, not a cultural apology. They seem to condemn Eastwood or the film, as the sheriff had denounced Munny as a "killer of women and children".

The assertion of identity through a rhetorical figure in *Vertigo* and *Unforgiven* criticism is problematic. This lurid figure generates film criticism; it also possesses considerable rhetorical and explanatory force. However, the origin of such a figure cannot be strictly determined. Hertz calls this the "pathos of uncertain agency": is the lurid figure in the text, or found through the act of reading (Hertz 1989: 100)? The fact it may not be clearly present in the text indicates that its power derives, in part, from the critic's own desire or suggestibility. This uncertainty can be linked to the love/hate relation with the other in melancholia. Freud and Kristeva contend that melancholic identification is fundamentally ambivalent, resulting in a crisis of subjectivity: either the patient or the object must be exterminated. Freud also argued that ambivalence is a quality of primary identification:

Identification ... is ambivalent from the very first; it can turn into an expression of tenderness as easily as into a wish for someone's removal. It behaves like a derivative of the first, oral phase of the organization of the libido, in which that object that we long for and prize is assimilated by eating and in this way annihilated as such (Freud 1921: 105)

Borch-Jacobsen argues that the ambivalence of the (melancholic) rapport does not come from its capacity to transform from love to hate to love. Instead, it derives from the tendency of identification to obliterate the other's specificity. The emotional tie induces anxiety in all of us because it "relates me to all those 'others' with whom I identify myself, without ever knowing myself or recognizing myself in them" (Borch-Jacobsen 1993: 154). While these identifications are forgotten, they can be repeated as lurid rhetorical figures in film criticism.

What if this lurid figure does not function, what if it is not fully persuasive? What if film criticism cannot overcome textual doubt? Cynthia Chase points out that, in terms of the gestures of maternal care or signification's material elements, there is "the thoroughly unstabilizing impossibility of determining between the significative, marks determined by an encoding, and the insignificant effects of sheer probability or

chance" (Chase 1989: 83). This uncertainty is resolved through the performative or persuasive power of the imaginary father. Through him we encounter "the performance, the production, of the disjunction between performance and cognition" (Chase 1990: 132). Primary identification often appears to be gendered. While the father is associated with the phenomenal aspects of language, the mother is aligned with its material elements and both can be transformed into an abject. Kristeva writes that the abject is "radically excluded and draws me towards the place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva 1982: 3). Chase contends that primary identification performs a "misogynistic gesture" because abjection is regarded as universal rather than particular (Chase 1990: 133).

The "pathos of uncertain agency" is resolved through the act of interpretation that is film criticism. The implication of this is that, "Such writing may enact the performative gesture on which it seeks to comment" (Chase (1990: 133). Something is always lost, abjected or forgotten in the relationship between the critic and the film. The rhetorical or affective nature of textual nature of critical performance is denied or foreclosed. Although lurid rhetorical figures are transferred on to the text through rhetorical performance, textual ambiguity is repudiated. Accordingly, such figures dis-figure or de-face the film.

Vertigo and *Unforgiven* criticism often involve a melancholic denial of the text. While *Vertigo* critics may enact a masculine identification to save an endangered feminine textual figure, the film seems to undercut the very possibility of successfully completing such a project. Trumpener (1991) and Linderman (1991) argue that *Vertigo* is a *mise-en-abyme*. This interpretation is supported by Judy's revelation in the flashback because it completely destabilises textual meaning. It is not possible for either critics or viewers to differentiate Judy's contribution to Madeleine's creation from that of Gavin Elster. Nor can they establish with certainty the extent of Judy's complicity in the crime: it is impossible to distinguish victim from victimiser in *Vertigo* conclusively. As critics search for the definitive female victim or real woman, they resemble Scottie: melancholiacs looking for the irretrievable object. Critics become mired in the text, trapped by their own longing, despite being forewarned about the fictional nature of this figure through Midge's alternative narrative perspective. And, like Scottie, they attempt to displace their own melancholia. They appear to perform an abjection of the feminine on to the film in order to halt the oscillation of identity and facilitate the construction of a critical discourse with a fixed locus.

Unforgiven seems to indicate that William Munny's hold on forgiveness is tenuous at best. He remains haunted by his past, and his inner turmoil is arguably paralleled by the ambiguity of the film's *mise-en-scene*. The Eastwood persona also seems to be con-

structured as ambivalent. Critics who read or transfer forgiveness on to Eastwood or the text perform a melancholic denial of the uncertainty surrounding a textual and/or cultural masculine figure. At the very least they render the actions of a monstrous figure ambivalent or comprehensible (that is, potentially forgivable).

Critics who abject Eastwood or the film also engage in a melancholic denial of the text through their assumption that *Unforgiven* is no different from other Eastwood films. Munny has atypical qualities for an Eastwood action hero. Early in the film his character is an ageing, incompetent, reformed gunfighter. Munny also has a family, a delineated past, and feels some remorse for his crimes. The murders he commits may recall the violent and vindictive behaviour of other Eastwood films. However, the way that the final confrontation is filmed does not fetishise violence, leaving the viewer somewhat confused about the events. Munny may reject salvation in that scene, but the film's ending suggests his exile from grace is not permanent. The comparative complexity of this particular Eastwood character cannot be ignored.

Transference as Reading

The relationship between the film critic and the text proposed in this article has similarities to Peter Brooks' formulation of the reading process. Brooks is best known in Film Studies for his work on melodrama (1976). He has also employed psychoanalysis in his writing on narrative and the activities of readers in literature (1984 1987 1994). He claims that the interaction between texts and readers generates meaning. "Meaning ... is not simply 'in the text', nor wholly the fabrication of a reader (or a community of readers), but in the dialogic struggle and collaboration between the two, in the activation of textual possibilities in the process of reading" (Brooks 1987: 14).

Brooks contends that the reading process is inherently dialogic. He deploys the psychoanalytic concept of transference as a model for this process. In *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling* he asserts that, "The transference is textual because it presents the past in symbolic form, in signs, thus as something that is 'really' absent but textually present" (Brooks 1994: 54). This can be explained as follows. In psychoanalytic therapy the patient talks to the analyst. Even if the analyst remains silent, his or her mere presence carries the promise of interpretation. This promise stimulates the patient's discourse. The analyst shapes this discourse into a coherent whole, returning it to the patient through what Freud calls "constructions" (Freud 1937b). The work of interpretation is both collaborative and contested. If the analyst's construction is successful, it produces further memories or associations from the patient. On some occasions the patient resists the analyst's intervention and/or produces no new material. This may require a new direction in the

treatment, but Freud also argues that the patient can be convinced that the analyst's construction is correct. This conviction, "achieves the same therapeutic result as a recaptured memory" (Freud 1937b: 266).

Brooks writes that in narrative, "Something is being transmitted or transferred from the teller and is told to the listener, and to listening: it has entered the realm of interpretation" (Brooks 1994: 51). He compares the analytic patient to the textual narrator and ultimately the author, while aligning the analyst with the narratee and reader. Brooks claims that, like the analyst, the narratee or reader attempts to reconstruct the narrator's story. "The process of listening to a story or reading a text is essentially constructive, a filling-in of gaps, a building of fragments into a coherent whole: a conquest of the non-narrative by the narrative, non-sense by the semantic" (Brooks 1994: 57). He argues that more efficacious interpretations are like analytic constructions insofar as they are both convincing and critically productive.

Narrative truth, then, seems to be a matter of conviction, derived from the plausibility and well-formedness of the narrative discourse, and also from what we might call its force, its power to created further patterns of connectedness, its power to persuade us that things must have happened this way, since here lies the only explanatory narrative, the only one that will make sense of things (Brooks 1994: 59).

Film critics can be compared to analysts who reconstruct the film into a more coherent narrative. *Vertigo* critics try to locate a female victim who is identified with the truth of the narrative, while *Unforgiven* critics seem to judge Clint Eastwood (or his character) in order to situate the film generically and/or culturally. Yet while some parallels between critical and textual positions seem evident, it cannot be determined strictly where such meanings originate. Meanings are created in the "dialogue" between film critic and text. A cogent reading of a film will transform the ambiguous text from the danger of "non-sense" into the "semantic" legibility of interpretation.

Brooks' model of the reading process has some difficulties. Borch-Jacobsen argues that Freud's concept of transference is indistinguishable from suggestion (Borch-Jacobsen 1993, 39-61). If this is the case, then the analytic situation is not dialogic, if we understand dialogue as the free exchange of views between conversational partners. Brooks is certainly aware of the issue of suggestion. He maintains that Freud sought to challenge his own interpretive mastery in the analytic relationship in late papers such as "Analysis: Terminable and Interminable" (Freud 1937a) and "Constructions in Analysis" (Freud 1937b). Brooks claims that in the transference dialogue the analyst questions his privilege and may even occupy the patient's

position (Brooks 1994: 58). Following Shoshana Felman, he asserts that in the reading process the reader and text may alter positions so that the text becomes, like the analyst, the presumed site of knowledge. The “reader shuttles between these places, in an unstable dynamic” (Brooks 1994: 58).

The problem with this aspect of Brooks’ argument is that the terms of reader and text, analyst and patient, are just reversed. He still assumes that a dialogue is occurring, that there is an exchange between two distinct sides. However, hypnosis or suggestion nullifies the distance between the doctor and patient. “The patient does not submit to the other, he becomes the other, comes to be like the other – who is thus no longer an other, but ‘himself’” (Borch-Jacobsen 1989: 230). Since the hypnotic bond is that of the emotional tie, there is no subject here at all. There is only the anxiety of birth. Borch-Jacobsen writes: “This first bond, this first copula that makes me what I am, is also the first unbonding, the first annihilation of alterity (a forgetting of the other, prior to any remembering) a matricidal Oedipus” (Borch-Jacobsen 1989: 181). The identities of film critic and text do not exist before they come together in the mimetic, identificatory process of reading and writing that is interpretation. As Hans-Jost Frey claims, “Form is always already the defiguration of the formless, whose place it takes” (Frey 1985: 124). Brooks’ emphasis on the goal of reading as a coherent, persuasive understanding of the text that produces further interpretation must be rethought because it overlooks the textual consequences of the interpretive desire for cogency. The establishment of stable critical positions and readings of the films in *Vertigo* and *Unforgiven* criticism is apparently predicated on the anxious repudiation of textual ambivalence or uncertainty.

Conclusion

The model of performative film criticism traced here can extend beyond *Vertigo* and *Unforgiven*, or melancholy texts generally. The work of de Man, Chase and Hertz suggests that lurid rhetorical figures will appear elsewhere in film criticism. For example, Janet Staiger, using an “historical reception studies” approach, has analysed the links between the use of animal motifs and gender and sexual identity in the reception of *The Silence of the Lambs* (Staiger 1993). More broadly, auteur film analysis might be an extensive discourse where the performative qualities of criticism can be located. Dana Polan reminds us that in auteur theory there is both “a drive to outline the desire of the director, his or her (but usually his) recourse to filmmaking as a way to express personal vision” and a “desire for the director – the obsession of the cinephile or the film scholar to understand films as having an originary instance in the person who signs them” (Polan 2001). We may find the pathos of uncertain agency in the tension between these two desires, “reinscribed as

questions of activity and passivity, guilt or innocence and play themselves out as compulsively repeated figures” (Hertz 1989: 100).

Maybe, maybe not. This model of performative criticism cannot be forced upon film criticism. It exists only as a pattern, discernible through rhetorical performance, as identification. Borch-Jacobsen argues that affects are not recollected, but repeated or performed constantly, in *statu nascendi*, as if for the first time (Borch-Jacobsen 1993: 58).

The primary, affective mimesis of critic and text I have “found” in *Vertigo* and *Unforgiven* criticism recalls Paul de Man’s theorisation of the autobiographical performance of (all) texts. “The autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between the two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutually reflexive substitution” (de Man 1984: 70). Of course, this article cannot exempt itself from the identificatory processes it traces. It is also a form of primary identification. My textual performance exceeds its cognition to the extent that I have traduced films and other texts. I have engaged in film criticism, but have I been persuasive nonetheless? Do we share a rapport?

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