CHAPTER 7

IDEOLOGY, DESIRE, AND GENDER

As postmodern discourses are restructured in response to an increasingly complex system of commerce and exchanges in contemporary society, certain modes of thinking, talking, and desiring along with the spaces of power that they inhabit are publicly inhibited and repressed in the mainstream of middle-class life. These repressed powers and desires, however, return to the communal life through various strategies of cultural transference (the displacement of unconscious desires from one site to another) that enable them to be attached to new, unexpected ideas, signs, objects, and activities and thus pass through the censor of public inhibition. The repressed returns again and again and each time in the guise of a new set of signs and activities. In other words, when a sentiment, feeling, idea, or wish becomes "taboo" in mainstream culture because of new historical conditions, it acquires a new life in (acceptable) disguise through transference. This disguised life, more often than not, is a life that is conducted on the margins of culture. If, for instance, the desire to dominate women is (for ideological reasons) no longer acceptable to the liberal consciousness of the middle class, the deep desire of a patriarchal order to control women finds its expression in the symbolic enactment of this desire in the space of a margin where the liberal imagination enacts its cultural fantasies through the mediation and agency of others. The symbolic site for the enactment of consciously repressed desires is usually removed enough from the main culture to allow an individual to flatter himself that he is morally superior, tolerant, and open-minded and has a sophisticated ethical consciousness but close enough to provide him with a viewpoint from which he can vicariously participate in the acting out of his deep desires and
repressed wishes. An individual, confronted by historical social developments that inhibit him from freely expressing his desire for domination, becomes in short a voyer by using various strategies of transference.

If we agree with Louis Althusser ("Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," Lenin and Philosophy, 1971, 127-186) that ideology is "a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence," we can regard these transferential strategies and similar devices to be the effects of ideological apparatuses for the interpellation and recruitment of subjects. They produce a set of representations through which people (mis)recognize the real conditions of their situation and "make sense" of those conditions in such a way that their intelligibility "explains" and "justifies" the existing relations of production in which gender plays a significant economic as well as political and ideological role. John Huston's Prizzi's Honor is one of the most powerful instances of this ideological operation of cultural transference. The film acts out the repressed desires for domination and subjugation of women that for various historical reasons are no longer overtly permitted in mainstream culture. In the symbolic space of a Mafia family, the film provides a set of mediating agents through whom the repressed political desires of patriarchy and the structure of its power and exploitation are articulated.

To understand the operation of the film's ideology, one has to bear in mind the contradictory position of women in contemporary capitalist societies. In its attempt to recruit women for its cheap labor force, the capitalist "free" market, which is desperately in competition for labor, has had to produce new subjectivities for women so that it can recruit a self-sustaining and efficient work force. To construct these new subjectivities, the contemporary exchange system has placed a great deal of pressure on women to develop a new mode of public negotiations and discourses about women—the aim of which is to give women the psychological and social skills they need to perform confidently in the work place. Women in postmodern discourses are represented as equal to men, and the order of patriarchy is "officially" rejected. The need to have women in the work force, however, runs counter to the ideologi-
The opening scene of Prizzi’s Honor—a wedding—is a celebration of the traditional woman: woman as family person both in the sense of a homemaker and a loyal member of a group (in this case the Prizzi Family). The wedding is elaborate and rather gaudy affair in which the values of the traditional family served by a woman and dominated by men are consecrated and sanctioned by religion. As “Ave Maria” is sung, the ceremony extols woman’s virginity and monogamy in the relationship values that are highlighted by the contrast between Don Corrado Prizzi’s two granddaughters: Therese, the bride, and her sister, Maureen. The bride, named for the celibate saint, is dressed in the traditional vioagial white wedding gown while her sister, whose name is reminiscent of the femme-fatale Mae West, wears a strapless black gown with a clattering soft-pink sash over one shoulder. The family matriarch attempts to reconcile Maureen and her father, Dominic Prizzi, her father points to Maureen’s dress and asks why she is dressed like a “whore.” The two modes of womanhood, “the Virgin” and “the Whore,” are thus established in the very beginning of the film and constitute the two modalities of subjectivity: the film situates the viewer in such a relation to the events that he will produce a tale in which the subject position of woman as virgin is reenacted in opposition to the denigration of woman as whore. The virgin and the whore are in fact the only frames of intelligibility that the men in the film seem to have for their relationships with women. If a woman does not fall into either category, the men experience a cognitive and emotional confusion; they become paralyzed and do not know how to relate to her. Charley Partanna’s reaction to Irene Walker is an exemplary instance of such confusion and paralysis. When Charley discovers Irene’s professional life and becomes familiar with her background, the information he obtains about her is so unsettling that it puts Irene beyond the virgin-whore binary. Charley, in a moment of incoherence and disorientation loudly asks, “Do I ice her? Do I marry her?” Such a dilemma is a sign of the crisis of binarism in patriarchy, which can only divide women into the virgin and the whore, under pressure of postmodern discourses that produce subject positions for women that seem to exceed the patriarchal signifying system. The desire of patriarchy to continue with the old taxono-

my of virgin-whore nonetheless continues, and the result of the conflict between the repressed binarism and postmodern subject positions for women (which reproduce in gender relation the contradictions of political power, economic practice) is the kind of disorientation that Charley confronts. However, he must come to terms with this confusion, and the film eventually resolves this (culture’s) dilemma by returning to the binarism and reinserting women back into patriarchy.

The motif of monogamy announced in the opening scene is rearticulated later when Charley allows it to be known that Maureen—in response to his philandering—ran away with another man only to be brought back in disgrace by her father. As a result Maureen is now a nonperson in a family which has excised her from Brooklyn (the feudalism of the Prizzi family) to Manhattan where she earns her living as an interior decorator while Charley is an honorary son of the family. She is held responsible for breaking the code of monogamy and is quite aware of her position as the family outsider when she ironically comments on her strapless gown: “I gotta reputation to keep up.”

The limits of the “new” womanhood, however, are primarily tested in Irene. She is first seen in the film sitting in the balcony of the church looking, in a rather distracted way, at the ceremony. When Charley notices her, she seems not only to enjoy the attention but in an uncanny way to have expected it. The “tale” of the film constructs her as such a schematic woman that the spectator, retrospectively, should be inclined to think Irene planned this “chance” meeting. As soon as Charley spots her, he tries to find out who she is; he hires a photographer to take pictures of her and even calls Maureen (for the first time since the broken engagement four years earlier) to see if she knows anything about Irene. The call sets in motion Maureen’s “jealousy” of Irene, suggesting that the film produces a post for intelligibility for the spectator to regard the rivalry between women as inevitable, as somehow “natural” to the very “essence” of womanhood. No matter what kind of woman is involved—the homebound Theresa or the free, sophisticated, Manhattanite Maureen—a woman is a woman in certain “essentialized” characteristics such as jealousy that are preeultural and transhistorical.

Irene is a woman of stunning beauty. Outwardly, therefore,
she fits the traditional feminine code of affording sexuality, and in fact her physique is the only reason Charley is attracted to her since he does not know anything about her at the time. Through this convention of love at first sight of a beautiful woman, the film once more asserts its underlying ideology about woman: she is reduced to that in her which is openly visible; woman is a surface. Her surface, moreover, determines all her connections, social relationships, and entire life. Thus Irene is attending the wedding ceremony and reception, apparently like a member of the "family," but this is only an appearance. It later turns out there is quite a different reason for her presence at the wedding. This duplicity of appearances and reality is repeated throughout the film and is one of the significant features of her "character": she is other than what she seems to be. She is scheming and fraudulent. This motif of falseness and counterfeit is captured most clearly in the image of her purse. When she is dancing with Charley, she does not let go of her purse, a rather odd gesture given the nature and place of the ceremony. It soon becomes clear that even her purse is other than what it seems: it hides a gun, the mark of violence that is the antithesis of femininity in the dominant codes. The purse is in fact a case for holding the tools of her trade: a pistol for murdering a member of a rival mob family. She, unlike other guests at the wedding, has been flown in from Los Angeles as a hired gun. She is, in other words, not what she seems to be. She is a woman recruited into the male work force as a "supplement" male labor and to shield men from the law. If she kills an enemy of the Prizzi family while everyone is attending the wedding then each one will have a perfect alibi. The working woman enters the labor force only to provide relief for the working man. Thus Irene is neither a family friend nor a traditional woman. She is socially, in Derrida's words, a "dangerous supplement." Angelo Partana, Charley's father, turns a photograph showing him standing next to her as evidence of an unwanted connection. Although she is a "supplement," she is herself made intelligible in the tale of the film as an instance of luck: she is the opposite of (feminine) finitude and presence. She is not a complete woman, not a complete hit-man, nor can she be a complete wife, a complete member of the Family, nor a complete mother (the only child she holds in her arms is a doll).

Before being called away to perform her professional duty and eliminate the Prizzi family opponent, Irene agrees to dance with Charley. Charley, however, is oblivious to the threat of the revealing signs emitting from Irene, because, like a real man, he is in love; and love (at first sight) makes him blind. A slightly bearded, no-nonsense, super hit-man for the Prizzi family and a special favorite of Don Corrado himself, Charley is a very typical man, unattuned and without any particular direction, goal, or ambition in life. His attempts to find out more about Irene, through both the photographer and Maerose, all remain fruitless until Irene herself calls later that night ostensibly to apologize for leaving Charley in the middle of their date. The spectator later discovers that her phone call not only conceals her homocide (the reason she left the reception) but also is a ruse to entice Charley as part of a larger scheme that Irene has invented to neutralize Charley as a hit-man. When the emissary from the Prizzi family, will, she knows, eventually be sent to eliminate her. On the phone she is charming, coquettish, and, after informing Charley that she is in California, quickly agrees to have lunch with him the following day in Los Angeles. The effect of the telephone call is to further enhance, from a traditional point of view, the impression of Irene as an aggressive, last woman. As impression that is reinforced at lunch. She is too "active" and "assertive" for a woman, so active and assertive in fact that she makes Charley look like a helpless boy. She orders their meal at the restaurant on her own and does not allow Charley to pay for their meal. She asks Charley to an outdoor restaurant for lunch; she drives him in her (very expensive) car; and she does most of the real talking—Charley, the obtuse hit-man, is reduced to near silence and incoherence; his conversation is limited to informational questions such as the name of the drink, the name of the language in which she ordered them, the name of the song the band is playing. In a sense the traditional roles are reversed: Charley is the passive one following Irene's active lead. This reversal, in the cultural context of the film, is seen as a transgression of the established code and resulting in the construction of Irene as a nonwoman, a quasi-male, in other words, a "lack." According to the film's ideological marks, the spectator "knows" that this is not a normal state and will have to be transformed. The elimination of the nonwoman is therefore foreshadowed.
During lunch Charley confesses to Irene that he is in love with her. Irene's response (her obvious insincerity manifested in her elicted gestures and overt overintellectuality) arouses the spectator's suspicions about her motives. Later in the film the viewer discovers that her suspicions are well-founded: she has schemed and planned the whole affair from the very beginning. Not only is she a devious, scheming woman, she is also an adulterous one since her affair with Charley takes place while she is still married. Moreover, the spectator's tale is supposed to forego as Irene's reasoning for making Charley fall in love with her is that she has stolen over half-a-million dollars from a Prizzi casino and she knows the Family will send its super hit-man after her and her husband, Maxie Heller. Charley and the Family, however, are unaware of Irene's involvement with Maxie or the scam. After murdering Maxie in his wife's California home, Charley is shocked to discover Irene enter and cheerfully shout, "Honey, I'm home." Learning that Irene is Maxie's wife, Charley refuses to believe her pleas that she was about to get a divorce from Maxie and instead tricks her "Honey, I'm home," asking her if this is the way an estranged wife addresses her husband. By having Charley interrogate Irene's endurance, the film requires the spectator to construct Irene as duplicitous, immoral, and scheming, adulterous con artist. Irene's credibility crumbles as the film progresses. No matter how grave Irene's crimes against the Prizzi family and against Charley, he cannot, as Irene very well knows, kill the woman he loves. Irene, it must be added, is also quite aware that in a world dominated by men she is alone, and in her loneliness she must take care of herself. She therefore fears that deceives Charley, returning only half of the stolen money and feigning ignorance of the half she keeps for herself.

Charley returns to Brooklyn but is unable to forget Irene. Irene is the most seductive, feminine woman he has ever met, yet she is a hit-man, just like Charley himself. She is a "foreigner," a Polish woman who has "chosen" her name (like the trustworthy Italian Finlay, the embezzling head of a bank in which the Prizzi family holds 25 percent interest); and she is blonde, unlike the women of the family. The code of patriarchy that Charley abides by is neither dear nor helpful in dealing with such a high degree of complexity, thus causing Charley's deep polarization and complete incoherence ("Do I love her? Do I marry her?"). He eventually decides to marry her, and the couple settles in Brooklyn despite the warnings of Charley's father that wherever Irene walks into a roomful of Prizzis, women all talk will stop. Irene will be an extraterritorial person, a woman in exile, a transgressor of the hierarchized binaries of patriarchy, and finally an object of female jealousy. Macrorie's comment about Irene that "Just because she's a thief and a hiter doesn't mean she ain't a good woman in all other departments" is a many-sided statement aimed partially as making Charley aware of the fact that Irene is indeed a thief and a hiter and thus to denigrate her, but in a rather ironic way it is also a statement that comes closer than any of the comments by the men in the film to capturing Irene's insane complexity as a modern woman: a complexity that the common sense of patriarchal ideology, in terms of which the film makes sense, naturalizes as "deviousness" and "scheming."

Irene is a highly intelligent, self-sufficient, professional woman who is tough and unsentimental. She is deeply aware of her loneliness in the world of men and the necessity of taking care of herself all by herself. She has a political pragmatism that derives from her awareness of the predominance of the code of patriarchy and her marginality in it. She is, for example, the woman behind the kidnapping of Finlay, the crooked bank executive. She not only plans the whole affair to the absolute utmost of Charley and his father but is crucial to its successful execution. She is, next to Charley, the "second hit-man." During the kidnapping when the captain's wife accidentally walks into the middle of it, it is Irene who quickly responds to the situation and shoots her. The shooting sends the city police department into a frenzy of violence against the Mafia. Irene knows that as a woman she is expendable and that sooner or later the Prizzis will turn her over to the police so that the rampage against the Mafia will stop and they can return to business as usual. This deep awareness of her marginality, the need to take care of herself, is represented in Irene's desire to have as much money in the bank as possible—she knows the ruthless operation of a capitalist mode of exchange and does not want to be beaten by it. She therefore insists that the Prizzi family return to her the money
that she had originally stolen from their casino since the insurance company has already compensated them for the loss. Reclaiming the money is a matter of principle and self-sufficiency for Irene even though she knows that insisting on her principles and "rights" diminishes her chances for survival within the Prizzi family patriarchy. Thus she pressures Charley to put her case before Don Corrado.

It is a mark of her intelligence, political pragmatism, and professional skills that when Charley calls her from Don Corrado's house to tell her that everything is "100 percent O.K." and that her money will be returned, she realizes Charley is lying and that she is doomed. Charley's big meeting with Don Corrado is given the bleak choice of either killing Irene or being abandoned by the family. His appeal that Irene is his "family" does not get him far with the logic of the Prizzi family. His father, the patriarch, refused him, argues that the marriage tie does not mean very much as he has known Irene for only a few weeks; he then reminds Charley that he had told him not to marry a woman who is in the business—a warning, in other words, to stay away from the new working woman.

To save herself Irene flees Charley and the Family, but Charley follows her to Los Angeles. With his knife hidden in his jacket, Charley arrives at Irene's home to kill her on the eve of her departure for Hong Kong. Irene, of course, knows that he is there to kill her and prepares to defend herself. However, in representing the murder scene, the film reverses the situation. The ideology of patriarchal gender relations places the spectator in a post of seeing from which he obtains a view of the murder scene that justifies Charley's action. Although Charley has premeditated Irene's murder and has arrived with a knife at the ready to terminate her life, the camera dwells lavishly on Irene's bedroom in which she is seen loading her gun, attaching the silencer and getting ready to kill Charley. Irene, not Charley, is presented as the murderer. The film's ostensibly justifiable in depicting Irene as the murderer is that she fires on Charley before he throws his knife at her; the history is completely ignored: Irene pulls a gun on Charley only because she knows his mission is to kill her. Irene's self-defense is thus turned into another example of her murderous nature. When Charley pins Irene to the wall with his knife, the film reaches a climax: the moment in which the new woman is punished for all her acts of transgression against the code of patriarchy. Through the agency of a Mafia family and the figure of a transgressive woman, postmodern capitalism dreams its deepest dream of domination. Resistance against domination is eliminated, and the regime of patriarchy is restored in the relationship between men and women. Irene is removed from the scene because she resists the "haling" of ideology to accept the subject position of compliant "feminine" woman and to submit to the dominant practices of patriarchy. In the political economy of "love" there is no room for her as an oppositional subject who acts through her agency, in ideology's efforts to recruit and install her as the "object" of desire without acknowledging her own "different" desires.

The other strong woman in the film, Maurose, Charley's former fiancée and Dominic Prizzi's daughter also resists the interpretation of patriarchy at first. She has been disowned by her family because of her violation of the code of monogamy. However, she is not murdered like Irene but rather is taken back into the code of patriarchy. She is allowed to live because her transgressions are not as disruptive and dislodging of the codes and practices of patriarchy as Irene's and because she consents to take up the "modified" subject positions offered to her. She is a reformist not a revolutionary, a dissident like Susan in Seidman's Desperately Seeking Susan. The ending of the film is quite significant in this respect. After killing Irene, Charley returns to Brooklyn where he feels lonely and needs a companion to help him forget his trip to Los Angeles. He thus calls Maurose and invites her to dinner. Maurose's answer, which is strategically placed at the very end of the film, is a revealing one: "Holy cow, Charley! Just tell me where you want to meet!" "Holy cow!" is an outdated verbal expression, and although it is thus "ironic," it also signals the historical regression in which Charley's codes of patriarchy have now "fallen in." She is ready to be recruited as a feminine woman and her response to Charley is a declaration of her readiness and acceptance of the code. The film represents Maurose's "consent" as her redemption and offers as her redeeming trait her unquestioning adherence to the code of romance. She loves Charley and is prepared
to do anything for him and to commit any act to get him. She, like Irene, has a goal and knows how to achieve it, but unlike Irene, she is never self-interrogative and critically aware of her goal and its political dimensions. She is, in other words, not a politically self-questioning person and, to a very large extent, treats her "love" for Charley as "natural"—inevitable. She does not inquire into the ideology of the dominant ideology of patriarchy that interpellates her as a "lover." She never "asks" herself why she loves him. The spectator is to understand her love as the effect of the "natural" attraction of a man and a woman, especially two who grew up together. "Love," in other words, is self-evident; it is a platitude that explains itself outside the politics of patriarchy. Consequently she suspects that she is socialized to love a man beyond and above everything else and that such unquestioning love is far from being "natural" and is indeed an instance of the operation of the ideology of patriarchy in interpellating her as a woman and placing her in the relations of production.

She is represented in the film as an artist, a woman sensitive to the aesthetic side of life. Whereas Irene has a political pragmatism that enables her to see through the operation of the code of patriarchy, Maerose becomes fascinated by the texture of life, not seeing beyond and above everything else, thus aesthetizing her experiences as a woman in the political economy of reality constructed by men. In the language of common sense, she is typically feminine: attentive to details and responsive to the "beauty" of life; in other words, she has a "philosophy" of life but her philosophy is entirely aimed at the aestheticization of experience: "Everyone sees shapes differently, but color is forever." "Shapes," masses that occupy space differently and give different impressions to different people, are merely relative (historical); "color," on the other hand, is unvarying (absolute). She is in search of an absolute ground for her life: "color" provides this for her in her professional life as an interior decorator, and "love" becomes the absolute of her emotional life. She has no awareness that the absolute is after all grounded in history and is ultimately political and thus historically contingent (namely, not absolute). Her uncontesting acceptance of "forever" leads her to a reacceptance of the code of patriarchy: "Just tell me where you want to meet."

The representation of Maerose in the film follows the trajectory of her divided behavior and ideas. To the extent that she, like Irene, transgresses the code of patriarchy, she is punished and treated as "whore," whereas her final act of submission and acceptance is rewarded. Similarly, Maerose's clear sense of her goal makes her, like Irene, come across—in the patriarchal common sense of the film—as a scheming woman who stops at nothing to get what she wants. An exemplary scene is her encounter with Charley and the account she gives of her romantic love affair to her father. Charley goes to Maerose to get her advice about Irene ("Do I love her? Do I marry her?") but rather than attending to Charley's urgent pleas, Maerose seduces him and in a sense forces him to make love to her "on the carpet" in the livingroom of her Manhattan apartment, thus affirming the code of the "whore." When she reports this event to her father, whom she hopes to ingratiate so that she can get back at Charley, she reverses the entire situation. She tells her father that Charley raped her, "screwed" her several times, and then proceeds to describe the size of Charley's penis, again violating the code of virginity—she is indeed represented as a scheming "whore."

However, the crucial representation not only of her deviousness but also her utter insensitivity and cruelty is her touch on her father's ulcer. Respecting to his pain and pleas for water, Maerose runs the tap water, making a convincing noise while she pours liquor in a glass and then hands it to her suffering father. She breaks the filial bond, an artist. She also has a "philosophy" of life but her philosophy is entirely aimed at the aestheticization of experience: "Everyone sees shapes differently, but color is forever." "Shapes," masses that occupy space differently and give different impressions to different people, are merely relative (historical); "color," on the other hand, is unvarying (absolute). She is in search of an absolute ground for her life: "color" provides this for her in her professional life as an interior decorator, and "love" becomes the absolute of her emotional life. She has no awareness that the absolute is after all grounded in history and is ultimately political and thus historically contingent (namely, not absolute). Her uncontesting acceptance of "forever" leads her to a reacceptance of the code of patriarchy: "Just tell me where you want to meet."

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in fact a form of rape. Maeroze wants her father to see Charley, his asexual "son," the other men of the family, and perhaps himself differently—as constructed by the code of patriarchy at the core of which is the owning of women as sexual beings.

Again like Irene, Maeroze is a knowing woman: to document Irene's theft, she retraces the other's routes, finding witnesses that can testify that Irene was indeed involved in the casi-no affair. She is also capable of planning a scheme through which her grandmother will be forced to act upon her findings and "get" Irene. Her plan, however, is only partially successful. She is unable to persuade her grandfather to do what she wants immediately, but her scheme and evidence prompt Don Corrado to insist that Irene return the stolen money "within five days" with interest. Despite participating in all the signs of female otherness, Maeroze, unlike Irene, accepts romance as the test of her identity and the uncontested ground of womanshool. As a result of this acceptance she is reinscribed in patriarchy and allowed to live. A mere dissident is no real threat to the prevailing economic and political order but rather provides a safety valve for protest and by disagreeing, purges the system, allowing it move on structurally intact.

In annihilating Irene while allowing Maeroze to survive, Prizzi's Honor acts out contemporary American society's repressed fantasies that no longer can be openly articulated in the center of the public sphere. That which is not possible in the center is transferred and executed in the margin. The patriarchal codes thus maintain their legitimacy: all that has happened is a transference of the site from which ideology interprets the subject and places her in capitalism. The new site is as powerful a place of "hailing" as the previous one without being as politically and culturally vulnerable. The transference, in other words, is in the end a strategy of containment, and thus its psychic space is traversed by the forces of exploitation and domination.

2

Jean-Jacques Beineix's Diva has been viewed by most as a beautiful film that is subtly entertaining in part because of its delightful visual jokes and references to film and media culture.
which ostensibly sets out to support such an ideology by dramatizing it, becomes in actuality not an affirmation of liberalism but a deconstruction of the very philosophical grounds upon which it is founded. For the central male characters, Jules and Gorodish, to achieve self-governing and fulfilling independence through emotional encounters and aesthetic know-how, they have to negate the very principles of liberalism that authorize their search and their world view. Liberalism and its underpinning pluralism are articulated in the world of the film as mere strategies of containment in capitalist patriarchy—discourses for interpellating women as the "subjects" of men's desires.

The current crisis in the relationship between men and women in the West (a larger view of an imperial self and its relations to the outside world) is foregrounded in recent years partly because of the rapid shifting of patterns of behavior under new social forces. The traditional codes of connection in male-female relationships have been prohibited in the public discourses of postmodernism. And Western women are no longer represented in these discourses as a mere actant of men's erotic and domestic fantasies. As a result the Western middle-class male has to search for this lost center (necessary for orienting his sense of self and emotional well-being) in the margins. In Pinter's "Honors" the margin that inscribes the prohibited centering codes is the Mafia family, the underworld world that is not in the public sight but circumscribes it. In Diva the Mafia family is replaced by the world of white mercenaries, corrupt officials, and Third World merchants, which although removed from the center of values and subjectivities of the West, nonetheless circumscribe it. This "excess" of the center, in other words, operates in Diva as the margin in which the codes of patriarchy—suspended in the public postmodern discourses of gender—are given a dark and powerful force. As Diva clearly indicates, the search for a new erotic and emotive site (following a familiar pattern in Western history) has led to the emotional and sexual colonisation of the dark woman: an exploitative relation that deprives the non-Western woman of the very self-sovereignty for which Gorodish and Jules strive. Beneath the playful and glittering surface of Diva, the calm Zen-like gestures of Gorodish and the innocent-looking face of Jules lie a deep, destructive aggression and emotional cruelty. The film is an allegory of what Cynthia, the film's "black American diva," calls "an evil" (a rape) of the dark woman by the Western man who no longer can unleash his unchecked erotic fantasies upon the postmodern Western woman.

On the surface, Diva devolves around a complicated plot consisting of a double chase. In the rather intricate interweaving of these stories, however, quietly and perniciously a third story takes place that, like the first two stories, is about the destiny of two voices: both private voices that should not be made public. If the Haitian seer river pirates get hold of the tape of Cynthia's rendition of Calzata's La Voix (made surreptitiously by Jules), her aesthetic purity and performative integrity will be violated, and she will be reduced to a mere commodity and reduced to the rank of popular singer. ("Vous me prenez pour les Beatles?") She is the dark singer who refuses the status of "celebrity," believing in the public discourses of postmodernism. The "publication" of the second taped voice is also equally ruinous of a career. This is a tape made by a white prostitute, Naïa, recounting the crimes of the chief of police who, along with a private army of thugs, is involved in prostitution rings, drug trafficking, and murder.

Alongside these two actual chases, a third chase takes place in the film. In this one, the searchers also struggle to retrieve something that is of vital importance: the traditional erotic order and patriarchal ideal of womanhood and femininity Jules and Gorodish need for securing their own power of masculinity and perpetuation of their exploitative relation with women. This search, however, is equated in the film with the search for spontaneity, poetry, and affirmation of the rights of the individual to shape his life and world according to his sovereign desires. Unlike the first two chases, this search takes place not on the streets of Paris, but in the dark interiors of quiet lofts; the awesome inside of a lighthouse; the dreamy terrain of a "fantas tale" told over the telephone; and in the textuality of surrealistic jokes. The object of this search is a woman (Naïa) tantalizingly placed on the moving boundaries of the figure of nurturing mother and seductive mistress. This peculiar combination, in which
woman is projected as a self-negating person, requires tradition-
al gender arrangements for its existence, but these are in crisis in
the West. To a very large extent the postmodern Western
woman, in comparison to the Eastern woman, refuses to respond
to the image of herself projected by male fantasies rooted in the
cultural representations generated by the patriarchal social
order. The white European man is thus forced to go outside con-
temporary Europe to find a woman who could be interpolated
into the order of his (political) desires. However, in Dios
the white man, whose gender hegemony is being challenged,
revenges himself by punishing the white woman throughout the
film—presenting her as self-aborted, insensitive, inhumanly
efficient, and, on the whole, nonsexual.

The first European woman the film focuses on is Nadia, a
prostitute who is fleeing from being fecklessly kept as the chief
of police's mistress. Before being murdered by his henchmen, she
conceals in the mailpouch of Jules's moped an audio tape cassette
recording her miseries and revealing the crimes of the chief of
police. Nadia is the white woman as burden—by dropping the
"burden" of her confession (her history) on Jules, she pits him
against the corrupt forces and sets in motion their nearly fatal pur-
suit of him. Barefoot and barely clothed, Nadia is a "professional"
woman stripped of all "womanly" qualities. The blonde police-
woman, Paula, is also a "professional." Although in her profes-
sional capacity she saves Jules in his loft and protects him from his
adversaries, she only partly succeeds as the redeeming woman.
She is the meddling, punishing mother who takes care of Jules
only as part of preserving her own image. She is, significantly,
indifferent to sensuality and uninterested in touching and contact.

While on a stake-out with her partner, who brags about his athletic
powers as a runner and somewhat facetiously invites her to feel
his leg muscles, she becomes nervous and refuses. The other white
women presented in the film do not fare any better: all are pre-
sented as lacking spontaneity and warmth. In one of the chase
scenes a wounded Jules feeling his pursuers takes shelter in a
video-games arcade. Bleeding from a wound and almost losing
consciousness, he leans on the shoulder of a young white woman
for support. Paranoid and unfeeling, the woman mistakes his ges-
ture for a sexual pass and shoves him away. It is also white pro-
tute who imitates the betrayal of Jules that results in his being
shot; she persuades a dark prostitute who has befriended Jules,
letting him hide from his pursuers in her apartment, to reveal
his location to the thugs seeking him. The futility and frustration in
the relationship between contemporay Western men and women
is summed up in a powerful visual gesture: tired, taking refuge in a
friend's apartment, Jules lies down fully clothed next to his friend's
white companion and burrows in head—still shielded in his
motorcycle helmet—into the invited woman's shoulder; she then
punches his helmet away. Completely protected and without a
trace of vulnerability, Jules is impervious to her. It is also im-
portant to notice that in the film none of the white women, including
the policewoman who is on the scene more than any other white
female, plays an important role in the unfolding of the story and
all of them are low in the hierarchy of characters in the film.

In telling contrast to the white woman, who is cold and dis-
tast, the dark woman is depicted as warm, loving, resourceful,
and above all in emotional and sexual synchrony with man. She
is the epitome of ideal womanhood that Jules and Gerodias find
in the process of vanishing from their own culture but are striv-
ing to retrieve and reestablish as the norm.

One embodiment of this ideal is Cynthia—the dark goddess
whose beauty, quiet but powerful sexuality, and shielding
strength must be preserved and protected at all costs. She is
Jules's "private property," "his diva," and must remain his
and only his; Jules's arduous efforts to keep the tape of her voice out
of the hands of the Taiwanese record pirates is an enactment of
his refusal to share with the public. The owning of her (voice) is,
of course, very significantly based on any "right" but on a "theft": Jules's taping of her voice without her consent or even
knowledge. Having "stolen" her voice, Jules, the postmodern
Mafia man and neocolonialist, acquires the right of ownership,
and throughout the film he behaves as if he does indeed have a
legitimate claim on her voice. As Cynthia reminds him, the ille-
gal taping is nothing short of a rape. However, Cynthia is pre-
sented in the film as the forgiving mother-mistress: unlike the
blonde policewoman, Paula, who searches Jules's apartment for
evidence of wrongdoing that could lead to his punishment, Cy-
thia, who has the evidence of Jules's wrongdoing, not only does
not punish him but embraces him, and the film ends with Jules in her arms reaffirming his sense of true womanhood.

The spectator makes this relation intelligible in his tale by viewing ideology's hailing as a natural and organic relationship between man and woman, thus universalizing the codes of gender in capitalist patriarchy. This naturalization is emphasized by the elaborate camera shots of Jules's "romantic" walk with Cynthia, resplendent in a flowing gown and carrying a white parasol, through the Tuileries Gardens where the two are shown in silent communion with each other and nature. Such "romantic" acts as Jules bringing Cynthia an enormous bouquet of flowers and his fascination with lyrical music are stark contrast to Jules's own contemporary urban language and life-style symbolized by his apartment: a virtual storehouse of postmodern electronic technology located on the top floor of a garage, packed with discarded machinery and vehicles, and decorated with large wall murals of 1950s automobiles. Jules's "romantic" gestures thus point to his deep-seated nostalgia for recapturing the lost world in which patriarchy, with its gender codes and exploitative modes of living, is unquestioned.

The latent sexual dimension of Jules's relationship with Cynthia is alluded to when the camera cuts from the scene of their walk to a close-up of Jules the following morning lying under blue satin sheets in Cynthia's room. As the camera pans the room, it turns out he is sleeping alone on the couch, but in an earlier scene, he acts out his sexual desires for "his Diva" using a dark, red, and a stand-in.

Alba is to Gorodish what Cynthia is to Jules: nurturing, loving, and ethereal. Her movements around Gorodish, for the most part, occur on the balconies that keep her scudding above the floor and beyond the hard resistance of earth (the realities of the crisis of patriarchy). Her manner and speech are also displaced—she is a woman-child symbolizing an everlasting childhood. Her language is charged with fables, jokes, stories, and verbal gestures that press the banality of daily talk toward the poetry of the street. If Cynthia is, as Jules's words, the "Queen of the Night," calm, restful, mysterious, then Alba, whose name means "dawn," is the angel of the day bringing with her freshness, movement, and openness. She is in tune with higher realities, and not only her talk and carefree gestures point to a "beyond," but her saluting the sun with her bare breasts while taking care of Jules in the lighthouse is a central visual image reminding the audience of the lyrical space in which Jules and Gorodish's search is taking place. She is uninhibited; she shoplifts an album from a record shop, hiding it in a portfolio of nude photos she has made of herself, as if to signal her disregard for such material codes as private property and such moral ones as propriety. She is the spirit of freedom from the social. Unlike the "serious" contemporary white woman, she is the instance of playfulness; and also unlike the white woman, she not only does not "burden" the man but, as her acts of disregard for the routine demonstrate, she "lifts" him to a higher region of reality with her surreal tales and fantastic fables. The politics of her gestures and the contradictions upon which this notion of freedom is based are revealed when one realizes that she is herself a piece of private property owned by Gorodish and subject to his sense of propriety as when he jealously chides her for coming late, threatening to put her back where he found her—on a road in Vietnam with her VC friends—if she does it again.

The women of the film are thus separated along a color line with white representing lulleness, lack of love, and a deadly indifference to emotions and art, which symbolize life-giving energies, warmth, and protectiveness. The white women are all unaware of the inner needs of the men around them whereas the dark women center their lives around the desires of men and are thus shaped by men according to their needs. The film carefully points out that the emotional and erotic power of the dark woman is not just a question of relatable personal perception but a universally perceived fact. One way in which the film signifies this universality is to permeate those environments encompassing the harmony of white men and dark women with blue lighting (or blue objects). Even when Jules is with the prostitute, the film plays with the color of the lighting: harsh colors shuttering the calm dark light symbolize her failure. More important, the film attempts to show how this notion transcends the particular by studying the relationship between dark women and white men from two entirely different perspectives: the view of Gorodish and that of Jules.
Gorodish is the intellectual involved in the discovery of the underlying structures of reality. Through his analytical powers he sees the connections between events (including the two conspiracies behind the two chases) and by manipulating the relationship between the two manages to achieve his goals and arrange the deaths of all the bad guys: not only the chief of police and his henchmen but also the Taiwanese record pirates. He is a frightening new postmodern combination of intellectual-technocrat-guru whose voracious, imperial "I" does not recognize any boundaries. He is the exemplary man of the new patriarchy—fully involved in the technologies of exploitation and power. He is equipped with the latest high-tech electronic and technological devices and gadgets and at the same time he is the man of the book, a member of the "old guard" of the Talking Heads. He is the man of the moment and always in control of the situation. The reader is reminded of another character, the "I" of the novel, who is also a synthesis of the old and the new, the high-tech and the traditional. The novel is a commentary on the transition from the old to the new, from the traditional to the modern. The reader is left to wonder whether Gorodish is a reflection of the author or a creation of his own imagination.
But the film's association of Jules-Gorodish with the forces of good breaks down under its own inner contradictions, which deconstruct the philosophical ground of the film: Jules-Gorodish, far from being uncontaminated goodness, partake in the same crimes for which the chief of police is doomed. For Jules and Gorodish to obtain a fulfilling relationship, which for them is the main purpose of life, they find themselves taking those very same qualities away from others. Gorodish steals Alpha from Indochina. Jules steals Cynthia's voice and dress, not only causing her agony but also forcing her into an abhorrent situation that threatens to destroy her integrity, identity, and art. The target of these acts of violence are dark women who are vulnerable in a white world. Gorodish and Jules exploit this vulnerability in the same fashion the chief of police exploits prostitutes and drug addicts and in the same tradition that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century colonialists exploited the Third World. In the film the dark woman replaces the Western woman, who is moving away from this position of total vulnerability to the Western man's oppressive desires, as the site where aggression is unleashed. The film legitimizes this aggression and restructures the code of patriarchal gender relations by presenting Jules and Gorodish on the side of goodness, poise, sensitivity, and aesthetic harmony. However, their patriarchal acts—subjugating women to reinstate the codes of masculinity—are based on the same principles as those of the criminals: the exploitation of others. The polarization of good and bad in the film thus collapses under the weight of its own arbitrariness. The film's seeming coherence is achieved through love, but the coherence is based on an incoherence, a violation of its professed values and founding ideas. This situation is itself an extension of a larger historical change: the current political crisis in the relationship between men and women in the West and its underlying economics, an crisis masked by the seeming order of an imported love.

The subject of the film turns out to be the transgressions committed against those whose victimization is necessary for the heroes to reach the desired level of gender security in the threatened codes of patriarchy. That dark women are the objects of aggression is a telling indication of the changing political economy and geocritics of the times: the colonization of women may
come to an end in one part of the world but the domination of the imperialist male continues in other corners of the globe. The emotional expansionism of the white male, however, is legitimized in the language of flight from the emotionally dead white women and embrace of the resurrecting dark female: the interpellation of dominant ideology merely changes sites.