Symptom, the sequel and the victim of art

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The Symptom, the Sequel and the Victim of Art

by

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The Symptom, the Sequel and the Victim of Art

This paper examines the diegetic structures of the films Alien, Aliens, Terminator and Terminator II: Judgment Day from the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis. The analysis reveals structural similarities between the two Alien films and hysteria and between the two Terminator films and paranoia, while focusing on problems of suspension of disbelief as dependent upon processes of spectator/reader identification with the characters of a narrative, an issue central in the history of literary criticism.

The introductory chapter, "From Plato's Chair to Cassiopeia's Chair," briefly discusses Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, its relation to critical theories of reader identification with the hero(ine) of a text and problems arising out of literary theory's confusion between the ideal ego and the ego ideal which tends to make art an object causing desire, and the reader a victim of art.

"Hysterical Alienation, Hysterical Recuperation" delineates the structural similarities between the Alien films and hysteria, positing Alien as the cinema of symptom and the sequel, Aliens, as cinema of cure. Special attention is paid to the ways the films, in mimicking structural aspects of hysteria, inscribe positions for the spectator within the diegesis. Lacanian concepts of the phallus and the sinthome are crucial to this discussion.

"Men Miracled Up and Cursory Contraptions" elaborates the relation between the Terminator films and the structures of paranoia while focusing on the spectator's inscription in the diegesis. The analysis is supported by aspects of the Schreber case, post-modern mechan-eroticism and Lacan's theories of the Name-of-the-Father, desire and metaphor and metonymy.

The conclusion, "The Victims of Art," links the preceding analyses to the history of literary criticism, returning to the problem of the suspension of disbelief and the process of identification. Ideas borrowed from W. H. Abrams, Walter Ong, Jacques Derrida, Maurice Blanchot and research in Artificial Intelligence interact with Lacan's theories of sinthome and the signifier as constitutive of subjectivity, as expressed in his Seminar on Poe's "The Purloined Letter," to outline a position in the text from which the reader/spectator is not prey to identification processes and is not the victim of art.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ii

**From Plato's Chair to Cassiopeia's Chair**

by Way of an Introduction 1

**Hysterical Alienation, Hysterical Recuperation:**

Configurations of the M(D)other in Ridley Scott's Alien and James Cameron's Aliens 8

"Men Miracled Up and Cursory Contraptions":

Reconstructing the Name-of-the-Father in Cameron's Terminator and Terminator II 32

**The Victims of Art** 72

Works Cited 96
This being an introduction, it partakes, as do all introductions, in that sort of retroactive reading best summed up in the phrase "20/20 hindsight" in that it is supposedly written after the fact to inform the reader of the gist of the pages to follow. But I have never had perfect vision. It is at this point that I enter the discourse of the hysteric. Confronted with the che vuoi, the demand of the Other (what I imagine the institution and its representatives, my thesis committee, to expect of this thesis—"So, what are you trying to prove by diagnosing movies, Cindy?"), I find myself paralysed by an inability to answer. Somewhere in the split between this demand and my desire to say 'I am that I am; I did it because I did it,' I am caught up in the logic of the hysterical demand which Slavoj Zizek, in The Sublime Object of Ideology, articulated thus: "'I'm demanding this of you, but what I'm really demanding of you is to refute my demand because this is not it'" (Zizek, 112). In other words, one never asks the hysteric what he or she wants, what he or she means, because, whatever he or she answers, that won't be it.

Be that as it may, if I were to be as honest as I
possibly could be, I would have to say that I have no excuse, no intention in diagnosing movies beyond the pure jouissance of the bricoler, the tinkerer; my sole intent having been--to the best of my knowledge--only to take things apart and rearrange them. But inherent to this pleasure, which stands now in the position of my hysterical falsehood, lies the immanent drive to mastery. And indeed, through the process of writing, my understanding of Lacan’s theories, however tenuous it still must be, has increased on an exponential level.

But this in itself cannot constitute the desire to diagnose movies, which must always lie elsewhere, in the place of the Other from whence desire speaks itself. Here, in the nexus between desire and mastery, I find the Lacanian mirror stage as it relates back to the topic at hand, film. In articulating the formation of the subject, Lacan posits that the infant, at one point, identifies itself in the mirror with both the infant in all its lack of motor control and the more powerful mother in whose arms it is supported. The mirror is optional, providing a means to envision the event; what should be apparent in this is the narcissism of the move toward mastery inherent to subject formation. In "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," Lacan expresses the relation between mirror stage and mastery thus:
This development is experienced as a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the formation of the individual into history. The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation—and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic—and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject’s entire mental development" (Lacan, 4).

This misrecognition (méconnaissance) will later found the split in subjectivity experienced through the intervention of the Law-of-the-Father (one may imagine Dad arriving on the scene to tell Mom to leave Baby because the green beans are burning), and the consequent language acquisition becomes the subject’s mode to mastery in place of the doubled, misrecognized imago child/mother (one may imagine Baby discovering that Mom can be summoned back to the mirror by uttering the cry, "Mommy"). Of course, this explanation is grossly simplified, but one sees in it that the infant at one point realizes that the satisfaction of its needs relies upon the actions of another, which the acquisition of language is meant to facilitate. What is not so obvious is that the point at which the infant has not realized the discontinuity between its satisfaction and the Other remains even after he or she has become a fully operational subject in language. For Lacan, this mirror stage misrecognition will play a part in all subsequent subjectivity:
The fact is that the total form of the body by which the subject anticipates in a mirage the maturation of his power is given to him only as Gestalt, that is to say, in an exteriority in which this form is certainly more constituent than constituted, but in which it appears to him above all in a contrasting size (un relief de stature) that fixes it and in a symmetry that inverts it, in contrast with the turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating him. Thus, this Gestalt—whose pregnancy should be regarded as bound up with the species, though its motor style remains scarcely recognizable—by these two aspects of its appearance, symbolizes the mental permanence of the I, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination; it is still pregnant with the correspondences that unite the I with the statue in which man projects himself, with the phantoms that haunt him, or with the automaton in which, in an ambiguous relation, the world of his own making tends to find completion" (2).

Herein lies the problem which has plagued theories of the aesthetic ever since Plato's Republic—all theories of the suspension of disbelief, reader identification with the characters, realism and organic wholeness. Perhaps these theories would not pose a problem but for the fact that in attempting to uncover what it is that makes a reader suspend disbelief, the theory inevitably ends up on the terrain of cause and effect. Plato was not so much concerned with art, especially poetry, as an imitation of an imitation as he was with the way in which he felt it misled people from appreciation of the true, Ideal object. Of course, he also posited this Ideal (chair) as being something so irreremediably outre and other that only the philosopher had access to it, and then only through a shadowy glimpse of its outline. If Plato, the philosopher,
had met Lacan, the psychoanalyst, he might have glimpsed that his Ideal chair consisted of no more than the desire to sit comfortably, in which case the representation, the physical chair, would be no closer to the desire to sit comfortably (Ideal chair) than the artistic representation would. Be that as it may, in positing that art’s supreme falsehood beguiled the reader/spectator into believing in second rate truth and beauty, Plato’s complaint against the poets sets up all subsequent arguments, from Aristotle on, to make of art an objet petit a in the sense of Stuart Schneiderman’s definition: "an object which causes someone to desire" (Schneiderman, 7) and to make of the reader/spectator a victim of art. All theories of reader identification and organic wholeness partake of a certain conflation or, more precisely, an elision of the ideal ego with the ego ideal. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan succinctly differentiates these two in Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis:

Hence, Freud’s nascent concept of ideal ego would refer to primordial narcissistic fixations (primary identification), while the ego ideal that Freud had described so extensively would correspond to secondary identification with others. Placed in the secondary realm of language and exchange, the function of the ego ideal (one’s own alter ego as reflected in others) is to command the play of relationships. Within a Lacanian purview, the ideal ego is linked to a primordial sense of the self as it enters into the projection of one’s being in requests or demands, while the ego ideal is the reflection of one’s idealized moi identity in the secondary narcissism of relationships" (Ragland-Sullivan, 54).
Theories of organic wholeness, the sublime and moral uplifting or the aggrandisement of the reader through identification with a hero(ine) all play upon the primary reconnaissance of the mirror stage while simultaneously attributing to this effect a function of secondary identification through realism. In other words, the reader believes in the text because he or she recognizes himself or herself in the realistic portraits of the characters and because he or she desires the completion and aggrandisement promised at the end, i.e. the reader is the victim of the manipulations of an art that mimes reality while promising that, should the reader buy into it he or she will be a larger, more complete person.

The problem with this pattern of identifications is best stated by Ragland-Sullivan:

By seeing a convergence between ego (Lacan's moi) and ego ideals (Lacan's others) in dreams and hypnosis, Freud confused both as objects of Desire, representing wish fulfillment. Lacan's efforts have gone in the opposite direction; he tries to maintain a distance between the ideal ego and ego ideals (alter ego) and to separate both of these from the mechanism of desiring. In this way the subject can survey itself in its fundamental fantasies and displacements, instead of disappearing into the identificatory exclusion and closure of 'apparent sameness,' which occurs in the relating of ideal ego to ego ideals in relationships" (54-55).

In diagnosing the movies Alien, Aliens, Terminator and Terminator II, I will be looking at the ways in which the ideal ego and ego ideals manifest themselves within the
psychic structures these films elaborate, leading to a
discussion of aesthetics which puts to rest the concept of
reader/spectator as victim of art.

By some happy accident (I took courses in Literary
Theory and Astronomy in the same quarter), Plato’s Ideal
Chair has been hopelessly confused in my imagination with
the celestial constellation, Cassiopeia’s Chair. On warm,
summer nights, when I gaze up into the sky, I see that
group of stars and think, "There’s that Ideal Chair." And
maybe that is the best place for Plato’s chair, out there
where we cannot sit in it.
"Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown on to him and they still give him much trouble at times."

(Civilization and Its Discontents, 38-39)

In The Imaginary Signifier, Christian Metz proposes that the filmic state, as he calls it, borders on the dream-state; the subject/spectator apprehends the film in much the same way that he or she apprehends a dream. But Metz is also aware of a dissymmetry between the filmic state, and the dream-state, and he claims the filmic state is both more effective and less effective: more powerful because the conscious mind is aware that the images really are physically present, less powerful because those images are not the product of the subject/spectator’s own unconscious. Given this double-bind, how does the subject/spectator avoid defense mechanisms and enter an apprehension of the film which directly opposes these forces. Metz poses this same question thus:

...how does the spectator effect the mental leap which alone can lead him from the perceptual donnee, consisting of moving visual and auditory impressions, to the constitution of a fictional universe, from an objectively real but denied signifier to an imaginary but psychologically
real signified?" (Metz, 116).

In answer, Metz proposes that "...the spectator's defenses...must be integrated with the very content of the film ...in such a way that the subject can avoid activating his own defenses" (ibid.). Based on Metz's insight, I would like to propose two interpretations of how this integration of defenses is accomplished in Ridley Scott's Alien and James Cameron's Aliens: the cinema of symptom and the cinema of cure.

In presenting itself as symptom, the cinema minimizes disbelief by aligning itself with the forces of the filmic state, placing the subject/spectator in the position of the subject supposed to know, of the analyst, if you will. It plays on the field of conscious ego operations by affirming the distancing effect of both the reality of the signifier and its status of being another's images, allowing the subject/spectator to assume a non-threatening, external position of mastery, even if only a symbolic mastery. In other words, it presents itself in such a way as to say yes, these are real images, but they are not your images; they are a mystery for you to solve, symptoms for you to decipher. It is this call to decipher, no more than the conventional opening of any mystery or suspense thriller, that is inscribed in the content of the beginning of Ridley Scott’s Alien; the crew of the Nostromo are summoned from their cryogenic sleep by
the ship's mainframe, Mother, to investigate an unidentified signal, the *Che vuoi?* of the Other. By articulating the Other's question, the film engages not only the crew, but the subject/spectator as well, to function in the position of analyst, the one to whom the symptom is addressed. As Zizek has written in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*,

> The subject is always fastened, pinned, to a signifier which represents him for the other, and through this pinning he is loaded with a symbolic mandate, he is given a place in the intersubjective network of symbolic relations. The point is that this mandate is ultimately always arbitrary: since its nature is performative, it cannot be accounted for by reference to the 'real' properties and capacities of the subject" (Zizek, 113).

At the level of the film, this arbitrary element is expressed when two of the crew contest the summons to explore, demanding to be paid extra for the extra duty, but they are reminded that it is in a subclause of their contracts. The mechanics, Parker and Brett are pinned to a signifier and symbolic mandate (that of investigator) outside of their 'real' subjective capacities as mechanics. At the level of the spectator, the signifier and symbolic mandate were, to some extent, implicit in his or her act of purchasing a ticket; the spectator came to find out about the alien of the title. But it is within this scene that the mandate enters the diegesis of the film as performative role, and it is at this point that the spectator, outside of any real capacities, is called
upon to identify his or her implicit mandate as reified in the performative role delineated by the film.

This would seem to imply a certain amount of secondary cinematic identification with the crew (not to be confused with psychoanalytic identification, cf. Metz, 54–56). But one aspect of the cinema of symptom is a constant undermining of this sort of identification. Cinema as symptom depends on the distancing of the spectator’s unconscious from the signifier of the film in order to avoid the overwhelming of the ego and instinctual defense mechanisms. The cinema of symptom relies on the maintenance of the primary cinematic identification in which the spectator identifies with his or her own gaze as inscribed in the film and denies the sort of regression to mirror-stage reconnaissance implicit to identification with a character. Ridley Scott’s film accomplishes this through a nearly equal weighting of character importance. In *Alien*, the crew interacts as separate but equal individuals: Dallas is the Captain, but Ash, the Science Officer, also has authority, as do Ripley, who is second-in-command, and Parker, the Chief Mechanic, in his area of jurisdiction. As the spectator moves through the diegesis, different characters function as acting subject so that secondary cinematic identification is continually broken. Beyond the mechanisms of the "Ten Little Indians" plot structure borrowed from Agatha Christie, which tends
to equate importance and power with survival, the crew of
the Nostromo are seen to operate like the cogs of a
machine; each performs a function without which the whole
cannot hope to survive. It is only in the end, when Ripley
becomes the "last little indian," that the spectator gains
a single focal point for identification.

This distancing is enhanced by the predominance of
those third-person-omniscient camera shots typical of the
horror genre; the subject/spectator usually knows where
the alien is before the characters do and is always
prepared for the coming action by the camera work and/or
the sound track. In addition to interrupting the process
of identification, this reinscribes the
subject/spectator's position as the subject supposed to
know, and maintains the primary cinematic identification
with his or her own gaze.

A further element of the diegesis highlights this
position and in fact marks the place where the
subject/spectator truly engages the network of
signification and the mandate it imposes. Approaching the
source of the signal, the crew discovers what unmistakably
represents female anatomy; the alien vessel, of gigantic
proportions, has two tailfins strongly resembling spread
legs and between them an explicitly vaginal opening. The
image is so overt as to be obtrusive, almost comical. Here
the film presents a blatant representation of the primal
scene, the phantasmatic vision of parental coupling leading to the discovery of the mother's lack of a penis, which comes to the spectator via a fuzzy and broken video transmission from off-screen characters. The distortion of the camera-work, far from undoing the heavy-handedness in the presentation of the image, serves to heighten its distancing and point it out as a subtext. As Metz states,

...the ordinary framings are finally felt to be non-framings: I espouse the film-makers look...but my consciousness is not too aware of it. The uncommon angle reawakens me and...teaches me what I already knew. And then, it obliges my look to stop wandering freely over the screen for a moment and to scan it along more precise lines of force which are imposed on me. Thus for a moment I become directly aware of the emplacement of my own presence-absence in the film simply because it has changed" (Metz, 55, italics his).

The distortion of the camera-work indicates the spectator's point de capiton, the symbolic mandate signified in the image of the primal scene. Even the spectator uninformed by psychoanalytic theories, and so much the better if he or she is not, is aware that this image represents at least a clue. Thus what follows passes uncensored by the subject/spectator's conscious conception of reality because this reality principle is reconstituted within the diegesis by the very signifier that pins him or her into the signifying chain of the film and issues the arbitrary, symbolic mandate. It is a space ship, something existing only in imagination, but it is marked by familiarity, a familiarity that functions even more
powerfully if not recognized by the conscious and interpreted by theories of Oedipal crisis.

This scene is also a signpost mobilizing and preparing the subject/spectator for the manifestation of the hysterical symptom that almost directly follows it. After entering the "castrated" Mother through the vaginal opening, one member of the crew discovers eggs. That his name happens to be Kane (homonym—Cain and cane) is yet another nexus in the signifying chain which plays on Biblical references to subjective failure to appease the desire of the Other, recalling the che vuoi? and the hysteric's crippling failure to answer. Here, the form of the symptom is determined, and Kane, through his name, is pinned to the impossible signifier and its equally impossible symbolic mandate: Man's desire is the desire of the Other. Zizek states:

What is hysteria if not precisely the effect and testimony of a failed interpel llation; what is the hysterical question if not an articulation of the incapacity of the subject to fulfill the symbolic identification, to assume fully and without restraint the symbolic mandate?" (Zizek, 113).

And in true hysterical fashion, Kane refuses the castration of the m(0)ther by "catching" the maternal function in the same way that we say we have "caught a cold." While this statement is an overt acknowledgment to being overwhelmed by a virus, it is implicitly an attempt at radical mastery. In saying that I have "caught a cold,"
I imply that I have the little bugger right where I want it, in my lungs and sinuses. Thus, when Kane inhales the maternal function, it is at one and the same time an admission that the ego has been overwhelmed while it maintains a radical mastery of castration on the level of signification. Freud says, in "The Neuroses of Defence," "Hysteria begins with the overwhelming of the ego, which is what paranoia leads to. The raising of tension at the primary experience of unpleasure is so great that the ego does not resist it and forms no psychical symptom but is obliged to allow a manifestation of discharge—usually an excessive expression of excitation" (Freud, 96). So here we have the beginnings of a symptom for our cinema of symptom: the symbolic and somatic expression of castration fears. Overwhelmed by having fallen through the blue haze obscuring knowledge of the maternal manque d'être which pops out of an egg, attaches its penis-like representamen to his oral orifice and begins insemination without resistance; Kane goes into a coma much like the overexcited swooning of yesteryear’s woman.

According to Lacan, what is repressed at the level of the Symbolic erupts in the Real, and the Real is the territory of the Thing, "the material left-over, the materialization of the terrifying impossible jouissance" (Zizek, 71, italics his). In terms of the diegesis of *Alien*, the symptom will erupt as the Thing from Kane's
chest; a bizarre reenactment of the birthing process which will lend it all the attributes of hysterical somatization while inscribing it as a fetish replacing the m(O)ther's missing phallus. This fetish is further elaborated as partial object by the camera work which resists giving the spectator a full view of the alien. It consumes, one by one, the crew of the Nostromo, achieving its penultimate expression in the penile head of the alien backlit in blue just before Ripley blows it out the airlock to make it a foreclosed signifier in the void of unrepresentable desire, deep space.

The dominant actions outlined by the plot bear in common an outward movement: the crew goes out of the ship to decipher the signal, the alien erupts out of Kane's chest, and is eventually blown out of the airlock of the escape module after Ripley takes it out of the Nostromo. The dominance of an externalizing movement is another indication that this film partakes of the cinema of symptom, for what is the symptom if not a deceitful externalization hiding while indicating a repression. Of course, there are internal movements in the diegesis of Alien, but the external movements bear the emotional thrust because the Nostromo is inscribed with the mark of the maternal: its exterior breast-like cups, the womb-like chamber of Mother, the ship's mainframe, its separate nurturing environment as opposed to the hostile void of
space; to go out is tantamount to a threat of immanent death. And, in terms of the genre, there are comparatively few external shots of the Nostromo and its position in space, which serves to reinforce the idea that outside is death, that sort of death of the unrepresentable, death by eradication of the signifying chain. So this external movement, by reifying the thrust of symptom, serves to remind the subject/spectator of the safety distance by implicitly addressing him or her as an outside toward which the diegesis moves while it also functions to pin the subject/spectator to the symbolic mandate by reinscribing him or her as gaze within the field of representability, staving off the effects of outside as death, the destruction of the signifying chain which he or she has been called to decipher.

Along the lines of external/internal movement, preoccupation with the devouring symptom masks another element centered on the desire of the m(0)ther in the form of the ship's mainframe. The figure of the cyborg, Ash, who functions in the place of Mother, consistently enacts a hidden desire which supports the alien to the detriment of the subject/crew. It is Ash who countermands Ripley's order that the crew and Kane remain in quarantine; it is Ash who hides from Ripley whatever information he has got under the microscope, and it is Ash who tries to kill Ripley when she discovers that Mother is operating under a
directive to bring back the alien—crew expendable.

Mother, the computer, the internal, comes to represent unconscious desire as Lacan describes it in Agency of the Letter,

...there is no other way of conceiving the indestructibility of the unconscious desire—in the absence of a need which, when forbidden satisfaction, does not sicken and die, even if it means the destruction of the organism itself" (Lacan, 167).

This dichotomy of externalized symptom/internalized desire further inscribes Alien as cinema of symptom by delineating a relation between desire and knowledge that reiterates the state of neurosis. In the film, knowledge is always elsewhere, imputed to the subject/spectator through camera-work and sound track, and Mather's desire is hidden until the end. Never do we come to any understanding of the alien as a sentient being motivated by desire, unlike the sequel. The alien remains, throughout the film, as Ash describes it, "... the perfect organism. Its structural perfection is matched only by its hostility...I admire its purity, a survivor unclouded by conscience, remorse or delusions of morality." Not until this confrontation with the computer, Mother, through Ash, do we discover that the alien is the representative of desire. We have, all along, assumed that Mother desired the crew, operated on the crew's behalf to their benefit. There is a short circuit here between knowledge and desire indicative of symptom. To quote Zizek: "The hysterical
question opens the gap of what is 'in the subject more than the subject', of the object in subject which resists interpellation—subordination of the subject, its inclusion in the symbolic network" (Zizek, 113, italics his). It is the foreclosure of this object in subject, as Ripley blows the alien out the airlock, that will fix the gap, cement the question and preclude any hope of an answer.

Ripley has already exploded the unconscious desire, the Nostromo and Mother with it, in a sequence filmed under stroboscopic lighting which signals the foreclosing of jouissance and marks the immanent break-up of the signifying chain. And this final foreclosure, the ejection of the "Thing" into the void of the field of unrepresentability signals the release of the subject/spectator. While the performative position of subject supposed to know has allowed him or her to apprehend the film without arousing defense mechanisms, the fact of the foreclosure pushes this distancing to the point of disinclusion in the signifying network. The subject/spectator leaves the cinema slightly disoriented, the hysterical question still in place. In no way does this mean to imply a "bad" cinema experience, merely that the terrible, repulsive attraction of the alien is fixed in relation to the subject/spectator.
James Cameron's *Aliens*, as cinema of cure, operates against the grain of those lines of force outlined by Christian Metz; while it never denies the reality of its signifier (this would be quite counterproductive for the film), the cinema of cure definitely works to minimize its reality by consistently utilizing those ordinary framings which are felt to be non-framings. The camera-work is predominantly third person, and the spectator readily espouses the film-maker's gaze. But it is a gaze without the omniscience of the Scott film. A high frequency of close-ups of Ripley paired with shots espousing Ripley's gaze serves to circumvent the incredibility of another's images by encouraging secondary cinematic identification. The spectator's defenses are overcome by the promise of the cure through the inscription of the phallic signifier within the diegesis of the film. Lacan says, in "The Signification of the Phallus," "The phallus is the privileged signifier of that mark in which the role of the logos is joined with the advent of desire" (Lacan, 287). In other words, through paternal intervention in the mirror stage, both language and desire are born, and in Lacanian terms both operate under the aegis of the phallus, which is neither the penis nor the father proper, but has to do with his various manifestations as Law or Name as the marker of a certain "fall into subjectivity." The subject/spectator's mandate concurs with the
inscription of the phallic signifier where it joins the role of logos (the film) with the advent of desire (the spectator's), and as Ripley becomes the diegetical site of investment for the phallic signifier, joining both Law and Name, both logos and desire, she becomes the object of secondary cinematic identification. As the film progresses it becomes a case of "when Ripley speaks, everyone listens." She fulfills the role of desire by being desirable to the spectator both as the one who will survive and desirable through the inscription of Corporal Hicks' desire. Additionally, much of the diegesis follows Ripley's desire to protect both Newt and the troops. If you will, the phallic signifier guarantees accession to subjectivity as long as the spectator plays along, assumes the symbolic mandate to identify with Ripley.

The intent to cure is signalled in the opening scene. Ripley is "rescued" by a "deep salvage" team. It is at this point, also, that the film inscribes the symbolic mandate to identify with Ripley in an overdetermined lap-dissolve from Ripley's face to a space-eyed view of planet earth. While the shot serves, diegetically to indicate that Ripley is being returned to earth, it metonymically imputes her as representative of all earthlings and metaphorically links her with the maternal, i.e. mother earth. The shot also functions to locate the spectator's gaze within the film--the spectator is out in
space—and focuses it along lines of force that draw it to secondary cinematic identification with Ripley—the spectator is looking in on Ripley/earth, identifying with earth as home and thus with Ripley, its metonymic designate.

But, in order for identification with Ripley to function, the promise of the cure and the reassurances of the phallic signifier must be brought into play. And in order for there to be a cure, there must be an illness. Ripley is elaborated as being hysteric due to a fear of and lack of motherhood. She has regular psych-evaluations and continues to have nightmares which feature the alien as a figure for fear of motherhood. The spectator is shown, immediately after the lap-dissolve, one of Ripley's nightmares in which she begins the convulsions of host-mother labor and the alien baby's head deforms her stomach, but does not emerge through the skin.

In the corporate boardroom scene, Ripley's outstanding performance as an ordinary woman defeating the perfect organism is not only reviewed as exorbitantly expensive—"42 million in adjusted dollars. That's minus payload, of course," quotes one exec—but is treated as a sort of hysterical hallucination; Ripley has "...found something never once recorded in over 300 surveyed worlds," another exec reprimands. The punitive powers of the Law place Ripley in the function of the child, the
goal of the spectator since all secondary cinematic identification involves regression to a sort of mirror stage meconnaissance. And this meconnaissance is encouraged by the fact that Ripley is already invested, through her symptom, as a site of the maternal. The scene initiates the identification, but it also inscribes the Phallic signifier in a relationship with Ripley, an investment in her which will be expanded as the film unrolls. Mirror stage misrecognition will be reiterated at several points throughout the film, each presenting a stronger investment of the phallic signifier, most notably when Ripley puts on her loader, a hydraulic enhancement of the human body, prosthetic godhood.

The promise of the cure is tied in when the Company loses contact with a colony on the planet where Ripley first encountered the alien. Burke, a company rep, presents the rescue mission as not only Ripley’s sole means of regaining status as desirable object in the eyes of the Father (the Company will pick up her contract as a flight officer), but also as the sole cure for her hysteria—a face-off with her fears of maternity bound up in the alien. The phallic signifier in this scene is localized in the presence of the military; Burke visits Ripley accompanied by Lieutenant Gorman, who assures her that the military has state-of-the-art fire-power and training, everything she and the spectator will need to
defeat the alien. As Lacan says, "Demand constitutes the Other as already possessing the 'privilege' of satisfying needs, that is to say, the power of depriving them of that alone by which they are satisfied" (Lacan, 286). Thus the military becomes the Other through which Ripley will access the phallus. "The fact that the phallus is a signifier means that it is in the place of the Other that the subject has access to it. But since this signifier is only veiled, as ratio of the Other's desire, it is this desire of the Other as such that the subject must recognize..." (288).

Ripley, by accepting the mission, recognizes the desire of the Other and commences her rebirth into motherhood and desire, which is "neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting" (287). Ripley will be split between the appetite for satisfaction as configured in the alien, and the demand for love which will be focused around the figures of Corporal Hicks and the child/survivor, Newt. Thus the rebirth imaged for the spectator when Ripley slides through a chute in the colonists' outpost, at the instigation of Hicks, to capture Newt, indicates the constitution of Ripley's desire, because only a moment before, the marines opened fire on Newt thinking she was an alien.
As knowledge and power are consolidated in the figure of Ripley, the progress of the cure is marked and identification is increased. It is Ripley who points out the hazards of firing "standard light-armor piercing rounds" just beneath the main reactor tower, and Ripley who rescues the marines after their commander, Gorman, suffers hysterical paralysis. By contrasting Ripley's response, especially after she has just relived her nightmare via the video transmissions sent to the mobile commandpost by the troops, with Gorman's hysteria, the film indicates that the promise is being effected, Ripley is being cured. This confirmation is reinforced by the fact that Ripley breaks down the distancing of the video transmissions, driving the command unit into the alien's nursery to rescue the marines. She aligns herself with the Name of the Father (symbolized as the military) to combat the desire of the m(O)ther (the alien). The video transmissions function differently in Cameron's film; rather than distancing the spectator by their difference, they are closely aligned with Ripley's gaze and serve to heighten the secondary identification.

When Ripley returns to the nursery, it will mark the transformation to synthome, identification with the symptom. The alien, in Cameron's cinema of cure, more closely resembles the primally repressed than a fetish. She is buried three levels beneath the breast-like
atmospheric processor, sort of what is at the heart of all women. Camera shots linger on the aliens, delineating the whole of their form, especially the mother alien. For Burke, the alien is a fetish, an access to the desire of the m(O)ther which denies castration by representing substantial monetary remuneration, and Burke, seen as considerably out of line by the rest of the group, is eventually consumed by his fetish.

The rest of the characters view the alien as a sort of outbreak of fear, but a desirable fear; the alien gives them purpose. As Zizek so succintly states it, "the only alternative to the symptom is nothing: pure autism, a psychic suicide, surrender to the death drive even to the total destruction of the symbolic universe. That is why the final Lacanian definition of the end of the psychoanalytic process is identification with the symptom" (Zizek, 75, italics his). This is what Ripley accomplishes when she enters the nursery to save Newt, her symbolic daughter, and discovers the presence of the phallic mother symbolically reified in the film—the first shot the spectator gets of the alien mother is of a penile appendage laying eggs, the camera then tracks up her engorged abdomen, finally focusing on her projectile "inner" mouth which hisses. As Ripley squares off with this fantasy of repressed, pre-oedipal desire, the m(O)ther with phallus, she communicates with it, cutting
loose a blast from her flame-thrower, then pointing it at the eggs and staring meaningfully at the alien mother. Suddenly, the alien has been humanized, brought closer. She and Ripley have something in common, motherhood. It is only when an egg opens, the implicit threat of death betraying the unmistakable deal they've struck in mutual respect of maternity, that Ripley opens fire on the nursery.

Not only does this scene indicate to the spectator delivery on the promise of the cure, but it radically extends the investment of phallic signification in Ripley that has been implicit from the beginning. She was brought along on the mission to function as an advisor because she is the only one who knows. Her position as center of knowledge is reiterated throughout the film; Ripley not only rises above the hysteria of Gorman, but also that of private Hudson and Newt. Her communication with the alien signals language acquisition which can only be brought about through the phallic signifier, and it realizes the split evincing desire as the subtraction of the appetite for satisfaction, the alien, from the demand for love, Newt and Hicks.

Ripley has but one more step to effect the completion of her cure, the repression of the phallic mother, the metaphoric move by which she will replace desire of the mother with assumption of the mother's place and desire of
the father. In the cinema of cure, the mother is repressed rather than jouissance foreclosed, and this is indicated in the diegesis as the spectator hears her screaming into the void. In the cinema of symptom, all one hears is the music of the sound track and the rushing of air. It is the mother who will be elided in the signifying chain and replaced with the phallus.

Up until this point, the dominant movement has been internal, like the inward-probing movement of psychoanalysis. This is inscribed in the opening scene when Ripley's module is sucked into the salvage ship, referred to in her dream as "rescued by a deep salvage team." The marines go "in" to complete their mission, at one point Lieutenant Gorman says, "I'm coming in," Ripley dives into Newt's hiding place to catch her, drives the mobile commandpost into the nursery to save the marines, later takes the elevator down and enters the nursery to save Newt and the marines build barricades so the aliens won't get in, all of which serves to reify the psychoanalytic process, up until this point.

But the final scene undoes this movement for the spectator, while completing Ripley's cure. It is overtly outward moving, but implicitly inward in terms of the diegetical machinery already elaborated. By putting on the loader, Ripley once again assumes the Name of the Father to help her repress the phallic mother and protect her own
budding identification with the place of the mother through Newt. And Ripley is a truly awesome sight in her loader, yellow warning-light cycling round on top, as she growls, "Get away from her, you BITCH!" This is the pay off for the spectator; Ripley, after all this struggle, has finally achieved rebirth into the patriarchal order, melding with it to become the prosthetic goddess. Her figure, through the secondary identification, excites the spectator's primary narcissism in its reenactment of the mirror stage; Ripley and her loader are the all-powerful, symbiotic child/mother fusion. What's more, the whole oceanic, hydraulic hybrid is blessed by the paternal signifier since the loader is also phallic, the tool of the stevedore and property of the military.

But the loader must be jettisoned with the phallic mother to confirm Ripley's acceptance of her own castration; the phallus is hers only through the Name of the Father. Lacan describes a "condition of complimentarity...produced by the establishment of the subject by the signifier" whose poles are, namely, that "the subject designates his being only by barring everything he signifies, as it appears in the fact that he wants to be loved for himself" and that "the living part of that being in the primally repressed finds its signifier by receiving the mark of the repression of the phallus (by virtue of which the unconscious is language)"
The primally repressed alien can only stand for one of the figures in the algebra of desire if it is marked by the repression of the phallic signifier, the loader. So it is implicitly through repression, an inward motion, that Ripley achieves the status of subject, i.e. the cure of this cinema. And Ripley's success is marked by the hugs and kisses of Newt who, at last, calls her "Mommy." On the heels of this appellation, comes the android, Bishop's, reconfirmation. It seems that Bishop's only function in the whole film is to utter the words which will consign Ripley to the status of subject, as he says, "Not bad for a human." Ripley has eliminated her hysteria by identification with the mother as desire of the Other, and the spectator has "experienced" this shift along the chain of signification through identification with Ripley.

But the outward movement of this final scene undoes the cure for him or her. When the m(0)ther is repressed by Ripley, she comes screaming out of the screen to the spectator, whose gaze, through the camera-work, has been suddenly shifted to the outside. Secondary cinematic identification with Ripley has been radically broken and the spectator is now in full possession of the repressed m(0)ther. The symptom has been placed squarely in the spectator's visual lap which is why the beddy-bye scene following it passes by as so much effluvia. The spectator
is shown that, yes, Ripley and Newt are A. Okay, but what of the spectator. He or she has inherited the symptom. In this case, the cinema of cure is, itself, hysterical, ejaculating the symptom onto the spectator’s narcissistic gaze.
In positing James Cameron's *Terminator* and *Terminator II* as cinema of symptom and cinema of cure, one leaves behind the field of hysteria and ventures into the domain of paranoia, and because this confuses the idea of a cinema of symptom and cinema of cure, a few prefatory remarks are in order. It is virtually impossible to speak of the two films separately; they both elaborate the symptom per se in their presentation of the persecutory delusion because the psychotic symptom represents an attempt at a cure. Freud, in his analysis of Senatspräsident Schreber's autobiographical account, remarks, "The delusion-formation, which we take to be a pathological product, is in reality an attempt at recovery, a process of reconstruction" (Freud, Vol. III, 457, in italics in the original). In this way the narrative of these films, as with Schreber's narrative, becomes a sort of archaeology as reading, dedicated to uncovering absence and constructing explanatory structures for that which has been (or always already was) alienated. The modes of symptom and cure through which the subject/spectator enacts denial regarding the film's material reality by taking up diegetically outlined
positions and subsequently reinvesting in the "certitude" of the filmic signifier does not work in the Terminator films. These films articulate themselves as subject supposed to know simultaneously fractal, symptomatic: a position which bars the spectator from diegetical inscription as either subject supposed to know or through processes of secondary cinematic identification.

It would seem that the spectator is to assume the position of the archaeologist in relation to the filmic signifier, and indeed both films inscribe a summons to decipher near the commencement of the narrative. In Terminator, following a brief clip from the battle of the future and the opening credits (in that order), the immanent appearance of the terminator is presaged by the mechanical failure of a garbage truck and an electrical disturbance to which the garbageman responds by repeating the phrase, "What the hell?" But the repetition of this vacuous phrase indicates a lack of intent toward an answer—this phrase, given an intention toward an answer, would be completed as "What the hell is it?" Furthermore, the spectator is not inscribed in the diegesis as subject supposed to know, for the garbageman deserts the scene, less interested in an answer than in avoiding the answer. In Terminator II, the summons to interpret occurs after scenarios of the future, and the only human called upon to
investigate the manifestation of the terminator, a policeman who radios in that he is checking an electrical disturbance, is promptly disposed of by the T1000, who then assumes the policeman's identity. Both incidents serve to intimate to the spectator that investigation would be a hazardous proposition and that the position of subject supposed to know lies elsewhere in the diegesis.

As a matter of fact, the summons to decipher keeps recurring throughout both films--Sarah Connor demands of Kyle Reese, "Why me?" And the cops, much to their detriment, keep investigating. Even psychological analysis is summoned to provide answers which are then proved false in both films. In Terminator, the criminal psychologist interprets Reese's behavior as psychotic and explains this to Sarah, but he is proven wrong when the terminator arrives at the police station. It is interesting to note here that the proof misses the psychologist who, on his way out the door as the terminator enters, drops his keys, bends to retrieve them and thus never even sees the terminator. The verification of Kyle's history addresses only the spectator. In Terminator II, the psychiatrist, played by the same actor who played the psychologist in the first movie, receives a dramatic rebuttal to his diagnosis of Sarah Connor as suffering from "Schizo-affective disorder" when the T-1000 walks through the bars of the sanatorium's security doors. And his
response—jaw gaping, cigarette let drop to the floor—encourages the spectator to ridicule any narrative position of informed subject.

Instead, the spectator is given an extra-diegetical subject supposed to know. The 'I' who enunciates these films, John Connor, marks the absence of any subject position in the diegesis as well as giving the lie to any illusions of a subject supposed to know. It is the John Connor of the future who plays puppetmaster to all the diegetical positions, the John Connor of the future who "knows" but must "not know" what function all these ciphers cum characters perform and how it all adds up. Even when the spectator is given a juvenile John Connor with whom to identify in Terminator II, it is still John Connor as he will become who holds all the answers—a position outside the narrative of the film which is further fragmented by the voice-overs in which Sarah Connor, John's mother, plays at being the voice of history. In "T II" the position of subject supposed to know to whom the symptom is addressed as a summons to decipher not only lies elsewhere, outside the film, but is split into masculine and feminine components—a split further evinced in Sarah's will to "change fate" by attempting to assassinate the man who will develop the technology necessary for the effectuation of SkyNet, persecutor par excellence.
In her article "Child/Alien/Father: Patriarchal Crisis and Generic Exchange," Vivian Sobchack points out the difficulties related to spectator identification with the characters of these films:

Patriarchal re-solution is also harder won in *The Terminator*—not only because Reese's death in the narrative's present confounds the logic of the future from whence he comes, but also because paternity and patriarchal power are overtly split between two opposed alien figures with whom the spectator is encouraged to identify: Reese, the loving but vulnerable rebel from the future who will father his own eventual leader, and a cyborg assassin whose nearly invincible power and determination inspire more than reluctant admiration" (Sobchack, 26).

In addition to resisting the forces of spectator identification, this splitting echoes the symptomatic withdrawal precursory to the development of the delusion (which I will discuss further on), and its function as representation of the disintegration precedent to delusion formation is further elaborated as a history, an archaeology in terms of the diegetical time frame. Freud remarks, "Paranoia decomposes just as hysteria condenses. Or rather, paranoia resolves once more into their elements the products of the condensations and identifications which are effected in the unconscious" (Freud, Vol. III, 434).

Even Sarah Connor is split, just as configurations of the paternal are split. She begins the first movie as three names in a phonebook, and this split is carried through the diegesis by the figure of the police, who,
Unlike the two future father-figures, are not interested in any one particular Sarah Connor so much as they are interested, as is the press, in the fate of the three Sarah Connors. The film invests a great deal of irony in this split; twice Sarah Connor is summoned to the television to hear of her namesakes' assassinations, namesakes who are a housewife/mother and a "professional" woman--the remaining Sarah Connor being a waitress.

As in Scott's Alien, the spectator's identification with the characters in the film is frustrated by oscillations in the lines of power which also further elaborate this splitting and decomposition. In Terminator, the spectator is encouraged to identify with Sarah Connor as the focal point of all the action--the one for whom everyone, from terminator, to protector to cops, is looking. But Sarah suffers a loss of identity in this process, and only near the end of the film can she be seen to have any ability with which to counter the terminator, when she repeatedly drags or orders Kyle Reese to his feet and finally smashes the cyborg.

Kyle is a much more powerful character, but defies identification in his brutality and obverse frailty; Reese is alternatively seen as suffering nightmares, nostalgia and wounds, or he brutally yanks Sarah through their escapes. When they hide out in the motel, Reese responds to Sarah's plaint, "So much pain." But he does so with an
inhuman dictum which gives insight into the faculties which allowed him, previously, to grab her by the hair with more than necessary force and order her not to move: "Pain can be controlled; you just disconnect it." Then, in the same scene, he says, "I came across time for you, Sarah. I love you. I always have." Sarah and Kyle make love. They make John Connor. But first they make plastique. If Sarah is too powerless to be a stable point of identification for the spectator, Kyle Reese is just too mechanically obsessive.

Then, of course, Arnold Schwarzenegger as the terminator, in his handsome invincibility and computer-generated command of every situation, successfully undermines his "black hat" position of being beyond empathy. The spectator wants to inhabit the T101's powerful and indestructable body.

And in Terminator II, while the young John Connor is the focal point of the action, he is also a narcissistic juvenile delinquent, charming and repulsive by turns, often quite capable, but always in need of protection. Sarah Connor has become more mechanically obsessive, resembling by turns the terminator or the psychotic; she is strong, but inhumanly single-minded. Schwarzenegger as the T101 has lost his evil prime directive to become the goodlooking, invincible protector, but he is still, above-all, a machine. And the T1000, while his quicksilver
beauty and mytho-magical powers arouse a deep aesthetic appreciation, is more inhuman than the terminator of the first movie. Even as the cyborg terminator of the first movie, Schwarzenegger delivered those hallmark one-liners fraught with irony—in Terminator, where one would expect the T101 to be much more mechanical than in the later film, he responds to the flophouse super’s, "Whatcha got in there, buddy, a dead cat?" by selecting "Fuck you, asshole" from a computer menu of plausible replies. In contrast, the T1000 only says what it is absolutely necessary to say, and then only in the flatest of tones. While any one of these fragmentary positions provides enough prowess to attract the narcissistic Imaginary of the spectator, none of them emerges as an individual hero. Thus the spectator shifts from identification to identification.

This lack of a single subjective position in the narrative is enhanced by the camera work which rarely takes up a subjective point of view in terms of the narrative, but operates almost solely through a sort of third-person omniscience which easily conflates with the enunciative position of the absent John Connor of the future. In this way the film conducts itself as subject supposed to know, reconstructing an identity for itself.

The summons, then, is not so much to decipher as it is a summons to reconstruct necessitated by a process of
identification problematized because the film is a delusion, the product of a withdrawal from the desire of the Other expressed in object cathexis, from all the stuff and dross of reality which ordinarily takes on meaning personal to the subject through its metonymous and metaphorical relations to those imagos which lie in the Imaginary but which remain separate from the subject—remain in the place of the Other—through the agency of the Symbolic. This withdrawal, in turn, gives rise to an alternative reality, the delusion, which tries to reconstitute the desire of the Other so that a position emerges for a desiring subject who makes no sacrifice to the Phallus.

The spectator is left with another route into the film which Lacan seems to suggest in "On a Question Preliminary to any Possible Treatment of Psychosis" when he writes,

Like Freud, I hold that we must listen to the speaker, when it is a question of a message that does not come from a subject beyond language, but from a speech beyond the subject. For only then will one hear that speech, which Schreber captured in the Other, when from Ahriman to Ormuz, from the evil God to the absent God, it brings the seed in which the very law of the signifier is articulated: 'Aller Un-sinn hebt sich auf! 'All Nonsense is abolished!' (Ecrits, 214).

At the beginning of Terminator, this message "from a speech beyond the subject" appears, seemingly from nowhere. After the sequence denoting the war of the future
between the evil SkyNet and the absent John Connor, stark white script scrolls onto the screen and promises that all Nonsense will be abolished. Beyond any identification, beyond any faith, the spectator must apprehend the film as a certitude because--

The machines rose from the ashes of the nuclear fire. Their war to exterminate mankind had raged for decades, but the final battle would not be fought in the future. It would be fought here, in our present.

Tonight..."

Because it is the paranoiac’s delusion, the battle for cohesion in the face of an unacceptable threat which calls the very act of signification into question, the delusion must be, must exist as certainty. Hence the insistence of the word "Tonight..." which, on the screen, is set apart on a line of its own. "Tonight..." not only insists by repeating the idea "our present" but also creates an opening from screen to spectator in the ellipsis following the word. The spectator is left to finish the sentence with the images of the film. This sort of inscription also occurs at the beginning of Terminator II through the disembodied voice of Sarah Connor functioning in a tone and register reserved for the most sacred or sanctimonious histories, calling the spectator once again to behold the play of the signifier. The spectator assumes the certitude
of the film, like the psychotic, because he or she must, because ça parle (it speaks). As Lacan says, chastising the general bent of psychology to question whether or not the psychotic "believes" in his delusion,

"La réalité n'est pas ce qui est en cause. Le sujet admet, par tous les détours explicatifs verbalement développés qui sont à sa portée, que ces phénomènes sont d'un autre ordre que le reel, il sait bien que leur réalité n'est pas assurée, il en admet même jusqu'à un certain point l'irréalité. Mais, contrairement au sujet normal pour qui la réalité vient dans son assiette, il a une certitude, qui est que ce dont il s'agit--de l'hallucination a l'interprétation--le concerne "

("Reality is not what is in question. The subject admits, through all the verbally developed explicative detours within his reach, that these phenomena are of another order than the real; he knows well that their reality is not assured, he even admits, up to a certain point, their irreality. But, contrary to the normal subject for whom reality comes up in his plate, he has a certitude which is, for him, his concern--from the hallucination to the interpretation" (Séminaire III: Les Psychoses, 87-88: trans. mine.))

Thus the denial of the film's material reality and reinvestment in the reality of the filmic signifier operates through both the summons to decipher and the process of identification as they were previously discussed in relation to Alien and Aliens, but in Terminator and Terminator II the filmic state operates in such a way as to mimic the formation of paranoid delusion.

In other words, the spectator, in order to achieve a subjective position within the film, must identify the position of the desiring subject in a world in which the
characters function more strictly as ciphers or markers than they ordinarily do in a fiction. In any fiction, characters will function as metaphors for the ideals underlying the narrative progress—as objects petit a invested with all the condensations of imaginary meanings which the narrative voice (and the reader) invests in them. The function of characters in a narrative which structures itself as a paranoid delusion lies in their metonymic destabilization. In explaining metonymic destabilization it is first necessary to outline a few characteristics of psychosis as Lacan delineates them in "On a Question Preliminary to any Possible Treatment of Psychosis":

For the psychosis to be triggered off, the Name-of-the-Father, verworfen, foreclosed, that is to say never having attained the place of the Other, must be called into symbolic opposition to the subject.

It is the lack of the Name-of-the-Father in that place which, by the hole that it opens up in the signified, sets off the cascade of reshapings of the signifier from which the increasing disaster of the imaginary proceeds, to the point at which the level is reached at which the signifier and signified are stabilized in the delusional metaphor" (Ecrits, 217).

That this slippage in the field of the signifier results from the lack of the Name-of-the-Father in the place of the Other can be better understood when one considers that the Name-of-the-Father is the symbolic referent which effects the points de capiton, the pinning of signifiers to meaning. As Anthony Wilden writes in The Language of
"Perhaps language is in fact totally tautologous in the sense that it can only in the end talk about itself, but in any event, Lacan has suggested that there must be some privileged 'anchoring points' (the points de capiton), points like the buttons on a mattress or the intersections in quilting, where there is a 'pinning down' (capitonnage) of meaning, not to an object, but rather by 'reference back' to a symbolic function. The tautologous, 'unanchored' glissement [sliding] of the signifier over the signified is in fact an aspect of certain types of [psychotic] language, where the correspondence of the subject's language to the 'reality' accepted in normal discourse has somehow become unhinged, so that one may discover the [psychotic] at the mercy of binary semantic oppositions structurally similar to the child's first semantic or phonemic acts, but in which the opposition is valued over the content" (Wilden, 273).

Lacan will articulate these binary semantic oppositions as the positional register of language, metonymy, in

Séminaire III: Les Psychoses:

C'est le coeur de la pensée freudienne. L'œuvre commence par le rêve, ses mécanismes de condensation et déplacements, de figuration, ils sont tous de l'ordre de l'articulation métonymique, et c'est sur ce fondement que la métaphore peut intervenir... S'il y a un ordre d'acquisition, ce n'est certainement pas celui qui permettrait de dire que les enfants commencent par tel élément du stock verbal plutôt que par tel autre. Il y a plus grande diversité. On n'attrape pas le langage par un bout, comme certains peintres commencent leurs tableaux par le cote gauche. Le langage, pour naître, doit toujours être déjà pris dans son ensemble. Par contre, pour qu'il puisse être pris dans son ensemble, il faut qu'il commence par être pris par le bout du signifiant" (Sem. III, 259-260).

(It is the heart of Freudian thought. The work commences with the dream, the mechanisms of condensation, displacement and figuration, all
of which are of the order of metonymic articulation, and it is on this foundation that the metaphor can intervene...If there is an order of acquisition, it certainly is not that one which permits it to be said that infants commence by this element of the verbal stock rather than another. There is the utmost diversity. One cannot grasp language by one end, as certain painters commence their paintings from the left side. Language, in order to be born, must always be already taken in its entirety. On the other hand, for it to be taken in its entirety, it must begin by being taken by the end of the signifier. Trans. mine.)

The characters of Terminator and Terminator II function as ciphers, place-markers for what cannot be signified, which have been introjected into the diegesis on the basis of their contiguous relation to what is not present (John Connor as Name-of-the-Father). Ellie Ragland-Sullivan explains this process in Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis:

If imaginary images function like Symbolic order words, it is clear that words need not be separate from things, and we can begin to comprehend the functional principles behind dreams, poetry, and psychotic language. By ascribing a homogeneous—Imaginary—structure to symptoms, dreams, memory lapses, jokes, parole, signifieds, and the rest, Lacan surmised that the merger function between words and objects (or things and people)—based on associational similarities—ultimately refers to unknown signifiers present in the Other(A). Imaginary truth, in other words, only takes on its "sense" (sens) in relation to the repressed language in the Other(A), whose oppositional mode of thinking is neither rational nor grammatical but Desiring and intentional" (Phil. of Psych., 239).

The juvenile John Connor, Sarah Connor, Kyle Reese and the Terminator pose problems for the spectator wishing to
enter the film by identifying with them because they circulate like so much flotsam and jetsam indicating what is no longer (or, in this case, what is not yet): John Connor. In other words, spectator identification slips because the characters function as signifiers that, consequent to the absence of the Name-of-the-Father, enter into a metonymic play in which, as Ragland-Sullivan writes,

"No signified, no principle of unity and self-meaning, could appear in language, then, but only the grandious ideal ego: the unnamed, uncastrated enfant merveilleux who is "spoken" by the disembodied signifiers inhabiting the Other(A). The signifiers that now "speak" the psychotic je (woi individuality having disappeared) would normally be inaccessible to conscious life" (250).

This also addresses the elements of megalomania so prominent in Terminator and Terminator II. If the T101, T1000 and SkyNet provide the films with nearly invincible persecutors, how much more grand, uncastrated and marvelous must John Connor appear. John Connor, the psychotic je which is "spoken" as sole concern of all the characters in these films, elaborates himself as the savior of humanity through his manipulations of all but SkyNet. As Freud writes of megalomania,

"...in paranoia the liberated libido becomes fixed on to the ego, and is used for the aggrandizement of the ego. A return is thus made to the stage of narcissism...in which a person's only sexual object is his own ego...and we can assert that the amount of regression characteristic of paranoia is indicated by the length of the step back from sublimated
homosexuality to narcissism" (Freud, Vol. III, 459; italics in the original).

For every terminator SkyNet sends back, John Connor sends a counter-agent; he rewrites the primal scene by sending back his father (both Kyle Reese and the T101 of Terminator II), certain of both their patrimony and their death, which would constitute a rather large step back from homosexual attachment to the father and into narcissism by its very nature of being a supreme act of radical mastery.

John Connor rests secure and inaccessible in the future to manifest himself, first, as the unborn and unnamed (because he sent back Kyle Reese who tells Sarah her son is named John, John Connor can be seen as naming himself), then as the narcissistic "enfant merveilleux" of Terminator II, a precocious juvenile delinquent who knows how to break into computers, fend for himself, and instruct his surrogate father, the T101, on the mores of being human.

Freud, writing of Schreber, delineates the structure of megalomania which could serve perfectly as a plot summary for the two films:

The process may stop at the stage of a partial detachment or it may spread to a general one, which will loudly proclaim its presence by means of the symptoms of megalomania. Thus...the detachment of the libido from the figure of Flechsig may have been the primary process in the case of Schreber; it was immediately followed by the appearance of the delusion, which brought back the libido on to Flechsig
again (though with a negative sign to mark the fact that repression had taken place) and thus annulled the work of repression. And now the battle of repression broke out anew, but this time with more powerful weapons.... till at length a victory for the forces of repression could find expression in a conviction that the world had come to an end and that the self alone survived" (Vol. III, 460)

If the self alone survives, the signifiers who speak it, those "miracled up men and cursory contraptions" (455) of Terminator and Terminator II engage metonymic play on a number of levels. The editing continually expresses this sort of contiguity. In Terminator II, Sarah, trying to convince the psychiatrist that she is sane enough for a visit from her son, asks him why the company would cover-up the fact that they found terminator remnants. Her question is followed immediately by a jump cut to the company and Dyson retrieving these very remains from a high security vault. Even in Terminator, which plays much less in the metonymic register, several jump cuts shift from a focused shot on a hunter-killer machine of the future to a garbage truck or caterpillar tractor of the present. Here, the idea of contiguity should not be confused with that of similarity. The perfect machine of the future is linked to the fallible machine of the present through the level of syntactic function (the level of the signifier) rather than through any denotative or connotative characteristics (level of the signified). The connotations of these jump-cuts not only lie outside the
significative contiguity—machine—but run counter to any similarity; as Constance Penley states in "Time Travel, Primal Scene and the Critical Dystopia," "...tech turns noir because of human decision-making and not something inherent in technology itself..." (Penley, 69). The two machines do not mean the same the thing; they only share the same syntactical slot in the grammar of the film. And another sort of metonymy, that of synecdochy (substitution of the part for the whole), also finds expression in Terminator. When the first Sarah Connor listed in the phonebook gets her death by metonymy, the camera focuses on the red dot of the laser sighting on her forehead, then cuts to the terminator's hand firing the gun.

Dialogue in Terminator II, also takes on metonymic characteristics. As Lacan says, "Mais quand Schreber entend Factum est, et que ça s'arrête, il y a certainement la un phenomene qui se manifest au niveau des relations de contiguite. Les relations de contiguite dominent, a la suite de l'absence ou de la defaillanace de la fonction d'équivalence significative par voie de similarite." ("But when Schreber hears "Factum est," and that it stops, there is certainly a phenomena which manifests itself at the level of the relations of contiguity. The relations of contiguity dominate, following the absence or the weakening of the function of significative equivalence through the path of similarity" Sem. III, 249. Trans.)
mine). He adds a bit further on, in discussing the effect of interrupted speech, "Ce qui s'impose au sujet est la partie grammaticale de la phrase, celle qui n'existe que par son caractere signifiant et par son articulation" ("That which imposes itself on the subject is the grammatical part of the phrase, that which only exists through its signifying character and its articulation" ibid. Trans. mine). What he is pointing to is speech emptied of its meaning: "Viola un personage qui est là à se servir d'immenses bla-bla-bla extraordinaiement articulées, quelquefois riches d'inflexions, mais qui ne peut jamais arriver au coeur de ce qu'il a a communiquer" ("Here is a person who is there at the service of immense babblings extraordinarily well articulated, sometimes rich in inflections, but who can never arrive at the heart of what he has to communicate" Ibid. 250. Trans. mine). In Terminator II, John Connor riddles the general dialogue with cliched, empty catch phrases. Confronted with the truth of the T101, after believing that his Mom was a lunatic, he says, "Get a grip, John." After the T101 tells him self-destruction is in human nature, he says, "Major drag, Huh?" And he gives a lesson to the T101, who always speaks meaningfully even if it is rather clipped, on how to speak more like a human, instructing him to say "No Problemo" instead of "Affirmative" along with a whole string of such all-purpose cliches.
More specifically as it relates to the function of the characters, metonomy slides across the surface of *Terminator II* in relation to the use of sunglasses. The spectator first sees sunglasses in the first film when the terminator puts them on to cover the aftermath of a radical optical surgery. Here the sunglasses function in a way reminiscent of those years past when mirrored sunglasses meant hiding the visible effects of an "altered state" due to drug use. And the idea of sunglasses begins to empty of its meaning further when the terminator sports them at night. But in *Terminator* only the terminator wears sunglasses; in *Terminator II* sunglasses start to slip from face to face. The sunglasses start out in the pocket of an old hippie who tries to stop the T101 from taking another hippie's bike. The T101 intimidates them out of the hippie's pocket and puts them on while the sound track plays George Thoroughgood's "Bad to the Bone," all of which has the effect of humorously recalling the first movie in which the T101 indeed embodied the idea of being "bad to the bone," in spite of the fact, or perhaps because of the fact, that his "bones" were chrome. The sunglasses remain on the T101's face until they are knocked askew in a tussle at the Pescadero Mental Hospital while he and John Connor liberate Sarah. This occurs after John has instructed the T101 that he cannot just kill people. Thus the T101 commences the project of
humanization, and the sunglasses disappear for a brief period only to reappear on the face of the T1000 when he encounters a California Highway Patrolman and commandeers his motorcycle as well as his face and form. The sleek, CHiP helmet and mirrored eyewear metonymically echo the T1000's alchemical prowess and imbue him with the attributes of being the only 'real,' evil, mechanical man left in the film. But the sunglasses don't stop here. They next appear on the face of Sarah Connor as she sets out to assassinate Dyson, the man responsible for the technology which will enable the eventual production of SkyNet. By now, because the sunglasses have been emptied of any function other than referentiality, their only signification is positional, associating Sarah with the terminators.

But the metonymic play can best be seen in Terminator II in the figure of the T1000. A large part of the T1000's aesthetical appeal, as well as its terrifying power, rests on its metonymic ability to assume the shape and appearance of anything it "touches," provided it is of the same mass. Made of "mimetic poly-alloy," the T1000 can turn itself into the floor of the Pescadero Mental Hospital (metonymy on metonymy—the spectator is shown several jump cuts between the guard's coffee filling his cup and the liquid man rising out of the floor) or John Connor's foster-mother. It stands in the place of "IT" as
ungendered shifter and mass noun par excellence. It defines the perfect "disembodied signifier inhabiting the Other(A)." The T1000 operates as complete lack of identity save that given it by the teleology which relates it to what is not there—the John Connor of the future. It is pure function and referentiality. The spectator sees the T1000 assume the forms of several police figures thus imputing to the cops a persecutory identity, even though, on the level of the signified, these police figures serve as prey and disguise for the T1000. And its antagonism toward the T101 makes him seem all the more human by comparison. Its absolute emptiness redefines everything it comes into contact with; it empties everything and everyone of any alternative connotation and gives them a meaning that is strictly binary and oppositional. What more could be desired of metonymy?

It should come as no surprise, then, that we find the T1000 at another nexus in the elaboration of the psychotic delusion. For Lacan, desire is a metonomy, a metonomy constructed of metaphors. If man's desire is the desire of the Other, then the subject is caught in a continuous slide of substitutions which will always fail to fulfill the parameters of this desire as it is constituted outside of "self" and comprised of more than the subject will be able to locate in his or her substitutions. As Ragland-Sullivan says,
Lacan insists that self has an anticipatory value that it seeks to reaffirm in Real situations through the recognition of others (ego ideals meant to reify an ideal ego) and, in so doing, reaffirm its worth retroactively. But Desire prevents this drama of anticipation and retroaction from being harmonious. Since the Real objects of Desire (objet a) always refer to yet another Desire—both backward to primordial objects and forward in the anticipation of an impossible, final fulfillment—the objects themselves as well as the absent signifiers in the Other(A), place the moi in an unstable metonymic chain of Desire" (Phil. of Psych., 244-245).

The metaphoric substitution of objets a for those primordial objects, which have become signifiers in the Other, place the subject in a metonymic slide, as no set of objets a will be seen to merge completely with the set of signifiers in the Other. Thus, the subject, having attached a libidinal "meaning" to one or more objects, will always be in the position of being contiguous to the remaining, unsignified signifiers in the set comprising the desire of the Other. One sees here how it is inevitable for the psychotic to eventually "bump into" the empty hole left in the Other by the missing Name-of-the-Father; at which point, ineluctably, the signifying chain is going to breakdown, for what is missing as signifier in the Other cannot possibly be signified through the metaphoric substitutions of objets a. In this way, the T1000 becomes the volatile reconstruction of a signifier (a signifier which could not possibly be found amongst the objets a of the subject's
original libidinal connection to the 'real' world) built out of the fragments (signifiers) in the Other over the place where there is no signifier. The T1000 is as amorphous as the void it intends to recuperate and as threatening as the retroactively immanent breakdown which destabilized the signifying chain on which depends the constitution of the 'self' as desiring subject.

But it must not be forgotten that psychosis also decomposes the condensations and identifications effected in the unconscious. Through the T1000, SkyNet is signified. SkyNet will go online on August 8th, 1997, according to the T101, who says, "Human decisions are removed from Strategic Defence. SkyNet begins to learn at a geometric rate. It becomes self-aware at 2:14 a.m. on August 29th, 1997." SkyNet, according to Reese in the first film, "decided our fate in a micro-second--extermination," echoing the enigmatic statement Lacan makes near the end of "On a Question Preliminary to any Possible Treatment of Psychosis": "The term, in which the process by which the signifier has 'unleashed' itself in the real culminates, after the failure of the Name-of-the-Father was opened up--that is to say, the failure of the signifier in the Other, as locus of the signifier, is the signifier of the Other as locus of the law" (Ecrits, 221). The endless dechaining of the signifier evident in these lines, as it is in the
endless referentiality of the T1000 in the film, can only be stabilized by signifying the Other (SkyNet) as locus of the law.

SkyNet is "hooked into everything," a vast network of fiber optics and telecommunications satellites, and provides the film with a persecutor whose composite elements compare to the filaments and rays of Schreber's "God"—a persecutor who, like Schreber's "God," is ignorant of human nature (although a great deal of possible human responses are programmed into the T101 and T1000, they remain ignorant of such human nature as tears, jokes and the unrelenting will to survive) and is divided up into different personas. In these endless divisions of the persecutor figure, the "cascade of reshapings" and "increasing disaster of the imaginary" (op. cit.) dance around the rim of that which cannot be signified. SkyNet always remains exterior to the film, in its future, as the site of anticipated fulfillment while its absence is articulated retrospectively. And one must include in these dividings up the figure of the T101.

As the first elaborated and primary terminator, the T101 lies closest to that signifier which "bumped into" the void in the Other which set off the whole chain of reconstruction. This signifier, Freud posited, is the homoerotic wish which is part of every psychotic symptom. As Freud writes, "The view had already been put forward in
psycho-analytic literature that patients suffering from paranoia are struggling against an intensification of their homosexual trends, this pointing back to a narcissistic object-choice. And a further interpretation had been made: that the persecutor is in reality the loved person, past or present" (Freud, Vol. II, 152-153). In terms of the two films, homoeroticism should be read as homoeroticism, the erotics of androcentrism as enacted on the body as machine and the machine as body. Mark Dery, in his "Guerrilla Semiotics," sums up this conundrum:

"Schwarzenegger, a hunky Menschmachine best known for his portrayal of a death-dealing cyborg, epitomizes sexual confusion in the technotronic age. When he confesses, in the BBC's five-part teardown of Tinseltown, Naked Hollywood, that 'pumping iron is just like having sex,' he speaks for many. 'Can you believe how much I am in heaven?,' he effuses. 'I am, like, coming day and night.' His experience is hardly unique. Few who have sat in a state-of-the-art health club, surrounded by mirrors and straddling a gleaming Cybex apparatus, its moving parts slick with lubricant, would deny that the overall impression is one of automated intercourse. It is Philosophy in the Nautilus Room—the Marquis de Sade meets Jack LaLanne" (Dery, 43).

In this respect, it is not surprising to find the T101 (read Arnold Schwarzenegger) as the privileged site for eroticism. Only the T101 comes through time posed like Greek statuary, body-builder muscles gleaming showily. Kyle Reese comes through time in a decidedly unerotic fetal position, and when he arrives in the present he squeals and gasps with pain in a most unaesthetic
fashion. The only evidence the spectator gets of the T1000's travel through time, on the other hand, is a gaping hole in the chainlink fence: a figure that will be echoed when its final scream forms a chrome vagina of its throat which is not unerotic, but comes to the spectator laden with implications of death. The T1000 is presented as naked upon arrival, but the image of nudity succumbs to the image of the murder of the policeman—the primordial murder of the father which brings us back to the hole in the fence as the void in the Other where the Name-of-the-Father should be. It is immediately followed by the T1000's assuming the shape of a clothed policeman. While the T101 is invested with fully potent homosexuality, the T1000 gives life to all its ambiguity, its emptiness and its relation to death. Donna Haraway, whose "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" deals explicitly with the problematics of post-modern identification while positing the cyborg as a potent subversive position for the socialist feminist, elaborates cyborg sexuality thus:

"Modern medicine is also full of cyborgs, of couplings between organism and machine, each conceived as coded devices, in an intimacy and with a power that was not generated in the history of sexuality. Cyborg 'sex' restores some of the lovely replicative baroque of ferns and invertebrates (such nice organic prophylactics against heterosexism). Cyborg replication is uncoupled from organic reproduction" (Haraway, 66).

Homoeroticism functions as the sterile barrier to homoeroticism, but it still preoccupies itself with the
image of the father. Though it is Kyle Reese who figures as father in the primal scene of the first film (cf. Penley), it will be the T101 who Sarah invests as perfect father. As the T101 plays with her son John, Sarah says in a historically-toned voice-over, "Of all the would-be fathers who came and went over the years, this thing, this machine was the only one who measured up. In an insane world, it was the sanest choice." And this perhaps reflects the fact that, as a signifier for what cannot be signified, Kyle Reese presents a very ambiguous figure linked through the cause of his presence to both the John Connor of the future and the terrifying Law of the Father that is SkyNet. Reese functions more as a mere link in the signifying chain than as a focal point for eroticism.

Even the figure of Sarah Connor becomes more mechanical and masculine. She is linked metonymically to the T101 through the sunglasses, as previously discussed, and she localizes the concept of body as machine by working out in her hospital cell, cleverly up-ending her bed to gain a chin-up bar (one wonders if she also bench-presses with it). She becomes, in the second film, a hardened killing machine with gleaming muscles, especially in those scenes in which she batters down the hospital guards and when she prepares to assassinate Dyson. As her roommate, Ginger, says in Terminator when they make their Friday night toilette, "Better than mortal man deserves."
If homoeroticism in its context with psychosis and the films, functions as a sterile relay in the metonymic chain of desire, it remains to discuss the mechanics of this relay.

Several references to the time frame, especially as it relates to the signifier, have been made in the course of this paper, and, of course, any discussion of the films could not avoid the "time-loop paradox" as it is commonly called. Constance Penley, in her analysis of Terminator posits the "time-loop paradox" as narcissistic wish fulfillment, citing the fact that the John Connor of the future, in effect, rewrites the primal scene disposing of the father "...in order to go off with (in) his mother" (Penley, 73). She further elaborates this as the key to the spectator's fascination with this sort of story, which has certainly proven to be good box office with such films as Back to the Future and sequels. While it might be true that this really is the hook for the spectator, and on one level it seems to be a plausible reading of the first of the two films, it fails to take into account the homosexual preoccupation with the concept father as it is elaborated in the T101 as icon of the paranoid persecution complex. And it completely fails the second film in which the mother is transformed into a masculinized machine.

This failure can be attributed to the fact that the "time-loop paradox" of Terminator and Terminator II
functions most expressly at the level of the signifier in its appointed rounds, especially as they concern the paternal metaphor and the structure of delusion formation in psychosis. As Wilden has stated,

...the point de capiton is defined in purely linguistic terms as that by which the signifier brings the indefinite glissement [sliding] to a stop. The diachronic function of the point de capiton in the sentence, according to Lacan, is that function which describes the process of signification in speech. The signification of a sentence remains 'open' until its final term (including punctuation). Each term is anticipated by those which precede it in the construction of the sentence, and, inversely, the meaning of the sentence is retroactively revealed by a sort of reading backwards from the end" (Wilden, 274).

This recalls the previously quoted discussion of desire as the drama of anticipation and retroaction by Ragland-Sullivan. It also recalls Freud's theory of delusion formation as being a "lordly" reconstitution of the decomposition of condensations and identifications in the unconscious. At any rate, if John Connor is "rewriting" the primal scene and family history, he is also rewriting the apocalypse and the homoerotic father. Furthermore, he rewrites under the onus of a threat of extermination, the source of which lies both in the past and future--SkyNet, the "new order of intelligence" and scaffold over the void in the Other. As was previously discussed regarding the function of the characters as signifiers, these films, more than performing as meagre wish fulfillment, reconstruct a subjectivity which has
been radically resolved into its component elements; the films function as John Connor reading backwards to the place where the *point de capiton* has fallen into the Lacanian Real.

Freud hints at this when he comments on Schreber:

Ideas of this kind about a world-catastrophe are not infrequently reported as occurring during the agitated stage in other cases of paranoia. If we take our stand upon the theory of libidinal cathexis, and if we follow the hint given by Schreber's view of other people as being 'cursory contraptions', we shall not find it difficult to explain these catastrophes. The patient has withdrawn from the persons in his environment and from the external world generally the libidinal cathexis which he has hitherto directed on to them. Thus all things have become indifferent and irrelevant to him, and have to be explained by means of a secondary rationalization as being 'miracled up, cursory contraptions'" (Freud, Vol. III, 456)

It is easy to see the relation between "miracled up men and cursory contraptions" and the terminators (certainly contraptions) and Kyle Reese ("miracled" into the present from the future). It is also easy to understand the relation between the future as a locus and the future as a signifier for the-place-of-that-which-cannot-be-signified. The secondary rationalization as it is elaborated by the film takes the form of *reconnaissance*, misrecognition. As Slavoj Zizek writes in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*,

...the subject is confronted with a scene from the past that he wants to change, to meddle with, to intervene in; he takes a journey into the past, intervenes in the scene, and it is not that he 'cannot change anything'--quite the contrary, only through his intervention does the scene from the past *become what it always was*;
his intervention was from the beginning comprised, included. The initial 'illusion' of the subject consists in simply forgetting to include in the scene his own act—that is, to overlook how 'it counts, it is counted and the one who counts is already included in the account' (Lacan, 1979, p. 26). This introduces a relationship between truth and misrecognition/misapprehension by which the Truth, literally, arises from misrecognition..." (Zizek, 57-58).

At the literal level, this is exactly the framework structuring Terminator and Terminator II; if John Connor had not sent back Kyle Reese, he would not be who he becomes in the future, and it is the fragments of the first T101 which provide Dyson with the keys to unlocking the technology necessary to build SkyNet. (It is interesting to note here that the T101 has left yet another arm stuck in the machinery of the present in Terminator II. With very little retroactive reading one can readily see the potential for a "Terminator III").

One of the most prominent examples of retroactive reading in the first film, which gets mentioned again in the second, can be found in the message that John Connor makes Kyle Reese memorize to give to his mother. Here it is the case that what is enunciated in the future can only be read in the past. It should also be noted that the message changes somewhat when it is reiterated by the juvenile John Connor in the second film. Like the childhood game of "telephone," the message is distorted in its transmission from one to another of the characters.
The message from John Connor of the future which Kyle repeats to Sarah consists primarily of a thank-you for your courage in the dark times to come. But when the juvenile John Connor repeats it to the T101 (after having heard it from his mother, one must surmise) it has become redolent with the power to change fate. The John Connor of the future who effects the speech act can only understand what he meant by it as the John Connor of the past.

But *meconnaisance* also plays at the diegetical level of the film. Perhaps the most notable example of misapprehension centers around the answering machines of both the L.A.P.D. and Sarah Connor. Troubled by the news broadcasts denoting the assassination of the other Sarah Connors, Sarah calls the police and is put on hold. The police, meanwhile are trying to contact Sarah and keep getting her answering machine. Sarah then phones home, but Ginger has already been killed, and the terminator takes the message. (In an ironic mode the terminator hears Ginger’s preamble to the beep which says, "Ha! Ha! Ha! Fooled ya! You’re talking to a machine. But that’s Okay; machines need love, too! This is Ginger. Sarah and I can’t come to the phone right now..." Thus the terminator discovers he has terminated the wrong girl. He also gets Sarah’s location from her message). This might all appear to be simply missed connections, until one remembers the very nature of an answering machine; the message on the
machine is always received retroactively as a speech act occurring in the past whose meaning can only be read in the future—whenever the tape is played-back.

Another incident involving the telephone more clearly demonstrates back reading. Sarah calls her mother's cabin from the motel she and Kyle are holed up in and gives away the phone number to the motel. The spectator then discovers that it was the terminator on the other end of the line, mimicking Mom's voice—perfect reconnaissance for Sarah, perfect retroactive reading for the spectator. The T101 must then call the number to find out Sarah's location—the message can only be read retroactively. And Sarah can only realize that her mother is dead after the terminator shows up at the motel—reading back again.

The voice-overs in which Sarah speaks the history can be viewed in this respect also. Sarah speaks from outside the film, from the place of the Other, to tell the spectator about "Judgement Day," the war with the machines, the machine as the perfect father, and the uncharted territory of reshaping history. But these messages only take on meaning for the spectator at the end of the film when he or she has witnessed the war with the T1000, the deep bond between John and the T101 which shows up as he is lowered into the molten metal and remembers the arm caught in the giant cog just as John Connor disposes of the arm and micro-chip from the Cyberdyne
labs. Only then does Sarah's history "mean."

Truth as it emerges from misrecognition gets a pointed elaboration in Terminator II, when young John Connor calls to warn his foster parents, but the T1000 has already arrived on the scene and imitates Jenelle. John suspects something is wrong because Jenelle is never this nice and hands the phone to the T100, who notices a dog barking in the background and asks John what his dog is named. John replies, "Max." The T101, mimicking John's voice, asks the T100, mimicking Jenelle's voice, if "Woofie" is alright. The T1000 answers that "Woofie" is just fine. The truth that they are speaking to the T1000 only comes about because the T1000 mistakes the dog's name given by the T101 as true--it misrecognizes the dog.

But perhaps the most evident images of retroactive reading come through the diegesis of both films in the slow-motion sequences. These occur several times, and each time it implicates an instance of misrecognition and retroactive reading. The first instance occurs when Sarah sees the news clip about the second Sarah Connor's murder. She walks to the payphone in slow-motion and all the men in the bar stare at her as if she were not human but something absolutely unrecognizable. She drops her quarter and begins to dial, then notices a piece of paper attached to the phone. She must turn it over, read the back side, to discover that the phone is out of order.
The next incident is even more pronounced. The terminator enters Tech Noir, a night club, and stalks between tables and dancers in slow-motion. Sarah drops her napkin and bends to fetch it just as the terminator looks her way. The terminator reaches the end of the bar and turns back. Voila, he spots Sarah, but only after he turns back.

In *Terminator II* the same slow-motion formula is used when young John Connor is running from the T1000. He is in some backstage-of-the-mall maze of corridors and comes through the double doors only to see the T101 coming at him in slow-motion, shedding the box of roses he used to conceal his shotgun. John mistakes the T101’s intention, believing that he has come to gun him down. It is only when he looks over his shoulder to see the T1000 rounding a corner that he understands and hits the floor.

At the end of the film, though shot at regular speed, John will again have to "read backward" to determine which of the Sarah Connors is actually his mother (the other being the T1000). And, of course, it is the one behind him. But this scene also echoes an earlier scene in which John, after verifying the identity of the T101, comes to realize that his mother was not crazy—everything she said was true. This same sort of retroactive reading keeps the spectator indulging in the certitude of the filmic signifier. Again and again, especially in those scenes
concerning the mental health profession, any elaboration of the film as a delusion will finally turn up a point de capiton which forces the spectator to "read back" and recover the narrative as truth.

If it has been impossible to separate the two films as symptom and cure because they both present both paradigms, it is, nevertheless, possible to separate them at the structural level of expressing Freud's later expansion of the paradigm for psychosis; the first film, like the first stage of paranoid symptom formation, reveals a retraction of libidinal cathexis, and the second film, like the second stage of delusion-formation, represents an attempt at reconciliation with the external world from which the paranoid has withdrawn. In "The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis," Freud states:

Now one might expect that when a psychosis breaks out something analogous to the process in a neurosis happens, though of course between different institutions in the mind; that is, that two steps may be discernible in a psychosis also, the first of which tears the ego away from reality, while the second tries to make good the damage done and re-establish the relation to reality at the expense of the id. And something of the kind can really be observed in a psychosis; there are indeed two stages in it, the second of which bears the character of a reparation—but then the analogy gives way to a far more extensive similarity in the two processes. The second step in a psychosis is also an attempt to make good the loss of reality, not, however, at the expense of a restriction laid upon the id—as in neurosis at the expense of the relation with reality—but in another, a more lordly manner, by creating a new reality which is no longer open to objections like that which has been forsaken" (Freud, Vol.
Recalling the earlier quote attributing Schreber's views of other people as "miracled up" and "cursory contraptions," the first stage of delusion formation would then include a withdrawal of libidinal cathexis to other people (and things) in which the subject had previously invested. At this level the first film, Terminator echoes the first stage of delusion formation. Sarah Connor is systematically isolated from the people and life she once knew. Her roommate, Ginger, is killed. The police protecting her are killed. Her mother is killed. Toward the end only Kyle Reese remains, then even he is killed.

The settings also reflect this alienation. Sarah starts out in a busy diner. Then the spectator sees her at home with Ginger preparing for a date who calls and cancels at the last minute. Sarah next shows up alone in a bar where she recognizes the immanent threat against her life while the other patrons' looks alienate her. She then moves to Tech Noir, a bustling nightclub filled with dancing couples—Sarah is alone. Here she meets Reese, and, after a wild chase scene through busy streets, they wind up at the police station—not perhaps as bustling as Tech Noir, but full of busy people all the same. Sarah is isolated from Reese. The next scene moves the couple to a culvert below the highway, separate but still in proximity to the flux of population. The motel scenes which follow
suggest seclusion, a hideaway where illicit lovers might meet. This is followed by another wild chase scene in which they return to the flux of the population, but the other people on the street are just obstacles to be surmounted, departed. And they finally end up in a deserted factory: just Sarah, Kyle, the terminator and automated production. And then there is one, Sarah.

The second film elaborates a much different stage, that which tries to reconstruct the connection to people and things. Sarah and John move from relative isolation into small groups. Young John Connor begins the film with his friend, leaving behind his foster family to whom he has minimal attachments. They go to a video game arcade which is crowded, but the game player always plays alone. Then John is separated from his friend, but regroups with the T101 to go spring his mother from Pescadero Mental Hospital where she has willfully separated herself from all the others by affecting catatonic behavior. The subsequent group of three hooks up with Sarah's former gun-running compatriots, followed by the threesome's cooptation of the Dyson family.

Though in the end only Sarah and John will be left, it is not in alienation. The factory, though it is evacuated, is not automated; traces of human activity abound. And though the father, as T101, is disposed of, it is through the affective bond to John (and Sarah a little
bit) that he sacrifices himself for their future safety, a
safety which structures itself as a resolution between the
homoerotic threat and the breakdown of the signifying
chain. The regressive, narcissistic ego--John Connor--has
acceded to the Imaginary bond with the primordial mother
reconstructed as mechanical and masculine--the perfect,
"lordly" reality "which is no longer open to objection
like that which has been forsaken" (op. cit.).
The Victims of Art

The history of literary criticism endlessly recycles the question of what engages the reader of narratives, involves him or her in its chain of affects. The answers, numerous and varied though they seem, from theories of the sublime, mimesis and organic wholeness to postmodern conceptions such as reader-response, can all be reduced to the fulcrum of identification operations effecting the "willing suspension of disbelief." M.H. Abrams, in his essay "Belief and the Suspension of Disbelief," outlines the issue:

The problem of belief, in one or another formulation, is no less ancient than criticism, and it has always been argued in terms of 'knowledge,' 'truth,' and 'reality,' which are the cruxes of all philosophical disagreement. After twenty-five centuries, there seems greater weight than comfort in T.S. Eliot's weary conclusion that 'the problem of belief is very complicated and probably quite insoluble' (Abrams, 1).

In the end, Abrams can only conclude that the "implicit but constant requisition of a serious literary work upon our predispositions and beliefs is not an end in itself, but a necessary means to engage our interest and feelings, in order to move them toward a resolution" (30, italics mine).
Here we have a theory of symptom and cure that takes its force primarily from the history of literary criticism as Abrams outlines it in his essay. Furthermore, this "cure" can be seen to rest (historically) on the process of identification: "There is no escaping the circumstance that a poet must submit to the conditions of human nature in order to be their master" (ibid.). Indeed, this sort of cure dependent upon the reader/spectator's identification with the hero(ine) of the narrative can be seen to operate as an underlying structure in the film Aliens as I previously discussed it in its function as "cure." But, this concept, the film as curative, fails in its conflation of the ideal ego with the ego ideal. It is as if the language of the film itself, the flow of images, refuses the narcissistic, primary identification with Ripley, at the very moment when she achieves a triumphant wholeness, by projecting the alien out from the screen toward the spectator.

Of interest in this formula is the apparent need for the machinery of moral edification to attach itself to prelinguistic structures. This is the stuff of Aristotle's Rhetoric, which admonishes that tragedy should illustrate the struggles of an elevated personage in order to incite catharsis. Of course, Aristotle's catharsis is much more moderate than moral edification, but again and again, in dogmatic theories of poesy, one sees the return of the
elevated personage, the exemplum. Our heros are not our fathers; they are our mothers. For we do not wish to be like them; we wish to be them. And if even the cinema of cure, with its ideological praxis intent on restoring culturally correct maternal activity, fails to cement the ideal ego with the ego ideal, how much more so must the cinema of symptom or the structurally paranoid film, in its very resistance to this sort of identification, fail to engage the spectator's conflated ideal ego/ego ideal? In these films, the spectator's position, in relation to the narrative, is inscribed as already outside; no hero(ine) stands as always already centrifuge of the diegesis and focal point for the spectator's primary narcissism.

The Abrams essay quoted above was published as part of the proceeds from a conference on literature and belief in 1957, and, while Abrams and the others were busy mumbling about suspension of disbelief, identification, organic wholeness and the like, Walter Ong, in his essay "Voice as Summons for Belief," decided to take a more language-oriented approach that comes closer to separating the two functions of identification, positing them as an intra-personal "I" and "thou":

As he composes his thoughts in words, a speaker or writer hears these words echoing within himself and thereby follows his own thought, as though he were another person. Conversely, a hearer or reader repeats within himself the words he hears and thereby understands them, as
though he were himself two individuals. This double and interlocking dialectic...provides the matrix for human communication. The speaker listens while the hearer speaks" (Ong, 83).

He goes on to say that the assumption of a mask is inherent to communication, and "...voice demands role-playing, taking the part of the other within who is not ourselves"(88). What Ong delineates here can be seen as corresponding to the ego ideal as "reflection of one’s idealized moi identity in the secondary narcissism of relationships" (Ragland-Sullivan, 54). At another level, these masks produce a remoteness which makes the text evocative:

The reason for the corresponding heightening of effect seems to be the fact that all communication takes place across barriers, or is an attempt to crash through barriers, namely, the barriers which bar the ultimate compenetration of the 'I' and the 'thou'" (Ong, 99).

In positing an impulse toward mutual permeation of the 'I' and 'thou', Ong comes close to elaborating mirror stage reconnaissance, a primary identification that would correspond to the ideal ego. But, by placing both the distancing structure of the mask and the compenetrating heightening of effect within the field of language, Ong manages to separate the two while inverting them. It is the secondary identification with an other like but not the same as self which is primary to language, as the foundations of language are built through paternal intervention in the mother/child symbiosis. In the realm
of language, primary identification merely lends this structure heightened effect as a vestigal channel for affects, a sort of cross-current or under-tow that ends up adding force to the general flow. To wit, the ideal ego and the ego ideal elaborate themselves as separate in the process of psychic development through language acquisition. Ragland-Sullivan explains this process:

In other words, language is such a distortion and deferral of experience that presubjective perception is repressed, albeit dynamically. The moi (which was initially mother-oriented) gradually comes to identify with the father as a secondary introjection identified with cultural ideals. While the (m)Other remains as the unconscious source of primary identity with objects of Desire, the father comes to represent conscious (i.e., public or social) ideals: a dual perspective coexists in the interior of the moi" (56).

It should be noted that presubjective perception includes the mirror stage and all that goes before it. Here we see that the impulse of moral edification to excite the primary lies in its necessity to make of the "morally correct" an object of desire rather than a public or social ideal. To the extent that morals or values, by their very definition, belong to the social, we see how what begins as ego ideal rapidly succumbs to ideal ego in a bizarre melange of the essential and the intentional. All this points to the fact that, if the reader/spectator's position must be inscribed in the text to overcome defences, language itself necessitates a position of secondary identification which is not
conflated with the ideal ego. It is language itself, as
something to be read, that must posit within the terms of
its own articulation a position of anticipation and
retroaction, a barrier to immediate coextention with
subjectivity such as is implied in the Cartesian cogito, a
position to be inhabited by an other, a reader.

Leaving aside for a moment the issue of language, and
returning to Abrams' essay, he seems to outline just such
a position in his discussion of the Divine Comedy:

And the more credible and terrifying Dante, in
his one function as moral monitor, makes the
exemplary suffering of the damned, the more
difficult he makes his other task of winning our
emotional consent to the thesis that God is
Love, and Hell follows. To this end Dante
inserts himself, a mortal like us, into the poem
as the experiential center through whose eyes
and sensibility we invariably view Hell, as well
as Purgatory and Heaven" (Abrams, 23).

Abrams delineates the perfect ego ideal position from
which to experience the Divine Comedy:

[Dante] repeatedly misapplies his sympathy,
feels an irrepressible admiration for the
strength and dignity of some of the sinners in
their ultimate adversity, weeps with such an
abandon of fellow-feeling that Virgil must
sternly reprimand him..." (ibid.).

Dante, as first-person narrator, "exhibits with entire
credibility" the whole range of what is human in face of
the eternal so that we may recognize ourselves in him. But
Abrams' discussion elides the position of a parent/child
dyad—Virgil/Dante—in his confusional apprehension of the
mechanisms of identification. Abrams has separated the ego
ideal from the ideal ego, but only at the cost of excluding from his exegesis the function of primary identification. Virgil, as subject supposed to know, makes sense of Dante's excessive and uncontrolled reactions, and it is not without the mirror stage fusion of the more powerful Virgil with the childlike Dante that the reader appreciates the Divine Comedy. While the author of the Divine Comedy, on the one hand, has separated the ego ideal from the ideal ego, on the other hand he has fused them. The didactic intentions of his text necessitate both Dante as ego ideal and Virgil/Dante as ideal ego to "persuade us, against all our natural inclinations, that the Inferno, with its savage, repulsive and exquisitely ingenious tortures protracted in perpetuity, is not only required by God's justice but...is entailed by God's 'Primal Love'" (ibid.).

Dante's formula for reader identification also structures the cinema of cure in Aliens. Not only is it necessary that the spectator identify with Ripley as an ego ideal, the spectator also identifies with the ideal ego symbiosis of Ripley with the techo-military apparatus, especially when Ripley assumes the hydrolic enhancement of the loader. But, whereas Aliens can be seen to overflow, diegetically, its own agenda, the Divine Comedy does not because, if one can identify with Dante-as-narrator and with the Virgil/Dante dyad, one may also take up the
position of Virgil as subject supposed to know.

This is more or less the structure underlying the Terminator films. Of course, these films partake of both symptom and cure and do not follow the formula as does Dante’s work, which rests wholly in the realm of the curative. The potential for each figure to serve as ego ideal in these films confounds a direct correspondent to the position of Dante-the-narrator. And the dyads of mirror stage ideal ego are likewise fragmented. John Connor in the anticipatory mode fuses with Sarah and the T101 by turns. Only through the John Connor of the future can any sort of cohesion emerge. It is John Connor of the future who functions in the position of Dante-the-narrator, engaging in a flow of ego ideals. And it is the dyad of John Connor, split between the anticipatory mode of the juvenile and the retroactive man he will become, that provides an ideal ego. Thus the figure of Virgil, who maintains a constant illusion of comprehension beside Dante-the-narrator’s turbulent affective flux of ego ideals, provides a model for the formula embodied in John Connor of the future.

In these films, however, ideal ego and ego ideal are separated by a source of articulation both beyond the text and across time, an articulation that mimics the structure of desire in language. It must be remembered that the self has an "anticipatory value" that reads both retroactively
"toward primordial objects" and forward in "anticipation of an impossible, final fulfillment" which desire prevents from being harmonious. Language also functions according to this structure and is always received in anticipation of its final term but can only be given meaning or sense retroactively. Furthermore, both language and desire can be seen as issuing from an Other which is articulated within the text(self) as being outside the text(self).

Given these parameters, one sees emerge a John Connor (as he will become) meant to conceal all the distances and gaps between the terms in the nexus of language, desire and identity. In other words, all this--time-loop, the metonomy of desire, and language itself--keeps me as a constant horizon of my own perception. The very flow of images which constitutes the film (or words which constitute the written text) reiterates this time-loop and metonomy of desire. The flux of images activates desire in its structural essence. Only through metonomy does one produce the illusion of motion from a series of still photographs. It is language itself that constitutes the illusion of John Connor as he will become. And this illusion is the only possible "organic whole" we can make of either life or literature.

Here, at the level of language, the reader or spectator enters the text, not as victim of art, but as illusion of understanding. In this regard, the ELIZA
Project from the field of Artificial Intelligence offers proof that this illusion of understanding can activate an affective engagement on the part of the reader/spectator. ELIZA, developed by Joseph Weizenbaum, operates on the principle of matching patterns in English words and sentences. According to Pamela McCorduck, in her book *Machines Who Think*,

ELIZA was intended to simulate—or caricature, as Weizenbaum himself suggests—the conversation between a Rogerian psychoanalyst and a patient, with the machine in the role of analyst. There were a number of reasons for that choice. Partly it had to do with the illusions of mutual understanding that Weizenbaum senses human beings entertain" (McCorduck, 252).

Without delving into academic spats, Weizenbaum involved a Stanford colleague, a psychiatrist named Kenneth Colby, who developed a sister program, DOCTOR. The association turned out to be rocky, and Weizenbaum became concerned: "Though it did indeed simulate the conversation between a psychotherapist and a patient, Weizenbaum was convinced that it might be misunderstood as giving some insight into therapy, into madness" (253). And it was precisely on this point that the association broke up. ELIZA and her avatar, DOCTOR, have obvious and irrefutable shortcomings as psychotherapeutic applications; they fall far short of the mechanisms of transference, and the programs are easily fooled because they do not rely on any kind of understanding, being merely a process of "matching and classification." But the project illuminates some
interesting aspects of language:

ELIZA is seductive, and its protocols are wonderfully funny to read—that is, as long as you remember that the conversation is taking place between a computer and a human being, and not between two humans. But that distinction is very hard to maintain, at least for the human involved" (254).

McCorduck goes on to describe a demonstration in which "the conversation suddenly became intimate":

Our visitor, an internationally respected computer scientist, who knew very well that there was a computer at the other end of the line and not a human being, nevertheless began to disclose his worries about his wife, his children, his distance—both geographical and emotional—from them. We watched in painful embarrassment, trying hard not to look, yet mesmerized all the same. Something about that impartial machine had evoked a response from the visitor that the norms of polite human conduct forbade" (254).

Whether in the impartial machine of cinema or the resistance of the written text, language, itself an illusion of understanding and an impartial machine, elicits reciprocation, an affective investment through that very same "heightening" effect Ong described. Language can always only give the illusion of fusion, an illusion we are driven to cling to through the trauma of castration, which, for Lacan, lies in the paternal intervention between mother and child as a symbiotic whole. ELIZA has, on other occasions, demonstrably failed the "Turing Test" for qualification as an artificial intelligence (Alan Turing proposed that the true test of
artificial intelligence would be a dialogue in which the machine produced language usage that could not be determined from its human counterpart's. Still, the project, in its limited access to language, points to important psychical structures that certainly bear on our reception of language as it is embodied in texts.

ELIZA evokes mechanisms that approximate repetition automatism, the tendency of the subject to repeat unpleasant experiences in disregard of the pleasure principle. Lacan delineates repetition automatism in his Seminar on “The Purloined Letter”:

Our inquiry has led us to the point of recognizing that the repetition automatism (Wiederholungszwang) finds its basis in what we have called the insistence of the signifying chain. We have elaborated that notion itself as a correlate of the ex-sistence (or: eccentric place) in which we must necessarily locate the subject of the unconscious if we are to take Freud’s discovery seriously. As is known, it is in the realm of experience inaugurated by psychoanalysis that we may grasp along what imaginary lines the human organism, in the most intimate recesses of its being, manifests its capture in a symbolic dimension” (Lacan, 28).

Here Lacan seems to be articulating another victim—the being captured in a symbolic dimension eccentric to itself. For it is also "the symbolic order which is constitutive for the subject" (29). In other words, this position, "the decisive orientation which the subject receives from the itinerary of a signifier" (ibid.) will also be the position of subjectivity in relation to a text. This differs from the previously described processes
of identification in that it is through following the
signifier, by reading, that one iterates the internal "I"
and "thou" eternally opposed to the unary self of mirror
stage meconnaissance. The imaginary identifications
associated with the victim's position fade in the presence
of the signifying chain which governs foreclosure,
repression and denial, the displacements of the signifier.
Subjects in language "follow so faithfully the
displacement (Entstellung) of the signifier that imaginary
factors, despite their inertia, figure only as shadows and
reflections in the process" (ibid). This echoes Ong's
proposition that the ego ideal of primary meconnaissance
on the other side of the barrier lends the text its
heightened effect, while ego ideals function in language
use as the assumption of a mask. In Lacanian terms, the
unconscious is the discourse of the other. What takes this
beyond the position of the victim is the fact that this
split opens a void within the subject, "and if the first
thing to make itself heard is the void, it is within
himself that he will experience it, and it is beyond
speech that he will seek a reality to fill this void"
(Function and Field of Speech and Language, 40). So, while
this void fuels our suspension of disbelief, making us
seek a reality in the text, the fact that text is language
undermines any promise of completion and aggrandisement.

In the Seminar, Lacan elaborates the itinerary of the
signifier, the purloined letter, and the intersubjective roles that its possession dictates to the various characters in the narrative, while simultaneously delineating the manner in which the signifier is emptied of all meaning until it becomes what only the signifier can become—the only means of presence for that absolute absence, death. It is this lack which functions as both cause and result of the repetition automatism enacted by the characters as they repeat the positions of the itinerary. The Queen, in confiding her lack of the letter—its theft—to the police, has already divested the letter of its message. Because she tells the police the message contained in the letter, the message has no value. It no longer represents an interpersonal relation between herself and its author. And Dupin, in taking up the position of Minister D__, divests the letter of its meaning in the blackmail plot by stealing it, thus putting Minister D__ in the position of the Queen, the position of lack. Dupin himself must activate a subsequent meaning for the letter in its value as hostage for monetary reward, and in this act he takes up the position vacated first by the Queen, then by Minister D__. Once he has "sold" the letter back to the police, it no longer represents monetary reward. The letter, in its essential emptiness, in that it cannot mean what is written on it but instead must perform as the presence of an absence, necessitates
the values it is given. At the same time, its very emptiness—its definition as signifier—results from its exchange. Lacan explains the way in which this fact constitutes subjectivity:

So runs the signifier’s answer, above and beyond all signification: 'You think you act when I stir you at the mercy of the bonds through which I knot your desires. Thus do they grow in force and multiply in objects, bringing you back to the fragmentation of your shattered childhood. So be it: such will be your feast until the return of the stone guest I shall be for you since you call me forth.'" (52)

The absolute power of the signifier articulates us as its victims; victims of the signifier, as Lacan imputes to the itinerary of the signifier the status of "truth" and the power "which makes the very existence of fiction possible" (29). On this basis, Derrida will make his argument against Lacan’s "reading," calling Lacan "The Purveyor of Truth" (in the French title, "Le Facteur de la verite," the word facteur plays as both postman and factor). And Derrida takes as his point of departure Lacan’s neutralization of the narrator: "...the witness’s fidelity is the cowl which blinds and lays to rest all criticism of his testimony" (36). Here, on this neutralized ground, Derrida perceives a factor of the truth in fiction:

To what does this neutralization of the narrator commit the Seminar?
1. The narrator (himself doubled into a narrating narrator and a narrated narrator, not limiting himself to reporting the two dialogues) is evidently neither the author himself (to be
called Poe), nor, less evidently, the inscriber of a text which recounts something for us, or rather which makes a narrator speak, who himself, in all kinds of ways, makes many people speak. The inscriber and the inscribing are original functions that are not to be confused with either the author and his action, or with the narrator and his narration, and even less with the particular object, the narrated content..." (Derrida, 179).

Derrida's inscriber and inscribing inhabit a space outside the text as textuality that seems to echo Ong's "Other" within us. It also might be confused with language, the itinerary of the signifier. But it is necessary to the elaboration of Lacan's obfuscation of the account's structure as narrative which allows Derrida to point out the shift of scene in Lacan's reading:

This lack permits the scene of the signifier to be reconstructed into a signified (a process always inevitable in the logic of the sign), permits writing to be reconstructed into the written, the text into discourse, and more precisely into an 'intersubjective' dialogue (and it is not fortuitous that the Seminar's commentary concerns only the two dialogued parts of "The Purloined Letter")" (180).

From this vantage point, Derrida critiques Lacan for making a "whole" out of the narrated content while obliterating the "whole" of the narration, not only disincorporating the narrator, but the other two tales in the triptych as well. In other words, the Lacanian itinerary reduces the reader to a narcissistic ideal ego within the text, overlooking any secondary ego ideal positions available.

Derrida makes any number of interesting points in
addition to those I have brought out, and indeed the two readings—both Lacan's and Derrida's—indicate a whole cluster of confusions and contradictions both within the psychoanalytic framework and outside of it. I cannot possibly do justice here to all of these issues, but focus instead on the potential between the two readings for a position within signification from which to recuperate the victim of art. While Derrida's reading points out certain limitations in Lacan's, Lacan's reading certainly points out a verifiable structure that cannot be dismissed as purely psychoanalytic hocus-pocus. Lacan omits certain items in his intent on making a lesson of Poe's tale, and here we return to that odd relationship articulated between didacticism and the victim of art, but this does nothing to disprove what he says.

It is indeed through the itinerary of the signifier in its representation of lack that we engage a fiction, and thus we cannot escape being the victims of the signifier. But fiction, the whole of the work, is also a signifying formation masking a void and, as such, constitutes itself as a symptom. This does not suggest we need be victims of art. We enjoy art as a symptom. In The Sublime Object of Ideology, Slavoj Zizek articulates two stages in the psychoanalytic process, interpretation of symptoms and going through the fantasy:

When we are confronted with the patient's symptoms, we must first interpret them and
penetrate through them to the fundamental fantasy as the kernel of enjoyment which is blocking the further movement of the interpretation; then we must accomplish the crucial step of going through the fantasy, of obtaining distance from it, of experiencing how the fantasy-formation just masks, fills out a certain void, lack, empty place in the Other" (Zizek, 74).

But problems arise when the symptom is held onto even beyond the fantasy, to which Lacan posed the concept of *sinthome*: "Symptom as *sinthome* is a certain signifying formation penetrated with enjoyment: it is a signifier as a bearer of *jouis-sense*, enjoyment-in-sense" (75). Zizek goes on to say that the *sinthome* "is not enchained in a network but immediately filled, penetrated with enjoyment" (76). This is the position held out to us by Poe's narrator. While he includes himself in the narrative, he is not on the itinerary of the signifier so to speak; he never takes possession of the letter. He partakes of the process of language, its anticipatory and retrospective elements, through his recounting of the tale, but he avoids the primary identification necessitated by moral edification in his silence when the moral of the story would be ennunciated. The story ends in Dupin's voice. The narrator gives us no interpretation, no evidence that his account bears Truth or even implies his opinion of the whole matter. He merely takes pleasure in it: "At Paris, just after dark one gusty evening in the autumn of 18--, I was enjoying the twofold luxury of meditation and a
meerschaum..." (Poe, 6). Poe's narrator, like ELIZA, gives us the impression of having understood, but he nowhere indicates his knowledge; he is in the story to ask pertinent questions. Zizek explains the relation between truth, enjoyment and the sinthome thus:

> From this perspective of the sinthome, truth and enjoyment are radically incompatible: the dimension of truth is opened through our misrecognition of the traumatic Thing, embodying the impossible jouissance" (Zizek, 79).

It should come then as no surprise that the position of sinthome is the diegetically mapped out position of the spectator in the cinema of symptom as it is elaborated in the film Alien. Ripley activates no mirror stage meconnaissance because the truth of the traumatic Thing is impossible jouissance. The alien, in its reproductive incorporation of the host, represents the end of the mother and the reign of the M(O)ther, the symbiotic child/mother whole. Instead, though we tend to form a secondary bond with her in the end, we generally take our pleasure from the safe distance of the omniscient camera work. We are there only to ask pertinent questions, to assume the illusion of understanding until the diegesis answers us, to make "jouis-sense" of the mystery. This is also the position outlined for us in the figure John Connor of the future in the Terminator films. We take up this position, exclusive of its fusional tendencies regarding the young John Connor, through the agency of the
pseudo-historical voice-overs and numerous other referents insuring the distance of time. The spectator's position is not that of the detective, Dupin, who must make truth or meaning of the narrative, but that of the narrator who makes a pleasure of the tale as a telling. In "Towards a Psychoanalytic Reading of the System(s) of a Contemporary American Film," Barbara Leaming writes of a system that echoes Ong's speaker hearing/listener speaking:

Thus the analyst who writes the reading/reads the writing of the filmic text is quite different from the critic as detective. For the detective works with a corpse, a crime that is already done, and his work is simply passive reconstruction of a work which is already closed. The detective works to remove chaos by reading the clues, to erase disorder first of all by assigning guilt, by limiting the range of its infective possibilities. The psychoanalyst cannot assign guilt for the crime is only being written in the analysis" (Leaming, 16).

The position which Leaming accounts to the psychoanalyst, like that of the narrator of Poe's tale or that of the sinthome, engages the signifying chain without investing in the letter. Poe's narrator never takes possession of the letter, never gives it a value from which he profits. He merely takes pleasure in its passage, both writing and reading the itinerary. Though we may be the victims of the signifier, inescapably captured in its network, we are not the victims of art.

Indeed, most fictions offer such a position of sinthome in the narrative structure, whether it be through a first-person narrator or through the omniscience of the
narrator. The only fiction that seems to fall prey to the 
reconnaissance inherent to the itinerary of the signifier 
is that which also falls under the heading didactic or 
morally edifying. It is possible to posit reading from the 
sinthome as a more general practice. In his essay,
"Reading," Maurice Blanchot advocates a similar position:
"True reading never challenges the true book: but it is 
not a form of submission to the 'text' either" (Blanchot,
95). If he posits a true reading and a true book, Blanchot 
does not appoint a truth to the reading:

Reading, in the sense of literary reading, is 
not even a pure movement of comprehension, the 
kind of understanding that tries to sustain 
meaning by setting it in motion again. Reading 
is situated beyond comprehension or short of 
comprehension" (96).

Blanchot, the reader, will not fall victim to the sort of 
primary identifications Dupin does when he sets the letter 
on its appointed course. He chooses instead the illusion 
of comprehension which is not without its enjoyment. One 
may fear that this is a pale enjoyment in comparison, but 
the position of the sinthome does not remove us from the 
text; it merely frees us from being its victims. Blanchot 
seems to understand this:

Even if it demands that the reader enter a zone 
in which he has no air and the ground is hidden 
from him, even if, beyond these stormy 
approaches, reading seems to be a kind of 
participation in the open violence that is the 
work, in itself reading is a tranquil and silent 
presence, the pacified center of excess, the 
silent Yes that lies at the heart of every 
storm" (97).
Reading from the sinhôme allows us to participate in the text without becoming the victims of its truth, for we are still captured by the signifier, our inescapable and constitutive factor, but we need not attempt to pass it off, laden with our own imaginary processes, as ideal object. To indulge the itinerary of the signifier with a role as signified, is to abolish its truth, its emptiness, and play its victim. Blanchot admonishes against this sort of reading:

And when Valery worries about today's uncultivated reader who demands that facility accompany his reading, this worry may be justified, but the culture of an attentive reader, the scruples of a reading filled with devotion, an almost religious reading, one that has become a sort of cult, would not change anything; it would create even more serious dangers, because although the lightness of a casual reader, dancing quickly around the text, may not be true lightness, it has no consequences and holds a certain promise: it proclaims the happiness and innocence of reading, which may in fact be a dance with an invisible partner in a separate space, a joyful, wild dance with the 'tomb.' Lightness from which we must not hope for the impulse of a graver concern, because where we have lightness, gravity is not lacking" (98).

The lightness of reading as an end in itself, as an end to meaning, means a recognition that the signifier structures the position, the subject, but the position is not one. The position, the subject is neither singular, nor monumental Truth.

As victims of art we label movies and recordings. As victims of art we periodically "cleanse the trainstation
bookstores" (Michel Maffesoli, forthcoming, 1992). As victims of art we opened fire on the National Endowment for the Arts' support of works such as those of Maplethorpe. As victims of art we campaign against pornography. And all to no effect. We are as much prisoners of the signifier now as we were before the NEA got "cleaned-up," and pornography thrives no matter the censorship of the moral majority (cf. Maffesoli). It does not necessarily follow that record albums provoke suicide and witchcraft in teens, because these cultural artifacts inscribe in their very nature as language the position of the sinthome. Zizek, in describing the end of the psychoanalytic process as identification with the symptom, points to a social responsibility beyond censorship: "The analysis achieves its end when the patient is able to recognize, in the Real of his symptom, the only support of his being" (Zizek, 75). Art is always only art; yet it serves the sociality in its circulation as culture; it provides the being with an Other from which desire is articulated. And whether or not one views this desire as "desirable," it still must be signified in the symptom. How much better if we should recognize the symptom as symptom, as part of our "culture of hate," as constitutional of ourselves and engage the sinthome. Lacan may have been able to say there is no cure, but he also elaborated certain anodyne properties of psychoanalysis.
We may acknowledge that we fall under the spell of art, but we must also acknowledge that we need not be its victims.
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