In sound recording, as in image recording, the apparatus performs a significant perceptual work for us—isolating, intensifying, analyzing sonic and visual material. It gives an implied physical perspective on image or sound source, though not the full, material content of everyday vision or hearing, but the signs of such a physical situation. We do not hear, we are heard. More than that: we accept the machine as organism, and its "attitudes" as our own.¹

However, it is not so much sound in general as the voice in particular which would seem to command faith in cinema's veracity. The notion that cinema is able to deliver "real" sounds is an extension of that powerful Western episteme, extending from Plato to Hélène Cixous, which identifies the voice with proximity and the here and now—of a metaphysical tradition which defines speech as the very essence of presence. Charles Affron situates himself comfortably within this tradition in a recent book on sentiment, where he writes: "Sound ... guarantees immediacy and presence in the system of absence that is cinema. Images that constantly remind us of the distance in time and space between their making and their viewing are charged, through voice, with the presence both that uttered words require for their transmission and that they lend to our viewing of the art."² When he adds a few pages later that "our belief in fiction is promoted by the presence of the speaker's voice" (p. 115), he unwittingly points to the fetishistic value which a surprising number of film theoreticians have conferred upon the voice—to the key role it has been asked to play in the larger project of disavowing cinema's lack.

More is at issue here than the recovery of the object. When the voice is identified in this way with presence, it is given the imaginary power to place not only sounds but meaning in the here and now. In other words, it is understood as closing the gap between signifier and signified. Even more important, at least within the context of this discussion, Western metaphysics has fostered the illusion that speech is able to express the speaker's inner essence, that it is "part" of him or her. It locates the subject of speech in the same ontological space as the speaking subject, so that the former seems a natural outgrowth of the latter. The fiction of the authenticity of cinematic sounds thus promotes belief not only in presence but in self-presence.

It would seem almost obligatory to marshal the forces of deconstruction at this point,³ but the point I wish to make has been more precisely anticipated by Lacan, who remarks in "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis" that "I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object."⁴ Lacan emphasizes here that speech produces absence, not presence. He also reminds us that the discoursing voice is the agent of symbolic castration—that at
the moment the subject enters language, he or she also undergoes a phenomenal "fading" or "aphanisis." Finally, he indicates that language preexists and coerces speech—that it can never be anything but "Other."

The voice is the site of perhaps the most radical of all subjective divisions—the division between meaning and materiality. As Denis Vasse observes, it is situated "in the partition of the organic and organization, in the partition between the biological body and the body of language, or, if one prefers, the social body." The sounds the voice makes always exceed signification to some degree, both before the entry into language and after. The voice is never completely standardized, forever retaining an individual flavor or texture—what Barthes calls its "grain." Because we hear before we see, the voice is also closely identified with the infantile scene. On the other hand, because (as I stressed a moment ago) it is through the voice that the subject normally accedes to language, and thereby sacrifices its life, it is associated as well with phenomenal loss, the birth of desire, and the aspiration toward discursive mastery.

This concentration of contradictory values and functions within a single organ would seem almost to encourage conceptual slippage from one "side" to another—from the voice-as-being to the voice-as-discursive-agent. This is precisely what has repeatedly happened in film theory. The voice has been identified with presence by appealing to its pre- or extralinguistic properties—by exploiting its status as "pure" sound. However, as Comolli points out, it is primarily in its discursive capacity that the voice has been called upon to make good the absence upon which cinema is founded:

As soon as [speech and the speaking Subject] are produced, sound and speech are plebiscited as the "truth" which was lacking in the silent film. The decisive supplement, the "ballast of reality" (Bazin) constituted by sound and speech intervenes straightaway, therefore, as perfectionment and redefinition of the impression of reality.

The fetishistic operations of film theory turn not upon actual sounds but upon a "sonic vraisemblable," and the voice-as-carrier-of-meaning has a dominant place within that vraisemblable. In other words, what is at stake within cinema's acoustic organization, as within its visual organization, is not the real, but an "impression of reality." Cinema creates this "impression of reality" by participating in the production and maintenance of its culture's "dominant fiction," i.e., in "the privileged mode of representation by which the image of the social consensus is offered to the members of a social formation and within which they are asked to identify themselves."

As other writers have noted, Hollywood's sonic vraisemblable stresses unity and anthropomorphism. It subordinates the auditory to the visual track, nonhuman sounds to the human voice, and "noise" to speech. It also contains the human voice within the fiction or diegesis. Dominant cinema smoothly effects all four of these ideal projects through synchronization, which anchors sounds to an immediately visible source, and which focuses attention upon the human voice and its discursive capabilities. This emphasis upon diegetic speech acts helps to suture the viewer/listener into what Heath calls the "safe place of the story," and so to conceal the site of cinematic production. It is thus the sound analogue of the shot/reverse shot formation.

However, it has gone largely unnoticed that like the visual vraisemblable, the sonic vraisemblable is sexually differentiated, working to identify even the embodied male voice with the attributes of the cinematic apparatus, but always situating the female voice within a hyperbolically diegetic context. This chapter will attempt to show that Hollywood's soundtrack is engendered through a complex system of displacements which locate the male voice at the point of apparent textual origin, while establishing the diegetic containment of the female voice. It will also suggest that interiority has a very different status in classic cinema from the one that it enjoys in the literary and philosophical tradition which Derrida critiques. Far from being a privileged condition, synonymous with soul, spirit, or consciousness, interiority in Hollywood films implies linguistic constraint and physical confinement—confinement to the body, to claustral spaces, and to inner narratives. Finally, this chapter will argue that Hollywood borrows not only from the Freudian model of female sexuality, but from the Jonesian model, as well, and that its female subject is consequently organized around both castration and concentricity.

"You're a beautiful woman; audiences think you have a voice to match," explains a publicist to silent-screen star Lina Lamont in Singin' in the Rain (1952) when she wonders why she's not allowed to answer the questions directed to her by fans and reporters. Lina (Jean Hagen) violates this expectation of smooth complementarity whenever she opens her mouth; she speaks shrilly and ungrammatically, with a heavy Bronx accent. The studio for which she works, Monumental Pictures, attempts to conceal the seeming heterogeneity of her voice to her body by having others speak for her.
Singin’ in the Rain suggests that synchronization is synonymous with a more general compatibility of voice to body—that a voice which seems to “belong” to the body from which it issues will be easily recorded, but that one which does not will resist assimilation into sound cinema. Since Lina’s voice “contradicts” her polished appearance, it stubbornly refuses to be recorded. When the studio attempts to do so, it discovers that Lina can remember to speak into the microphone only if it is attached to her body, but this solution poses other problems: the sounds of her heartbeat and rattling pearls drown out her voice, which, moreover, comes through only intermittently because of the movements of her head. In addition, since the sound wiring has to be inserted beneath her clothing, she falls over every time someone pulls or trips on it. Synchronization is finally effected, but only through the supreme artifice of postdubbing another voice over the image of Lina moving her lips—the voice of Kathy Seldon (Debbie Reynolds).

Early in the film, a demonstration talking picture is shown at a studio party. It consists of an extended close-up of a middle-aged man enunciating with exaggerated clarity the words: “This is a picture and I’m talking. Look how my lips have sounds coming from them, synchronized in perfect unity.” Not one of the female characters in Singin’ in the Rain could echo this claim with absolute credibility. Not only must Lina rely upon Kathy for her singing and speaking voice, but at a climactic moment in the diegesis, the voice of Cosmo (Donald O’Connor) is superimposed over her moving lips. Furthermore, although Reynolds’s voice is in fact used for most of the songs, it is replaced by that of Betty Noyes for the number “Would You,” which is sung in The Dancing Cavalier. Thus, whereas Lina seems to sing the song in the film-within-the-film, and Kathy within the diegesis proper, a third voice, outside both fictions, actually generates the melody. Most baroque of all, in the scenes where Kathy is depicted as postdubbing Lina’s dialogue for her, what we in fact hear is the normal speaking voice of Jean Hagen, the actress playing Lina—a voice which contrasts dramatically with the one Hagen employs whenever Lina speaks in pro pria persona.17

The bewildering array of female voicesmarshaled at both the diegetic and extradiegetic levels for the purpose of creating direct sound suggests, even more forcefully than the difficulties Lina encounters in attempting to articulate and record her lines, that the rule of synchronization simultaneously holds more fully and necessitates more coercion with the female than with the male voice—suggests, in other words, that very high stakes are involved in the alignment of the female voice with the female image. I would like to conduct a brief examination of the codified deviations from the rule of synchronization in order to arrive at a clearer understanding of why that rule should be imposed so much more firmly upon female characters than upon their male counterparts.

One of Hollywood’s most established deviations from synchronized sound is, of course, postdubbing, which juxtaposes voices with images after the latter have been produced and (usually) edited, so bringing momentarily together in the studio the shadow play of celluloid and the actual voices of flesh-and-blood actors. The latter speak the lines assigned to them while closely observing the lip movements represented on screen, and their voices are recorded as they do so. These actors may be the same or different from those whose images they conform to vocally, but in both cases the aim is usually the complete illusion of “perfect unity.” This is the effect for which Monumental Pictures strives when it joins Kathy’s voice to Lina’s body, just as it is the motivating hope behind MGM’s own intricate sound mix of Singin’ in the Rain.

Like synchronization, postdubbing performs a supervisory role with respect to sexual difference, enforcing the general dictum that female voices should proceed from female bodies, and male voices from male bodies. Violations of this dictum are marked as “comic,” and are never more than temporary. Once again, Singin’ in the Rain offers a convenient example—this time one taken from the very end of the film. After the premiere of The Dancing Cavalier, the audience asks Lina to sing them a song. Backstage, Kathy is persuaded to lend her voice to Lina once more, and a microphone is set up behind the curtain. The ploy works until midway through the song, when Don, Cosmo, and the producer pull the curtain to reveal the source of the singing voice. When Kathy runs from the stage, Cosmo replaces her at the microphone, breaking into song as the unwitting Lina continues to move her lips. However, although the unity of a fictional character is thus broken, the larger diegesis of Singin’ in the Rain is at no point challenged, nor does its representational system falter for a moment. In effect, a “false” narrative structure gives way to the “true” one; the voice is returned to its rightful “owner,” who is finally delivered up to the audience of The Dancing Cavalier. “This is the girl whose voice you heard tonight,” calls Don to the crowd. The specter of sexual heterogeneity is thus raised only so that it can be exorcised, and the female voice “remarried” to the female body. One would have to look beyond Hollywood to find a film
which postdubbing subverts sexual difference—to an experimental text such as Patricia Gruben’s Sifted Evidence (1980), which is discussed in the final chapter of this book.

A second codified deviation from the rule of synchronization is the voice-off, so designated because its ostensible source is not visible at the moment of emission. The voice-off exceeds the limits of the frame, but not the limits of the diegesis; its “owner” occupies a potentially recoverable space—one, indeed, which is almost always brought within the field of vision at some point or other. Moreover, although the voice-off seems to challenge the primacy of vision by introducing the threat of absence, it generally contributes to the unity of the classic cinematic text by carving out a space beyond the frame of one shot for the next to recover. Sometimes this recuperation is postponed for so long that the invisible source of the voice-off becomes a structuring absence at the level of the narrative, as well as at that of the shot. In Hitchcock’s Psycho (1960), for instance, “Mrs. Bates” can frequently be heard quarreling with her son in a location beyond the camera’s range, each time intensifying the mystery that surrounds “her,” and hence the viewer’s desire for proairetic resolution. However, even when the voice-off is not employed in either of these ways, it generally extends the boundaries of the fiction beyond what can be seen to what can be heard, and so contributes to the diegetic illusion. As a result, the voice-off is sexually differentiated in much the same way that a synchronized voice is. (I will have more to say about the voice-off later, when I discuss its use in Kiss Me Deadly.)

The voice-over, on the other hand, is coded as occupying a different order from the main diegesis. That difference often seems more quantitative than qualitative, merely a slight temporal and/or spatial dislocation. The voice-over of Walter/Fred MacMurray in Billy Wilder’s Double Indemnity (1944), for example, speaks from a position so closely adjacent to the events represented in the image track that the two eventually converge. On other occasions, as in many traditional documentaries, the voice-over seems separated from the fiction by an absolute partition. To the degree that the voice-over preserves its integrity, it inverts the usual sound/image hierarchy; it becomes a “voice on high,” like that of the angel Joseph in Capra’s It’s a Wonderful Life (1947), a voice which speaks from a position of superior knowledge, and which superimposes itself “on top” of the diegesis.

To the degree that the voice-over preserves its integrity, it also becomes an exclusively male voice. The only disembodied female voice-over that I have been able to find in the history of Hollywood film is that which narrates Joseph Manckiewicz’s Letter to Three Wives (1949), and even it differs sharply from its male counterpart. Although it “hovers” above the image track, in an invisible spatial register, it occupies the same temporal register as the other characters, and often comments upon events as they occur. Moreover, although its “owner” escapes the viewer’s gaze, her appearance is a frequent topic of conversation. At one point, two of the other characters even look at her photograph, obliquely angled so as to resist and tantalize our vision. The disembodied voice-over in Letter to Three Wives is thus curiously both corporealized and diegeticized.

There is a general theoretical consensus that the theological status of the disembodied voice-over is the effect of maintaining its source in a place apart from the camera, inaccessible to the gaze of either the cinematic apparatus or the viewing subject—of violating the rule of synchronization so absolutely that the voice is left without an identifiable locus. In other words, the voice-over is privileged to the degree that it transcends the body. Conversely, it loses power and authority with every corporeal encroachment, from a regional accent or idiosyncratic “grain” to definitive localization in the image. Synchronization marks the final moment in any such localization, the point of full and complete “embodiment.”

Pascal Bonitzer describes the embodiment of the voice in terms of aging and death, remarking that as soon as its source is revealed, it becomes “decrepit” and “mortal,” vulnerable to stray bullets. The metaphor is suggestive, but it fails to address the issue which is immediately broached within classic cinema by any reference to the body—the issue, that is, of gender. Much more pertinent here is a recent book by Michel Chion, La voix au cinéma, which relies heavily upon the categories of the “masculine” and the “feminine” when articulating the relation of filmic voice to filmic image. Unfortunately, Chion’s sorts into the domain of sexual difference seem motivated primarily by the search for poetic props, and so remain for the most part both uncritical and devoid of self-consciousness. Indeed, so determinedly does La voix au cinéma circumscribe its discussion of the voice within existing gender demarcations that it assumes much of the symptomatic value of a Hollywood film, and will be correspondingly utilized here.

Chion’s argument converges most dramatically with dominant cinema whenever it comments upon the contrasting values traditionally assigned to the embodied voice, on the one hand, and the disembodied voice, on the other. On these occasions, sexual difference almost invariably functions as a major point of reference, the metaphorical terrain upon which the opposition is mapped. In one particularly striking passage, which warrants close scrutiny, La voix au cinéma compares the
localization of a previously unlocalized voice to the performance of a striptease:

In much the same way that the feminine sex is the ultimate point in the deshable (the point after which it is no longer possible to deny the absence of the penis), there is an ultimate point in the embodiment of the voice, and that is the mouth from which the voice issues. . . As long as the face and mouth have not been revealed, and the eye of the spectator has not "verified" the coincidence of the voice with the mouth. . . the vocal embodiment is incomplete, and the voice conserves an aura of invulnerability and of magic power.22

Castration is clearly "in the air" here, but it's difficult at first to locate the bleeding wound, particularly since the terms of the analogy are quite puzzling. A striptease, after all, turns upon removal, whereas the localization of the voice involves the addition or supplementation of the body. However, the equation comes into focus with the reference to yet another scene within which loss is anchored to female anatomy—with the reference to that mythical moment when gender is first displayed and apprehended. Chion is in effect comparing the close-up which discloses the moving lips of an invisible speaker with two situations in which a woman's genitals are exposed to a male gaze: the climactic moment in a stripper's performance, when she removes her G-string, and the moment within the Freudian scenario when the young boy is obliged, if only momentarily, to acknowledge the genital difference of his sexual other.

The ostensible reasons for this complex analogy are several. First, each term in the equation incorporates a scenario of vision. Second, in each case the drama is played out at the level of the body. Finally, in each instance the gaze "discovers" an absence or lack—a lack which is presumed to be anatomical within the contexts of both the striptease and the "revelation" of sexual difference, but which in the context of cinema can be read only as the loss of those symbolic attributes which accompany the unlocalized voice (authoritative vision and speech, superior knowledge, and a radical alterity with respect to the diegesis).

However, the "common" denominators that link all three scenes push the analogy definitively in the direction of sexual difference, making the female body the site not only of anatomical but of discursive lack. By comparing the close-up that installs a filmic voice within a filmic body to the unveiling of woman's genitals, the passage quoted above suggests that to embody a voice is to feminize it. It thereby situates the female subject firmly on the side of spectacle, castration, and synchronization, while aligning her male counterpart with the gaze, the phallus, and what exceeds synchronization.23

Body Talk

As I have already suggested, dominant cinema also holds the female subject much more fully than the male subject to the unity of sound and image, and consequently to the representation of lack. This is not to say that the male voice consistently occupies the privileged position of the disembodied voice-over within that cinema. On the contrary, the male voice-over actually appears relatively infrequently in Hollywood films, at least in comparison with the synchronized voice, and on those occasions when it does have a part to play, it is usually associated with a diegetic figure. Nevertheless, in his most exemplary guise, classic cinema's male subject sees without being seen, and speaks from an inaccessible vantage point. These qualities can be most efficiently designated through the disembodied voice-over, but they are also recoverable from the much more terrestrial uses to which Hollywood generally puts the male voice.

Insofar as the voice-over asserts its independence from the visual track, it presents itself as enunciator. It seems, in other words, to be a metafictional voice, the point of discursive origin. This impression is sometimes augmented by the disembodied voice's extratextual familiarity—by vocal characteristics that evoke a well-known "personality," such as Mark Hellinger in Jules Dassin's The Naked City (1948),24 or even the director himself. Orson Welles makes the most of the last possibility in The Magnificent Ambersons (1942), a film in which he not only functions as a behind-the-scenes narrator, but deliberately conflates that role with his authorial persona through an extraordinary verbal signature in the credit sequence. (At the end of that sequence, we hear the voice to which we have intermittently listened during the past 88 minutes say these words over the image of a microphone: "I wrote and directed [this film]; my name is Orson Welles.")

However, whether or not the voice-over is reinforced in this way, it can never be more than a fictional inscription of a productive activity which is itself situated outside the film, and dispersed over a wide range of technological and human agencies (the apparatuses of sound recording, sound mixing, postdubbing, and projection, as well as the scriptwriter, voice coach, sound crew, actors, and director, to name only the sound agencies). The authority of the disembodied voice-over is thus the effect of both a displacement and a condensation.

Despite its efficiency, this paternal representation is not easily assimilated by the classic fiction film. As Bonitzer points out, it too openly and aggressively proclaims its superior knowledge, a knowledge over which it claims exclusive rights;25 it is "undemocratic," pulling rank not only on the characters within the diegesis, but on the viewer, as well. Moreover, by insisting so forcefully upon its own detachment
from the events it describes, or upon which it comments, the noncorporalized voice-over constantly pulls away from the narrative order to its own, and so at times inhibits secondary identification. (In Stanley Kubrick’s *The Killing* [1956], for instance, it functions as a kind of court recorder, coldly and punctiliously establishing the time and place of each event leading up to the climax, thereby distancing the viewer/listener from the guilty characters.) It is presumably for these reasons that it is so rarely utilized by Hollywood, and that when it is, as in such typical examples as Jean Negulesco’s *Johnny Belinda* (1948), Don Siegel’s *Riot in Cell Block 11* (1954), or Billy Wilder’s *The Seven Year Itch* (1955), it is often confined to the beginning and/or conclusion, and so functions as either a prologue or an epilogue.26

The embodied or diegetically anchored male voice-over might seem the logical alternative to its disembodied or diegetically unanchored counterpart, but it has not been generally adopted for that purpose. It is a striking fact that, apart from contemporary movie and television revivals of film noir, this voice is largely confined to a brief historical period, stretching from the forties to the early fifties.27 The instances that come most quickly to mind, moreover, suggest that the embodied male voice is likely to speak “over” the image track only because of drastic circumstances, when it is (or recently has been) in extremis. The voice that narrates Billy Wilder’s *Double Indemnity* (1944), for example, “belongs” to a dying man, who received his mortal injury at the hands of a woman. The voice-over in Rudolph Mate’s *D.O.A.* originates from a man who has been fatally poisoned. The voice that narrates Otto Preminger’s *Laura* derives from a character who is shot to death during the course of the film, and whose virility is in doubt from the very outset. The narrator of another Wilder film, *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), is even more dislocated from phallic orthodoxy; not only is he a creatively, morally, and financially bankrupt writer who permits himself to be supported and dominated by an aging actress, but (as we learn at the end of the film) he is dead. His voice thus speaks less from the “heights” than from the “depths.” The male voice-overs in Welles’s *Lady from Shanghai* (1947), Jacques Tourneur’s *Out of the Past* (1947), Raoul Walsh’s *Pursued* (1947), and Delmer Daves’s *Pride of the Marines* (1945) are similarly associated with characters who have been scarred by a major trauma, psychological in the first three cases, and physical in the third.

In each of these films, the voice-over is autobiographical and self-revealing. To borrow a phrase from Doane, it turns the body “outside,” displaying what is “inaccessible to the image, what exceeds the visible.”28 That display takes the form of a temporal regression, a move-

ment back to a prior moment in the speaker’s life which accounts for his present condition. The fact that the voice-over is accompanied in this way by an extended flashback, which translates what it says into images, and so anchors it to the order of the spectacle and the gaze, suggests that its regressive journey carries it to the heart of the diegesis, rather than to the latter’s outer edges.

Further attesting to the secondary status of the embodied voice-over, at least in four of the examples cited above, is the compulsion out of which it speaks. The narrative voices in *Out of the Past, Lady from Shanghai, Pride of the Marines,* and *Pursued* are governed by the need to master an intolerable past through linguistic repetition—to “bird” that past by retelling it. This sense of compulsion is even more pronounced in *Double Indemnity*: Walter refers to his story as a “confession,” and he produces it for a figure who is not only his elder, but his moral and professional superior (i.e., for a paternal representative).

Involuntary or constrained speech is a general characteristic of the embodied voice-over, as is vividly dramatized by that variant which seems most fully to turn the body “inside out”—the internal monologue. The voice in question functions almost like a searchlight suddenly turned upon a character’s thoughts; it makes audible what is ostensibly inaudible, transforming the private into the public. It is through this device that we learn about the sexual desires of the women who inhabit the female seminary in Don Siegel’s *The Big Knife* (1971), and that we enter Cécile/Jean Seberg’s memories in Otto Preminger’s *Bonjour Tristesse* (1958).29

On these occasions the discursive mode is direct rather than indirect. No distance separates teller from tale; instead, the voice-over is stripped of temporal protection and thrust into diegetic immediacy. Thus deprived of enunciatory pretense, it is no longer in a position to masquerade as the point of textual origin. Moreover, since this voice-over derives from an interior rather than an exterior register (in other words, since it represents thought rather than speech), the listener’s access to it is unlicensed by the character from whom it derives, and so clearly constitutes a form of auditory mastery.

All this is another way of saying that the embodied voice-over designates not only psychological but diegetic interiority—that it emanates from the center of the story, rather than from some radically other time and place. Its status is thus quite distinct from that of the disembodied voice-over, and it is by no means a satisfactory alternative to it. Indeed, as I indicated earlier, the embodied voice-over is a precarious hook on which to hang the phallus. Hollywood dictates that the closer a voice is to the “inside” of the narrative, the more remote it is from the
“outside,” i.e., from that space fictionally inscribed by the disembodied voice-over, but which is in fact synonymous with the cinematic apparatus. In other words, it equates diegetic interiority with discursive impotence and lack of control, thereby rendering that situation culturally unacceptable for the “normal” male subject.

However, even as it issues and reissues this sexually differentiating edict, dominant cinema works against it, holding its male as well as its female characters to the imperative of visibility, and securing both within the limits of the story. Hollywood thus erects male subjectivity over a fault line, at the site of a major contradiction. In order both to conceal this contradiction and to sustain the male viewer/listener in an impossible identification with the phallus, classic cinema has elaborated a number of strategies for displacing the privileged attributes of the disembodied voice-over onto the synchronized male voice—mechanisms for reinscribing the opposition between the diegetic and the extradiegetic within the fiction itself. As a result of these mechanisms, interiority and exteriority are redefined as areas within the narrative rather than as indicators of the great divide separating the diegesis from the enunciation. “Inside” comes to designate a recessed space within the story, while “outside” refers to those elements of the story which seem in one way or another to frame that recessed space. Woman is confined to the former, and man to the latter. It is thus only through an endless series of trompes l’œil that classic cinema’s male viewing subject sustains what is a fundamentally impossible identification with authoritative vision, speech, and hearing.

Before examining the procedures whereby female characters are incorporated within an exaggeratedly diegetic locus, and male characters assigned a seemingly extradiegetic position, I would like to observe that cinematic sound is organized in relation to representations of hearing as well as representations of the voice. Authoritative speech, for instance, often implies or is implied by a heightened faculty of audition—the capacity, as it were, to “over-hear.” This is literally the case with the angels at the beginning of It’s a Wonderful Life, as well as with the exceptional female voice-over in Letter to Three Wives (1949), who comments ironically on the diegetic flow of sounds and images. It is an implied attribute of the doctor in Irving Rapper’s Now, Voyager (1942), to whom the female protagonist confesses everything without quite knowing why. In other films, hearing is played off against the voice, so that the two are defined in terms of antagonism rather than complementarity. This is very much the case with Welles’s Touch of Evil (1958), an example with which I would like to remain for a moment.

Quinlan (Orson Welles), the corrupt police commissioner in Touch of Evil, controls the territory over which he has jurisdiction almost entirely through his voice. He establishes the guilt of others through simple pronouncement, often constructing the necessary evidence in a similar manner. When Vargas (Charleton Heston), a Mexican official, decides to expose Quinlan’s corruption, he tapes a conversation between Quinlan and a colleague in which the former is coerced into saying a number of self-incriminating things, and so obtains a legal hold over his American adversary. In short, Vargas uses Quinlan’s voice against him.

The sequence where this power struggle takes place occurs at the end of the film, when Menzies (Joseph Calleia), wearing a hidden microphone, calls Quinlan out of a bar and interrogates him about a number of suspiciously solved crimes as the two of them walk across a bridge. Meanwhile, Vargas moves back and forth on the surrounding oil derricks and beneath the bridge, recording the exchange. The camera cuts between the two scenes, so that the space occupied by each functions alternately as “on” and “off.”

Vargas does not speak during this sequence; he is “pure” ear, his own hearing supplemented by the apparatus, and closely identified with it. Even when the other two men are out of his line of vision, he is able to follow what goes on between them through the machine he holds—he is in control, that is, of off-screen space. Quinlan, on the contrary, neither sees nor hears Vargas. He continues his conversation with Menzies unconcernedly until he hears his own voice echoed back to him by the tape recorder. He is thus defeated by his inability to master off-screen space.

This auditory failure is represented as the loss of discursive potency. Significantly, it completely neutralizes the authority previously exercised by Quinlan’s voice, leaving him mortal and vulnerable. It would thus seem that in certain cinematic situations, the faculty of hearing is privileged over that of speech—that at times it may indicate a position of superiority to and control over the one who talks. The basis for the ear’s occasional priority would seem to be its claim to be outside the drama within which the voice is contained. That exteriority is formally figured through the cross-cutting which isolates Vargas from Quinlan and Menzies in the bridge sequence. Vargas’s association with the apparatus further emphasizes the exteriority of his position by equating it with the site of cinematic production.

The opposition of “outside” to “inside” is here elaborated through
two male characters. However, “interior” rhymes with “inferior” to such a degree in classic cinema that sexual difference is the usual vehicle for its articulation. So imperative is that convention that Touch of Evil goes to considerable lengths to establish that although Vargas’s hearing is external to Quinlan’s speech, woman nonetheless occupies the innermost point of the diegesis. The central female character, Suzy (Janet Leigh), is confined within increasingly restricted spaces over the course of the film until she finally arrives at a jail cell. That interiorization also involves her increasing auditory and verbal incapacity—an incapacity so extreme as to assure Quinlan’s discursive superiority over her even at the nadir of his powers.

Early in the film, Suzy is taken at her request to an American motel where she thinks she will be safe while her husband, Vargas, investigates a border murder. A number of subsequent shots show her lying on the bed in her room, half-drugged with fatigue, but prevented from falling asleep by an enormous ear-shaped speaker attached to one of the walls. The music comes from a radio in the motel office, where a group of thugs await the appropriate moment to assault her. Suzy is unable to respond with anything but frustration and panic to the music, bafﬂed by all sounds whose source remains beyond her field of vision. The thugs, on the other hand, are able to control what they cannot see through a flick of the dial or a knock on the wall. They also manage to keep any familiar sounds from reaching her by intercepting her phone calls. This auditory incompetence is linked to a verbal incompetence, which is most pointedly evident in the cry Suzy later utters from the balcony of Grande’s hotel—a cry which is swallowed up in the noise of the traffic below, unable to make itself heard by a single diegetic ear.

The interiority/exteriority antithesis, which in classic cinema serves to deﬁne the opposition between the levels of ﬁction and enunciation, is reinscribed into the narrative primarily through three large operations. Each of these operations exploits that ambiguity in the concept of interiority which permits it to designate both a psychic and a diegetic condition, and which makes it possible for the former condition to signify the latter. As a group, they are more or less synonymous with sexual difference in the dominant narrative ﬁlm.

The ﬁrst of these operations folds the female voice into what is overtly indicated as an inner textual space, such as a painting, a song-and-dance performance, or a ﬁlm-within-a-ﬁlm. Through it the female

voice is doubly diegeticized, overheard not only by the cinema audience, but by a fictional eavesdropper or group of eavesdroppers. Male subjectivity is then deﬁned in relation to that seemingly transcendental auditory position, and so aligned with the apparatus.

This operation is staged with unusual literalness in the already cited sequence from Singin’ in the Rain, where Cosmo and Don pull the curtain to disclose Kathy at the microphone. With that gesture she is transferred from off-stage to on-stage—from outside the spectacle to inside the spectacle. The shift is emphasized by the immense movie screen which is revealed when the curtain is drawn, which frames both Kathy and Lina. When Kathy tries to break out of the frame by running off-stage, she is forcibly prevented from doing so by the audience, to whom Don appeals to “stop that girl.” When he adds, “That’s the girl whose voice you heard tonight,” he summons her not only back onto the stage, but into the diegesis of The Dancing Cavalier.

I have already commented on some of the implications of this transaction. The earlier substitution of Kathy’s for Lina’s voice licensed the former to stray from its legitimate locus, a license which is intolerable to the classic system. It is now revoked with a vengeance, and the female voice resubmitted to the law of synchronization. At the same time, authority is reinvested in the male voice, which is shown to orchestrate the ﬁctional drama from behind the scenes—from the very place, that is, from which Kathy has just been excluded. Even when the male characters ﬁnally come out on the stage, they manage to escape the frame that secures Lina and Kathy: Cosmo shatters the illusion of the performance when he grabs the microphone, as does Don when he addresses the audience directly.

Max Ophuls’s Lola Montes (1955), most “writerly” of woman’s ﬁlms, and more a ﬁlm about classic cinema than a participant in it, subdivides its diegesis in similar ways by confining its female protagonist (Martine Carol) to a circus ring, and obliging her to offer prewritten answers to the questions posed to her by the ringmaster. Like Cosmo and Don at the end of Singin’ in the Rain, the ringmaster (Peter Ustinov) is represented as being outside the spectacle, in a position of discursive control. Because he remains to one side of the drama, and because his voice at times speaks “over” the image of Lola, he seems less diegetically anchored, and hence closer to the point of textual origin. Indeed, during Lola’s pantomime repetition of her earlier rise to fame and fortune, he maintains a running off-screen commentary, much like a disembodied voice-over.

Another Ophuls film, Letter from an Unknown Woman (1948), situates the female voice at the interior of the narrative by contextualizing it
within a written rather than a performance text. That film is structured as a letter from the protagonist, Lisa (Joan Fontaine), to the object of her desire, Stefan (Louis Jourdan). Stefan receives it the night before he is scheduled to fight a duel with Lisa’s husband; he sits down to read it, and Lisa springs to life as an (almost immediately) embodied voice-over. However, since the letter opens with the statement, “By the time you read this letter I may be dead,” and since the convention notation at the conclusion of the letter confirms that this is indeed the case, her voice exists only in and through Stefan’s consciousness. Closed up in the sealed envelope handed to his mute servant, it is given a hearing only through his act of reading, permitted to expand only within the receptacle of his imagination. This enclosure is thematized by the contents of Lisa’s letter, which assert over and over again her complete submission to Stefan’s wishes (“All I wanted was to see you again, to throw myself at your feet. Nothing else mattered . . .”; “I’ve had no will of [yours] ever . . .”; “Somewhere out there were your eyes, and I knew I couldn’t escape them . . .”; “My life can be measured by the moment I’ve been with you and our son . . .”).30

John Schlesinger’s Darling (1965) offers another version of what might be called the “written” female voice-over, used once again for purposes of containment. The film opens with the shot of a poster being replaced by another on a London billboard. The new poster, which superimposes over one calling for relief of hunger in the Third World, features a close-up of the protagonist, Diana (Julie Christie), with the logo: “My Story. Ideal Woman.” On the soundtrack, a disembodied male voice-over invites Diana to recount her autobiography “in your own words.” Diana immediately embarks upon that narrative, also as a voice-over. However, whereas the male voice is anonymous, Diana’s has already been embodied through the opening shot.

The poster sequence gives way to an extended, episodic flashback which continues until the end of the film. Diana’s voice-over also continues, albeit intermittently, with numerous ellipses. However, the two are not only out of synchronicity, but out of narrative alignment, with the diegesis frequently contradicting Diana’s verbal reminiscences. Ultimately, her voice is transferred from this seemingly extradiagnostic (albeit far from privileged) position to one emphatically inside the diegesis. Although for most of the film it gives the impression of being part of a “live” interview, at the conclusion it is shown to emanate almost like a sound hallucination from an article published in a women’s magazine. The magazine, whose cover displays a reduction of the same glamor photograph earlier displayed by the poster, is on sale in massive quantities in a London newsstand, as if to suggest that Diana.

Body Talk

Psychoanalysis provides classic cinema with a second strategy for situating the female voice within an exaggeratedly diegetic space. This strategy, which I will call “the talking cure,” anchors woman to a fantasmatic interiority through involuntary utterance; she is obliged to speak, and in speaking to construct, her “own” psychic “reality”—a reality which, we are told, has been there all the time, albeit long repressed and forgotten. The talking cure is negotiated with astonishing frequency and openness in the “woman’s film” of the 1940s. Many of the texts which fall into this category, such as Robert Siodmak’s The Spiral Staircase (1945), Curtis Bernhardt’s Possessed (1947), Anatole Litvak’s The Snake Pit (1948), and Mitchell Leisen’s Lady in the Dark (1944), focus on the interaction between a male doctor and a female patient, and they all manifest an intense fascination with a space assumed to be inside the patient’s body. However, in each case the internal order clearly derives from an external source, so that these films dispute the very divisions they are at such pains to establish.

In Possessed, for instance, an unconscious woman is injected with a drug which induces her to speak on command. What she is obliged to produce in this way is, of course, her past, which flashes onto the screen as her voice embarks upon its regressive journey. Interiority is thus extracted through an action upon the body: liquid is injected into a woman in order that a cluster of memories can then be projected both onto the doctor’s diagnostic “screen” and onto our cinematic screen. The slippage between “inner” and “outer” is reiterated by the doctor when he tells his patient that the drug he is giving her will “help you to tell us what we want,” and when he confides to a colleague: “Every time I see the reaction to this treatment I get the same thrill I did the first time”—i.e., when he foregrounds the structuring role his own desires play in the talking cure. Interiority and exteriority also spill over each other in the narrative that ensues, since the patient (Joan Crawford) is shown to suffer from a deafening noise which seems to assail her from without, but which proves to have its origin within—to be, that is, the sound of her own heartbeat.

Lady in the Dark gives a more explicitly ideological inflection to the concept of interiority, suggesting that it is a synonym for social as well as libidinal containment. The central character in that film, Liza Elliott (Ginger Rogers), is the editor-in-chief of a fashion magazine—an untenably potent discursive position for an American woman in 1944, and one which, given its active relationship to scopophilia, situates her on the side of what classic cinema decrees to be male rather than female subjectivity. She is consequently eased out of the job she has successfully performed for a number of years, and redefined first as spec-
Lady in the Dark opens with Liza's visit to a medical doctor—a visit which results in the recommendation that she see a psychiatrist. She has been prompted to make that visit by a haunting and mysterious melody, which she feels compelled to hum from time to time without understanding why. That melody not only baffles Liza, but it identifies her with another scene, sharply divided from the one she traditionally occupies; it places her "in the dark," with an equal emphasis on the first and last of those words.

Reluctantly acting upon her physician's advice, Liza goes to the psychiatrist and submits to psychoanalysis. As with the protagonist of Possessed, this cure follows a regressive path, leading predictably "back" to the family. The recounting of dreams is the agency of Liza's Oedipal "return." It is also the means by which she is equipped with an inner life which is incompatible with her social and economic position, and which is an obvious cultural imposition, despite the psychiatrist's attempt to deny his own productive role in its creation ("Does it strike you that in your dream you were the exact opposite of your realistic self?" he asks Liza. "You dreamt it, no one else did. Strange as it seems, it came from you.") Liza's voice is thus the point at which she is constantly coerced. Indeed, according to the logic of the film, it is a song sung by her as a child which comes back to command her adult voice, and which obliges her to undergo the talking cure.

Liza's dreams insert her into what is a progressively well-articulated subtext, in relation to which the film's larger diegetic organization functions as a kind of frame. This nesting-box effect is reiterated at more and more microscopic levels within the dreams themselves, which revolve around not only images of containment, but images of containment which contain images of containment. Thus, the chest in the first dream opens to reveal a blue dress, which itself encloses an important childhood memory, and into which Liza places her adult body. In the same dream, Liza's portrait is commissioned so that it can be reproduced in miniature on a new stamp. In the final dream, Liza initially stands outside a circus enclosure, looking in, then abruptly finds herself merely on the other side but in one of the circus's cages.

These objects and places figure a mise-en-abîme interiority to which the melody also beckons, an endlessly receding locus which is simultaneously a psychic terrain and a domestic arena, with the one implying and indeed leading to the other. The enclosure of Liza within this black hole at the center of representation isolates her definitively from the discursive authority to which she lays claim at the beginning of the film itself a figure for the radically external site of cinematic production. It transforms her from a fashion editor to a model, locating her definitively on the side of spectacle. Each of the dream receptacles is the cause or scene of display, from the blue dress which inspires instant exhibitionism in its wearer ("Look at me," Liza appeals over and over to various male characters as soon as she has donned it) to the much more elaborate song-and-dance number staged within the circus setting.

The third of the operations through which Hollywood reinscribes the opposition between diegetic interiority and exteriority into the narrative itself is by depositing the female body into the female voice in the guise of accent, speech impediment, timbre, or "grain." This vocal corporealization is to be distinguished from that which gives the sounds emitted by Mae West, Marlene Dietrich, or Lauren Bacall their distinctive quality, since in each of these last instances it is a "male" rather than a "female" body which is deposited in the voice. Otherwise stated, the lowness and huskiness of each of these three voices connote masculinity rather than femininity, so that the voice seems to exceed the gender of the body from which it proceeds. That excess confers upon it a privileged status vis-à-vis both language and sexuality. The contrivance which is my present concern, on the contrary, involves the submersion of the female voice in the female body, and results in linguistic incapacity and a general vulnerability.

The voice of Suzy in Touch of Evil, for instance, is dragged along with her into a state of increasing somnolence, culminating in unconscious muttering. Lina Lamont in Singin' in the Rain is another case in point, her voice not only scarred by a Bronx accent which renders it incapable of standard American pronunciation, but so easily giving way to the gravitational force of her body that it is drowned out by her heartbeat on tape. The maladroit utterances of Judy Holiday in George Cukor's Born Yesterday (1950) serve a similar function, emphasizing the role of matter over mind, while the voice of the Marilyn Monroe character in Wilder's Seven Year Itch (1955) is so closely identified with her body that she uses the latter to authenticate the former. (She offers to prove the veracity of the lines she speaks in a television advertisement—"I had onions for lunch. I had garlic for dinner, but I stay kissing fresh"—with an actual kiss.)

What is at issue in each of these examples (all, curiously, drawn from the fifties, just as the previous set were drawn from the forties) is the identification of the female voice with an intractable materiality, and its consequent alienation from meaning. Like the other two procedures briefly discussed here—the incorporation of the female voice within a recessed area of the diegesis, and the deployment of that voice to create a psychic order to which its "owner" is then confined—the corporealization of the female voice magnifies the effects of synchronization. It
emphatically situates the female subject within the diegetic scene, on the side of what can be overseen and overheard, and in so doing draws the curtain on the male subject’s discursive insufficiency. By isolating the female subject from the production of meaning, in other words, it permits the male subject to pose as the voice that constrains and orchestrates the feminine “performance” or “striptease,” as enunciator rather than as himself an element of the *enuncié*. The identification of the female voice with the female body thus returns us definitively to the scene of castration.

What this castration entails is perhaps nowhere more dramatically rendered than in the opening sequence of Robert Aldrich’s *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), which shows a car speeding down a darkened highway, brought to a perilous halt when a seminaked woman, Christina (Cloth Leachman), steps abruptly in front of it. As the driver admits the woman to the front seat of his car, he ironically comments: “A thumb’s not good enough for you. You’ve got to use your whole body.” When the image yields to white credits rolling across a black surface, Christina’s voice continues to be heard, breathing heavily from the exertion of what we later learn has been an extended run. In other words, it adopts the technical status of a voice-over—a voice which speaks from a different order from that to which the image belongs.

However, not only is Christina’s voice already embedded in the narrative, but we remain in no doubt as to its temporal and/or spatial location during the credit sequence, since it still seems to issue from the front seat of the now-invisible speeding car. It thus clearly derives from a point inside the diegesis, rather than an external vantage. Indeed, since at this juncture the image track contains information about the film’s production rather than its fiction (i.e., the names of the actors, director, producer, etc.), it is privileged over the soundtrack, so that Christina’s voice seems to breathe “under” rather than “over” the titles. Finally, although that voice is momentarily detached from the spectacle to which it is initially synchronized, it is not even momentarily disembodied. On the contrary, it is what one might call “thick with body,” still vibrating with the effort of inhaling after a long run, and resonant with the remark made by the driver of the car to Christina (“You’ve got to use your whole body”).

Much has been made of the sustained voice-off of Dr. Soberin (Alan Dekker), the villain of *Kiss Me Deadly*—of the invulnerability of that voice during the extended period of time when its source remains invisible, and its abruptly actualized mortality the moment its source comes into view. “To maintain [his face] off-frame (one sees only his legs, knows him only by his blue suede shoes) gives to his sententious

(turbaning, an oracular range: sombre prophet of the end of the world,”

writes Bontzter.

And, deprived of that, this voice is submitted to the destiny of the body; the only institution in the story to whose law it is submitted renders it decrepit, mortal. It suffices that the subject of this voice appear in the image (it suffices that he can appear), and it is no longer anything but the voice of a man, otherwise called that of an imbecile: the proof? A shot, he falls—and with him, in ridicule, his discourse with its prophetic accents.31

What has not been remarked is just how fully Christina’s voice is, from the very outset, “submitted to the destiny of the body,” and how quickly that destiny catches up with her: five minutes after her voice has breathed “under” the credits, she is no longer anything but a memory. Curiously, her death scene situates her mouth—the source of her voice—out of frame again, the image showing us only her naked legs dangling in the air, and her raincoat in a heap below. However, this framing confers no authority upon her, because once again the sounds she emits are nonlinguistic and involuntary—here a scream, wrung out of her by the torture inflicted upon her body.

I have attempted to show that Hollywood’s sound regime is another mechanism, analogous to suture, whereby the female subject is obliged to bear a double burden of lack—to absorb the male subject’s castration as well as her own. It is hardly surprising, given the weight of this sexually differentiating load, that the female voice should have come to represent a stress point in the functioning of the entire cinematic apparatus (the stakes, after all, are of phallic proportions). However, castration is not the only trope through which dominant cinema conlates the female voice with the female body. Hollywood also organizes female sexuality around the image of what Montrelay calls “the insatiable organ hole,” an image which gives interiority yet another semantic extension.

The word *interiority* has supported a number of different meanings in the preceding discussion. I have suggested that within dominant cinema it primarily designates the “inside” of the narrative, but that this primary designation is usually obscured through three textual operations which make interiority a synonym for femininity. By confining the female voice to a recessed area of the diegesis, obliging it to speak a particular psychic “reality” on command, and imparting to it the texture of the female body, Hollywood places woman definitively “on stage,” at automatic remove from the cinematic apparatus
The second of these textual operations clearly complements the first; indeed, it would be difficult to think of a cinematic instance in which the “talking cure” does not simultaneously create a story-within-the-story, and in so doing, doubly diegeticize the female voice. The third operation also overlaps with the first at times, since the corporealized female voice emerges with particular frequency within performance situations. The second and third operations are not as overtly compatible: in fact, at first glance they would seem to occupy contrary sides of the traditional mind/body divide.

However, the opposition between these sexually differentiating procedures is only apparent, since there is no real antagonism between the psychic realm brought into existence through the “talking cure,” and the material deposit which often deforms woman’s speech within classic cinema. The interiority which Hollywood imputes to her has nothing whatever to do with transcendence or Cartesian cogitation. On the contrary, that interiority helps to establish the female body as the absolute limit of female subjectivity. This is because within classic cinema, woman’s psyche is only a further extension of her body—its other side, or, to be more precise, its inside.

In an exemplary chapter from The Interpretation of Dreams, Freud insists upon the absolute incommensurability of psyche and body, while at the same time dislocating the former of those concepts from the idealistic tradition which has defined it:

I shall carefully avoid the temptation to determine psychological reality in any anatomical fashion. I shall remain upon psychological ground, and I propose simply to follow the suggestion that we should picture the instrument which carries out our mental functions as resembling a compound microscope or a photographic apparatus, or something of the kind. On that basis, psychological locality will correspond to a point within the apparatus at which one of the preliminary stages of an image comes into being.\(^\text{32}\)

This passage is of considerable relevance to the present discussion, not only because it deploys a cinematic metaphor, but because it presents a psychical model which Hollywood renders gender-specific. By so consistently identifying the male subject with authoritative vision, speech, and hearing, classic cinema attributes to the male subject the psychical reality which Freud maintains is the norm for both sexes. As in The Interpretation of Dreams, his psychic apparatus is closely identified with the cinematic apparatus, and so radically denatured. It is also emphatically exteriorized (which, of course, is not the case in the Freudian model).

Classic cinema decrees a very different state of affairs for the female subject. The “talking cure” films, whose narrative operations pivot upon female interiority, deprivilege that interiority by referring it insistently back to the body. Indeed, the two most frequent varieties of psychic reality identified with woman in this category of films are hysteria and paranoia, both notorious for collapsing the distinctions between inner and outer, mind and body.\(^\text{13}\) The curiously corporealized psyche attributed to woman by the talking cure films is thus perfectly compatible with the blurred consciousness attributed to her by the materiality of her discourse. (It is not surprising, for instance, that the pounding noise which afflicts the patient in Possessed is ultimately shown to derive from the same source as the noise which drowns out Lily Lamont’s voice during the recording of The Dancing Cavalier. In both cases the female body imposes its tyrannical rule.)

The “talking cure” films also deprivilege the female psyche by denying to woman any possibility of arriving at self-knowledge except through the intervening agency of a doctor or analyst. In The Snake Pit, Lady in the Dark, Henry Levin’s The Guilt of Janet Ames (1948), and Hitchcock’s Marnie (1964), it is this paternal figure who induces the female protagonist to articulate desires she never knew she had, and who then interprets them for her. On those occasions when woman’s speech is most fully given over to this obligatory self-articulation, as in the concluding sequence of Marnie, her voice often seems to circumvent her consciousness altogether. At these times she speaks not so much the language of the unconscious as the language of unconsciousness.

Although it otherwise falls to one side of the “talking cure” films, Kiss Me Deadly provides an extreme example of the corporeal form female interiority assumes within classic cinema. It also locates that interiority irretrievably beyond its “owner’s” consciousness. The relevant sequence is once again the film’s opening, which shows Christina mailing a note to Hammer, the driver who picks her up. Since she writes that note immediately before her death, it assumes an analogous status to the missive in Letter from an Unknown Woman; it seems, that is, to promise entry into her innermost self. The letter does, in fact, conform to this expectation, but in a surprising way.

As in the “talking cure” films, the words that map out Christina’s interiority derive from an external source, albeit one with the same name. Those words—“Remember me”—are taken from a poem by Christina Rossetti, the first lines of which read: “Remember me when I am gone away. / Gone far away into the silent land;/ When you can no more hold me by the hand,/ Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.” A few lines later, the speaker of Rossetti’s poem expresses her hope that “the darkness and corruption” will “leave/A vestige of the thoughts that once I had.” This ambiguous remark, which seems to refer simultaneously to
the speaker’s own thoughts and to those she once occupied in her lover’s mind, identifies the pronoun me with idea and memory—with what exceeds the body.

The pronoun has a very different meaning when Aldrich’s Christina employs it, leading back to rather than away from corporeality. After reading her note, Hammer searches for material evidence rather than turning to his memories. His investigation leads him first to Christina’s apartment, where he finds the Rossetti poem, and then to the morgue, where he demands to see her corpse. In its cinematic recontextualization, “me” thus comes to designate not spirit, consciousness, soul, or memory, but the speaker’s body. That body is now cold and speechless, but not for these reasons empty of interiority. Indeed, the sight of Christina’s corpse arouses in Hammer the powerful desire to take possession of its “contents.”

Since the coroner has already performed an autopsy upon Christina’s body, and removed the key he found inside, Hammer must violently extract what he seeks from that person’s clenched fist, an image which reiterates the theme of containment. Hammer’s obsession with the contents of the female body is also figured through a number of other images of enclosure—the cold-storage unit which holds Christina’s corpse, the locker which key opens, and the multilayered box found inside that locker, which contains the object for which he is looking.

Because that object is secured only through the key that is found inside Christina’s body, and because it is contained within a closed box, it functions at least in part as a metaphor for female interiority. (This reading is reinforced by the final sequence of the film, in which Lilah—like the mythological Pandora—opens the box, and unleashes its horrors upon the earth.) The ironic phrase coined by Hammer’s girlfriend, Vera—“the great Whatsit”—consequently refers to feminine interiority as much as it does to the mysterious atomic substance, and in so doing, depicts that interiority as inimical to language and representation, as literally “inexpressible.” However, far from being a remote and untraveled region, well beyond the phalic pale, what is given here as “femininity” is in fact constructed precisely through language and representation—through Vera’s phrase, through the Rossetti poem, through the endlessly repeated play between containers and their contexts, and through the explosion with which the film ends.34

What passes for the “dark continent” of femininity is a familiar and

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choanalysis, where it at times assumes a similarly corporealized form. According to certain seasoned travelers within that latter discourse, there are three points of entry into woman’s inner recesses—the mouth, the anus, and the vagina.35 Ernest Jones, “pathfinder,” explains that although the vagina will ultimately be given pride of place, the mouth is the starting point for female sexuality, and places a definitive stamp upon it: “We all agree about the importance of the oral stage, and that the oral stage is the prototype of the later femininity is also a widely accepted tenet. . . . Helen Deutsch in this connection has pointed to the sucking nature of the vaginal function.”36 At least within the tradition extending from Jones to Montrelay, the female drives are thus believed to revolve around a series of “insatiable” and largely equivalent “organ holes,” and hence to follow an alimentary logic.37 As a result, woman is “more concerned with the inside of her body than with the outside.”38 Within this theoretical paradigm, female interiority is basically an extension of the female body, much as it is within classic cinema.

What I am moving toward here is the hypothesis that Hollywood draws not only upon the paradigm of female sexuality advanced by Freud, but upon that championed by Jones—that it conforms the female voice not only to the model of a “stunted and inferior organ,” but to that of an “organ hole.” Beyond the stifease, with its “nothing to see” (which Hollywood translates into the paradoxical imperative that woman be precisely given over to visibility), and its revelation of the discursive impotence of the female voice, is projected the yawning chasm of a corporeal interiority. In classic cinema, as in the writings of Jones and his followers, there is an implied equation of woman’s voice with her vagina, each of which is posited as a major port of entry into her subjectivity, but which is actually, I would argue, the site at which that subjectivity is introduced into her. The voice is, of course, the preferred point of insertion, but in extreme situations the vagina can be substituted.

I will speak in a moment about Jean Negulesco’s Johnny Belinda (1948), a film in which the equation of the voice with the vagina is particularly pronounced, but first I want to explain my perhaps too easy slippage from Jones’s remarks about the female mouth to the conclusions I have just drawn about the female voice in dominant cinema. The prominence of the talking cure within both psychoanalysis and many Hollywood films of the 1940s suggests that the importance of the female mouth finally has less to do with the inaugural role it is assumed to play within female sexuality—its alimentary logic—than with its status as a generator of gender-differentiated and erotically charged sounds. It is, after all, primarily through those sounds that either psy-
desires, memories, or pleasures. At its most culturally gratifying, the female voice provides the acoustic equivalent of an ejaculation, permitting the outpouring or externalization of what would otherwise remain hidden and unknowable. Thus, as Heath remarks, the key part played by the voice within the pornographic film—"so many bodies and bits of bodies without voices; merely, perhaps, snatches of dialogue, to get things going, and then, imperatively, a whole gamut of pants and cries, to deal with the immense and catastrophic problem... of the visibility or not of pleasure, to provide a vocal image to guarantee the accomplishment of pleasure, the proper working of the economy." The female voice is consequently, if not for all intents and purposes, then at least as far as woman's interiority is concerned, the projection of the mouth.

Male access to woman's psyche is blocked at its usual port of entry in Johnny Belinda, a "talking cure" film with a difference, necessitating the search for an alternate route. The central character of that film, Belinda (Jane Wyman), is a farm girl who has been deaf and mute since birth. Because she is outside language, her family and the other town residents assume she is without the capacity for reason. However, a newly arrived doctor insists that Belinda merely lacks the words to express her thoughts, and attempts to prove his point by teaching her to use sign language.

The results are less than satisfactory. The mute woman does manage to learn a number of significant gestures, but only by identifying each sign with a concrete object, on a one-for-one basis. Because those gestures belong so fully to an exterior register, and because they are devoid of the "presence" which the voice has long been believed to confer, they do not seem capable of revealing Belinda's inner "reality." The doctor finally takes her to an out-of-town specialist, hoping to find a medical treatment for her deafness and muteness, and thereby to gain access to her interiority.

The examination which the specialist subsequently gives Belinda strays far from its expected object. Rather than producing any new information about her vocal and auditory difficulties, it leads to a major discovery about her reproductive system—to the discovery that she is pregnant. In other words, finding the customary (oral) path to the inner regions of female subjectivity impassable, the specialist would seem to have taken the alternative (vaginal) route. The examination thus effects a startling reversal of the displacement Freud describes in the essay on fetishism: instead of directing his attention "upward," away from woman's genitals to her face, the specialist shifts his attention "downward," away from her face to her genitals.

The specialist follows in the footsteps of the man responsible for Belinda's pregnancy. Although that earlier penetration was a rape, it is shown to have beneficent results. It gives Belinda what psychoanalysis is always quick to propose as the final solution to the problem of female desire, the one thing able both to make good woman's lack and to give her an ideologically recognizable and coherent "content"—a baby. That "supplement" also provides her with a surrogate voice, capable of emitting that most exemplary of female sounds (at least within classic cinema): the cry.

The degree to which Belinda's interiority is henceforth represented as an extension of her maternal function is indicated when the rapist attempts to appropriate her child, and she kills him in the ensuing struggle. Placed on trial for murder, she is acquitted on the grounds that "something in her was stronger than the precept 'Thou shalt not kill'"—that she obeyed "an instinct stronger than the laws of man—the instinct of a mother to protect her child."

The terms of this defense echo Jones's declaration that "femininity develops from the promptings of an instinctual constitution." By attributing Belinda's emotions and actions to her innate impulse to nurture, the legal apparatus of the film anchors her interiority firmly to her drives, making the former an extension of the latter. Thus, what the talking cure is here unable to coax out of the female voice is "spoken" instead through the female body. However, as in Lady in the Dark and Possessed, what is thereby "discovered" has in fact been introduced into Belinda from outside, via the penis.

By using one as a back-up to the other, classic cinema indicates that the Jovian and Freudian models of female sexuality may not be as starkly incompatible as they are generally believed to be—at least not at the level of their filmic deployment. I have already commented on the lengthy discussion of the vocal "strip tease"—upon that unveiling of female discursive lack which follows both from the subordination of the female voice to the female body, and from the enclosure of that voice within narrative recesses and closets. This discursive divestiture works by aligning woman with diegetic interiority, and so by isolating her definitively from the site of textual production. The talking cure gives that interiority an added dimension by projecting "into" woman a psychic realm which generally doubles as a narrative within the narrative.

The Jovian paradigm, with its insistence upon the "natural" body as the basis of female sexuality, and hence of female subjectivity, is always hovering somewhere in the background of classic cinema, working not so much to contradict woman's castration as to reiterate it by
embedding both her voice and her interiority in corporeality. That paradigm comes into more prominent play in the last two films I have discussed because female speech is obstructed there—in *Kiss Me Deadly* because there is no possibility of extracting verbal information from Christina’s body after she has been tortured to death, and in *Johnny Belinda* because there is no female voice through which to install interiority. In both of these texts, the female body is made to speak in place of the female voice, obliged to yield up its “secrets” to the physician’s or coroner’s probing hand and gaze. And in each case, those “secrets” turn in some way upon woman’s “instinctual constitution”—upon her reproductive faculties or her explosive sexuality.

I would like to conclude both my textual analysis of *Johnny Belinda* and the chapter as a whole by reappropriating from Derrida a signifier which he has appropriated from sexual difference, a signifier with which he has attempted to erase the opposition between “inner” and “outer,” and to suggest that what passes for essence always carries the trace of a previous inscription. That term is *invagination*, which Derrida suggestively defines as “the inward refolding of *la gaine* [sheath, girdle], the inverted reapplication of the outer edge to the inside of a form where the outside then opens a pocket.”  

Ironically, Derrida’s deployment of the concept of invagination has tended to obscure rather than to foreground the ways in which text engender their readers and viewers; as is frequently the case in his work, it is exploited primarily as rhetorical currency, as a “fertile” metaphor through which to theorize writing. This is unfortunate, because the concept has important ramifications for our understanding of sexual difference, particularly in its cinematic manifestations.

Derrida’s definition can be applied with great precision to the three operations which have been the chief concern of this chapter, operations which equate the female voice with diegetic, psychic, and corporeal interiority. They, too, crease the text in such as way as to construct a recess or enclosure into which woman can be inserted. And since this recess is always linked by analogy to the image of female sexuality as a bottomless pit, these operations could also be said to fold that sexuality “into” woman, to be one of the mechanisms whereby she comes to be identified with a dark continent.

The notion of invagination thus has the great merit of obliging us to understand that concentricity has no more of a natural claim upon the female subject than does castration—that far from expressing woman’s “instinctual constitution,” the bottomless pit of female sexuality, like woman’s diegetic interiority, is nothing but a textual “pocket.” Indeed, I would go so far as to assert that whenever the female voice seems to