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Coal Miners' Daughters: Representations of Women in Germinal, Matewan and Harlan County, USA

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just visible under her Apache-Mexican outfit. Both women know that they will never be truly integrated into American society.

When Dallas returns to civilization in Lordsburg, she is viewed again as a prostitute, and it is only then that Ringo understands that indeed she is a woman of ill-repute. While Ringo and Dallas become a couple, and in this sense one might speak of a happy ending, they will have to leave American society in the end. As Doc Boone says, they will have "to be saved from the blessings of civilization." In the United States, neither Ringo nor Dallas will be able to shed social stigma. It is only south of the border, in Mexico, that they will be free.

At this point, the Spanish-speaking viewer of the film will remember the scene at Apache Wells. Ringo Kid speaks Spanish and cares about speaking Spanish. He asks Chris, "Donde està la cocina?" showing respect for and familiarity with Chris's culture. This respect is returned by Chris when he warns Ringo not to go to Lordsburg because of the dangerous Plummer brothers.³⁷ The Spanish-speaking audience that was already significant in the 1930s, would also have noticed the content of Yakima's song about the land and the man she loves. The song not only describes her own loss, but also foreshadows Dallas's future south of the border. The song of Spanish-speaking Yakima must have touched the soul of many Mexican-Americans, who in the 1930s were threatened by the Repatriation Act that required them to move to Mexico, despite the fact that many of their children were American-born.

In the expository scenes of the film, the travelers already sitting in the stage are warned that Geronimo is on the warpath and they are given the option not to travel to Lordsburg. The way Dallas responds early on in the film to this offer conveys her attitude toward "civilized" America and hints at the ending of *Stagecoach*. Looking at and alluding to the women of the Law and Order League, who have forced her out of town, Dallas comments: "There are things far worse than Apaches."³⁸ "Civilized" America appears less hospitable than the "savages."

At the end of Maupassant's novella, Boule de Suif sobs quietly, outraged at the injustices she has suffered from her fellow travelers. She is well aware of the fact that they will neither support her nor allow her to rise above her social class. In a parallel situation on the other side of the Atlantic, Dallas and Yakima remain at the margins of American society. A happy ending for these women is only possible through their voluntary disappearance from this very same society.³⁹

³⁷ Incidentally, Luke Plummer, the murderer of Ringo's father and brother, speaks Spanish, too. However, he uses the language to give orders to a man he considers inferior, a man who is afraid of him.

³⁸ This statement is not part of earlier *Stagecoach* scripts and must have been added in the final version, rendering the political message of this film more forceful.

³⁹ Thanks to Harley Hammerman and William Davies King who provided valuable insights into the Nichols-O'Neill relationship, and to Charles Maland, who shared information on Dudley Nichols. Thanks also to Mary Chatfield and Maria de los Santo Onofre-Madrid for many insightful comments.

Coal Miners' Daughters: Representations of Women in *Germinal*, *Matewan* and *Harlan County, USA*

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While we would like to believe that coal mining, with its inherent dangers and disasters, is largely a thing of the past, recent tragic events in West Virginia and Kentucky prove otherwise.¹ Thus, naturalist art, with its deep sympathy for the miner, seems today as relevant as ever. Indeed, since the publications of Émile Zola's *Germinal* (1885), Upton Sinclair's *King Coal* (1917), and Theodore Dreiser's *Harlan Miners Speak: Report on Terrorism in the Kentucky Coal Fields* (1932), coal miners have been an important and integral part of naturalist art, and women have always been a part of that world. In this essay, I attempt to offer insights into women's contributions to coal mining as depicted in three very different films—all of which deal with strikes, labor disputes, and mining accidents: 1) Frenchman Claude Berri's *Germinal* (1993), the most recent film adaptation of Zola's famous novel about miners in Northern France in 1866; 2) *Matewan* (1987), American "indie" favorite John Sayles' account of the Matewan, West Virginia, coal wars of the early 1920s; and 3) *Harlan County, USA* (1976), American Barbara Kopple's documentary of the miners' strike against the Eastover Mining Company in Harlan County, Kentucky, in 1973. I present the films not in order of their appearance, but in order of the historical events depicted, from earliest to most recent. I hope thus, with the help of Pierre Bourdieu and other critics, to show a certain progression in the relative power of women, over time. In addition, by examining one French film and two American, I hope to gain some insight into how the very different evolving social conditions in France and America shaped women miners in different ways in their respective countries.

For feminist critics like Luce Irigaray and Gayle Rubin, men in patriarchal societies are the exclusive holders of the monopoly on the

¹ As of June 1, 2006, thirty-three coal miners were killed on the job in the United States, including twelve in January at the Sago mine in West Virginia, and five on May 20 at Kentucky Darby No. 1 in Harlan County. That is up from twenty-two miners killed in 2005. See www.chron.com/display/story.mpl/nation/3912256.html.

² See Luce Irigaray, "Le marché des femmes," *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1977), and Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, Rayna R. Reiter, ed. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975).

instruments of production and reproduction of capital.² In such a system, women occupy positions of relative powerlessness, functioning "as commodities, or objects of exchange that circulate among men. If we keep this in mind, we see that virtually all the miners depicted in these films, both male and female, are feminized, in the sense that none of them are owners of the mines in which they work. As such, they are all consigned to the status of second-class citizen. Another way in which they could be said to be feminized, is that their work space is relatively invisible. In his book *Masculine Domination*, Pierre Bourdieu points out that women's work has been diminished through its exclusion from public spaces—through its consignment to the private, invisible space of the home.³ Since many coal miners work underground and thus out of public view, it could be said that their job lacks the prestige of visibility. What I hope to show is how, within the already inferior position of miners in the corporate hierarchy, women miners occupy the absolute lowest positions—both above and below ground.

For mining expert Paul Rakes, early coal mines tended to display "an array of modern equipment at the surface facilities, while underground face operations continued as a labor-intensive enterprise that changed little in several decades."⁴ What is obvious in *Germinal* is that masculine labor reigns at both levels—through the use of men's muscle power underground, and through their exclusive access to machines above ground. Indeed, for Bourdieu, if the old structures of sexual division seem still to determine the very direction and form of labor, it is because patriarchal societies function through a number of practical principles which men and women, consciously or unconsciously, apply in their career choices. One of these principles gives men the monopoly of the handling of technical objects and machines.⁵ Figure 1, a film still from *Germinal*, by Claude Berri, pictures the miner Maheu (Gérard Depardieu), breaking the cable of the hoisting cage, mining terminology for a sort of elevator that transports workers and coal cars. Here, through his use of a hatchet to break the cable, he displays both his muscle power and his association with technical equipment and machines.

In fact, men's monopoly of machines can be viewed from the first scene of the film, when the hero, an unemployed railroad mechanic named Étienne Lantier, wanders to the Montsou mine looking for work. Much of the difficulty and humiliation that he suffers early on stems from the fact that he is forced to accept a giant demotion. Indeed, he is a skilled mechanic

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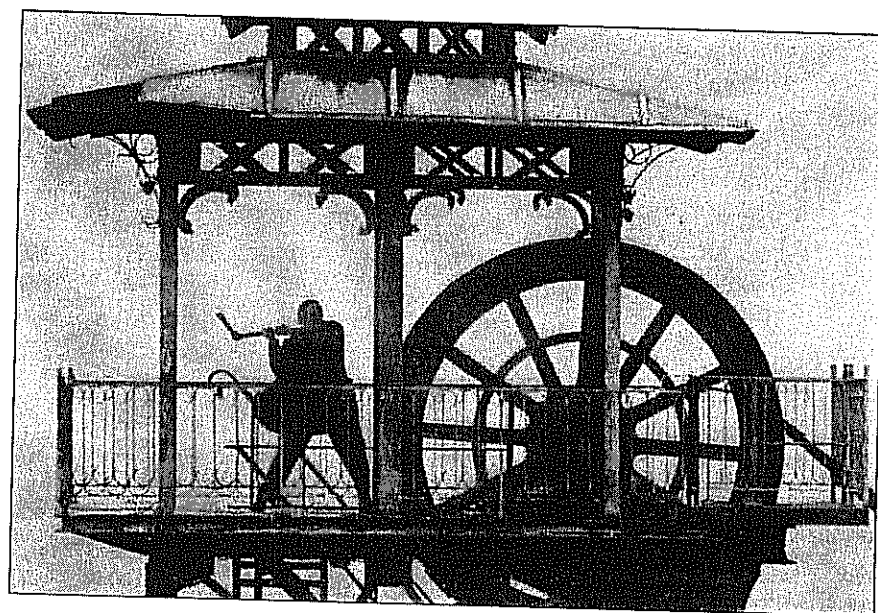


Figure 1: Still from *Germinal*, directed by Claude Berri (1993).
Courtesy of Ohlinger's Movie Store, New York.

who obtains his job at the mine only because a woman miner conveniently died the night before. Thus, he replaces her, literally using her shovel, and doing a woman's job—one that, not surprisingly, is the lowest in the hierarchy and involves no machinery. His job is further diminished in that it involves merely transporting, by filling and pushing carts, coal extracted exclusively by men. He is thus removed from what is arguably the most important task within the mine—the actual extraction of coal. In Rakes's assessment, this is not surprising, since unskilled miners tended to obtain jobs as "coal loaders."⁶ None of this is lost on the hero's nemesis, fellow miner Chaval, who, upon meeting the new hire, remarks: "Alors les garçons mangent le pain des filles!"⁷ For Bourdieu, who speaks from a point of view that links sexuality and power, one of the worst humiliations for a man is to be turned into a woman.⁸ With Chaval's insult, both Zola and Berri establish the strict contrast between Chaval, who represents brutal, unenlightened masculinity, and Étienne, who goes on to pursue the loftier aspirations of the intellect by becoming the leader of the strike.

² Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, Richard Nice, trans. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001) 61.

³ Paul H. Rakes, "Technology in Transition: The Dilemmas of Early Twentieth-Century Coal Mining," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 5 (1999): 28.

⁴ Bourdieu 94.

⁵ Rakes 52.

⁶ See Émile Zola, *Germinal* (Paris: Classiques Français, 1993) 40. All citations taken from the novel are from this edition.

⁷ Bourdieu 22.

I would like to suggest, therefore, that the hero's long, difficult path to leadership and social consciousness is rendered all the more dramatic and satisfying, as he starts at the very bottom. This includes not only doing a woman's job, but also receiving job training from a girl—fifteen-year-old Catherine, who shows him the ropes and impresses him with her physical strength and expertise in the film. For Bourdieu, the subordination of women can be expressed either in their exclusion from work or, as is the case with the female miners in *Germinal*, in their being required to work.⁹ Indeed, Catherine works not by choice, but by necessity. The same goes for her mother Maheude, who at the end of the film, having lost three children and a husband to the strike, must toil in the mine. The dire poverty of their large family means that each individual who is old enough must work. Not surprisingly, after only a few months, Etienne is assigned the more prestigious and lucrative duties of timbering and extraction, while Catherine remains forever in the same entry-level job. In addition to laboring as many hours as the men, she must help her mother in the household. She is the first to awake in the morning and she must awaken the other miners, then prepare their breakfast and lunch. Hence, one could argue that the men have it easier, in that they are spared domestic tasks.

In the novel, Etienne is at first unaware that some of his fellow workers are women since they all wear baggy uniforms that hide their physical differences. Because Catherine keeps her long hair up under her cap, he initially takes her for a boy. However, when he discovers that she is female, it is not surprising that he immediately develops an amorous interest in her—one that puts him in further conflict with Chaval, his rival for her affections. While she can be taken for a boy at work, in her leisure time she dresses like a typical young woman of her era and displays an increasing awareness of her ability to attract men. This is evident, early in the film, in her desire to buy a ribbon for her bonnet—an item that could be considered a conventional symbol of femininity. When she is unable to get the money, Chaval offers to buy it for her at Maigrat's shop, in exchange for sexual favors, which she refuses. Unbeknownst to her, Maheude was forced to ask Maigrat for more credit earlier that day and succeeded in getting food only by agreeing to send him her daughter for his sexual enjoyment. Catherine is thus an object of exchange between two men and her own mother, who, although she has no intention of granting Maigrat's wish, is nonetheless forced by poverty to enter the system of exchange.

Figure 2, another film still from *Germinal*, pictures Chaval accompanying Catherine to the shop after convincing her that he will buy her the ribbon without requiring a favor in return.



Figure 2: Still from *Germinal*, directed by Claude Berri (1993).
Courtesy of Ohlinger's Movie Store, New York.

Here, gender difference is emphasized by the stark contrast between his dark hair and apparel versus her correspondingly light colors, as representative of her youthfulness and purity. The distance between them, as well as their divergent gazes, underlines the platonic nature of their relationship. It is significant that, after buying the ribbon and leaving the shop, Chaval immediately puts his arm around her, suggesting that in his mind, the purchase has granted him physical access.

In fact, we may view the shop scene in light of Laura Mulvey's seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in which she argues that visual enjoyment in mainstream movies is based on voyeuristic and fetishistic ways of looking. The major trope of the cinematic apparatus is the active, mastering male gaze which subjects the passive, fragmented, and silenced image of woman. Thus, visual pleasure derives from a structure of male looking versus female "to-be-looked-at-ness" which replicates the unequal power relations between men and women. Because of the way the two types of gaze are structured, the spectator necessarily identifies with the male protagonist(s) in the narrative and thus with the objectification of the female figure.¹⁰ In this scene, Maigrat and Chaval clearly occupy positions

⁹ Bourdieu 84.

¹⁰ See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, Brian Wallis, ed. (New York: David R. Godine, 1984) 361-74.

of power, as owners of capital—the store and the money, respectively—while Catherine functions as the object of their gaze. In the sense that she is much less interested in them than her own appearance, the scene could be considered a depiction of a young woman's burgeoning vanity. The two men's separate objectifying looks in the direction of Catherine, something not mentioned in the novel, but shown in the film in separate close-ups, underline their rivalry for her affections. The close-up of her hands, furthermore, is emblematic of their fetishistic gaze. By setting his scene in a shop and representing a financial transaction, the filmmaker emphasizes Catherine's role as a sexually available commodity. The rather loud clanging of the coins on the counter, something we hear but do not see, suggests this idea further, through the cinematic use of sound. The fact that we view Chaval and Catherine from the back during the transaction contributes to its impersonal nature. Interestingly, Etienne is again feminized in that he is consigned to a position of relative passivity. Indeed, he must merely watch while his rival escorts Catherine to the store. Remaining outside the shop, he is quite literally shut out of the system of exchange. The fact that Catherine actively returns his look, moreover, something also not mentioned in the novel, puts them less in a relation of master versus victim than in a relation of mutual passivity and powerlessness.

Chaval's sadistic, violent character becomes evident shortly after this scene in his rape of Catherine—an act that, for Bourdieu, demonstrates that in patriarchal societies, the sexual act is generally represented and conceived in terms of the principle of male primacy.¹¹ Catherine's passivity in the rape scene, coupled with her overall obsequiousness and the fact that she only ends her relationship with Chaval when Etienne kills him, suggest that she accepts and internalizes masculine domination. In fact, for Bourdieu, "The dominated apply categories constructed from the point of view of the dominant to the relations of domination, thus making them appear as natural. This can lead to a kind of systematic self-deprecation, even self-denigration, visible in [women]."¹² Interestingly, Zola attributes Catherine's passivity to heredity. When Etienne tells her that he was fired from his last job for striking his boss, "[e]lle demeura stupéfaite, bouleversée dans ses idées héréditaires de subordination, d'obéissance passive" (47). And during the rape, "[...] elle cessa de se défendre [...] avec cette soumission héréditaire, qui, dès l'enfance culbutait en plein vent les filles de sa race" (122). Such comments explaining the differences between the sexes in terms of biology suggest that Zola adheres to a type of thought that constructs sexual differences in conformity with a mythic vision of the world rooted in the arbitrary relationship of domination of

men over women.¹³ It is significant that, while Etienne's relations with prostitutes, his fling with Mouquette, and his eventual consummation of his relationship with Catherine are all treated in the novel, filmmaker Berri sees fit to keep his hero totally chaste. I would like to suggest that in doing so, he makes him less a fully developed character than an icon of perfection, a Christ-like, Messianic figure.¹⁴ In addition, it means that Berri, perhaps even more so than Zola, subscribes to the ancient notion that sexual activity saps men of the energy necessary to devote to "higher" pursuits, that is, endeavors that are more intellectual, artistic, and political.

Such ideas are readily evident in *Matewan*, a fictional account of actual events in Matewan, West Virginia, in 1920. Like Etienne Lantier, its hero, Joe Kenehan, is an idealistic and totally chaste outsider who is sent to awaken a sense of solidarity among miners. And since he is a *Wobbly*—a conscientious objector and pacifist—one could also argue that he is somewhat passive-feminized. When the action opens, a strike over tonnage rates has just broken out at the Stone Mountain Coal Company. A train bringing black strike breakers from Alabama to Matewan also brings union organizer Kenehan. His task is to overcome the ethnic and racial biases that divide the miners into native white, black, and Italian immigrant camps, to maintain discipline during the strike, and to resist the temptations to violence posed by a company spy and by the frustrations of the miners themselves as they endure weeks of idleness in a hillside tent colony.¹⁵ Hence, the film is commendable for its multiplicity of philosophical, religious, and political discourses and raises the added, perhaps uniquely American, question of ethnic and racial relations between miners and workers who, in their mutual poverty and lack of power, are all seen as minorities. While miners in *Germinal* appear at times to be the same gender, those in *Matewan* often appear to be the same race. Indeed, all coal miners are "black" when they are at work, a fact certainly not lost on the director.¹⁶

Since Sayles appears more interested in America as a melting pot than in women's efforts for equality, his female characters, not surprisingly, are secondary ones who do not work in the mines or participate in unions. The fact that women do not work as miners in the American films—in fact, American women did not work as miners until the 1970s—marks an important difference with *Germinal* and demonstrates that in America gender was far more important than race in determining who became a coal

¹⁴ Alison Murray, "Film as National Icon: Claude Berri's *Germinal*," *The French Review* 76 (April 2003): 911.

¹⁵ John Alexander Williams, "John Sayles Plays the Preacher," *Appalachian Journal* 15 (1988): 346-47.

¹⁶ Even Zola understood that coal miners are black at the end of the day. In *Germinal*, he describes a group exiting the mine as "une bande de nègres" (65).

¹⁷ Karuleah S. Reichart, "Narrating Conflict: Women and Coal in Southern West Virginia," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 7 (2001): 11.

¹¹ Bourdieu 18.

¹² Bourdieu 35.

¹³ Bourdieu 11.

miner.¹⁷ For Bourdieu, women's exclusion from work began after the industrial revolution, with the separation of work and home and "a decline in economic weight of women in the bourgeoisie, henceforth assigned by Victorian prudishness to the cult of chastity and the domestic arts of watercolors and the piano."¹⁸ Though the women in these films are certainly not bourgeois, it appears that some Victorian ideas managed not only to cross the Atlantic, but also to reach and impact the lower classes. This situation, coupled with the fact that American miner's salaries in 1920 were significantly higher than those in France in 1866, hence allowing American women to stay home, helps to explain women's different role in the American films. In addition, the proliferation of Appalachian women's political organizations and activist groups suggests that American women, since they stayed home, had more time to organize than their French working counterparts.¹⁹ In a sense, American women's exclusion from work is both good and bad. On the one hand, they were not subject to the great dangers and health problems inherent in coal mining, while on the other, they were denied the freedom, power, and status of the breadwinner.

Since most of their husbands died in a mining accident fifteen years before the beginning of the narrative, the women of *Matewan* are particularly vulnerable as widows. Like Catherine, they are manipulated and victimized, either verbally or sexually, or both. Though Kenenhan insists he is not religious, his compassion for the powerless, coupled with his pacifism, his admiration for the Mennonites (fellow pacifists), and eventual martyrdom, all suggest his function as a Messianic figure. Surely one of the most important aspects of his character is his Christ-like reverence and respect for women, manifested most obviously in his granting them a voice and in his openness to listening to their stories. In two brief scenes, we meet two widows: Bridey Mae, who greets the company men as they arrive in town to try to break the strike; and Emma Radnor, whose boarding house provides Kenenhan with his initial base in town and who shows her kind yet spunky nature by cleaning a black miner's wound after she steals food from the company store. Here, Joe listens attentively to the story of her husband's death in the mine and her regret that her son now works there. The juxtaposition of these two scenes—the first showing the company men's abusiveness and the second showing Joe's compassion—suggests that the depiction of the good guys versus the bad is drawn largely along the lines of their contrasting treatment of women. A similar juxtaposition occurs later, when the company men insult Emma in her home and Joe offers her comforting words on her porch swing, a scene pictured in Figure 3.

Another important manifestation of Joe's Christ-like nature is his mentoring of the film's narrator—Emma's fifteen-year-old son, Danny, a

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Figure 3: Still from *Matewan*, directed by John Sayles (1987).
Courtesy of Ohlinger's Movie Store, New York.

miner, union member, and precocious Baptist preacher. The film presents a battle for Danny's soul between his friend and idol Joe, who preaches the doctrine of non-violence, and the company spy C.E. Lively, who tries to interest him in guns and dynamite, with the hope that he will choose violence.²⁰ Figure 4 pictures an armed Danny keeping a lookout while he and a friend attempt to steal coal for the miners' camp.



Figure 4: Still from *Matewan*, directed by John Sayles (1987).
Courtesy of Ohlinger's Movie Store, New York.

¹⁸ Bourdieu 84.

¹⁹ Reichart 11.

²⁰ Williams 347.

When he witnesses the murder of his friend at the hands of company men, his desire for vengeance grows, making his moral choice all the more difficult. But the end of the film shows that, as Joe is killed and Emma herself takes a violent path, Danny ultimately takes the high road by sparing a strikebreaker's life. The close-up of his face as he wrestles with this decision dramatizes the fact that he has indeed learned Joe's lesson. The doctrine of non-violence will be passed on to the next generation. But for feminists like Luce Irigaray, men's domination includes not only economic, but also intellectual capital. In other words, men hold the monopoly on knowledge.²¹ The fact that the high doctrine of non-violence is passed on exclusively through men (indeed, Danny's mother is shown blowing someone away just seconds before), indicates a residual sexism in Sayles' otherwise commendable movie.

A film punctuated with feminine anger, *Harlan County, USA*, is Barbara Kopple's Academy Award-winning documentary in which Kentucky women fearlessly confront the mine owner's armed thugs during a thirteen-month strike. The action begins in the summer of 1973, when workers at the Brookside Mine—miners who live in shocking poverty, without running water or indoor plumbing—vote to join the United Mine Workers of America. Duke Power Company and its subsidiary Eastover Mining Company refuse to sign a contract, provoking a strike of both whites and blacks. The women's major vehicle of empowerment is in fact two-fold. First, it is through their "women's club," an activist group whose main goal is to schedule, strategize, and maintain the picket line where, interestingly, they are as numerous as the men. After meeting separately from the men during the first ten months, they are asked to join the men's meetings for the rest of the strike, an indication that they have come to be viewed as equal partners in the struggle. One particularly heroic scene occurs when a woman picketer defends a black miner from the gun thugs' racial slurs: "That 'nigger' is a better man than you'll ever be!" she quips.

The second means of feminine empowerment, one put to extensive use on the picket line, is the protest song. Figure 5 pictures a miner-musician leading his fellow workers in a rendition of "My name is Sam. I'm a skuttle car driving man."



Figure 5: Still from *Harlan County, USA*, directed by Barbara Kopple (1976).
Courtesy of Ohlinger's Movie Store, New York.

The women's favorite song is a hymn adapted in the 1930s as a powerful vehicle of civil disobedience: "Like a Tree Standing by the Water, (We shall not be moved)." The effectiveness of this song resides in its blending of a familiar and catchy tune with an ingenious political message. While the Bible and the hymn imply "moved" in the emotional sense, the women in *Harlan County* emphasize the literal meaning: like a tree, they will not be *physically* moved off the picket line. When their songs prove inadequate, they resort to more drastic measures by lying down in the road to stop police escorts of scab labor—an act that clearly angers management and lands them in jail. But even here, they continue singing. After expressing her distaste for "scabbin," an incarcerated woman breaks spontaneously into the song, "Stay on the picket line, always on the picket line."

Hence, women are constantly singing in this film while the soundtrack offers an on-going commentary of events by women singer-songwriters like Sarah Ogan Gunning, Florence Reese, and Hazel Dickens, this latter also featured in *Matewan*. The movie presents a seemingly organic progression of scenes and songs, most of which are written and performed by women. A women's meeting is followed by a song about being a miner's wife. Seventy-eight miners die in a mining explosion, followed by a song about the event. An interview with a miner afflicted

²¹ Irigaray 168.

with black lung is followed by a song about the disease. Another interview of miners lacking health insurance is followed by a song with the lyrics "you're not even covered on their medical plans," and so on. Clearly, the filmmaker is interested in "mining" the rich lode of American industrial folklore composed by Appalachian women, a music that can be attributed to a combination of "a rich musical tradition, [...] a history of radical unionism, and the independent, pioneer spirit of the people."²² Appalachian music gained national attention shortly before World War II, between the events narrated in *Matewan* and *Harlan County*, when songwriters Aunt Molly Jackson and her sister Sarah Ogan Gunning, also civil rights activists, came to New York City, having been banished for union activity in strike-bound Harlan county, Kentucky. In New York, they befriended Leadbelly, Woody Guthrie, and Pete Seeger, and sang at demonstrations, on picket lines, at school assemblies, in union halls, and on the radio.²³

In one of the most remarkable union meetings, we see Florence Reese, who, along with Jackson and Gunning, chronicled the struggle for unionization during the 1920s and 1930s, leading the miners in a rendition of her famous protest anthem, "Which Side Are You On?" adapted during the 1930s from the old Baptist hymn "Lay the Lily Low" and also used during the Civil Rights campaign of the 1960s.²⁴ The tune is what one critic calls a magnetic song in that it seeks, through the raising of class consciousness, to convert the listener to a movement or ideology.²⁵ Reese's song asks, "Which side are you on?" And then it answers, "There are no neutrals in Harlan county; you are either a union man or a thug for J.H. Blair." In this scene, the great respect granted Florence Reese is due perhaps less to her songwriting or singing, than to her remarkable personal history as a coal miner's daughter (her father died in the mines), as a survivor, and above all, as an active participant in the bloody Harlan county coal wars of the 1930s. Hence, we see that, by 1973, when incidentally, her husband is dying of black lung, she has reached universal appeal and true legendary status as a figure of the miner's eternal struggle. Since she represents only one of several generations of Appalachian women songwriters, she has apparently succeeded in passing on her art to future generations of women.²⁶

Another important voice is of course that of filmmaker Barbara Kopple who displays her sympathy for the miners by joining them virtually everywhere, even in jail. Her queries include the following: "How do you

feel about the people picketing out here?" "Do you think they're gonna shoot at us today? Are you scared?" "Are you proud of your husband?" "How do you feel about going back to work?" and "Do you feel you got a good contract?" At one point, filming is threatened when she is asked by a hostile company man to produce a form of identification. We hear her voice as she challenges *him* to produce one. He says he has misplaced his, and she quips that she has misplaced hers too. Such confrontations between filmmaker and subject suggest that Kopple views art as a revolutionary act, as a challenge to the powerful. Indeed, there is clearly a similarity of artistic method and vision between filmmaker Kopple and the women singer-songwriters she features: all see art as a weapon for social protest and environmental change. Women's collaborative efforts and the impression that the filmmaker and feminine subjects are all working together toward the same goal of social justice are surely some of the most pleasing aspects of this splendid work. In fact, of the three films, only Kopple's depicts women as major agents of social and political change.

In *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu observes that the great strides made by women during the past century have been largely in the occupations close to the traditional definition of female activities, such as teaching, social work, and the paramedical professions, and in the various forms of symbolic services, such as journalism, television, cinema, public relations, advertising, design, and decoration. He points out that women remain largely excluded "in positions of authority and responsibility, particularly in industry, finance and politics."²⁷ Such notions, I would like to suggest, apply to the women in these films, who do not occupy positions of power in the coal industry or in unions—American women were not allowed to join the United Mine Workers until the 1970s²⁸—but have made significant strides in the artistic fields of filmmaking and songwriting. In fact, for one critic, "Many bold, stirring songs and stories about political and social issues have been written by men. But no body of American folk song so poignantly describes the human condition as those written by women."²⁹ In addition to a good number of female composers, American women benefited from the role models of famous suffragettes, abolitionists, and civil rights activists like Mother Jones, Harriet Tubman, Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia Mott, and Emma Goldman. The voting rights, labor rights, abolitionist, and civil rights movements seem to have somewhat coincided and gained strength from each other in America. Can the same be said of France, where women, sadly, did not obtain the right to vote until after World War II and where the myth of the pioneer woman is less strong?

²² Henrietta Yurchenco, "Trouble in the Mines: A History in Song and Story by Women of Appalachia," *American Music* 9 (Summer 1991): 210.

²³ Yurchenco 210.

²⁴ Yurchenco 215.

²⁵ R. Chesla Sharp, "Coal-Mining Songs as Forms of Environmental Protest," *Journal of the Appalachian Studies Association* 4 (1992): 54.

²⁶ Yurchenco 209.

²⁷ Bourdieu 90.

²⁸ Reichart 15.

²⁹ Yurchenco 216.

Finally, the American mining films—where church scenes are juxtaposed with union meetings, hymns are turned into protest songs, unionizing is preached from the pulpit, and labor organizers sport biblical names like Daniel and Joseph—testify to the important fusion of religious and socialist thought in America. In largely Catholic, yet secular France, it seems to me that religion is seen, for the most part, as quite antithetical to social protest. Indeed, the priest in *Germinal* is a tangential character who shows little to no sympathy for the miners' plight. Clearly, all three films depict women who have transcended the traditional boundaries of the household. Hopefully, women of the twenty-first century will continue to make strides by inventing and imposing forms of collective organization and by making use of effective weapons capable of shaking the political and legal institutions that perpetuate their subordination.³⁰

Oculi omnium: Mystery and Spectacle on the Altar and the Screen

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"[T]he viewing of experience... delineates the experience of viewing," writes R. Barton Palmer in an article on the "metafictional Hitchcock."¹ Palmer focuses on a sort of contract between film and film-spectator, which allows (or forces) the viewer to suspend disbelief and enter the fiction of the film's narrative structure. The article continues, "proper spectatorship [...] involves a balance between dismissal and acceptance and requires a distancing from, yet involvement in, the diegesis."² The spectator recognizes the fiction of a story taking place on the screen, yet his desire to see the story's outcome—his *scopophilia*, the voyeuristic pleasure of watching a narrative unfold—supercedes or at least competes with his rational distance from the film, and he participates in the cinematic fiction.

The two films my article will address, Alfred Hitchcock's *I Confess* (1953) and Robert Bresson's *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne* (1950), call into question both this diegetic contract and the experience of *scopophilia* itself. Each film contains one particular frame, a core of meaning to read and decipher, and which I am tempted to call the *foundational fiction* of the film, borrowing Doris Sommer's terminology.³ In cinema, the foundational fiction can be seen as the film's idealized projection of story onto spectator, the staging of a deceptively transparent narrative. The image-text participates in creating a filmic identity, in a narrative construct with alliances to more than one genre (romance, mystery, biography, etc.). It is also a moment in the cinematic text when the viewer sees the story beyond the diegetic surface, when both "fiction" and "truth" are exposed in the cinematic text. This same moment, I will explain, contains the rupture of the spectator-film contract: the superficial fiction cracks, and the "true story" leaves its Aristotelian schema to take a new shape within this Deleuzian *fêlure*. I argue that the film's diegesis, which appears to center on one fiction, in fact proves to engage a different fiction

¹ R. Barton Palmer, "The Metafictional Hitchcock: The Experience of Viewing and the Viewing of Experience in *Rear Window* and *Psycho*," *Cinema Journal* 25.2 (Winter 1985): 4-19.

² Palmer 6.

³ For Sommer, "foundational fictions" are texts that participate in creating national identity, especially when a country's literary tradition is closely tied to that of another, colonial, entity. See Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fiction: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991)