

CHAPTER FOUR

Implosions!

The rationale of the action film, which ensures that the hero will overcome ludicrous obstacles, say obvious one-liners, and end in embracing loved ones, has given the genre a reputation for boundless stupidity. Writings on action cinema frequently concede its supposed “brainless[ness]”,¹ or dismiss it as “macho claptrap”² and “mindless spectacles”.³ As Yvonne Tasker summarises, by “critical consensus the action movie was cast as simplistic.”⁴ This association (generated by the predominance of action films revolving around a masculine logic) assumes that action films blindly follow identical discursive structures. Given the supposed stupidity of action films, ostensibly this assumption precludes films that include twists on the expectations of the genre. However, the fundamental kernel identifying the post-action lies precisely in its play on expectations. The post-action’s framework introduces a logic that veers from a relatively straightforward masculine logic (in which every powerful gesture is undermined by the threat of impotence) into the realm of analysis. In other words, the twist of the post-action occurs by the use of the very same conventions of the classical action film, but from a stance that parallels the analyst, whereby the post-action proceeds to rob the implied signification of the conventions.

The Analytical Structure of Post-Action

While *Last Action Hero* takes for granted a common knowledge of codes and conventions to generate humour, in the post-action film such conventions are used to cheat expectations. Thus John Woo’s *Broken Arrow* exemplifies the post-action’s break from the classical formula to the extent that certain conventions are

¹ Welsh, 16.

² Francke, 38.

³ Bean, 17.

⁴ Yvonne Tasker, ‘Interview with Yvonne Tasker’, *Velvet Light Trap*, (2002) (p. 43), retrieved 21 Nov. 2005, available at Flinders University Library: Expanded Academic ASAP Plus <<http://web3.infotrac.galegroup.com.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/>>.

deliberately designed to deceive. The first scenes of *Broken Arrow* imply a buddy-flick action narrative, with Vic Deakins (John Travolta) instructing a junior pilot, Riley Hale (Christian Slater), during their boxing match. Hale and Deakins are then assigned a top-secret assignment that involves a test run exercise in which they fly two nuclear weapons through Utah. Although the signals thus far have conformed to the well-worn formula that characterises the classical action film (two buddies are united in their wisecracks and their mission), it is at this point where things get interesting. When everything appears to be running smoothly, as part of an elaborate conspiracy organised to rob the government of millions of dollars, Deakins seizes the opportunity to steal the nuclear weapons. After forcibly ejecting Hale from the plane, Deakins drops the nuclear weapons,⁵ and then proceeds to cover his tracks by radioing the cryptic message that, ‘Hale’s lost it! I’m punching out!’ and crashes the plane to destroy any evidence against himself. What is significant about these scenes is that in spite of clues such as the knowledge that the fight between Hale and Deakins was the only event that was *not* recorded by the plane’s black box, as well as the military investigator’s, Giles Prentice (Frank Whaley), announcement of his deduction that *Hale* had ‘Lost it,’ and the murder of the soldiers who could prove Deakins’s guilt. Not only does *Broken Arrow* betray the buddy-flick expectations, but the crucial point of these scenes is that the codes and conventions up to this point designate a replay of the paranoid narrative which does not eventuate.

The expectations linked with certain conventions produce an implicit understanding of the direction of the narrative. In terms of these conventions *Broken Arrow* misleads the audience. We are aware that even if military intelligence manages to decipher the events that took place in the plane, there is no means by which Hale can prove his innocence, and hence we are deprived of the more familiar path of following Hale’s protests of innocence and of the ensuing fight to restore his name by confronting Deakins as well as the usual bureaucratic obstacles. Instead, almost immediately after Giles Prentice presents his theory, military officials confirm to Hale that they are well aware of his innocence and that the criminal mastermind is Deakins. The real surprise of *Broken Arrow* is that in spite of all the signs designating a particular narrative it, ultimately, does not deliver.

⁵ Hence the film’s title: a ‘broken arrow’ refers to a missing nuclear device.

The twist of the post-action lies in its use of conventions to mislead. Retrospectively, *Broken Arrow*'s sleight of hand is made obvious in Deakins' warning to Hale in the opening boxing match, in which answering his own question regarding his boxing talents, he reveals that his trickery lies in that 'I fake right, go left three times in a row. You expect it again, I take right in hard. That's what boxing is all about. Make your opponent think you're gonna do one thing, then do another.' In its trickery of outwitting the symbolic order by refusing to rely on the unwritten signification generated by the conventions of the action film, *Broken Arrow* achieves what Darian Leader describes as the act of slipping "away from the meanings normally generated by a particular set of actions."⁶ This 'slip away' (or 'hard right') from the action genre's conventions allows *Broken Arrow* to "cheat the grandest opponent that exists, the symbolic order that makes the whole plan possible in the first place."⁷ Through the simultaneous reliance and rejection of the action's conventions to both cheat and sustain the narrative, the post-action effectively changes the meaning of the conventions. It is this robbing of the signification generated by the codes and conventions of the action universe which points to the first clue of its analytical structure.

The vital feature defining the analyst's discourse is its destruction of the (externally imposed) master signifier alongside the production of a new master signifier that revises the meaning to all other signifiers. According to Jacques-Alain Miller, this state of confusion is a mark of the psychoanalytical experience:

You are in analysis as soon as you no longer know what words mean. You are in analysis as soon as lexical meaning is progressively undone by new meaning surging forth from actual speech, a new meaning constructed in analysis step by step or rather mistake by mistake.⁸

The post-action similarly encounters the loss of expectation associated with conventions. Rather than destroy entirely the recognisable features of the action universe, the post-action deprives conventions of their meaning and in doing so, exposes enjoyment and twists expectations. This shifting of meaning is best

⁶ Darian Leader, *Why Do Women Write More Letters Than They Post?* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), 148.

⁷ Leader, 148.

⁸ Miller, 'On Perversion', 309,

exemplified in the endings of the post-action, which provide a radical contrast to the classical action finale.

Usually, the final scenes of the action film are no more than variations on the hero's instant absolution of the possible consequences to his murderous rampage. The ending arrives with the coincidence of the resolutions of both the 'public' issue (capturing the villain, saving the world from impending disaster) and his personal problems (his wife's discontent with their marriage, a disgruntled boss). Given that these narratives are, as Latham Hunter puts it, "built on solid family structures and patriarchal guidance, resuscitating the primacy of the family and restoring the father to his position at the head of that family,"⁹ the last shots will reflect this by focusing on the hero's symbolic affirmation through close-ups which depend on the hero's status. If the hero is single, he will kiss a beautiful woman; if he has family, he will be surrounded by his children and his wife will kiss him; or if he is in the sequel with his 'buddy' (as in *Lethal Weapon 2*), the partners will laugh together. The post-action, by contrast, rarely provides such a neat affirmation.

Whereas in the action the various endings amount to an upholding of the law of the Father—the 'completeness' that the American regime (the master signifier) offers—the post-action's conclusion frequently will focus on the thing that is lacking and thereby regularly withhold the sense of a neat closure that marks the action film. Thus in *Snake Eyes*, although Ricky Santoro (Nicholas Cage) eventually does get the girl he has also lost everything, while *Broken Arrow* ends at the moment when the two protagonists might kiss. Characterising the post-action is precisely a refusal to affirm. This refusal to conform to the signification attached to conventions shatters expectations and in doing so, highlights the fantasy that underpins the master's discourse that dominates the classical action film.

The Preclusion of Fantasy

In contrast to the discourse of the analyst, the master's discourse operates on the illusion of the preclusion of fantasy: fantasy is the structural blind spot of this discourse; as Verhaeghe points out, "this relationship is unconscious"¹⁰. This

⁹ Hunter (pp. nos not available).

¹⁰ Verhaeghe, 113.

repression is the result, Bracher claims, of a discourse that “promotes consciousness, synthesis, and self-equivalence by instituting the dominance of the master signifiers, which order knowledge according to their own values and keep fantasy in a subordinate and repressed position.”¹¹ The appearance of the exclusion of fantasy in the action film is necessary so as to maintain the illusion that what is presented is ‘realistic’, that is to say, it is all about presenting the action as totally in the realms of possibility. Hence, the action film’s excessive reliance on what Steve Neale identifies as cultural verisimilitude artefacts. Cultural verisimilitude being the quotation of “authenticating discourses, artefacts, and texts: maps, newspapers headlines, memoirs, archival documents”¹² in order to adhere to public expectations as being ‘true’. Thus the action genre’s sense of reality is grounded in both the audience’s expectation that the hero will save the day, no matter how improbable this may be, as well as in references to an outside real event, such as the Vietnam War or Terrorism, or by the use of ‘authentic’ police discourse.

The inherent prohibition of fantasy explains Bordwell’s observation regarding fighting in action films:

Westerners seem to believe, [it] ought to be realistically messy, its impetus dissipated by awkwardness and fatigue. Watch Harrison Ford, the current master of reluctant, logy combat, in *The Fugitive* (1993) as he wearily grapples with the murderer of his wife, and wonder why Hollywood heroes don’t study a little acrobatic kung-fu. Why not learn to dodge blows, to hit the ground rolling, to leap over your adversary? Instead of a telegraphed uppercut, why not use a back flip to kick your opponent in the jaw?¹³

To answer Bordwell’s wry comments, and leaving aside the importance of the hero’s representation of the every (American) man, the ‘realism’ of the fighting distracts from the fantasy underlying such scenes as well as the ‘happy ending’. The messiness of the fights is ‘real’ and thereby renders the fantastic impossible.

The underlying fantasy of the action film is apparent in the post-action’s attempt to highlight the fantasy of the neat affirmation that the symbolic order offers. One of the crucial scenes in *Snake Eyes* revolves around Ricky Santoro’s horrifying discovery that it is his best friend, Kevin Dunne (Gary Sinise), who is the

¹¹ Bracher, 117.

¹² Neale, ‘Questions of Genre’, 161.

¹³ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 218–220.

mastermind of the plot to kill the Senator and anyone else who knows about the Army's fraudulent means of sourcing an increased budget. This moment of betrayal is magnified through Dunne's response to Santoro's protests against his choice between serving Dunne's interests (and his own), or doing his duty as a police officer. Dunne's simple response is that he knew that not only would Santoro be a convenient alibi, but also that Santoro can easily be 'bought out.' When Santoro refuses to take the money Dunne argues that this choice will cost him everything:

Forget about your job, your sweet life in Margate. Start thinking about jail! Your girlfriend will be gone, too, at the first sign of trouble, but not before she has a little chat with Angela! So say goodbye to your wife too! Twice a month with Michael won't be so bad if you can get him to spend a night in your shitty apartment! You'll lose it all, my friend! Everything!

Though the immediate impression appears to defy Dunne's predictions, in that Santoro triumphs in exposing a huge conspiracy, proves Dunne's role in the murders, defeats Dunne, and is proclaimed a hero, the final (anti-bliss) montage corrects this and illustrates the accuracy of Dunne's prophecy through shots of Santoro's wife and mistress both leaving him, the media hounding him for his past activities and his being shunned by the community. By highlighting the events of the 'day after' in these final scenes, *Snake Eyes* brings what has previously been repressed to the foreground, and in doing so retroactively unveils the fantasy that underpins the classical action.

The foregrounding of fantasy that marks the post-action points to a perverse structure. The perversion of the post-action is initially evident in the corruption of 'false suspense' that underlies the action film. As noted earlier, action films are not renowned for their unexpected twists mainly because there is some assurance of order maintained throughout the narrative. Altman describes this process as "false suspense [as] in order to participate in the film's strong emotions we must provisionally pretend we don't know that the heroine will be rescued, the hero freed, and the couple united."¹⁴ The art of false suspense is all about maintaining the illusion of the security of the symbolic order, which is withheld by the post-action.

The defining discursive feature that distinguishes action films from each other is their relation to the Name-of-the-Father. *Last Action Hero's* subversiveness lies in

¹⁴ Altman, *Film/Genre*, 25.

its attempt to unmask the Father, namely the action genre. As it eventuates, this was a grossly ineffectual gesture because it did not heed Slavoj Žižek's warning that the "unmasking of the Master's imposture does not abolish the place he occupies, it just renders it visible in its original emptiness, i.e., as preceding the element which fills it out."¹⁵ Though the post-action does not exclude the Father (as in psychosis), the post-action film deviates from the 'normal path' in a refusal to blindly follow the Law of the Father (doing the 'right thing' to do for America). Rather there is a reduction of the Name-of-the-Father by the post-action's challenge and exposure of its impotence. As the "regulating principle of the symbolic order"¹⁶ when the Law of the Name-of-the-Father is destabilised, false suspense is no longer possible because its regulating order is not guaranteed. Thus the ending of the post-action cannot offer the security that justice will prevail. In a twist to the classical narrative, the final scenes become a question both of how the hero will save the day and whether the hero will triumph.

The Lacanian *Objet Petit a*

The destruction of the classical action's convention of neatly affirming the symbolic at the narrative's end coincides with the upper level of the analyst's discourse, mirroring also Lacan's matheme for perversion: $a \diamond \$$. Through the post-action's inverse ending (which defies the neat, happy resolution classic to the action film), the post-action effectively presents a retrospective realisation of the fantasy underpinning the master's discourse. Here, once again, we return to the discourse of the analyst as it is the discourse which, as Bracher points out, illuminates and emphasises "what has been left out, repressed—that is, the *a*."¹⁷ It is precisely from this *a*, that the agent of the analyst's discourse operates. It is from this position that the analyst is able to reveal "the *a*, unconscious fantasy, cause of desire, which operates from behind the façade of master signifiers and the entire signifying apparatus."¹⁸

¹⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and out*, (New York: Routledge, 1992), 103.

¹⁶ Verhaeghe, 203.

¹⁷ Bracher, 124.

¹⁸ Bracher, 126.

What precisely is this *a*? The Lacanian *objet petit a* famously resists description. Nevertheless, Bracher makes the following attempt:

The function of object *a* can be filled by various things—whatever, in fact, can appear to offer the possibility of stopping up the gap, filling the lack. Woman (i.e., Woman, object of male fantasy), insofar as she is desired by man, fills the role of object *a*, a role that can also be filled by a pet, by capital, and by other phenomena as well.¹⁹

On this explanation the *a* is the leftover piece of enjoyment resisting symbolisation, which is why it is notoriously difficult to pin down. This resistance also explains the changing function of object *a*. Collete Soler defines this *a* as an agalma, claiming that “an agalma is an enigmatic something that makes someone interesting. It is linked with desire and it is the name of the object cause of desire when it functions as a mystery.”²⁰ Though the object *a* can operate as a point of mystique for desire, it alternatively, and often simultaneously, functions as a point of revulsion: Jacques Lacan akin this duality to the moment when the patient says, “*I give myself to you...but this gift of my person—as they say— Oh, mystery! is changed inexplicably into a gift of shit.*”²¹ The ambiguity of the object *a* demonstrates why it is frequently encountered in one of the more perverse genres, namely horror. The menacing power of figures such *The Silence of the Lambs*’s Hannibal Lecter, or *Nightmare on Elm Street*’s Freddy Krueger, resides in that they rob their victims of their object *a*. Freddy stalks his victims’ dreams and kills them through their fantasies. Similarly, as Žižek notes, in *The Silence of the Lambs*, through a series of invading questions, in return for titbits on the identity of the killer, Hannibal robs Clarice Starling of her “fundamental fantasy (the crying of the lambs).”²²

Where in the master’s discourse the object *a* is the repressed production, within the analytical framework it is emphasised. According to Verhaeghe, the “discourse of the analyst, as the inverse that of the master, brings this relationship to the forefront

¹⁹ Bracher, 114.

²⁰ Soler, 277.

²¹ Lacan, *Four Fundamental*, 268 (author’s emphasis).

²² Slavoj Žižek, ‘A Hair of the Dog that Bit You’, in *The Žižek Reader*, edd. Elizabeth Wright and Edmond Wright (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 277.

in an inverted form: $a \rightarrow \mathcal{S}$.”²³ Simply put, the analyst’s discourse is an inversion of the master’s discourse. Instead of repressing the piece which resists symbolisation (as in the master’s discourse), in the discourse of the analyst it is within the position of agent that this ambiguous object a lies. The analyst places what is excluded from symbolisation in the position of power.

Empowering the object a arrives only in analysis and perversion. Both the analyst and pervert, Miller argues, operate on the condition that it is either the analyst or pervert who “makes himself be object a .”²⁴ To Žižek, the agent which occupies the position of a , “knows perfectly what he is for the Other: a knowledge supports his position as the object of Other’s (divided subject’s) *jouissance*.”²⁵ The point of the pervert and the analyst is to act as what Miller calls an instrument designed specifically for the Other’s (barred subject’s) enjoyment:

in perversion he is precisely that: an instrument. That is rather surprising. It is the opposite of what is commonly thought about perversion. It is commonly thought that the pervert uses other people, other people’s bodies, without due respect for their status as subjects. Lacan’s fundamental clinical thesis regarding perversion is the opposite. Lacan asserts that the pervert devotes himself to the Other’s *jouissance*, the Other’s sexual enjoyment, trying to restore lost sexual enjoyment to the Other.²⁶

The operation of the analyst’s discourse, whether or not is taken up as perversion, is to expose, and reveal the a , the unconscious fantasy, of the Other. The pervert/analyst is then “able to reveal the truth of enjoyment to the non-pervert.”²⁷ This kinship between the analyst and the pervert highlights the elusiveness of the object a especially when, as Miller asks,

if the true pervert makes himself be object a , we can simply deduce from Lacan’s formula why it is incompatible with analysis. The analyst, in analytic operation, makes himself be object a . Is this to say that the analyst is a pervert? Certainly not.²⁸

²³ Verhaeghe, 113.

²⁴ Miller, ‘On Perversion’, 318.

²⁵ Žižek, ‘Four Discourse’, 79–80.

²⁶ Miller, ‘A Discussion’, 213.

²⁷ Miller, ‘On Perversion’, 306.

²⁸ Miller, ‘On Perversion’, 318.

But what is the characteristic that separates the analyst and the pervert? The distinction between the two relies precisely on the basis of the ambiguity of the *a*. As Žižek points out, the difference between the “social link of perversion and that of analysis,”²⁹ once again testifies to “the radical ambiguity of *object petit a* in Lacan, which stands simultaneously for the imaginary fantasmic lure/screen *and* for that which this lure is obfuscating, for the void behind that lure.”³⁰

Feminine Logic

For the post-action film the fallout of foregrounding this object *a* results in a revised logic. Unlike the classical action film, the post-action film is not dominated by a masculine logic, if anything what transpires through the emphasis on fantasy is that such films are bound by a logic that is *feminine*. This is not to imply, however, a field limited to action films with action heroines or action babes. Though the moment of the genre’s division is usually pinpointed to the introduction of the action heroine, such attempts are fraught with contention.

In the first instance, women as action heroes were perceived as simply ‘boys in girl’s clothing.’ Screen theory of the 1980s and early 1990s tended to argue that women were cast as either weak and feminine or hard and masculine. Jeffery Brown observes that women in the action genre were perceived as passive, and femininity was determined on possessing “the ‘soft’ (read: feminine) qualities.”³¹ Further,

Women in the action movies of the 1980s usually occupied the passive position...They were loved ones in distress...Or they were expendable love interests...Or they were appended to the narrative to counter the subtext of homoerotic tension between the male partners.³²

Alternatively, Brown continues, a few women occupied the position of ‘masculine’ action heroine. He also points out that to some “the image of heroines wielding guns and muscles can be conflated within the binary gender codes of the action cinema to

²⁹ Žižek, ‘Four Discourse’, 79.

³⁰ Žižek, ‘Four Discourse’, 79 (author’s emphasis).

³¹ Jeffery Brown, ‘Gender and the Action Heroine: Hardbodies and the *Point of No Return*’, *Cinema Journal* 35.3 (1996): 60.

³² Brown, ‘Gender’, 57.

render these women as symbolically male.”³³ In short, the hard and aggressive features are synonymous with masculinity, while soft and passive traits in the action genre are associated with femininity: a femininity that appears sorely lacking in the heroine of the action film.

One of the limitations of defining the difference between action films according to the gender of the protagonist, is illustrated by *The Long Kiss Goodnight*'s playful exploitation of the split dominating early screen theory by means of presenting Samantha Caine (Genna Davis) as the docile persona and Charly Baltimore (Genna Davis) as the active, aggressive woman. A surface reading along these lines would likely render the opposing spectrums of Samantha and Charly as a neat presentation of the thesis that women can be cast only as either hard or soft. The groundwork of this uncomplicated argument resides in the opening, with shots of Samantha Caine presenting her as enthusiastic mother: baking, cleaning, shopping, and laughing with her fiancé and her daughter. We also learn that she is a significant member of the community by a montage including her dressing up as Mrs. Claus, hosting get-togethers and driving home her drunken neighbour. Comments like the teenaged ‘Yo! Mrs. Claus is hot!’ and the newsreader’s leery ‘After one look at her, I’m thinking Santa got what he really wanted this Christmas,’ exemplifies the thesis that women in film are cast as objects to be looked at. As such, Samantha Caine occupies the ‘soft’, ‘feminine’ position. This straightforward assumption, however, loses its foundation with the arrival of her potentially ‘true identity’ in the form of Charly Baltimore.

Samantha’s amnesia is the cause of her repression of her ‘masculine’ features, which after an accident begin to filter back into her life as Samantha. Samantha’s other identity, Charly Baltimore, is exceptionally skilled with knives, has super sharp reflexes and strength, is a government assassin, and smokes! All of which supposedly codifies her as masculine. Once Samantha’s and Charly’s duality is established, a key obsessions of the film concerns her appearance. Her appearance provides a quick summation of the polarities of the woman’s position of hard and soft. Nathan Waldman (Brian Cox), after seeing Charly for the first time in eight years, notes that she is ‘A great deal frumpier.’ Charly distinguishes herself from

³³ Brown, ‘Gender’, 53.

Samantha by sneering at the softness of Samantha's body. When Mitch (Samuel L. Jackson) asks her if Samantha has 'Gone forever and ever?' Charly replies 'Thank God. Look at my inordinately large ass. Look what she did to me.' Defining who she is seemingly becomes dependent on the perception of her muscle build. Though the dual characters can be defined according to their hardness or softness there are hints that resists such a clear-cut interpretation. For example, Charly's appearance does not fit the ideal of hard-core masculinity. But for the dual characters the ambiguity of this presentation can be used to support either reading. Take the scene, for instance, in which Samantha/Charly spots her daughter through the lens of her long-range gun. What is significant about this scene is that while there is abundant evidence of Charly's hostility towards her daughter, Caitlin ('I didn't ask for the kid. Samantha had the kid, not me! Nobody asked me!'), she pauses a fraction too long and misses the opportunity to kill her (Figs. 4.1–4.6). The ominousness of this scene avails itself of two readings. Either her lingering gaze may be perceived as Charly's maternal longing for her daughter, or else the pause occurs due to Charly's killer instinct causing her to take the time to get the best angle possible. Up to the very final scene there is no clear-cut indication of Samantha/Charly's 'true self.' Significantly, both readings, whether of Samantha as feminine or Charly as masculine, have a stumbling block that resists interpretation. Thus one of the immediate weaknesses of the heroine approach is that the gender divide is not clear-cut and such potential overlaps result in ambiguous definitions.



Figure 4.1



Figure 4.2

The Long Kiss Goodnight: When Charly spots her daughter from her bedroom window, she loads her gun up and points it in Caitlin's direction.



Figure 4.3

As she methodologically lines up her target, the camera tracks in to a close up...



Figure 4.4



Figure 4.5

... that shows Charly's hesitation, which is interrupted when she hears her pre-arranged warning signal and quickly flees the house.



Figure 4.6

From the outset though, proclamations of the radicalness of the action heroine film was marred through the heroine's supposed masculinity. Theorists charged that through the action heroine's 'hard', 'functional', 'weapon-like' body, heroines such as Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) from the *Alien* films, and Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton) in *The Terminator 2*, were merely "men in drag."³⁴ According to Richard Corliss, the heroines of *V.I Warshawski*, *The Terminator 2* and *Aliens*

are not strong women who use their ingenuity, humanity and mother wit. They are Rambo in drag. They have a higher testosterone count than the national debt ceiling; they solve problems with artillery and adrenaline. And too many filmmakers, strapped by the conventions of the shoot-'em-up genre, think they are solving the problem of beefing up women's roles by turning them into

³⁴ Brown, 'Gender', 59.

beefcake. It's steroid screenwriting. [James] Cameron wonders, why can't a (modern) woman be more like a (mean) man? Then he makes her one.³⁵

In other words, the deadlock of the approach that designates boundaries according to gender, is that the 'action heroine' film simply superimposes superficial differences onto identical heroes and structures. Consequently, it is a mistake to focus solely on the gender of hero in terms of identifying differences in action films.

The introduction of the 'action babe' again revised the boundaries separating the subtle distinctions between the types of action film. Her popularity has led to the conclusion that, for this reason alone, such films are different from the early action film. Present in films like *Charlie's Angels*, *Tomb Raider*, *Swordfish* and *The Fast and the Furious*, the action babe challenges the immediate equation of action heroines being 'masculine' in her desirability. To Marc O'Day the term

'action babe heroine' is intended to capture the yoking together of the 'soft' and 'hard' elements which compromise this fantasy figure. She is at once—to draw on the contemporary popular cultural lexicon for describing beautiful young women—a 'babe' and, equally importantly, she is 'fit'.³⁶

Giving weight to the modified boundaries of the action's genre, the arrival of the action babes coincides with technological movement, as Mencimer argues:

Wires have allowed Lucy Liu and Cameron Diaz to high-kick, jump, and fly better than Seagal ever could, and the girls didn't have to become body-builders in the process. The lithe titanium bodies of Angelina Jolie and *Crouching Tiger's* Zhang Zhi Yi make men like Schwarzenegger look like lumps of heavy, slow-moving steel. Their kind of over-tanned, sweat-sheened, macho muscularity has all but disappeared from the screen.³⁷

In short, Mencimer claims that, "Technology and the sexual revolution...have combined to make the muscleman—and his movie—obsolete."³⁸ The flaw to this improved distinction is that, once again, an emphasis on gender neglects similarities and differences with other films of the genre. While the action heroine argument

³⁵ Richard Corliss, 'Why Can't a Woman be a Man? This summer's films feature more female roles, but are they strong women or just macho guys in drag?', *Time*, August 5 (1991): 67.

³⁶ Marc O'Day, 205.

³⁷ Stephanie Mencimer, 'Violent Femmes', *Washington Monthly* 33.9 (2001), retrieved 11 Nov. 2002, available at Flinders University Library: Expanded Academic ASAP Plus <<http://web3.infotrac.galegroup.com.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/>>.

³⁸ Mencimer (pp. nos. not available).

celebrated superficial differences to herald a significant development in the evolution of the action genre at the cost of significant similarities, the action babe camp focuses on the differences of the babe from the heroine and overlooks the discursive, technological, visual and structural similarities they possess with films like *The Matrix* and *Broken Arrow*. Concentrating on the discursive structure of such films has the advantage of encompassing something more than just the gender of the hero.

The Masculine Paradox

The feminine logic of the post-action exceeds gender in that it centres around a particular type of enjoyment. While the action's masculine logic is based on an unambiguous contradiction—for all the power the hero has, he is impotent—the foundation of the feminine logic defies articulation. Lacan's formula of sexuation (see Fig. 3.25) illustrates not just the duality of power and impotence that underlies the action film, but it also highlights the complexities of femininity in its resistance to inscription. The structure of the masculine, though an ambivalent one, is relatively unambiguous in that it is inscribed within language. The symbols on male side of the schema are defined by their tangibility in language. The masculine paradox avails itself of the power, albeit an illusion, and the stability that seemingly comes with inscription into the symbolic.

The logic of the masculine is grounded by the Law—in action films, the Law of the founding fathers— is the exception that provides and limits his enjoyment. The Law of the father is the factor that prevents the hero from being a bad guy in that it regulates his enjoyment; inasmuch as in the action universe men who do not enjoy are not real men, men who enjoy too much, transgress the (symbolic) order and jeopardise the community. The fragility of regulation is illustrated by Verhaeghe's point that as upholder of the Law

the king occupies a very strange position. Being the guarantee for law and order, he is at once the most necessary and the most vulnerable person within society. When he fails in his task, the cornerstone falls away and society as a whole is doomed.³⁹

The principle of regulating enjoyment is what separates the masculine from the feminine:

³⁹ Verhaeghe, 193.

To put it clearly: *the Name-of-the-Father furnishes a guarantee against uncertainty as regards sexual relations*. This guarantee grounds the social model for the regulation of the relations between the different sexes and the different generations. The Oedipal law is set up to regulate enjoyment.⁴⁰

The masculine experience is always undercut by his lack of relationship with the phallus which he cannot control. This is the reason why Lacan states that “On the side of man, I have inscribed $\$$, certainly not to privilege him in any way, and the \hat{e} that props him up has signifier.”⁴¹ Lacan’s ‘favour’, as he points out, serves to highlight man’s inability to control, and as such, often is the point of anxiety. Renata Salecl states that

The phallus that we find on the side of the man is not something a man can be happy about. Although a woman relates precisely to this phallus, the man is not at all in control of it. A man thus constantly tries to take on his symbolic function, since he knows that the symbolic function is what the woman sees in him. However, he necessarily fails in this attempt, which causes him anxiety and inhibits him.⁴²

Man is caught in a tricky trap, as on the one hand his *jouissance* is a *jouissance* of ownership and control, but on the other, as Miller highlights, with phallic *jouissance* comes not only a feeling of a “having...which gives him the superiority of ownership, something good,”⁴³ yet with it “the fear to be robbed.”⁴⁴ Thus the contradiction of masculine enjoyment is expressed within the formulas of sexualisation, as Bruce Fink shows, all “of man’s *jouissance* is phallic *jouissance*. Every single one of his satisfactions may come up short...Nevertheless, there is the belief in *jouissance* that could never come up short, the belief in another *jouissance*.”⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Verhaeghe, 200 (author’s emphasis).

⁴¹ Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, 80.

⁴² Renata Salecl, ‘Love Anxieties’, *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan’s Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality*, edd. Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 93.

⁴³ Miller, ‘Of Semblants’, 17.

⁴⁴ Miller, ‘Of Semblants’, 17.

⁴⁵ Bruce Fink, ‘Knowledge and *Jouissance*’, in *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan’s Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality*, edd. Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 38.

Man's relation to enjoyment, phallic *jouissance*, pins down the central characteristic of men. Because men are defined in relation to Name-of-Father, and cannot escape castration, unless they reject being part of the symbolic, they all can be considered as alike, which is to say that they all share a mark of their entry into the symbolic. To Copjec, the formula of sexuation renders the male experience as one that asserts their similarities, "If the differences among men may be disregarded, and one man can be substituted for another because they are manifestations of the same thing, what this thing is still unknown and must remain so."⁴⁶ The similarity that underlies the masculine experience is testified through man's relationship to clothing. Leader, in an analysis of the male and female reasonings, observes that

while most men like to be included in generalisations, many women don't. This fact is well known to retailers: if you want to sell a coat to a man, you can tell him that everyone in the City or on Wall Street is wearing it, but if you want to sell it to a woman, it is better to say, on the contrary, that no one is wearing it.⁴⁷

Herein lies the key point of difference between Lacan's formulas of sexuation.

Within Lacan's formula of sexuation, the ambiguity of defining femininity also translates to apparently conflicting symbols, but what distinguishes the feminine logic is its lack of a limit. For Lacan, preventing the "collectibility of woman," according to Copjec, is not the "external collisions of different definitions but...the internal limit of each and every definition, which fails somehow to 'encompass' her. Lacan's position opens out onto a beyond that it is impossible to confirm or deny."⁴⁸ The failure of providing an embodiment of the Woman is illustrated through the many discursive constructions of women: whether mother, *femme fatale*, tomboy, wife, whore, virgin, saint, or something else. Though a series of differences is evident, as Copjec asks, why among these constructions do we not encounter

woman as such? Lacan answers that the woman is not-all because she lacks a limit, by which he means she is not susceptible to the threat of castration; the 'no' embodied by this threat does not function for her. But this may be misleading, for while it is true that the threat has no purchase on the woman, it is crucial to note that the woman is the consequence and not the cause of the

⁴⁶ Copjec, *Read my Desire*, 234.

⁴⁷ Leader, vii.

⁴⁸ Copjec, *Read my Desire*, 225.

nonfunctioning of negation. She is the failure of the limit, not the cause of the failure.⁴⁹

For woman, there is no definite moment she possesses that marks her acceptance as a woman. If anything, the many constructions that women take up are, as Miller puts it, “the mask of the lack.”⁵⁰ The lack of a collective guarantee of ‘womanliness’ allows that the structure of femininity is more uncertain, since her existence is not inscribed within the symbolic. Existence, in the Lacanian sense, is in itself is a somewhat inconsistent concept, which reflects again the disparities between the masculine and the feminine logics.

While the masculine side’s symbols— $\$$ (the barred subject) and Φ (the phallus)—denote existence, it is an existence that is only symbolically assured, that is by being dependent on its guarantee by the big Other. Only entities that are fully integrated into the symbolic order can claim to ‘exist’, according to Žižek,

Lacan uses *existence* in this sense when maintaining that ‘Woman does not exist’ or that ‘there is no sexual relation’. Neither Woman nor the sexual relation possess a signifier of their own, neither can be inscribed into the signifying network, they resist symbolisation.⁵¹

The negative proof of masculinity is quite simply that the symbolic props up the man through his castration (his sacrifice), for a woman however, there is no definite moment that marks her entry into the symbolic, hence Leader’s comment that “Although a woman is often essential to a man’s sexual life...the reverse is far from the case.”⁵²

The concept of feminine enjoyment possesses an indefinable quality not known either to woman or man. While men enter the space of the Other upon their renouncement of enjoyment,⁵³ and though his entry means that his world is necessarily incomplete as not everything can be included in it, the woman’s experience is an unequal one. Though, like men, women also enter a space which is a failed one, but as Copjec argues,

⁴⁹ Copjec, *Read my Desire*, 226.

⁵⁰ Miller, ‘Of Semblants’, 17.

⁵¹ Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 136.

⁵² Leader, 1.

⁵³ I.e. the forced choice of either enjoyment or meaning.

The social world into which the girl enters is also a failed one, but not because it is incomplete or lacks anything. The fact that prohibition does not figure in her castration means that *nothing can be excluded* from it.⁵⁴

Therefore, in a sense where the masculine experience exists, the feminine experience revolves around what Lacan calls 'ex-sistence'. The breakdown of existence to the term ex-sistence, according to Žižek, is intended to encapsulate

the impossible-real kernel resisting symbolisation. The first traces of such a notion of existence are already visible in *Seminar II*, where Lacan emphasises that 'there is something so improbable about all existence that one is in effect perpetually questioning oneself about its reality.' It is, of course, this ex-sistence of the real, of the Thing embodying impossible enjoyment, that is excluded by the very advent of the symbolic order....And if we refer to this notion of ex-sistence, we could say that it is precisely woman that 'exists,' i.e., that persists as a leftover of enjoyment beyond meaning, resisting symbolisation, which is why, as Lacan puts it, woman is 'the *sinthome* of man'.⁵⁵

As the woman resists symbolisation, her ex-sistence, the structure of feminine enjoyment is grounded by negations. Hence, the negative paradox that rules Lacan's formula of the female side of his schema of sexual difference (see Fig. 3.25). Unravelling Lacan's formula in relation to her enjoyment, Fink claims that the symbols denote:

$\forall x\Phi x$: Not all of her *jouissance* is phallic *jouissance*.

$\exists x\neg\Phi x$: There *is* not any that is not phallic *jouissance*...All the *jouissances* that *do exist* are phallic, but that does not mean there cannot be some *jouissances* that are not phallic—it is just that they do not exist: they ex-sist. The Other *jouissance* can only ex-sist, it cannot exist, for to exist it would have to be spoken.⁵⁶

This double negation is emphasised in that all of the symbols on the feminine side resists inscriptions. $S(A)$, ~~Woman~~ and a all denote the impossible Real, which by

⁵⁴ Joan Copjec, 'More! From Melodrama to Magnitude', *Endless Night: Cinema and Psychoanalysis, Parallel Histories*, ed. Janet Berstrom (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 254 (author's emphasis).

⁵⁵ Žižek, *Looking Awry* 136–137. For Lacan, the *sinthome* is the kernel of enjoyment. Unlike the symptom which is like a coded message from the unconscious that can be deciphered, the *sinthome* resists the Symbolic and its attempts to define it.

⁵⁶ Fink, 39 (author's emphasis).

definition escapes language in its richness of enjoyment. The feminine structure is underpinned by an absence in language, hence Lacan's controversial (and misunderstood) declaration that, "~~Woman~~ cannot be said. Nothing can be said of woman."⁵⁷

The impossibility of clearly deciphering the feminine logic transpires through the underlying forces of the Real that mark the female side of sexual difference. The immediate symbol signifying the presence of the Real that illustrates the impossibility of feminine logic is the object *a*. It is the undefinable causal quality whereby men can relate to women and, as such, it is the object that is pinpointed to desire. According to Žižek, "the object *a* names the void of that unattainable surplus that sets our desire in motion."⁵⁸ Testifying to its power as the indefinable point of desire, the object *a* is not readily identifiable, which is why Leader argues that while

[a] man claims that he always chooses a woman as his partner when she has four attributes: a certain figure, a certain colour hair, a certain tone of voice... but he can never 'remember' the fourth attribute. The woman, for him, has something which he cannot name.⁵⁹

Although it is the only point that men can relate to women, for the woman, Salecl points out, "she has no relationship with object *a*, which is on her side of the schema."⁶⁰ This lack of a point of contact is exemplified in the failure of the sexual relationship: Woman is only encountered through illusion, hence Lacan's comment that "Man, in fooling himself encounters *a* woman, with whom everything happens: namely that usual misfiring, of which the successful sexual act consists."⁶¹ The failure rests in that he desires in her something that not only cannot be comprehended, but it is also something of which she is not cognisant. Thus, for Salecl, the major "problem of male and female subjects is that they do not relate to what their partners relate to in them."⁶²

⁵⁷ Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, 81.

⁵⁸ Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 134.

⁵⁹ Leader, 78.

⁶⁰ Salecl, 'Love Anxieties', 93.

⁶¹ Lacan, 'Television', 42.

⁶² Salecl, 'Love Anxieties', 93.

Woman's possession, within the realm of the symbolic, of a something extra, namely object *a*, means that nothing can consistently encompass her. The 'not-all' of woman led Lacan to conclude that "whereas in fact *woman* does not exist, woman is *not whole*."⁶³ To articulate the quality of being a woman results in failure. Thus Leader states that the "imagined responses to the question of femininity can be multiplied indefinitely, but no one of them, biological, social, provides the ultimate solution."⁶⁴ So, when Lacan proclaims that woman does not exist, he is asserting as Fink points out,

that Woman with a capital *W*, Woman as singular in essence, does not exist; Woman as an all-encompassing idea (a Platonic form) is an illusion. There is a multiplicity of women, but no essence of 'Womanhood' or 'Womanliness'.⁶⁵

The effect of a lack of an essence of what it is to be a woman means that becoming a woman is problematic, which means to Lacan that "a girl may become a woman, but there is no ready made answer as to how to do this."⁶⁶ The path to understanding what it is to be a woman translates to a need to work out the point of desire that others see—the object *a*. For men the object *a* is a mysterious quality that causes desire, but a woman's relationship with the object *a* is fraught with complications as Salecl's observation highlights:

A woman is concerned that she does not possess the object that a man sees in her, and thus she constantly wonders what is in her more than herself; because of this uncertainty, she endlessly questions the Other's desire.⁶⁷

For women this enigma is the cause of a hysterical challenge to endlessly question a designated master to discover precisely the thing about her that is more than herself. Leader notes that the methodology of an investigation of what men desire consists in, "surprising as it may sound...identify[ing] with a man. This is a curious thesis, that to find out what it is to be a woman, a girl will put herself in the shoes of a

⁶³ Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, 7 (author's emphasis).

⁶⁴ Leader, 3.

⁶⁵ Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, 7 n. 28.

⁶⁶ Leader, 2–3.

⁶⁷ Salecl, 'Love Anxieties', 94.

man.”⁶⁸ Through the ambiguity of the object *a* Lacan concluded that Woman is a mystery to all, including herself.

The instability of defining femininity is also apparent in Lacan’s designation of the S(*A*) that resides beneath the feminine side of the schema. The S(*A*) is at once both a signifier but also a signifier that does not exist in the realm of the Other. As Soler explains, precisely because it is a signifier of the Other’s existence, “It is a signifier, but one that paradoxically is not in the Other.”⁶⁹ Žižek describes this mysterious dual functioning object as the sign of “the lack in the big Other (the symbolic order), of its inconsistency, the mark that ‘the Other (as a closed consistent totality) doesn’t exist,’ it is the little bit of the real functioning as the signifier of the ultimate senselessness of the (symbolic) universe.”⁷⁰ The irreconcilability of these nameless objects/signifiers imbued with a reminder of the inconsistency of the universe is

then the following: it is a little piece of the real attesting to the ultimate nonsense of the universe, but insofar as this object allows us to condense, to locate, to materialise the nonsense of the universe in it, insofar as the object serves to represent this nonsense, it enables us to sustain ourselves in the midst of inconsistency.⁷¹

The signifier of the lack of the Other—S(*A*)—is akin to feminine *jouissance* in that it is an enjoyment that escapes language, goes to a beyond that escapes the phallic realm. Therefore Lacan states that “Insofar as her *jouissance* is radically Other that woman has more of a relationship to God than anything that could have been said in speculation.”⁷² Hence his riddle that “If by S(*A*) I designate nothing other than woman’s *jouissance*, it is assuredly because it is with that I am indicating that God has not yet made his exit.”⁷³ In other words, Lacan found that the closest way to decipher feminine *jouissance* was to, Salecl points out, “invoke the example of the mystics—women (and men) who find enjoyment in a total devotion to God,

⁶⁸ Leader, 3.

⁶⁹ Soler, 106–107.

⁷⁰ Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 135.

⁷¹ Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 134–135.

⁷² Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, 83.

⁷³ Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, 84.

who immerse themselves in an ascetic stance and detach themselves from the world.”⁷⁴ Lacan’s invocation of a God highlights the mystique of femininity in that while there is no evidence of a God, there is also no evidence that there is not a God. Feminine enjoyment similarly goes beyond the fallible, phallic realm, and into the indescribable. Feminine *jouissance*, though it is not grasped by language, the ‘heavenly ecstasy’ of this experience is sublime in that it proves that there is something more than the symbolic universe (the Other, \mathbb{A}), and “is thus usually perceived as the highest ‘happiness’ that the subject can experience. However, because this *jouissance* is foreclosed from language, it also is something that the unconscious does not know and thus cannot assimilate.”⁷⁵ In its lack of a limit, Copjec points out, “Lacan’s position opens out onto a beyond that it is impossible to confirm or deny.”⁷⁶ Unlike the absurdity of the masculine paradox, the feminine logic encapsulates a beyond, and this beyond translates in the post-action to a stress on both an unexpected withholding and an instant that stresses the indefinable.

The Abrupt Void

One of the more disturbing moments in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* arrives at the final scene that presents both an uncertain scenario (the unanswered question of her identity), as well as an emphasis on the lack of an exclusion: she has it all, in her enjoyment she is Woman. The lead up to this picture is designed to highlight her having everything. Thus we see Samantha/Charly driving a convertible through the American deserts. She rejects an offer by the President to earn lots of money (a tilt downwards reveals a suitcase full of money), and claims that she is going to work as a school teacher. But a long shot then presents an idyllic scenario of her sitting with her fiancé as her daughter plays in the distance. The moment that sticks out of this frame, is that after her fiancé, Hal (Tom Amandes), says, “I could sit here forever, couldn’t you?” she unexpectedly throws a huge knife to kill the chirping of a cricket, and then turns to him shrugging her shoulders and laughs (Figs. 4.7–4.12). Of her possessions, the most important here is an enjoyment that baffles those around her and produces a strange sense of horror.

⁷⁴ Salecl, ‘Love Anxieties’, 95.

⁷⁵ Salecl, ‘Love Anxieties’, 95.

⁷⁶ Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 225.



Figure 4.7



Figure 4.8

The Long Kiss Goodnight: When the final scene is interrupted by the chirping of a cricket, Charly/Samantha puts her drink down and...



Figure 4.9

... kills it.



Figure 4.10



Figure 4.11



Figure 4.12

The shock of this moment is emphasised through the silence and a shot of Hal's lack of response. After a stunned silence Hal turns to Charly/Samantha who laughs.

Contrasting masculinity's duality of power and impotence, the feminine logic is characterised by a beyond. This imbalance is best encapsulated in Barnard's summation that Lacan's schema illustrates both the "masculine logic of law and transgression and the feminine logic of love."⁷⁷ Unlike the male logic, which although grounded by an illusion is nevertheless inscribed, the feminine logic, revolves around an ambiguity, something that resists interpretation. In the final shot of *The Long Kiss Goodnight* there is a sense of witnessing something that escapes the picture. The void of this scene, in that something is at once present but also not there, is akin to the Lacanian act.

The act, according to Žižek is symbolic suicide: the "withdrawing from symbolic reality."⁷⁸ This renunciation of the symbolic is only really achieved in death, hence Lacan's thesis that "suicide is the only act that can succeed without misfiring."⁷⁹ In this connection he refers to the Sadean scenario in which, through the transgression of laws (crime) "man is given the power to liberate nature from its own laws. For its own laws are chains."⁸⁰ The act of suicide, Lacan continues, forces "nature to start again from zero."⁸¹ With a symbolic death the subject encounters "a space of freedom."⁸² After the act, Žižek claims, the subject "is annihilated and subsequently reborn (or not), i.e., the act involves as kind of temporary eclipse, *aphanisis*, of the subject."⁸³ The act is the point which arrives in the coincidence of absolute freedom with an "unconditional necessity: I feel obliged to perform the act as an automaton, without reflection (I simply *have* to do it, it is not a matter of strategic deliberation)."⁸⁴

⁷⁷ Suzanne Barnard, Introduction to *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality*, edd. Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 13.

⁷⁸ Žižek, *Enjoy*, 43.

⁷⁹ Lacan, 'Television', 47.

⁸⁰ Lacan, *Ethics*, 260.

⁸¹ Lacan, *Ethics*, 260.

⁸² Lacan, *Ethics*, 261.

⁸³ Žižek, *Enjoy*, 44. For Lacan, *aphanisis* is the fading of the subject.

⁸⁴ Slavoj Žižek, 'The Real of Sexual Difference', in *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality*, edd. Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 69 (author's emphasis).

In case of *The Long Kiss Goodnight*'s Samantha/Charly, the act is evident in her separation from the community that was so important in the opening scenes. Her rejection of the financially viable offer and her lie of going back to teaching, both testify to her relinquishing all symbolic ties. The impression of Samantha/Charly's renouncement of community and starting anew is magnified through the homage to *Thelma and Louise* (1991) when Samantha/Charly drives a convertible in the middle of nowhere. While this is an obvious in-joke to Davis' previous role, the fact that she is in the middle of nowhere is of significance. Like *Thelma and Louise*, the decisive scene of *The Long Kiss Goodnight* is the moment when she rejects the possibility of returning back to her old lives. The coincidence of the two films is that both films end at the same moment, namely when the characters are in the middle of nowhere with something that is incomprehensible. In *The Long Kiss Goodnight* the shots of her laughter, that provoke uncertainty as her daughter and partner look on mystified, are noteworthy for the underlying ambiguity. It is impossible to tell what her laughter means: is she a killer, or is she content with her role as wife and mother, or both? As there is a lack of clues to support either reading from the outset, all interpretation is doomed to failure. But the significance of the film ending at this juncture cannot be missed.

The femininity of post-action resides in the position of the act. In contrast to the classical action film, which compensates for the initial trauma of the act (that puts the narrative in motion) through excessive activity, the consistency of the post-action's ending is that by concluding precisely at the moment of trauma, it is a precise reversal of the classical generic ending. In the post-action there is a marked refusal to provide 'closure' or a signifier that the hero has been accepted into the symbolic, and in doing so, the post-action is without the fulfilment expected from Hollywood narratives. *Broken Arrow*'s abrupt ending is a prime example of the refusal to offer a neat closure. Rather, we are presented with a cut-to-black where one would least expect it: just before the possibility that the protagonists, Terry Carmichael (Samantha Mathis) and Riley Hale, might kiss (Figs. 4.13–4.18). The deprivation of the potential meanings usually generated by the last shots, such as the happy ending as an affirmation of the success of the Law, or the sanctity of the heterosexual romance, arises from the focal point of the ending: the void of the black of the cut-to-black.



Figure 4.13



Figure 4.14

In the close-ups, the music and the hug, the final shot-reverse-shots of Terry and Hale set up the expectation that they will kiss.....



Figure 4.15



Figure 4.16

but instead the camera cuts to a close up of their handshake.....



Figure 4.17

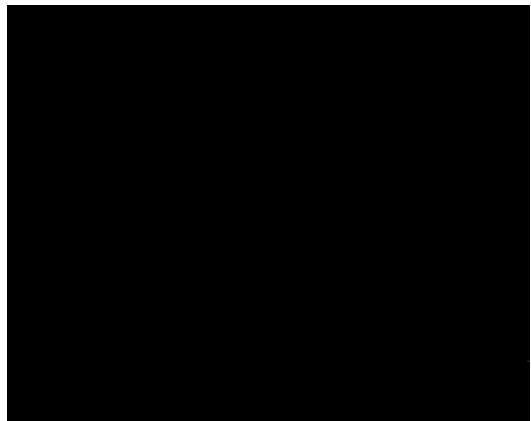


Figure 4.18

.... and then a cut to black to the end credits.

The division between action films and post-action can be identified according to where the traumatic encounter is located. In contrast to the post-action which ends at the point of trauma, the classical action famously uses the traumatic act as its starting point. In films like *Lethal Weapon* the act is the excuse for excessive violence, as illustrated through Riggs's suicidal behaviour. The danger of Riggs is that after his wife is murdered nobody wants to work with him and consequently his job as a police officer is in jeopardy. In short, his menacing power derives from his lack of reason to live. The inclusion of the act in the opening scenes is part of the Hollywood tradition of justification of aggressive activity. Commencing with a traumatic act repeats itself in *Commando* where the kidnapping of John Matrix's daughter provokes the escape into activity. As Žižek points out,

The very masculine *activity* is already an escape from the abysmal dimension of the feminine *act*. The 'break with nature' is on the side of woman, and man's compulsive activity is ultimately nothing but a desperate attempt to repair the traumatic incision of this rupture.⁸⁵

Similarly, *Die Hard* opens with numerous attempts to highlight John McClane's misfortunes, which implicitly originate from his wife's threats to divorce him. Like Riggs's 'recovery' from the death of his wife, John McClane's impending divorce is followed by frenzy of a spectacle. Where the emphasis on the out-of-control which characterises the action film stems from a masculine logic, the abrupt void or ambiguous conclusion of the post-action is feminine.

The Hong Kong Factor

The unpredictability of post-action's denouements is one of the obvious points where the Hong Kong influence is apparent. While the post-action's ending and the Hong Kong conclusion are largely similar in their unexpectedness, unlike the post-action, Hong Kong action cinema endings emerges from a tendency to rely on "Episodic construction [which] makes resolutions harder to predict than in most Hollywood films."⁸⁶ Further, according to Bordwell, Hong Kong action cinematic offerings tend to "sacrifice...characterisation and psychological change,"⁸⁷ while the focus on the

⁸⁵ Žižek, *Enjoy*, 46 (author's emphasis).

⁸⁶ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 184.

⁸⁷ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 20.

visual physical action as if “to compensate for the thinner characterisation...piles up plot twists.”⁸⁸ As such, these “abrupt reversals create a packed plot and rapid fluctuations of feeling.”⁸⁹ Bordwell locates the primary appeal of Hong Kong action cinema through Helen Soo’s comment that

Anything goes in Hong Kong cinema. In American movies, the hero never dies. They never kill the child. Most Americans like a happy ending. In Hong Kong films you never know quite how the ending is going to be. It’s very unpredictable, which makes it fun.⁹⁰

Hong Kong action films are distinguished from the traditional Hollywood action counterparts in several ways, and its influence of the post-action extends beyond the endings.

The ‘reciprocal’ relationship with Hollywood means that Hong Kong cinema’s identity is associated with a “scavenger aesthetic,”⁹¹ as its development is readily identifiable by its “pulling foreign techniques—age-old photographic tricks, samurai swordplay, New Hollywood gloss—into a dynamic tradition.”⁹² The perception that Hong Kong cinema clearly owes a debt to Hollywood is with foundation to the extent that plot frameworks are shamelessly lifted from Hollywood:

The new cosmopolitan style of the 1980s was created by directors who took notice of what Hollywood was doing. Inspired by *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) and *48 HRS* (1982), young filmmakers turned out action pictures bursting with pyrotechnics and gunplay. The 1980s crime cycle was launched by Leone’s *Once upon a Time in America* (1984). Like their 1930s predecessors, directors swiped plots with abandon⁹³

The enthusiastic plundering of Hollywood action cinema goes beyond simply borrowing plots, Hong Kong cinema’s famous ‘energy’ arises from “the swift pacing, the precise staging and economical cutting, the proliferating plot twists, and the trust in genre roles (dutiful cop-father, whore with a heart of gold) that one finds in classic American studio cinema.”⁹⁴ However, it is mistaken to equate Hong Kong

⁸⁸ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 21.

⁸⁹ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 21.

⁹⁰ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 184. Ms Soo is identified as a U.S. importer of Hong Kong movies.

⁹¹ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 11.

⁹² Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 210.

⁹³ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 18.

⁹⁴ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 24–25.

action directors as ‘rip-off merchants’, as Bordwell demonstrates by elaborating on the differences between Hollywood and Hong Kong cinema by comparing Brian DePalma’s *The Untouchables* (1987) with Kirk Wong’s *Gun Men*.⁹⁵ Bordwell finds that “a closer look at the two films allows us to pick out some significant variations within two major traditions of popular cinema.”⁹⁶ The *Gun Men*’s father-daughter “reconciliation through collaborative homicide is a characteristically audacious Hong Kong twist.”⁹⁷ The lead up to the unexpected ending achieves “a genuine sense of life at risk, down to the bare bones, everything reduced to the settling of scores. We never think that Eliot Ness will die, but Ding might; at the start of *The Untouchables* a little girl is killed by the gangsters, but in a Hong Kong movie a little girl can blast the villain.”⁹⁸

Inasmuch as the Hong Kong cinema may appropriate plot frameworks and certain filmic techniques, it also has an obvious, and increasing, formative effect on Hollywood. This influence is apparent in “almost any popular medium,” and reveals that the “Asian cinema exercising most influence on Western culture is Hong Kong’s.”⁹⁹ Hence Bordwell’s observation that, in recent years, “American filmmakers [have] returned the compliment of plagiarism.”¹⁰⁰ Examples of Hollywood’s sourcing of material from Hong Kong emerge in *True Romance* (1993), where

the heroes get trapped in the middle of a three way pistol standoff reminiscent of countless Hong Kong movies. Quentin Tarantino, *True Romance*’s screenwriter, stages a similar scene in *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) while also borrowing a plotline from Ringo Lam’s *City on Fire* (1987). In a swordfight in *The Mask of Zorro* (1998), the caped hero somersaults over his opponents. *The Matrix* (1999) plays out kung-fu and Woo-like gun battles in a dystopian cyberworld.¹⁰¹

Other obvious examples include the kung-fu fights in *Charlie’s Angels* which exploits the use of *The Matrix*’s (1999) ‘bullet time’, as well as the pyrotechnics and

⁹⁵ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 19.

⁹⁶ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 19.

⁹⁷ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 22.

⁹⁸ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 25.

⁹⁹ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 86.

¹⁰⁰ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 19.

¹⁰¹ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 86.

balletic fights of *Broken Arrow*, *Face/Off* and *Mission Impossible: 2* (2000). It is also apparent that the introduction of John Woo, a Hong Kong director, has significantly shaped Hollywood's action cinema. The changing shape of the action genre initially stumbled through several manufactured attempts of transformation. Apart from the clumsy contrivances of *Last Action Hero's* knowing play with conventions, Hollywood's controlling attempt to engineer changes to the action genre notably emerges in employing John Woo to direct *Hard Target* (1993). As Robert Hanke points out, this recruitment was motivated by a "belief that he could rejuvenate the overused genre conventions of action films."¹⁰² In Woo's appointment, as well as Hong Kong action choreographers/directors like Yuen Woo Ping of *The Matrix*, Corey Yuen of *The X-Men* and Cheung-Yan Yeun, the designer of *Charlie's Angels'* fights scenes, we have as Tasker points out, "a wider western visibility of Hong Kong movies, on the one hand, and the Hollywood employment of Hong Kong personnel (typically behind the scenes rather than in front of the camera), on the other."¹⁰³ Hanke asks "what of Woo's three Hollywood action films? Is this a case of Hollywood going beyond copying the conventions of foreign film style to hiring a foreign director who can convert his style into a production formula?"¹⁰⁴ Though Woo's *Hard Target* was ultimately a failure, its inability to offer a break in conventions arguably was due to the imposed modifications made to suit American expectations:

In the American version, Woo's aesthetics were subject to the genius of studio executives who re-edited the film because of unsympathetic responses to Van Damme fans at preview screenings, concerns over the level of violence, and a desire to market the film as an 'American' action movie to American audiences.¹⁰⁵

If anything, *Hard Target* illustrates that it is not enough simply to transport the Hong Kong touch, there needs to be a space for it, and as *Broken Arrow* and *Face/Off*

¹⁰² Robert Hanke, 'John Woo's Cinema of Hyperkinetic Violence: From *A Better Tomorrow* to *Face/Off*', *Film Criticism* 24 (1999), retrieved 21 Nov. 2005, Available at Flinders University Library: Expanded Academic ASAP Plus <<http://web3.infotrac.galegroup.com.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/>>.

¹⁰³ Tasker, 'Interview with Yvonne Tasker' (pp. nos. not available).

¹⁰⁴ Hanke (pp. nos. not available).

¹⁰⁵ Hanke (pp. nos. not available).

show, the post-action provides a space that allows the intrusion of the Hong Kong ‘irreality’.

In its emphasis on the hyper-spectacle of graceful action, the post-action is a fusion of both the action and Hong Kong action cinemas. The post-action embraces the Hong Kong appreciation of audacious stunts which, as Bordwell notes, are

outlandish by Hollywood canons of plausibility. Perhaps, as Noël Carroll has suggested, the fascination of these scenes springs from imagining an escape from gravity and the ‘reality of flesh’. The Hong Kong tradition challenges filmmakers to come up with ever more inventive ways of displaying the human body’s efforts to burst its earthly bonds. But this is not the whole story. Starting from astonishing movements of the body, filmmakers amplify them through the materials of cinema — movement, cutting, image composition, colour, and sound.¹⁰⁶

In classical action films, fights are accomplished through a battle between hulking muscles, not by speed or the sheer abandon of the laws of gravity as prominent in the post-action and the Hong Kong action film. In the traditional Hollywood action film

people punch for a while, usually rather slowly and seldom with the geometrical efficiency of kung-fu. The fighters seldom stop moving, even when they pause for breath, and they never freeze as abruptly as do Hong Kong performers...Throughout [the fights of *Die Hard*] the actors’ movements are ill-defined, and some gets concealed by parts of the set, there are no pauses to bracket phases of the fight. The movements lack efficiency, let alone clean-limbed attack and counter. This is a tussle.¹⁰⁷

Comparing the suspension of physical ‘reality’, the Hong Kong movements are distinguished from their classical Hollywood counterparts in their emphasis on the graceful, “even graceless falls look perfectly timed.”¹⁰⁸ Such stylisms translate in Hollywood as an emphasis on the feminine power of the hero.

Unlike the classical hero, the post-action hero’s power is not necessarily based around the over determined display of his or her muscular physique. The lithe body of the post-action hero moves beyond limitations of gravity and makes, to recall Mencimer’s observation, “men like Schwarzenegger look like lumps of heavy, slow-moving steel.”¹⁰⁹ The swift movements of post-action heroes is enhanced through

¹⁰⁶ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 220.

¹⁰⁷ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 224–226.

¹⁰⁸ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 218.

¹⁰⁹ Mencimer (pp. nos. not available).

various filmic techniques, the most famous being *The Matrix*'s use of 'bullet time.' Used to underscore the grace of fistfights, bullet time grinds motion to a halt as the bullets float mid-air to emphasis Neo's grace and agility. This technique is also used in *Charlie's Angels*, giving the 'Angels' metaphorical wings to fly through their fighting scenes. Through the prominent exaggerated fluidity, that turns even the most awkward stumble to an elegant *glissé*, the heroes are presented as stronger than their classical predecessors. Though in *The Fast and Furious* Dominic Toretto (Vin Diesel) physically resembles the classical action hero with his pumped up muscles, the use of a new kind of slow motion technique—what director Rob Cohen calls “smurring,” meaning a “combination of smearing and blurring”¹¹⁰—simultaneously makes his movements impossibly fast and slow. The shifting of attention from a gritty reality of fights to a heightened reality of spectacle illustrates a transformation of power.

The gradual metamorphosis from the masculine to feminine power is perceptible in *The Terminator 2*'s introduction of a different source of terror. In this film the menacing threat transforms from the solid, complete, hard power of Schwarzenegger to the new prototype, the T1000, played by Robert Patrick, a physically smaller and less muscular man than Schwarzenegger. The strength of the new model terminator does not reside in his bulky muscles, nevertheless he is clearly the much more powerful of the two. In opposition to the rigid power of Schwarzenegger's terminator, the menace of the T1000 derives in part from his indestructibility (his body repairs itself shortly after impact) but, even more importantly, from the circumstance that *he changes form*. As Tasker notes:

In *Terminator 2* Linda Hamilton's tough physique is played off against the strength-in-fluidity of the monstrous T1000 which pursues her and her son John. The T1000 can take on any form and imitate any voice, though he spends most of the film cast as a LA cop. At times we see him turn into a mercurial liquid, reconstituting himself when damaged. His limbs can be transformed into sharp metallic tools...The T1000's fluid ability to transform his body constructs him as a feminised monster, in contrast to the solidity of Schwarzenegger.¹¹¹

Contrasting the solid power of Schwarzenegger, *Terminator 2* revolves around a *feminine* monster whose strength lies within his ability to assume many masks.

¹¹⁰ Director's commentary on the *Fast and Furious* DVD (1.33.00).

¹¹¹ Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies*, 149–150.

At this point we encounter another instance of the Hong Kong influence on Hollywood action films. Attention to the masquerade is one of the fundamental qualities of Hong Kong action cinema. As noted by Bordwell:

The popular origins of Hong Kong plotting also emerges in screenwriters' fondness for the disguises, cross-dressings, pranks, and foiled schemes beloved of many narrative traditions, from commedia dell'arte to silent cinema.¹¹²

Underpinning the post-action hero is a similar reoccurring spotlight on the masquerade. While there is nothing new about an action hero who assumes a mask—take the example of the undercover cop; for instance the first shots of Riggs in *Lethal Weapon* present him as a drug baron to entrap the real drug baron—what distinguishes the post-action is that the masquerade becomes the source of fascination.

The post-action's emphasis on the masquerade points to its logic of the feminine. The link with the masquerade and femininity is explicit in Copjec's summary of the two ways of coping with sexual difference: "What Jacques Lacan calls the 'impostures of masculinity' are attempts to resolve the male paradox, while the 'masquerades of femininity' are attempts to resolve the female paradox."¹¹³

Thus the question dominating *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, Who is she really?—namely, which identity is the masquerade?—is question of the post-action film *par excellence*. The confusion generated by the masquerade is exemplified in the importance placed on uncovering the real woman behind the mask. Initially it appears that Charly is her true self and Samantha is a construction conceived on Charly's whim, as illustrated in the exchange between Charly's former mentor, Nathan Waldman, and Samantha. Waldman tells her that Samantha Caine was, 'Your cover. Do you hear me Charly? Do you hear what I am saying? Your memory was gone. You got confused. You brought your own cover. It was a fantasy, for Christ's sake! Samantha Caine never existed. You wrote the bloody script!' Her response, is to declare the whole thing as impossible, 'No! It's not a fantasy! I'm in the goddam PTA!' But this somewhat clear-cut distinction collapses through Mitch's pseudo-Freudian reading to uncover the 'real' Samantha/Charly. Mitch, to Charly's disgust,

¹¹² Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 183.

¹¹³ Copjec, 'More!', 254.

scrounges clues to understand her actions, claiming that Samantha's 'Personality had to come from somewhere.' Mitch believes that Charly Baltimore's construction of 'Samantha Caine' is Charly's 'Freudian slip' revealing her inner desire. Thus he rants that, 'Maybe Samantha Caine wasn't an act. Yeah, you had amnesia and all, but I think maybe you forgot to hate yourself for a while.' In short, we are to understand that Samantha is obviously not the 'true' self, but then, neither is Charly. In both cases, the masquerades of Samantha and of Charly are equally indecipherable.

The post-action's use of the masquerade provides a point of departure from the expected. The one thing that we learn in *Mission Impossible* (1996) and *Mission Impossible 2* (2000) is that the masquerade throws the narrative into confusion. Most of the twists of the film emerge from the detail that nearly everyone at some point wears a mask. Whenever Ethan Hunt (Tom Cruise) appears to be either dead or else a cold-blooded killer, a mask is taken off to reveal that it was someone else. Conversely, the final twist of *Mission Impossible* reveals that behind the villain's mask is Ethan Hunt, who uses this means to unveil the treachery of his girlfriend, Claire (Emmanuelle Béart). Jim Phelps (Jon Voight), the real spy within the organisation, however, has the best mask: he does not wear literal mask, but he deceives Ethan Hunt by acting as his boss and friend, and then as a dead man. The cheapness of face value is intensified in *Face/Off* which takes the concept of the masquerade to a point beyond this in terms of multifaceted narratives!

Face/Off centres on the plight of Sean Archer (John Travolta), the 'good guy,' whose life's mission is to capture Castor Troy (Nicholas Cage), the man responsible for the death of his son. After a series of complicated events involving a nuclear bomb and Troy's hospitalisation, in order to avenge his son's death and save the world, Archer must assume the identity, and therefore the face, of his nemesis. This is where the confusion sets in. Not only is it difficult to keep track of who's who, but there is also confusion as to who is really the good man in play. Troy, acting as Archer, is presented as a better father, husband, co-worker than Archer himself; heroism and its effects are no longer clean cut. Importantly, this confusion is further emphasised when Archer accepts the mask and starts to enjoy life as Castor Troy, and effectively 'be' him to regain his power: as Archer, Archer realises, he is actually ineffectual. As a narrative premise rather than as an inconsequential joke,

the disparate approaches to the masquerade highlight the opposition between the action and the post-action.

***Sinthome* and Symptom**

The femininity of the post-action's logic points to the presence of the *sinthome*. The *sinthome* is a thing akin to the feminine in that, as Žižek explains, it “persists as a leftover of enjoyment beyond meaning, resisting symbolisation.”¹¹⁴ To Josefina Ayerza the significance of the *sinthome* is that in its radical ambiguity it is “irreducible to significance.”¹¹⁵ In other words, the *sinthome* introduces the senseless meaning of the post-action. The *sinthome* is the senseless enjoyment pervading the frame of *The Long Kiss Goodnight*'s final scene. As such, all interpretations of the mysterious laughter of Samantha/Charly are doomed to failure because it does not hold any hidden meaning open to exploration. To Žižek, the *sinthome* is discernible from the symptom in that it is not in “the coded message to be deciphered by interpretation, but in the meaningless letter that immediately procures *jouis-sense*, ‘enjoyment-in-meaning,’ ‘enjoy-meant.’”¹¹⁶

The action film, in contrast to the post-action, is marked in the availability of its potential for ‘deeper meanings.’ As opposed to *sinthome*, symptoms points to an underlying message, which in action films may include racism, sexism, homoeroticism, blind patriotism, fathers and family. Under the tyranny of the master, all signifiers are invested with meaning and every gesture reinforces a particular ideology. For example, Jeffords's reading of the “muscular physiques, violent actions, and individual determination”¹¹⁷ of the 1980s action blockbuster renders each of these qualities as symptomatic of the Reagan era. The *sinthome*'s resistance to meaning is apparent in a comparison between the action's and post-action's opposing positions.

A standard reading could simply propose that both Samantha and Charly of *The Long Kiss Goodnight* are two separate presentations of a fantasy of women. But this analysis comes at the cost of overlooking the key ‘post-action’ moments of

¹¹⁴ Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 137.

¹¹⁵ Josefina Ayerza, ‘to resume again...’, available at <<http://www.lacan.com/frameII0.htm>>.

¹¹⁶ Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 129.

¹¹⁷ Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*, 21.

ambiguities, whether her indecision to kill her daughter or her enjoyment that concludes the film. The classical action emphasises meaning, allowing various signifiers to support varying messages such as bureaucracy equals bad, stupid and interfering. The prevalence of meaning in the classical action formula is designed to veil the horror of what really underpins the narrative—that is, the truth of its discourse, the impotence of the Law. The attention to the meanings that can be derived from the symptoms, states Žižek, simply “obscures the terrifying impact of its presence.”¹¹⁸ The meaning ‘behind’ the buddy-flick has relentlessly been subjected to scrutiny. Brown, for instance, in focusing on the interracial presentations theorises that the buddy relationship illustrates the possible mediation of cultural tensions.¹¹⁹ Fuchs, however, extends the concept of the erasure of racial differences, and concentrates on how it acts as a disguise of rampant homoeroticism that is supposedly prevalent in the buddy partnership.¹²⁰ The similarities in the framing of buddies and the heterosexual couplings, also has provoked discussion about its supposed meaning. Tasker, for example, argues that the homosexual tension is at its most explicit in the “buddy film”, for

the sparks which fly when male buddies banter with one another becomes more transparently sexual when transposed onto the male/female pair. And if the convention of the male buddy pairing is that the two will *not* kiss—they may joke about it incessantly, or perhaps exchange tender glances, as in the *Lethal Weapon* films—it is almost inevitable that the male/female buddy pair will end up in an embrace.¹²¹

An understanding of meanings derived by a particular gesture is not limited to the knowledge that film theorists possess. Makers of films like *Predator* and *Volcano* are well aware of the impact of meaning, which is why particular gestures demand emphasis. While the framing of an exchange of handshakes between two white men rarely involves a close-up shot with surging music, in both *Predator* and *Volcano* the famous clichéd shot of the handshake between a black man and a white man consists of an extreme close up of the hands. The enthusiasm in which the handshake is

¹¹⁸ Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, 71.

¹¹⁹ Jeffery Brown, ‘Bullets, Buddies, and Bad Guys’ (pp. nos. not available).

¹²⁰ Cynthia Fuchs, ‘The Buddy Politic’, in *Screening the Male: Exploring masculinities in Hollywood cinema*, edd. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (London: Routledge, 1993), 194–95.

¹²¹ Tasker, *Working Girls*, 74–75 (author’s emphasis).

filmed produces obvious signification loaded with meaning (America! Land of equality!). The essence of the post-action, however, limits such readings. The *sinthome*, to Žižek “is a psychotic kernel that can[not] be interpreted (as symptom).”¹²² *The Long Kiss Goodnight*’s point of departure from the classical action formula resides in the filling the frame with enjoyment, as the final scene exemplifies. The post-action emphasises what Žižek calls, “the central impossibility around which every signifying network is structured.”¹²³ Thus the defining point to the post-action shifts away from the action’s kernel of power/impotence to a focus on the element that resists articulation.

While the action’s equation with the masculine due to the overwhelming presence of the master signifier, whether it be America, the patriarchal order, or the law of the Founding Fathers, produces an abundance of meanings, in the twisting of conventions, the post-action dissipates the expected meanings associated with the action genre. The destruction of the accepted meanings generated by the conventions is the result of the weakening of the action’s symbolic order and produces a logic contrary to the Father’s Law. The logic of the feminine, unlike its masculine counterpart, foregrounds fantasy and as such, its logic therefore exceeds interpretation. The perversity of the post-action lies precisely in the failure to deliver. What makes the post-action film stand out is that in its feminine logic, the preclusion of fantasy, and the withholding of the satisfying ending, is that it demonstrates Lacan’s theorisations on Woman, the act, and feminine enjoyment, and presents to us – action films with Lacan.

¹²² Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 137.

¹²³ Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 143.