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# Raiders of the Lost Ark and the Hollywood Tradition: Nostalgia, Parody, and Postmodernism

Michael F. Deters

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Author

Raiders of the Lost Ark and the Hollywood Tradition:

Nostalgia, Parody, and Postmodernism

(TITLE)

BY

Michael F. Deters

**THESIS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

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## ABSTRACT

The film *Raiders of the Lost Ark* was released in 1981 to immediate success. Using a noticeably retrospective style, *Raiders* appealed to the public's desire to experience once again the same kind of viewing pleasure that Hollywood offered in the classical period. Accordingly, the film's nostalgic recreation of classical Hollywood entails a reliance on type characters, tough dialogue, and stock situations--with an overarching emphasis on maintaining a breakneck pace in its action. The appeal for the viewer, then, involves the satisfaction of a need to return to a superficially "simpler" time when the movies themselves were "simpler"--as they fulfilled the expectation of straightforward entertainment.

And yet, on another level, *Raiders's* debt to Hollywood past often manifests itself with irony and a slightly comic tone. In its reworking of genre conventions, the film tends toward parody. Certainly, the detection of such moments of parody is viewer-specific. As parody plays upon each viewer's distinct viewing history, each viewer may react differently to the film's inversion of the conventional. Whatever the case, *Raiders's* parodic revisions of genre expectations (for instance, those of the Western) enable the viewer to partake in a sort of game--wherein knowledge and recognition of those instances of parody provide their own reward: the viewer's active role in meaning-making results in the satisfaction of achieving a seemingly "higher level" of interpretation.

But *Raiders*'s relationship to Hollywood past is neither "simply nostalgic" nor "simply parodic." Paralleling the strategies of postmodern art, *Raiders* appropriates existing film images and plots. Accordingly, much of the film is a pastiche of previous Hollywood pictures. But unlike parody, pastiche entails no connotations of humor or derision. The appropriation of the existing image in the new text is effected seemingly without comment by that text. *Raiders* borrows then from films as diverse as 1941's landmark *Citizen Kane* and the independent 1955 film noir *Kiss Me Deadly*. Although the antecedent texts are not actually parodied--that is, ridiculed--in such appropriation, they must be in some way implicated.

Understanding the significance of *Raiders*'s appropriation though can be problematic. The effect of pastiche in *Raiders* is not so easily reconciled with the effects of pastiche in more overtly deconstructionist postmodern art. Part of the problem here is one of definition: the film seems to follow the formal strategies but not the oppositional politics normally associated with postmodernism proper. Ultimately, the key might be to follow the suggestion of Hal Foster and recognize two distinct strains of postmodernism. As Foster suggests, another (non-deconstructive) postmodernism exists: one that serves to uphold and rebuild--rather than resist--both the sociopolitical status quo and the overwhelming cultural influence of representation. *Raiders*, finally, formulates no real critique of the Hollywood film industry, but rather--and despite its gentle parody of film conventions--seeks to celebrate and affirm the Hollywood product's utility as a palliative.

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## I

## NOSTALGIA

In the summer of 1981 *Raiders of the Lost Ark* took America by storm, smashing box office records and bringing audiences out to the theaters for multiple viewings. Although the film featured rising star Harrison Ford as swashbuckling archaeologist Indiana Jones, its truly all-star cast operated from behind the camera: George Lucas, the creator and producer; Steven Spielberg, the director; and Lawrence Kasdan, the screenwriter. Between them, Lucas and Spielberg had already been involved in several of the most successful films ever: Lucas with *American Graffiti* (1973), *Star Wars* (1977), and *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980); Spielberg with *Jaws* (1975) and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977). With this first collaboration, Lucas and Spielberg superseded their already remarkable independent achievements, as *Raiders* grossed \$112 million in its first summer (Zimmerman 34). The nonstop action and adventure that *Raiders* offered proved a surefire formula for commercial success.

And yet, an equally important component in the film's overwhelming popularity was an adeptness at tapping into its audience's craving for the simpler, more viscerally engaging film experiences of Hollywood past. *Raiders* offered moviegoers a nostalgic return to the classical style of the 1930s and 1940s--where heroes talked tough, fought to the death, and always got the girl. With this appeal to nostalgia, the filmmakers ensured *Raiders*'s success even amidst financial



unrest in Hollywood. Zimmerman notes the necessity of understanding "how the film operates within the confines of the Hollywood movie industry, an industry that had been gripped by a serious recession for the previous thirty months" (35).

There seems little doubt that financial reward stood as a primary motive in the creation and production of *Raiders*. Almost any Hollywood product is calculatedly designed in the hope of high returns; *Raiders* is just a more straightforwardly packaged commodity. As David Ansen noted in *Newsweek's* review, "A high-inflation economy means low-risk filmmaking, and the moguls are convinced that escapism is the only thing that sells" (58). With *Raiders*, though, Hollywood offered a particular strain of escapism: the chance for its audience to watch a movie as if that experience itself (moviegoing) took place in another time entirely.

In reevaluating the significance of this film, then, it becomes clear that its nostalgia operates on two distinct planes: (1) it depicts a historical period that is, for many people, more interesting than the present, and (2) the way in which the film manipulates the semantic codes of the cinema recalls the filmmaking strategies of roughly the same era. *Raiders* maintains then a dual nature in its ability to evoke nostalgic reactions. We might compare for instance (1) a film like *Grease* (1978) whose appeal derives from its recreation of the "glory days" of the postwar boom, and (2) a film like *Star Wars* (1977), which depicts an age that never existed except in fantasy, but using a style recognizably endemic to the classical period of Hollywood moviemaking. As Fredric Jameson explains:

*Star Wars*, far from being a pointless satire of such now dead forms, satisfies a deep (might I even say repressed?) longing to experience

them again: it is a complex object in which on some first level children and adolescents can take the adventures straight, while the adult public is able to gratify a deeper and more properly nostalgic desire to return to that older period and to live its strange old aesthetic artifacts through once again. This film is thus *metonymically* a historical or nostalgia film. (116)

The impulse behind both *Grease* and *Star Wars*, then, seems to be nostalgia: the former a nostalgia for a bygone era, the latter a nostalgia for a representational style peculiar to a bygone era. As Jameson notes, *Raiders* uses both appeals to nostalgia:

*Raiders of the Lost Ark*, meanwhile, occupies an intermediary position here: on some level it is *about* the '30s and '40s, but in reality it too conveys that period metonymically through its own characteristic adventure stories (which are no longer ours). (117)

Accordingly, at least two strains of cinematic nostalgia exist. But, as Jameson suggests, it seems adequate to refer to the film about the 1940s as simply a *historical film* (116). More complex and perhaps more interesting is the film that attempts to revive an era indirectly through the retrospective manner in which it manipulates the language of cinema. Accordingly (and following the lead of Jameson), this discussion will confine the *nostalgia film* to the text that points toward a classical age not necessarily through its diegesis, but through a recognizably classical filmic style enveloping and projecting its diegesis.

As a result, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* achieves much of its richness through how it functions with respect to an existing Hollywood tradition. The film attempts to evoke a moviegoing experience of an earlier age: most visibly, the 1930s and 1940s. As the star Harrison Ford notes, then, it becomes a movie "about movies" (Schickel

and Smilgis, 75). But the approach that the filmmakers take toward representing representation is noticeably different from that of, say, Federico Fellini in *8 1/2* (1963) or Francois Truffaut in *Day for Night* (1973). Each text is a "movie about movies," but Truffaut and Fellini approach the phenomenon of film more by documenting the process of *filmmaking*, with resulting texts that frustrate audience perceptions by the play between the nested levels of reality (i.e., the film itself, the film within the film, etc.). *Raiders*, on the other hand, seems more like a film about the pleasures of film *watching*, as it seeks to facilitate rather than frustrate a desired viewing behavior, offering an intertextual web of association that provides comfort and escapism rather than a commentary on the problematic nature of representation.

And yet the manner in which *Raiders* relates to a cinematic tradition is not entirely consistent throughout. Its position with regard to Hollywood past operates on a variety of levels. For the purpose of analysis, then, I will identify in *Raiders* three different categories of intertextuality:

1. *Nostalgia*. A recreation of the classical style of Hollywood filmmaking by characteristic plot conventions, character types, and so on. Such evocations need not implicate specific texts, but rather a set of conventions and types endemic to a number of representative texts.
2. *Parody*. A playful, ironic reworking of Hollywood conventions. Once again, specific texts are not necessarily referenced. Parody might here be understood as Hollywood nostalgia imbued with a sense of irony, history, and humor.
3. *Pastiche*. An appropriation of an image from a specific existing film text. Pastiche is often distinguished from parody by its lack of derisive effect; a familiar image, shot, or situation surfaces seemingly without ironic comment or acknowledgment in the text.

Of course, such a taxonomy is inherently flawed: the categories overlap, the terms are inexact and disputed, and the definitions themselves provide only limited application. In breaking *Raiders*'s tightly cohesive structure up into its component parts--for the purpose of identifying various strategies at work--I risk (1) detracting from the film's significant power when considered overall, and furthermore (2) suggesting that the film is composed of discrete elements that each fall cleanly and exactly into one and only one of three or so categories I have established for analysis. The necessarily clinical procedure of analysis sometimes obscures the fact that a particular image or plot element has complex and multilayered effects in the text, which cannot be fully apprehended (if at all) by a singular approach. Nonetheless, this conceptual taxonomy will provide the framework for my analysis of various positions that *Raiders* adopts relative to cinematic tradition.

In the realm of nostalgia I would include, for example, the characterization of the film's hero. Indiana Jones's character is a composite of various Hollywood types: the swashbuckling adventurer, the hard-boiled hero, the learned professor. His behavior and dialogue emulate those of straight-talking screen idols like Humphrey Bogart and John Wayne. He is unidimensional, almost entirely lacking in psychological complexity; armed only with the knowledge that Indy is a "man's man," an alert viewer might predict nearly every of Indy's responses to the world around him. Such a character is predictable indeed, but such traits embodied the male lead throughout the classical period. Indy's resurrection of these same traits fulfill the audience's need to (1) relive memories of similar, earlier male characters

(straightforward, unwavering "men's men"), and in turn (2) believe that such men ever existed.

Marion, on the other hand, recalls the tough heroines of the classical age: the sexy Hawksian woman who knows how to have fun with the boys (as noted by Schickel and Smilgis, 75), as well as the strong-willed female proprietor of the sort played by Joan Crawford in *Johnny Guitar* (1954) and *Mildred Pierce* (1945).

Brandishing an attitude so big it could only fit on the big screen, Marion warns the slimy, villainous Toht: "*Nobody* tells what to do in my place."

Dialogue, of course, often provides the means by which such nostalgically typed characters are developed. Accordingly, Marion utters such retro-tough lines as, "Indiana Jones . . . I always knew some day you'd come walkin' back through my door"--echoing (among others) Rick Blaine's famous line in *Casablanca* (1942): "Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine." Later in the film, when Marion mentions the way the passage of time has affected them, Indiana contributes the gem: "It's not the years; it's the mileage." Such hard-boiled dialogue (which represents the Hollywood tradition of tough, terse speech, not the speech of any particular "real" time and place) verges on parody, but the film accompanies such dialogue with no textual evidence of derision. Unless the toughness of such dialogue is hyperbolized, the effect is a more-or-less "straight" meaning that serves to evoke the classical period without parodying it.

Although the 1930s adventure serials are often cited as a source of *Raiders's* breakneck action and pacing, these films do not seem so likely to be important in the

filmmakers' attempts to tap into audience nostalgia. First of all, the age of these films would disqualify most of the audience from having seen them in theaters. And as B-pictures, adventure serials would not be as likely as more popular films to enter into television's vast film-recycling mechanism. Therefore, not a great many of the audience would remember a B-serial, whereas most would have established an almost ritual identification with films from the classical period like *Casablanca*. On the other hand, regardless of the filmgoing experiences that a particular viewer brings to *Raiders*, he or she will almost certainly recognize its similarity to *some* collection of film memories (from B-serials, Westerns, gangster thrillers, or wherever), and in turn the desired nostalgic effect will have been achieved.

## II PARODY

Clearly, *Raiders* stands as a slickly polished evocation of a bygone style of filmmaking. The idea of nostalgia, though, presupposes that an audience (1) has favorable memories of the moviegoing experience, and (2) enjoys the revival of that past experience in the present. In fact, audience reactions to the film are probably not quite so simple, as the text itself occupies a somewhat ambivalent position with regard to those earlier films (i.e., the cinematic tradition) that made up such a hypothetically uniform audience experience.

It is worthwhile to consider, then, the variety of ways in which the text positions itself with regard to the Hollywood filmmaking tradition. *Raiders* maintains an almost uniform reverence to Hollywood tradition, balancing on the other hand a playfulness with regard to convention that should probably be called parody. (And here, I wish to respect consensus on the meaning of parody--retaining eighteenth-century notions of wit, derision, and humor--instead of adopting the theoretical position proffered by Linda Hutcheon, wherein almost any text pointing toward another text becomes parody, regardless of the position [respectful, playful, derisive] that the former adopts toward the latter [*Politics* 94].) How do we understand the film's playfulness, its parody of the Hollywood tradition? Or more specifically, if the parodic text produces humor, do we laugh at the new text itself? the convention the text parodies? implicated antecedent texts? the nature of representation? ourselves?

In the interest of approaching satisfactory "answers" to these questions, or at least exploring possible explanations of parody in *Raiders*, we might turn to one especially fruitful scene, relatively early in the picture, where closing time at Marion's Himalayan tavern is interrupted by a pair of unexpected guests. Indiana and the archfiend Toht (with his pack of Nazi and local goons) have each come to Marion in search of the headpiece to the Staff of Ra. When Toht, armed with a white-hot poker, threatens the helpless Marion, Indy unexpectedly (of course) returns with the cracking of his whip (the poker thus yanked out of Toht's grip) and the exultant battle cry "Let her go!"

In the ensuing confrontation, the filmmakers manage to invoke nearly every convention from the classical Western's stock situation: the barroom brawl. The result is a scene of intense action, at once (1) admirable for its thoroughness in neatly encapsulating tropes throughout the history of the genre, and (2) almost entirely unoriginal in its images, though modified in part by the exotic Himalayan setting. In this relatively short scene, the conventions of the Western brawl emerge in rapid-fire succession: (1) liquor bottles on the bar explode in a flurry of broken glass, (2) the brawl grows even more dangerous as fire spreads through rivulets of spilt liquor, (3) gunfire through a whiskey barrel creates an impromptu spigot whose bounty Marion partakes of--a bit of the old "Dutch courage," (4) Marion "clonks" one of Toht's henchmen on the back of the head with a flaming chunk of rafter. Because of the overwhelming familiarity of such images, the barroom scene may not specifically



recall other texts. Yet they are presumably identifiable as stock images whose referent is, more generally, the lexicon of the Western genre.

How, then, does the viewer react to these time-honored conventions of the barroom brawl, seeing them here again perhaps for the several-hundredth-or-so time in his or her viewing career? Of course, audience sophistication varies and the viewing process is a subjective experience: some may regard this sequence as merely exciting, action-packed--a fairly realistic brawl (i.e., similar to all those brawls previously encountered, if only vicariously through the movies.) On the other hand, most sophisticated viewers have probably acquired that literacy in the language of cinema to derive further meanings from the scene: specifically, Western films and television episodes shown ad infinitum give the average viewer a fluency in the lexicon of the Western genre.

As such, the effectiveness of this scene hinges on the audience's capacity for recognition of the tropes of the Western's barroom brawl. But, given such recognition, how does the viewer respond? Certainly the sophisticated viewer will share with the unsophisticated one an appreciation for the excitement and adventure that this scene generates, for example, as Indiana smashes a whiskey bottle over the head of the Himalayan henchman strangling him. Even more so, the literate viewer knows to appreciate that this sequence (and indeed the entire movie) is crafted with an attention to cinematic style that is unparalleled in most classical Westerns and in most contemporary action films. And, hopefully, the viewer reacts to this same moment--

Indy smashing whiskey bottle over the head of his foe--on at least one additional level.

Examining this moment more closely, we see Indiana Jones hunched over the bar in a stranglehold. He utters one word: "whiskey." After just a moment's hesitation, Marion locates a bottle of whiskey (Johnnie Walker Black Label Blended Scotch Whiskey) and quickly pitches it to Indy, who then performs that familiar barroom ritual: knocking his oppressor unconscious with a "thud" and a shower of broken glass. The effect, presumably, is a humorous one (although I cannot remember my reaction when I first saw the movie at the age of twelve). The filmmakers herein elevate, or at least revise, the cinematic cliché--the bottle broken over the head in melee--by introducing a parodic element. Indy and Marion take on parodic roles in the form of another the Western convention: the parched wrangler who sits down at the bar to order a drink. Indy, slumped over the bar, "orders" a whiskey and Marion, the strong-willed proprietor behind the bar, serves up the drink in question. Accordingly, the merely conventional becomes more clearly revealed as the parodic.

The result is an entertaining parodic moment, surely, but the actual origin of this sequence's humor--or any parodic element--remains somewhat obscured. It proves worthwhile to question, frivolous and inconsequential though it might seem, exactly who is privy to the humor inherent in Jones and Marion's playful reworking of the bottle-smashing convention. Perhaps Jones, in the throes of battle, retains a wisecracking attitude that prompts him to mockingly "order" a whiskey when what he really needs is the bottle-as-weapon. The hypothesis of such character motivation

actually raises some important issues regarding the function of parody and its relation to the diegesis: is the character ever? always? sometimes? never? a player in the playfulness of cinematic parody?

Although this question may remain largely speculative, the text might provide clues within the story-world that it creates: details as minute as the stylized expression on the hero's face. In this sequence, then, we may be prompted to ask: "Does Indiana Jones know he's doing something gently parodic, in the same way that I know?" While he might know his actions are *humorous*, the character cannot know they are *parodic* unless he acknowledges his own status as a player within a text. The best response then, to such bothersome quasiphilosophical problems may involve a simple litmus test: unless the character breaks that magical fourth wall (in the fashion of Brecht; Jean-Paul Belmondo in Godard's *Breathless* [1959]; or more recently and less provocatively, Bruce Willis in television's *Moonlighting*, Mike Myers in the film *Wayne's World* [1992], ad nauseam), we might most rightly attribute parody and all its attendant humor to the filmmakers, to the style that envelopes the story-world, and not to the story-world (and by extension its characters) itself.

At any rate, we laugh--even if Indiana Jones cannot laugh with us. But why does the parody, in which the conventional is converted, produce humor? Laughter being a highly subjective experience, parody might be a difficult phenomenon to apprehend. A few possibilities for humor, though, seem possible when we examine once again that sequence of enduring radiance--wherein Indy "orders" a whiskey, clubs

opponent using bottle. The (italicized) names of these possibilities derive from monologues that a hypothetical viewer might turn over in his subconscious.

(1) *That's funny because I have seen that type of sequence so many times before but the way they did it just now was a little bit different.* The simple reworking of the cliché provides sufficient "new life" to rejuvenate the conventional. In short, it does not so much "pardon" the use of the cliché as it does heighten and draw attention to a viewer's observation of the cliché. As such, the parodic element seems to derive its humor (when it is recognized) not so much by the cliché itself, and not simply by the ironic conversion of that cliché, but by the synthesis or juxtapositioning of the conventional and the unexpected.

(2) *That's funny because that sequence is so clichéd and the manner in which it's presented suggests that the filmmakers and the film know it's clichéd and are using it anyway.* Basically, the parodic mode might constitute a sort of "in-joke" wherein the viewer and the text are engaged in a mutual acknowledgement of a moment's (or a sequence's, an entire text's) status as self-consciously invoking a convention. Such a scheme offers the viewer a reward for his sophistication by allowing him to share in the creation of the text--a kind of membership in a semi-exclusive club. The parodic element celebrates then, a shared knowledge of a convention, even while mocking the inherently limited genre or medium that makes such conventions unavoidable.

Although the filmmakers' intent might not be a very important element of the text, the viewer's estimation or attribution of that intent might very well be. Consider

another familiar shot--and this shot I would want to file in the realm of parody just because it is so hackneyed, so relentlessly *standard* that it can be found in most action films. In this point-of-view shot (Indy's), near the close of the intense barroom sequence, another local mercenary aims a pistol offscreen; by eyeline match the audience knows the villain is aiming at Indiana Jones. A gunshot sounds, presumably from the native's pistol. In a medium reaction shot, Indy's eyes reflect shock. Neither the audience nor Indy, apparently, seems to know if Indy has been shot. In yet another POV shot, we see the henchman in roughly the same spatial configuration on the frame: he has not moved. But suddenly a thick black fluid oozes from his mouth and he falls forward--toward the camera and finally out of the frame--revealing Marion in the deep background of the frame with a smoking hot pistol. She has saved Indy by shooting his attacker.

Upon casual observation of this sequence, we would almost certainly be tricked into attaching a diegetic sound (gunfire) to the most obvious onscreen source (henchman's pistol). We ignore the fact that the villain is in point-blank range of his target, that our hero will almost assuredly not take a direct hit. Even after countless permutations, because this gimmicky shot relies on our conditioned facility at decoding the language of cinema, we are almost--if only for a split second--surprised by the outcome. Ironically, then, it is our *sophistication* in the viewing process that almost guarantees our *naivete* in forecasting the instantaneous result of an onscreen action.

Of course, most of us have seen this type of shot thousands of times before; we are taken aback each time. But after the initial shock and subsequent relief have subsided, how does the viewer react to this shot? Given the shot's extraordinarily manipulative nature and its untold frequency in the action film, can the viewer continue to regard the shot with the same quality of interest or affect? For example, might the viewer tend to regard such shots as stale, cliched? This seems a likely possibility. But exactly how the viewer receives this cliché (if he does at all) might vary, as suggested earlier, according to his or her attribution of authorial intent. At least two reactions seem possible:

1. The viewer perceives a cinematic cliché and attributes the inclusion of the cliché to shoddy production, unsophisticated scripting, unimaginative direction, et cetera. The viewer might come to think less of the film as a whole.
2. The viewer perceives a cinematic cliché and attributes its inclusion to playful filmmakers who fully intend this element to resonate with a convention. The viewer begins to recognize the operation of parody and may or may not find it amusing.

Of course there are infinite variables that might affect how the viewer perceives the cliché: apparent production standards, knowledge of a filmmaker's previous work, or perhaps the degree to which a convention becomes hyperbolized in the text.

Clearly, then, this filmic technique (gunshot mismatched to onscreen foe who is actually shot by offscreen third player) as used in this sequence of *Raiders* might affect different viewers differently. But with the preponderance of all the cinematic clichés that abound in the film, the sophisticated viewer is encouraged to become an active participant in a game-with-rules: the text hurls a barrage of parodic elements at the viewer, who attempts to identify them and thus establish himself, very nearly, as

cocreator of the text with the filmmakers. So long as the viewer can identify the parody of convention, he can enjoy with the filmmakers (by proxy: the text) a gentle laugh at that convention, and by extension the particular genre limitations and expectations that have necessitated, or at least popularized, that convention.

In the oft-cited sequence where Indy confronts a scimitar-wielding Arab, a similar form of parody seems to be at work. In a series of shots, a crowd of onlookers clears to reveal a black-draped swordsman who amazes and frightens with his dazzling, blindingly quick sword gymnastics. The eyeline match between Indy and this figure, as well as the clearance of onlookers to form a corridor between the two, suggests the ferocious confrontation that will surely ensue. But, with a look of initial horror and then apparent boredom, Indy lazily draws his pistol and unloads several rounds into the ostentatious swordsman. The crowd of onlookers--and almost assuredly the crowd in every theater--erupts with cheers.

For the audience, the moment is an amusing as well as a victorious one. The amusement derives from irony: the showy swordsman, with all his fancy maneuvers, is shot dead cold by the clever American, who, though not as visually impressive, retains a more expedient implement of battle (and a lesser reverence for the protocols of combat). Indiana Jones here exemplifies the rugged backwoods individualist of the romantic American tradition: "Yankee ingenuity" at its finest (more on this in Chapter IV).

But I would argue that this sequence's humorous effects are rooted in parody just as much as simple irony. Indeed, here the audience is party to a particular kind of

irony that finds its locus in the cinematic tradition. Up nearly to the outcome, every shot in the sequence (the Arab's fearsome prowess in action, Indy's stunned reaction, etc.), as well as the swelling, tension-building musical soundtrack, prepares the viewer for a very particular type of cinematic experience: the man-to-man confrontation with weapons, the showdown. We are conditioned to expect an encounter where the opponent's prowess may put the hero in mortal danger, or at least an encounter where the two players will trade body blows. Instead, in this East-meets-(old) West parody of the gunfight, anticlimax intercedes to undercut our priming for a more engaging and drawn-out encounter.

Even to the mythical viewer encountering the film medium for the first time, the effect of this sequence would be a humorously ironic one. But to the viewer seasoned in all the finer points of watching Westerns and action films in general, the reaction is more complex, as he can identify a parody of the convention of the gunfight. With his fluency in the language of the cinema, this viewer comes to expect a specific type of encounter; when that conventionalized encounter is avoided or, more accurately, revised, the result is parody. The diegetic elements contributing to the richness of the parody, then, might include the combatants' mismatch in destructive range and, ultimately, the anticlimactic outcome of the rising action.

I should perhaps suggest that the requisite degree of sophistication for a viewer's perception of parody in *Raiders* may be rather high. A frequent viewer of films does not necessarily constitute a sharp, astute, or careful viewer of films. As such, an average viewer might experience *Raiders* as a particularly rich and intense



action film--without perceiving its parodic elements. Unfair though it may be, the viewer who has more closely observed, identified, and (at least in his or her memory) catalogued the familiar tropes and conventions of the Hollywood cinema is in a better position to experience the richness of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* on another level--when it takes on humorous tones through its parody of filmic conventions.

All the same, the tradition of parody in Hollywood action films has a long history. Consider for instance the way in which the Sergio Leone Westerns, Howard Hawks's *El Dorado* (1967), or (as Ray suggests [257]) *Cat Ballou* (1965) use parody to revise and deride the sterile conventions of the classical Hollywood Western. As such, *Raiders's* parody of genre conventions and other cinematic cliches includes it within a rich tradition of Hollywood's own self-criticism. But it seems that the freshest, most contemporary way in which the film confronts its heritage is not through playful nods at (and against) convention, but through outright (and at least ostensibly underisive) appropriation of existing film images. In this manner, *Raiders* distinguishes itself from a long history of Hollywood parody by affiliation with the more contemporary artistic trend of appropriation.

### III PASTICHE

In short, then, *Raiders*'s nostalgia recreates an earlier filmgoing experience primarily through its use of recognizable stylistic strategies and character types: for example, the tracing of Indy's journey on a non-diegetic map; the tough, hard-boiled outlaw hero; terse dialogue; cliffhangers; and so on. Importantly, a particularly evocative (i.e., nostalgic) effect may be attained through the incorporation of a style. The text itself need not point directly to other specific texts (although the viewer may have one in mind). The nostalgia film operates by successfully reproducing certain prevalent filmmaking strategies of an earlier era. With those strategies perhaps common to hundreds or thousands of films, the referent is not one specifically alluded-to film, but the viewer's entire catalogue of retained film memories. The effect, then, is like the one Jameson identifies in *Star Wars*: "by reinventing the feel and shape of characteristic art objects of an older period (the serials), [the film] seeks to reawaken a sense of the past associated with those objects" (116).

*Raiders* navigates seemingly contradictory positions with respect to its filmic tradition. It manages to be both reverently evocative in its nostalgia and playfully derisive in its moments of parody. *Raiders*'s parody derives from its playful utilization and reworking of stock situations and filmmaking strategies. Like nostalgia, parody can function only by a deferral to an established set of filmmaking conventions--codes with a complex set of attached meanings. The division between

the two--nostalgia and parody--is often slight or nonexistent, and distinguishing thereof is often difficult. Some moments may even maintain a kind of dialogic quality, a double-voiced character simultaneously nostalgic and parodic (depending on viewer perceptions).

Still further along on the spectrum of intertextuality we might locate pastiche--the appropriation of existing images--a strategy commonly found in and attributed to postmodern art. Like nostalgia and parody, pastiche functions only by one text's (*Raiders'*s) deferral to other texts. But pastiche involves an implication of a specific text (or a shot, plot, etc. from a specific text) wherein the appropriation is almost immediately recognizable and furthermore uncommented-on by the new text. As Jameson defines it:

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something *normal* compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humor: pastiche is to parody what that curious thing, the modern practice of a kind of blank irony, is to what Wayne Booth calls the stable and comic ironies of, say, the 18th century. (114)

Here, Jameson defines pastiche as a strategy functioning more or less the same across various artistic media. However, it seems that for the specific study of film (such as this one), an even more precise definition might include the suggestion that the antecedent art implicated is almost always an image, shot, plot, or situation drawn from an earlier, usually Hollywood, film.

Pastiche becomes then an especially effective technique in film because (1) the cinema has always enjoyed a love affair with its own glorious past (in ways, for instance, that the television industry has not), and (2) the film audience is often well versed in the history of the medium. Although the detection of pastiche, like that of nostalgia and parody, requires an audience's erudition in the vast scope of film history (*Theory* 94-96), the massive popularity of the medium itself (in the 1930s and 1940s as well as today) brings a kind of accessibility to the antecedent texts implicated. (Compare for instance the scrupulously inaccessible intertextuality of a work like T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.)

Hopefully, the filmmaker's appropriation of images is recognizable and duly acknowledged by the audience--in which case the pastiche achieves its greatest possible effectiveness in the text. After all, it seems that one of the most important elements at work in a text is its ability to be received by its audience. If the pasticheur intends no audience recognition of his appropriation, perhaps he is--as is often suggested--nothing more than a thief, a plagiarist. But attribution of authorial intent can be a difficult and sometimes pointless pursuit. The effect of the filmic pastiche will almost always be received in some segment (however large or small) in the viewing public. Indeed, Hollywood filmmakers' use of pastiche seems relatively straightforward--as straightforward as it can be given the nature of the device, that is, to indirectly reference other texts. What, in fact, would be the point of pastiche if it were not relatively straightforward and recognizable? Artistic sloth hardly seems a worthwhile explanation.

Consider, for instance, that most notorious of Hollywood pasticheurs--Brian De Palma--who borrows wholesale from Hollywood masterpieces: plots, shots, situations, settings, and so on. In a film like *Body Double* (1984), De Palma appropriates the essential framework from Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954). To almost anyone who has seen *Rear Window* before (and this would be a populous club), De Palma's appropriation is rather transparent: *Body Double* does not seek to efface its debt to Hitchcock or elude the audience's apprehension of its strategies.

Most pointedly, the hero of De Palma's film (much like James Stewart's photographer in *Rear Window*) is encamped in a building across from an apartment complex, a position which affords him witness to a murder-in-progress. The appropriation involves a borrowing, then, of an entire network of cinematic variables--plot, suspense, spatial configurations, specific shots, and so on. For the audience familiar with the Hitchcock original, the appropriation is unmistakable; the De Palma text, no doubt anticipating audience awareness, necessarily communicates *something* about the nature of representation that elevates its pastiche above thievery, artistic incompetence, and so on--criticisms almost uniformly leveled against De Palma's works by dull-thinking popular reviewers.

In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, pastiche never operates quite so monolithically. The filmmakers retrieve images and situations from the classical period that implicate a staggering array of antecedent texts. But even with our working definition of pastiche--which seems a relatively precise one in theory--the actual identification of artistic appropriation at work in *Raiders* becomes problematic. Certain appropriations

resonate more powerfully than do others. Like any endeavor of analysis, categorizing a particular element as pastiche involves a measure of subjectivity. In *A Theory of Parody*, for example, Linda Hutcheon identifies pastiche (which she somewhat confusingly chooses to call parody) in *Star Wars*.

Other obvious parodies are also operating: C3PO and R2D2 are a mechanized Laurel and Hardy; Solo, Luke and Chewy are the new Three Musketeers. (27)

Hutcheon's first observation seems on target, but does the filmmaker truly appropriate the character dynamic between Solo, Luke, and Chewy from Dumas? "Perhaps," but "perhaps not" seems just as valid a response. Although Hutcheon acknowledges that a "decoder's competence is involved" (27) in identifying the appropriated element, I would suggest an even greater play of subjectivity: the decoder's very tastes, sensibilities, and peculiarities may be involved in his estimation of pastiche at work in a text.

As such, *Raiders* offers fruitful dividends to the viewer seeking to identify appropriated images. Such images, though, seem to vary in the magnitude of their imitation--from (1) the obvious and flagrant reworking of another text's image, to (2) a more faintly resonant moment whose similarity to one in another text is slight enough to be perhaps coincidental, and (3) any gradations in between.

For the sake of comparison, we might consider two possible pastiches in *Raiders*: one from each end of the imitative spectrum. The first is, almost inarguably, a reworking of a shot from *Citizen Kane* (1941). (Welles's film offers more than just a repository for the borrowing of images. As the most influential American feature of

the sound era, it revolutionized the language of world cinema to such a degree that the scope of its influence is only hinted at in contemporary pastiches.) At the close of *Raiders*, that mystical Ark is locked away--nailed shut in a wooden crate and designated "Top Secret." The Ark-bearing crate is then carted away to a location in a warehouse. As the camera cranes out, we see that the warehouse is infinitely large, filled with an inconceivable number of similarly "Top Secret" contraband. The film achieves an ironic closure, then, as the entire locomotion of the plot has derived from Indiana's pursuit of the Ark--which, now possessed, the government condemns to stagnation in a cavernous warehouse.

But it is the shot itself--a crane shot with matte animation in its background--that suggests a similar shot (and the likewise ironic closure it provides) in the conclusion of *Citizen Kane*. Welles and cinematographer Gregg Toland (pioneering the use of many now-standard special effects) likewise use a crane/matte shot to convey the awesome space of the warehouse in Kane's Xanadu. The camera cranes inward--showcasing the vast number of Kane's crated possessions--ultimately slowing down to a stationary close-up of a similarly elusive pursued object: Kane's Rosebud, his childhood memories given shape in a sled. Like *Citizen Kane's*, *Raiders's* conclusion draws much of its ironic intensity from its shot of a vast warehouse where a valued object (the locus around which the entire story revolves) is relegated to anonymity. The cinematic past alluded to is almost immediately apparent; the pastiche is, here, nearly unmistakable.

On the other hand, consider a significantly less obvious appropriation at work in *Raiders*. At the close of the film's first scene, Indiana escapes an army of spear-throwing Hovitos, finding rescue in his pal Jacques's seaplane. As the plane flies away and Indiana begins to relax, he suddenly realizes that he is sharing his seat in the plane with a snake. Horrified, Indy screams: "There's a snake in the plane, Jacques! I hate snakes, Jacques!" For the cineaste, this sequence may (or may not) conjure up images of another hard-boiled hero's semi-comic abhorrence of slimy creatures (in a jungle river setting, no less). In *The African Queen* (1951), Humphrey Bogart's Ornaught manifested his fear of the slimy in a hatred of leeches. After a dip in the river to tow the mired hull of the Queen, Ornaught returns above deck and removes his shirt, only to find himself covered with leeches. Ornaught screams: "Leeches! I hate leeches!"

Certainly, the connection between the two heroes' phobias is a provocative one: the similarity might well be called pastiche, but it might as easily be coincidence. Considering the incredible volume of films produced in Hollywood since the 1930s (approximately 15,000 from 1930-1976 according to Ray's [30] figures), maybe it should not strike us as unusual (and therefore noteworthy) when a particular element in one film bears certain affinities for an element in a preexisting film. I think the appropriate caveat on such uncertain instances of pastiche is, perhaps, to avoid reckless and conclusive attribution of appropriation. Then again, if Indiana Jones's hatred of snakes seems to a particular viewer a pastiche of Ornaught's hatred of leeches, it might as well be for all practical purposes.



The effect, then, is achieved regardless of the intent--which cannot or at any rate should not be accessed. ("Discrepancy between intent and effect" is a point that Robert Ray cogently makes throughout his book and is in fact the title of one chapter in the book.) As Linda Hutcheon notes, "inference of intent" (*Theory* 27) becomes an especially active variable as the viewer attempts to make meaning out of the codes in the allegorical text. Variations in individual viewers' inferences, then, result in varied responses--identifying or not identifying (by ignorance of an antecedent text or by conscious choice) a particular image as derivative. Certainly, though, the greater danger in watching any film involves a tendency to underanalyze signs (i.e., to perceive them uncritically) rather than a tendency to hyperanalyze them.

The great many instances of pastiche in *Raiders*, though, lie somewhere in the spectrum between these two extremes--incorporating and revising existing images in sufficiently clear terms such that the referent becomes apparent to a significant portion of the audience. As a film about movies--viewing them just as much as making them--pastiche then becomes the vehicle for much of the film's entertainment. The text uses pastiche, like it uses parody, to connect itself with a vast tradition in filmmaking. As such, its basic impulse seems celebratory, a homage to a litany of classic (and sometimes less than classic) films.

Accordingly, *Raiders*'s own configuration of signs defers to a host of existing images, and in turn to a rather large collection of other texts. For example, Indy's quest for a gold idol in the first scene of the film brings him into a perilous encounter with a giant rolling boulder. Indy runs from the boulder, looking back over his

shoulder and encroaching upon the foreground of the frame, a shot that visually recalls Cary Grant's flight from a treacherous crop-duster in Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959). Likewise, the film references *Casablanca* in a close-up of Indy just following the scene where Marion has apparently died in a truck's explosion. Indy's upper body--with shoulders hanging dejected over a table, hand holding a drink--dominates the frame in much the same manner that Rick Blaine's does as he hangs over the bar of his Cafe Americaine, bemoaning the day he met his Ilsa. And, once again, when Indy pursues the Nazis and the Ark by mounting a white horse (to an accompanying flourish in the musical score), the text points toward the "thrilling days of yesteryear" offered by Lone Ranger films and television shows (which could themselves be considered reformulations of predating Lone Ranger radio shows and books). The list, seemingly, could go on and on. But instead of continuing with this catalogue, I would like to explore in depth one especially notable pastiche in *Raiders*--which will lead, in turn, to an investigation of the greater significances of pastiche as it functions in the text.

The climax of *Raiders* finds Indiana and Marion tied back-to-back against a post in an island cave, where the Nazis and the archenemy archaeologist Belloq have prepared to finally open the mystical Ark and, presumably, to unleash and somehow access its mysterious powers. The Ark is opened to reveal . . . sand--apparently ordinary sand. But after a brief interlude of anticlimax and nearly frustrated expectations, the Ark comes to life, setting off a succession of random paranormal electrical explosions. Indiana Jones, ever the insightful hero, immediately cautions

Marion: "Don't look at it! Shut your eyes, Marion! Don't look at it, no matter what happens!" Bound from behind to a post, but maintaining vigilantly closed eyes, the two manage to survive the Ark's almost demonic power, while the entire Nazi troop in attendance is effectively disemboweled with the laser-like essence that emerges from the Ark.

After such a consistently adventuresome rising action, the film's climax may indeed have required such a dazzling spectacle to elevate it above the "commonplace," that is, to privilege its position in the text--as is most often required in the classical Hollywood action narrative. More importantly, though, the scene involves a reenactment of one or more existing plots. The climax derives from at least two existing mythic structures: (1) the ancient myth of Pandora's Box--in which Pandora defies godly edict, opening and gazing upon the contents of a box entrusted to her; and (2) the flight from Sodom and Gomorrah--in which Lot's wife defies the edict of God and turns back during their flight in order to gaze on his wrath.

Certainly, the mythic parallels here are valid; they might benefit from closer scrutiny (but that is the subject of another study entirely). If we instead consider the overall aims of *Raiders*, in which pastiche and cinematic tradition provide the very fabric of the filmmaking strategy, we might find a more adjacent text referenced in Robert Aldrich's 1955 film noir thriller *Kiss Me Deadly*.

Paralleling *Raiders*, the plot of *Kiss Me Deadly* revolves around Mike Hammer's pursuit of a mysterious object: "the Great What's-It," a box whose unknown, hopefully valuable contents court the attention of financial opportunists and

thrill-seekers. Before the conclusion of the film, it becomes apparent that this is in fact a Doomsday Box, a small package that contains an atomic bomb of unbelievable power. At the film's climax, Mike Hammer and his faithful secretary are bound back-to-back while a deranged character prepares to confront the awesome mysteries within the box. Mike Hammer cautions his secretary: "Don't open your eyes!" The box is opened, the atomic power within activated, and the beachfront for miles around is vaporized. Happily, and in one of the few glimmers of hope that *Kiss Me Deadly* offers, our heroes are preserved due to their foresight.

*Raiders's* appropriation of *Kiss Me Deadly's* plot marks its most visible and straightforward instance of pastiche. The filmmakers borrow, on a larger scale, the plot mechanism wherein a relentlessly sought-after object is ultimately revealed as an implement of massive destruction. But more specifically, *Raiders* appropriates the dynamic that propels the climax, the hero and heroine's spatial configuration at that climax, and roughly the same dialogue. How then, does this appropriation function in *Raiders*--with the dynamic composing as it does such a significant part of both films?

Seemingly, such a significant allegorical relationship between the two texts could establish a web of connections. By implicating *Kiss Me Deadly* on such a grand scale, *Raiders* brings into its own text a whole network of associations from the other film. Almost like a snake swallowing its live prey, this form of intertextuality allows the present film to envelope the entire diegesis of the earlier film; the *Raiders* text inscribes the other film within itself. Plot, characters, cultural assumptions, and so on from *Kiss Me Deadly* manage to hold a secondary residency within the viewing world-

-if not the story world--offered by *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Accordingly, we might do well to examine, for example, the evolution of Cold War paranoia by looking at the present text, the earlier text, and finally the earlier text subsumed within the present text.

By pastiche, such created networks of association open up the text to an entirely new domain of inquiry. And yet, one major barrier exists to completely ascertaining the nature of the resulting intertext. As in the idiom of pastiche, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* offers no direct commentary on the image and text borrowed from. Actually determining the exact nature of the relationships that exist between the two texts, then, can remain an exercise within the realm of speculation.

## IV

## POLITICS

If we agree, then, that *Raiders* is structured in a network of borrowed images, situations, and plots, it becomes necessary to probe in still greater depth exactly what is the overall significance of pastiche in the text. Pastiche is identified most often as one of the signature traits of postmodern art. Given that *Raiders* certainly uses pastiche, do we then necessarily include it within the realm of postmodern art?

Before investigating the film's status as postmodern, we must first acknowledge the disputed meanings of the term itself and the disputed validity of an attempt to define contemporary trends in art as necessarily distinct and separate from the field of modernist art. But if we must believe in the existence of a distinctive postmodern impulse in contemporary art, we may as well begin by approaching postmodernism as a "movement" that seeks to destabilize our cultural presuppositions, that is, to reveal--through simultaneous subversion of and complicity in hitherto stable systems of representation--the vast and often devastating power that representations wield in shaping the way we understand our social, historical, cultural, and political world. Or, as Hutcheon expresses in *The Politics of Postmodernism*:

[I]t seems reasonable to say that the postmodern's initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as 'natural' (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact 'cultural'; made by us, not given to us. (2)

As Hutcheon and others have suggested, postmodern art is--like all other art--the product of social, historical, and political contingencies. As such, postmodern art is never blank in its politics or "ideology-free." Hutcheon argues, though, that the prevailing impression of postmodernism is that it somehow evades or effaces all political involvement.

In saying this, I realize that I am going against a dominant trend in contemporary criticism that asserts that the postmodern is disqualified from political involvement because of its narcissistic and ironic appropriation of existing images and stories and its seemingly limited accessibility--to those who recognize the sources of parodic appropriation and understand the theory that motivates it. (3)

If we were to casually, uncritically evaluate Hutcheon's example of the "wrong" definition of postmodernism vis-a-vis *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, we might find the film a model for this definition. *Raiders* manifests, after all, each of these aforementioned characteristics: narcissism, parody, appropriation, limited accessibility. And the film, like most produced in Hollywood, may seem to be politically innocuous--as it offers entertainment, not a self-consciously didactic political message. But beneath its patina of thrill-a-minute action, *Raiders* remains a text as politically charged as any other. However, the political affiliations of this film do not seem to exactly match the political affiliations most frequently identified as characteristic of the postmodern.

For Hutcheon and most other commentators, then, postmodernism (and, more specifically, its pastiche) functions to denaturalize what we take for granted as natural, to uncover the sociopolitical ideologies masked in our representations that constitute our culture's "commonly held" ideals. For the sake of comparison, let us turn to a

text that, although operating within a different medium, likewise draws upon the Hollywood tradition for its inspiration. Widely cited (for instance, by Owens [233] in "The Allegorical Impulse") as an exemplar of postmodernism's deconstructive impulse, the artist Cindy Sherman poses and photographs herself in usually conventional or more specifically allusional images drawn from the Hollywood tradition. The result, therefore, is a pseudo--film still in which Sherman appropriates the lexicon of the Hollywood cinema in order to call into question the way in which that representational system shapes cultural images of women. As is characteristic of the postmodern, Sherman's critique of the politics of representation embodies a self-contradiction: critique is possible only through an inscription within the same representational framework that it critiques. Sherman interrogates Hollywood's alternate pedestalizing and trivializing of woman (as sexual object, as career girl, as victim, etc.) even as the indictment requires her to utilize much the same formal strategies.

If Sherman's work roughly corresponds to the overall political terrain engaged by the postmodern, how can we understand *Raiders*'s use of pastiche in the larger contexts of (1) postmodern art overall, and (2) its own political affiliations? It seems a difficult project to align *Raiders* with the same interrogation of representation that we see in model texts of postmodern practice. After all, there is much within the text that would resist its easy assimilation into the domain of postmodernism. Like Sherman's work, *Raiders* is a text that operates through the audience's familiarity with a network of preexisting signs drawn from the Hollywood tradition. But unlike Sherman's work, the manner in which *Raiders* positions itself vis-a-vis that tradition is



not immediately and conclusively recognizable as adversarial. Instead, the film seems absorbed in its cinematic heritage for the sole purpose of producing entertainment. When the film appropriates the North African exoticism of *Casablanca*, it does not on any level seem to suggest a reexamination of the way in which *Casablanca* has enraptured the American consciousness, homogenized our disaffected approaches to romance, and encouraged us to remain in the pattern of ritual vicarious behavior offered by the fantasy world of the cinema.

Even more specifically, *Raiders*'s use of pastiche does not seem to conform to the same doctrine of self-criticism that is usually attributed to the postmodern. In "Re: Post," Hal Foster describes this doctrine at work in the postmodern:

So if postmodernist art is referential, it refers only "to problematize the activity of reference." For example, it may "steal" types and images in an "appropriation" that is seen as critical--both of a culture in which images are commodities and of an aesthetic practice that holds (nostalgically) to an art of originality. (197)

Although *Raiders* shares with postmodernism the utilization of the same formal strategy--pastiche--the theory that informs its usage in the film does not correspond to the one proffered above. For example, any kind of artist who wanted to decry "a culture in which images are commodities" would probably choose to showcase his sensibilities through some channel other than the Hollywood film--a text made possible by the city that proudly professes: images *are* commodities--commodities that offer enormous dividends for their brokers. Indeed, if George Lucas and Steven Spielberg wanted to protest the commercialization of the image, they would probably stop making such elaborately devised and promoted would-be blockbusters.

Furthermore, the impetus behind *Raiders*'s appropriation of images does not seem at all to be a subversion of the notion of originality.

In order to approach an understanding of the politics behind *Raiders*'s pastiche, we might do well to analyze how politics are manifest more specifically in its story and in the way that story is told. What political affiliations does the text reveal more directly? First of all, the film is a typical Hollywood product in its postulation of a Manicheistic society. The tendency toward dualistic visions of society has existed in Hollywood from *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) through the rise of the melodrama, and up to contemporary films such as the manipulative and morally essentializing *Dances With Wolves* (1990).

In keeping with this heritage, *Raiders* depicts a world where phenomena can be taxonomized by a clear-cut binary division between good and evil, harking back to an era of filmmaking when "the good guy" and "the bad guy" were presented even less ambiguously than in the contemporary film. The Nazi army (an easy target) is composed of nameless, faceless minions of evil who blindly perform acts of unspeakable cruelty. They are stock villains, incapable of so much as one mote of psychological complexity. On the opposing side, Indiana Jones represents everything honorable, good, and right. Relative to his Nazi foes, he is a far more likable fellow, though no more possessing of psychological depth. As expected in the Hollywood melodrama, the individual morality of each major character is defined monolithically according to this binary division and does not waver or vary appreciably throughout the course of the film.

And yet, upon closer examination of the text--in which America is positioned as a kind of moral epicenter--the actual activities of our hero Indiana can in fact be construed as politically reprehensible. Not surprisingly, the guise of morality often functions to efface suspicious or odious political sensibilities (consider, for example, fundamentalist Christian perspectives on feminism, homosexuality, and foreigners). Disguising its politics with a veneer of adventure, heroism, patriotism, and righteousness, *Raiders* manages to elude audience apprehension of the political subtext.

So what we might notice, for example, in the first action scene after Indiana Jones arrives in Cairo is his overturning of local tradesmen's baskets in search of Marion. (An unnecessary disruption of native commerce: the film suggests that the fate of the white hero's heroine is more important than the livelihoods of Arabs.) Likewise, Indiana's arrival in town brings a trail of bloodshed; when he slays the black-clad Arab swordsman, the entire crowd erupts with joy, as if the white man's bringing of destruction were such a prized event (and symbolically sanctioning American military intervention in Third World countries: as if American presence is always sought after).

In a similar vein, Indiana Jones's entire existence as an archaeologist is predicated on the assumption that the artifacts and treasures of the Third World belong in the more capable hands of Western civilization's archivists and curators. As such, Indiana's trek to the Ark might best be understood as an imperial mission wherein he might deal appropriately with any native populations (the Hovitos, the Arab

swordsman, etc.) that interfere. Patricia Zimmerman addresses the way in which such individual situations actually add up to a dangerously right-wing political doctrine subtly disseminated throughout the text:

The manufacture of consensus around the film is based on employing references to film history and filmmaking to: decenter the immediate political questions of a film which destroys Third World people at a time when U.S. intervention in Central America is mounting; get a feisty woman entrepreneur out of a bar and into a skirt at a time when the advances of the second wave of feminism are threatened by a resurgence in the ideology of the traditional nuclear family; and mix up control of religious power with politics at a time when the New Right has molded this alliance into a powerful political tool. By effacing its own historical context, this film tries to deny that it in fact advocates the ideology of the New Right. (37)

Accordingly, the task of identifying *Raiders* with the postmodern becomes increasingly difficult--but only if we agree with the definition of the postmodern as an art that forces us to reconsider our (perhaps detrimental) cultural assumptions and the way those assumptions are shaped by our representations. At this point, I think a very worthwhile source to introduce is Hal Foster's preface to *The Anti-Aesthetic*, wherein he bifurcates the domain of the postmodern into two distinct strains:

In cultural politics today, a basic opposition exists between a postmodernism which seeks to deconstruct modernism and resist the status quo and a postmodernism which repudiates the former to celebrate the latter: a postmodernism of resistance and a postmodernism of reaction. . . . The postmodernism of reaction is far better known: though not monolithic, it is singular in its repudiation of modernism. This repudiation, voiced most shrilly perhaps by neoconservatives but echoed everywhere, is strategic: as Habermas cogently argues, the neoconservatives sever the cultural from the social, then blame the practices of the one (modernism) for the ills of the other (modernization). With cause and effect thus confounded, "adversary" culture is denounced even as the economic and political status quo is affirmed--indeed, a new "affirmative" culture is proposed. (xii)

I would disagree with Foster on only one point: if a postmodernism of reaction is indeed "far better known," it is nonetheless far less discussed in academic writings, where postmodernism is often confined to its deconstructive strain. Overall, though, the framework Foster provides is a very useful one: it helps explain how a text like *Raiders*--which utilizes some of the formal strategies of postmodernism--can be understood as postmodern in light of its political affiliations. Accordingly, we might still retain our understanding of *Raiders*'s appropriation as postmodern--without having to force upon it (rather artificially) a status as a deconstructive text. Deconstruction seems distant from the intentions of this film: it seeks moreover to provide entertainment, to feed an audience's hunger for a return to a "simpler" past.

The result, as Foster suggests, is a film that reinforces the status quo by reinventing the myths that the social order requires. In this sense, *Raiders* was an especially timely film, as it appealed to the public's need for nostalgia in an age when even the presidential election was affected by a nationwide revivalism. Haynes Johnson's description of the early presidency of Ronald Reagan demonstrates how both phenomena were responses to the same public sentiments:

Critics might rail against Reagan's simplicities, his evoking of nostalgia for a national past supposedly simpler and more pleasant, for presenting illusions that easy solutions to complicated problems existed. Americans in the eighties felt otherwise. Never mind hard realities and challenges of a far more competitive world. They were in a mood for the resurrection of old myths. (166)

In 1981--whether in the political world or at the movie theater--the American public sought an opportunity to believe again in the illusions of the past.

When we look at *Raiders*, perhaps even Foster's analysis of postmodern politics is limited--as it forces a complex network of political affiliations into a binary system of classification. In consideration of the almost infinite detail that *Raiders* offers in mise-en-scene, scripting, and montage, it seems possible to find evidence that might even support it as a text adversarial to the Hollywood tradition. *Raiders* could be understood to ultimately expose the illusions that riddle the classical Hollywood narrative. Inherent in the film's parody--as it exposes the conventional--is a kind of detached and cynical regard toward the Hollywood that has come before.

Even so, the cynicism suggested by *Raiders* seems slight. And the Hollywood parody has become such an institutionally tolerated (even encouraged) "subversion" that we cannot truly understand it as oppositional. Instead, acknowledging the limitations of Foster's dualistic framework, we might (for better or for worse) file *Raiders of the Lost Ark* within the classification of a postmodernism of reaction. After all, the film does not formulate any recognizable critique of representation in the manner suggested, for example, by Craig Owens in "Representation, Appropriation, and Power":

Photography and film, based as they are on single-point perspective, are *transparent* mediums; their derivation from the Classical system of representation is obvious, yet remains to be investigated critically. Artists who deal with such images work to expose them as instruments of power. Not only do they investigate the ideological messages encoded therein, but, more importantly, the strategies and tactics whereby such images secure their authoritative status in our culture.  
(111)

In short, *Raiders*'s relation to its own cinematic heritage, though qualified by instances of good-natured self-criticism, maintains a basic impulse toward nostalgic, adventurous

entertainment. *Raiders* seeks to cultivate--rather than interrogate--the power that the medium hold over its audience. What emerges then is a film that ultimately reinforces the mythmaking (and therefore, culture-influencing) potential of the film medium and, more specifically, the Hollywood industry.

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## FILMOGRAPHY

<i>Year</i>	<i>Film</i>	<i>Director</i>
1915	<i>Birth of a Nation</i>	D. W. Griffith
1941	<i>Citizen Kane</i>	Orson Welles
1942	<i>Casablanca</i>	Michael Curtiz
1945	<i>Mildred Pierce</i>	Michael Curtiz
1951	<i>The African Queen</i>	John Huston
1954	<i>Johnny Guitar</i>	Nicholas Ray
1954	<i>Rear Window</i>	Alfred Hitchcock
1955	<i>Kiss Me Deadly</i>	Robert Aldrich
1959	<i>Breathless</i>	Jean-Luc Godard
1959	<i>North by Northwest</i>	Alfred Hitchcock
1963	<i>8 1/2</i>	Federico Fellini
1965	<i>Cat Ballou</i>	Elliot Silverstein
1967	<i>El Dorado</i>	Howard Hawks
1973	<i>Day for Night</i>	Francois Truffaut
1973	<i>American Graffiti</i>	George Lucas
1975	<i>Jaws</i>	Steven Spielberg
1977	<i>Close Encounters of the Third Kind</i>	Steven Spielberg
1977	<i>Star Wars</i>	George Lucas
1978	<i>Grease</i>	Randal Keiser
1980	<i>The Empire Strikes Back</i>	Irvin Kirshner
1981	<i>Raiders of the Lost Ark</i>	Steven Spielberg
1984	<i>Body Double</i>	Brian De Palma
1990	<i>Dances With Wolves</i>	Kevin Costner
1992	<i>Wayne's World</i>	Penelope Spheeris