Review: Seeing through the Gendered I: Feminist Film Theory

Reviewed Work(s):

Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction by Teresa de Lauretis
The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s by Mary Ann Doane
The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema by Kaja Silverman
Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film by Christine Gledhill
The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory by Tania Modleski

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REVIEW ESSAY

SEEING THROUGH THE GENDERED I: FEMINIST FILM THEORY

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These five volumes which theorize about the relations among looking, gender, sexuality, and cinema mark a significant moment in the brief, but fervid, history of feminist film criticism. Each book provides new and exciting readings of films, while interrogating some current theories of cinema. Mary Ann Doane and Christine Gledhill both address genre theory, while they develop sustained analyses of one of the most derided of Hollywood’s genres, the woman’s film. Tania Modleski’s study of Alfred Hitchcock provides new insights into one of cinema’s most productive directors; while arguing against auteur theory she presents a superb example of it. Kaja Silverman and Teresa de Lauretis critique but also develop semiotic, psychoanalytic, and decon-
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Structive theories of subjectivity through sustained feminist considerations of theory, power, cinema, and woman.

In *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, for example, de Lauretis points out that "spectatorship is pivotal to... a feminist cinema... [because of its] conscious effort to address the spectator as female..." (p. 119). This concern with addressing a female audience by feminist filmmakers is mirrored in the efforts of feminist critics to theorize about the female spectator. Judith Mayne notes that virtually all the work done by feminist film critics since 1975 has been in response to Laura Mulvey's *Screen* article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In that article, Mulvey traces the "system of looks" constructed by the cinematic apparatus: the triangulated system of camera/projector, pro-filmic/cinematic image, and spectator. All are organized around the woman's body as "site of sight." The female body's "to-be-looked-at-ness" functions problematically within classic narrative cinema, because she is the object of pursuit; yet, simultaneously, she hinders the narrative because she is the object of spectacle. This positioning of the female body as fetishized object of the gaze constructs a male spectator for the female spectacle both within the film and within the audience. In effect, the woman's body is everywhere one looks on the screen; yet it is nowhere to be found among the spectators, whose gaze has been relentlessly constructed as that of masculine voyeur.

Mulvey's work opened two areas for feminist work in film. Within cinematic practice, she (with Peter Wollen) directed a number of avant-garde films that consciously sought to break the voyeuristic visual pleasure structured into mainstream films. At the same time, her *Screen* article helped us to "read" semiotically classic Hollywood narrative "against the grain" in search of the absences and discrepancies that these films sought to cover over. However, if Woman could not be found as spectator or as image, then this double erasure posed problematic political concerns for feminist filmmakers and critics. For B. Ruby Rich, the female spectator became the "ultimate dialectician." In 1978, she argued that "the cinematic codes have structured our absences to such an extent that the only choice allowed to us is to identify either with Marilyn Monroe or the man behind me hitting the back of my seat with his knee." Teresa de Lauretis provides a partial solution in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, calling for a recognition
of the conflict between the nonpresence of woman in discourse and the very real fact that women write, look, and act in practice. In many ways, her collection, *Technologies of Gender*, continues to struggle within this contradiction.

De Lauretis's title refers to Michel Foucault's "technology of sex." She owes much to Foucault's theory that sexuality is deployed through discourses of power, such as the medical, juridical, or religious, which produce sexuality through its repression. As his/story, the story of male sexuality, however, Foucault's technology assumes that sexuality remains ungendered; but according to de Lauretis, the question of gender remains central for feminist theory, because gender is primarily a representation with oppressive political and cultural effects. For instance, cinema, theory, and fiction construct gender through "the meaning effects and self-representations produced in the subject by the sociocultural practices, discourses, and institutions devoted to the production of men and women" (p. 19). Therefore, the technologies of gender are crucial sites of contestation for feminists.

If gender is a representation, then it is essential to inspect its repression. "The Violence of Rhetoric," the title of the second chapter, uses feminist social history (specifically, the work on "family violence" by Linda Gordon and Winnie Breines) to challenge Michel Foucault, Umberto Eco, Jacques Derrida, and Jurij Lotman's narrative theory. De Lauretis describes how the apparent gender neutrality of various discourses—social scientific, philosophical, and critical—commit an act of violence by directing our attention away from women toward a re-presentation of woman. Similarly, both postmodern theories and fictions erase gender, even as they thematize representation and reading, two areas of vital concern to feminist critics. The same is true of the discourses of history and modernism. Only a feminist critique can "account for" gender and thus change the technologies of gender. But how? The answer, harking back to Mulvey, seems overly familiar—that is, through feminist avant-garde cinema.

Using Yvonne Rainer's description of the "evolution" of her own work from female to feminine to feminist, de Lauretis traces the trajectory of women's cinema as a whole. Feminist work in film has tended to bifurcate its forms of address. Some directors, like Mulvey and Rainer, have refused narrative suture to foreground the construction of cinematic images. Much feminist cinema,
however, has rejected these distancing effects for a politically aware affirmation of women's voices and narratives on screen; this tactic is most widely found in documentaries like Connie Field's *Rosie, the Riveter* (1980). Feminist work in film has neither accommodated the multiplicity of differences within and among women; nor has it related subjectivity to sociality by melding the cinematic construction of the spectator to the social relations that produce various audiences. De Lauretis proposes a recognition of the heterogeneity that is the space, the "elsewhere," of feminism, because once the subject is constructed as gendered, other differences begin to proliferate and to undermine the position assumed to be that of the masculine spectator. These changes demand another kind of cinema, which she finds exemplified by Lizzie Borden's *Born in Flames* (1983). Borden's narrative film contains elements of popular, avant-garde, and political films. Refusing aestheticizing devices, it employs strategies that invite a wide range of responses within its audience. The radical potential of gender for feminist theory is not that it reduces all women to identical subjects but that it explodes subjectivity across a series of fields, each differentiated from the other, each multiplicitously developing in dialogue across radically heterogenous spaces. This is the promise of feminist work in film—the work of both film critics and filmmakers (and, I would add, film viewers, particularly from the women's community) for de Lauretis.

Her final essay circles back to earlier theories that are still unresolved. For instance, de Lauretis returns to Silvia Bovenschen's speculations on the "feminine aesthetic." Because questions of gender are fundamentally questions of representation, feminist theory constructs an aesthetic. The technologies of gender produced within the various discourses—film, theory, fiction, history—are subject to re-vision. Feminist work in film, possible only within a dialectic of counterdiscourses—the negativity of theory, the positivity of practice—is one site from which we can begin to see anew.

Mary Ann Doane's sustained analysis of the Hollywood woman's film of the 1940s presents a far darker vision of the female spectator. Her turn to genre proves far less amenable to feminist psychoanalytic theory. *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* focuses on a period, the 1940s and 1950s, and a genre, the "woman's film." Molly Haskell, who provided the first sus-
tained analysis of this genre, found that, on the one hand, its primary thematic gesture is toward the containment of female desire through "sacrifice, affliction, choice, and competition," resulting, by the films' ends, in the female heroine's death or marriage. On the other hand, Haskell pointed to the threat posed to these plots by the luminous presence of the stars' images: "Whatever the endings that were forced on Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, Carole Lombard, Katharine Hepburn, Margaret Sullavan, or Rosalind Russell, the images we retain of them are not those of subjugation or humiliation; rather, we remember their intermediate victories, we retain images of intelligence and personal style and forcefulness." This contradiction has both fascinated and repelled feminist critics, in a manner that evokes the double bind of the films themselves. Doane attempts to unravel this knot through a psychoanalytic reading of the genre's narrative and visual conventions.

Hollywood's consciously orchestrated attempt to target a female audience has implications, Doane argues, for constructing a theory of the female spectator within the cinematic apparatus. If, as Mulvey argued, Hollywood's use of the relay of looks between camera, character, and spectator constructs the gaze as male, then what is different about the address of the woman's film? Apparently, as Doane concludes, not much. Still, because of the contradictory status of the narratives and images which circulate around the female body in this genre, irruptive spaces occur in which to place the female spectator.

One of the most ambitious aspects of her book is Doane's desire to seek a reformulation of the psychoanalytic and economic—reconciling Freud and Marx, subjectivity and sociality—which could break through the insurmountable impasse challenging feminist critical theory. By locating her study during a moment in history, Doane finds fertile sources for making this connection amid the forms of advertising, the relations of cinematic address, and women's entry into the labor force during World War II. Despite a scarcity of goods, during the war years, advertisers floated a steady stream of images of products which were unavailable to consumers. These helped to develop an appetite for consumerism within the mostly female audience to which they were addressed. With the end of the war and the subsequent return of men to their jobs, the cranked-up war economy turned to the production of
these goods and their advertisers turned to women as the primary consumers.

The subtle slippage between the woman as commodity within the realm of film and advertising, and her position as consumer within both these spheres, produces, for Doane, a telling instance of the elision of object and subject which marks the woman's film. It is no accident, she contends, that the woman's film appears at this moment and plays out this doubling response to the female spectator. The elision of subject and object which Doane finds in the woman's film is implied in the dual usage of the term "fetishism." For Marx, fetishism was manifested through commodification; for Freud, it was manifested through the Oedipal scene. Each drama marks the foundation of their respective theories of sociality and sexuality; and each, to some extent, represses the female within its discourse. Still, woman, as site of consumption—as consumer and object to be consumed—suggests that her body lies precisely at the intersection of these two theories. However, Doane goes on to argue that fetishism, seen as a result of male castration fears, is not the proper concept to describe women's relationship to the commodity. For the woman as consumer, Doane argues, the distance between herself and the object blurs, for she is too closely associated with it. This ambiguous relationship between subject and object becomes the model for reading the "poses" of female spectatorship constructed within the woman's film.

Doane, like Haskell, charts four subgenres of the woman's film—the medical discourse film, the maternal melodrama, the love story, and the gothic paranoia film. This taxonomy resembles four of the psychic scenarios marking the construction of femininity within Freud's theories—masochism, hysteria, neurosis, and paranoia. Thus, as Doane notes early in the book, "the tropes of female spectatorship are not empowering" (p. 9), because the space open for constructing the female gaze is limited to an oblique angle which erases the distance between subject and object. As the woman watches a woman being watched, she both sees and becomes the image. By analyzing the construction of female spectatorship within the commodity system of Hollywood cinema, itself a commodity par excellence and a purveyor of the female body as commodity, Doane strives to find a place for history within psychoanalytic film theory. Ultimately, though, the female
spectator's only site appears to be a "non-place" (p. 12).

For example, medical discourse films take away the woman's body as a site of sight, de-eroticizing the body as it becomes a symptomatic text for the male physician to read. The diseased woman often quite literally loses her sight, like Bette Davis's character in *Dark Victory* (1939), who must mimic sight in order to fool her physician-husband before her death. This mimicry, like the pose of femininity, does, however, have subversive potential for woman, according to Doane. Appropriating the work of Luce Irigaray, Doane sees the female body as symptomatic of unfathomable and threatening depth in a character such as that played by Simone Simon in *The Cat People* (1942). A noir version of the medical discourse film, it replaces the detective with a psychiatrist who must plumb the depths of woman as enigma. The rational discourse of the physician seeks to unmask the erotic "animal" within woman's body. In the process, the female body is de-eroticized, de-specularized, and re-contained. *Humoresque* (1946), *Caught* (1949), and *Rebecca* (1940) violently obliterate the woman's look. In *Humoresque*, Joan Crawford's character is so myopic she must put on her spectacles to see the object of her desire, the violinist played by John Gardner. In a move reversing the traditional Hollywood trope of the sexually available woman who removes the lenses that enable sight, her gesture toward sight eroticizes the female gaze but results in disastrous consequences. Similarly, both Joan Fontaine (in *Rebecca*) and Barbara Bel Geddes (in *Caught*) play characters whose husbands have voyeuristic obsessions with the past that practically obliterate them. In case after case, Doane finds female desire is cut off, woman's body is arrested, woman's sight deflected, leaving her no place to look within the woman's film.

Although Doane provides brilliant readings of both the cinematic and psychoanalytic scenarios, her (in)sight seems partial. Doane insists too narrowly upon a heterosexual presumption within the films. Perhaps because Freud himself was incapable of fully grasping female homosexuality, Doane effaces the lesbian subtexts present in many of the films. For instance, despite its recuperative ending, *Mildred Pierce* (1945) plays on the deeply erotic bonding between Veda and Mildred, who appear as visual doubles. Furthermore, the Eve Arden character, whose self-contained sensuality deflects Mildred's problematic relationship to men, provides
Mildred with an intimacy impossible in heterosexual marriage. To be fair, Doane is working with films firmly coded within Hollywood's reworking of psychoanalytic readings of feminine desire. These films hardly affirm lesbianism; women's desire is always punished by disfigurement, death, and/or marriage (or all three). Still, as Doane points out, there are gaps within the films' narrative and visual economies, revealing "leakages" in their ideological framework where subcultural meanings might be discerned. Nevertheless, so completely does she read these psychoanalytically derived films through psychoanalysis, that she never looks "elsewhere."

Still, Doane's attempt to "theorize the female spectator," a project she notes is marked by the impossible positions of "transvestism, masochism, masquerade, double identification," is valuable for feminist theory. Inevitably, her readings of the Hollywood woman's film resemble feminist readings of Freud; they are both simultaneously explicit about and complicit within the "cultural construction of femininity" (p. 20). It is unfair to blame Doane as the bearer of bad news. Hollywood's images are oppressive to women and she refuses any easy route. Still, I am troubled by her inevitable conclusion that our pleasures go unremarked within dominant cinema. Once again, I sense a prescription about what is politically correct pleasure and fantasy. The fantasies Hollywood provides may arouse pleasures that are "suspicious" because of our identification with them, but they may also be "attractive" because of their moments of resistance [see Technologies of Gender, p. 107]. In other words, perhaps women are always "resisting viewers," as Tania Modleski suggests, glossing Judith Fetterley, and as such display a power over cinema. As Doane concludes, the woman's film gives us not femininity but a stylized version of it. Perhaps this style is the very source of our pleasure.

Kaja Silverman's Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema, which takes its title from Guy Rosolato's work on cinematic sound, appears oxymoronic. Mirrors reflect images, register in the realm of the visual, not the auditory. However, Silverman argues persuasively, the oxymoronic may be a fitting state to understand the female spectator (and auditor) of cinema, because both cinematic and psychoanalytic scenarios are enacted through a complex interaction of visual and aural experience and fantasy. From the beginning, cinema was always more than mov-
ing pictures; even silent films needed the accompaniment of a piano, at the least, and occasionally full orchestration to achieve their effects. Silverman argues that film criticism has ignored, effaced, covered up the relations of, and, more significantly, the ruptures between sound and image in cinema by foregrounding visual analysis at the expense of the auditory elements of film. This lack in film theory becomes emblematic of another lack—that undergirding male subjectivity, and its exposure becomes another project of The Acoustic Mirror.

Hollywood's narrative cinema embodies the female voice, encasing woman's utterances within the diegesis of the film by attaching it to the visual sign of the woman's body. This process of folding the voice inside the image works ironically to deny the female subject authority, because the codes of Hollywood privilege the disembodied voice, just as narrative authority resides most firmly in the omniscient third-person narrator. This is most clearly produced in the voice-of-God commentary that often accompanies (and signifies truth within) documentary films. Silverman's thesis hinges on the way the dissociation of the male body and voice in cinema and its corresponding overinvestment in the body of woman serve to mask the precarious male subject of cinema and psychoanalysis.

Furthermore, in a manner resembling cinema, psychoanalysis creates a "fantasy of the maternal voice" that turns on the ambivalent relationship of the child to the "sonorous envelope" produced by the mother's voice (p. 72). This envelope of sound is alternately represented as a soothing bath which engulfs the infant, recreating the imaginary sense of unity, or as a net or cobweb, trapping and (s)mothering the child under its blanket. This dual fantasy is further modified by the child's gender. The girl remains under cover of the maternal voice throughout her incomplete Oedipal crisis. In her prolonged identification with and desire for the mother, the daughter achieves femininity, which, according to Silverman's daring reversal of Freud, provides the model for subjectivity. Arguing for the importance of this negative Oedipal process and the primacy of symbolic castration to the formation of gendered subjectivity, Silverman finds a place for female homosexual desires unrecognized in the psychoanalytic and cinematic scenes analyzed by Doane. Thus, the negative Oedipal crisis is crucial if feminist theory is to resist an essentialist notion of
femininity. Within the psychic economy of loss, identification, and desire, the trajectory of the female subject in and out of the negative Oedipal crisis "makes it possible to speak for the first time about a genuinely oppositional desire—to speak about a desire which challenges dominance from within representation and meaning, rather than from the place of a mutely resistant biology or sexual 'essence'" (p. 124). The negative Oedipal crisis suggests that the construction of female subjectivity involves an active, productive identification with the mother, rather than the passive, idealized vision of the pre-Oedipal unity of mother and child theorized in various ways by Nancy Chodorow, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray.

These two "places" noted by Silverman are identified with the theories of Kristeva and Irigaray, both of whom have produced different and important discourses of the maternal. In contrast to Silverman's theory of the negative Oedipal crisis, both Kristeva and Irigaray tend to re-embbody the maternal voice. Kristeva's *chora* consigns the maternal to the purely biological and the semiotic to a space outside language. Irigaray's "two lips which speak" so thoroughly connects feminine discourse with morphological differences that femininity inheres in the body and again resembles the contained voice of woman within patriarchal order. Silverman's theory of subject formation frees feminine discourse from the tyranny of its biological difference and replaces anatomy within the symbolic differences of language. Thus, sexual difference is a memory reinscribed onto the body of woman of an earlier and more severe differentiation, that of subject and object. Because the memory is always a reading backwards through a language which constructs the symbolic order as a phallic order, the formation of sexual difference can hardly be conceived of otherwise—except through feminist theory and feminist cinema.

Not surprisingly, where Silverman finds alternatives to the cinematic and psychoanalytic embodiments of the woman's voice is within contemporary women's avant-garde films. In the films of Yvonne Rainer, Chantal Akerman, Bette Gordon, Laura Mulvey, and others, women can speak outside of the body. These films of deconstructive or psychoanalytic feminist "sophistication" refuse the display of body and the embodiment of voice which are the twin regimes superintending the female subject within dominant
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When feminist filmmakers disengage image and voice, they break the tyranny of synchronization, radically re-constructing cinematic address. Silverman notes that "the female voice has enormous conceptual and discursive range once it is freed from its claustral confinement within the female body. It is capable of talking about terrorism, anger, melancholia, homosexual as well as heterosexual desire, ancient Mexican divinities, soap operas, Emma Goldman, the circulation of money and even cinema itself" (p. 186).

But is this such a revelation? By focusing on the "acoustic mirror" has Silverman heard anything new? Doesn't she too privilege the same small group of women filmmakers, those with "sophistication"? I long for a discussion of other contemporary women filmmakers—Chick Strand, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Barbara Hammer, Gunvor Nelson—or a reinterpretation of such legendary figures as Maya Deren, Germaine Dulac, or Marie Mencken. All these women, whether for technological or aesthetic reasons, refuse to employ synchronized sound in their films. Sometimes it appears that Silverman has chosen films solely to justify her theoretical contentions, putting the examples to the service of a theory that repeatedly finds impaired male subjectivity modeled on femininity. For example, she avoids the whole genre of "unsophisticated" feminist documentary films such as Union Maids (1974) which rely on the female talking head to reconstruct a female voice within a female body through direct address to a female audience. What about the many musical numbers in which the embodied female voice subverts its containment by calling excessive attention to itself, such as the extreme closeup of Ginger Rogers's lips singing "We're in the Money" in pig latin in Golddiggers of 1933, or Marilyn Monroe singing about diamonds as "rocks [that] don't lose their shape" as she points to her breasts in Gentlemen Prefer Blondes (1953), or Bette Midler's postmodern spoof of the male gaze and the embodied female voice, "Nice Legs and Great Big Knockers" in Art or Bust (1986)?

I have focused on Silverman's rereadings of theory, but her rereadings of a number of films, particularly Mulvey and Wollen's Riddles of the Sphinx (1976), Francis Ford Coppola's The Conversation (1974), and Robert Altman's Three Women (1977), are equally daring. Silverman's discussion of Liliana Cavani's films, which have eluded feminist film critics because of their obsessions with
male characters, is a challenging venture into auteur theory. Cavani's films revolve around sexual confusion, scenic reenactments and repetitions, and marginality, which, Silverman contends, display her particular "fantasmatic" obsession: divestiture of the phallus enacted through castration (p. 216). It is important for feminists that some auteurs speak about and to femininity through their "fantasmatics." Of Cavani, Silverman asks, "What is the exchange that occurs between Cavani's author 'outside' the text and those male characters who represent her within the text if not a restaging of that fantasmatic drama [Freud's "A Child Is Being Beaten"] whereby a girl turns herself into a group of boys only in order to position them as female subjects, i.e., to castrate them?" (p. 232).

In a sense, this has been Silverman's fantasmatic as well; on the last page, she 'admits' that she has "pursued the image of a lacking or impaired male subjectivity across the breadth of the book," in the hope of displacing Freud's anatomical castration with the "crucial importance of symbolic castration, effected through separation from the mother and entry into a linguistic order which anticipates and exceeds the subject" (p. 234). The Acoustic Mirror brackets film and questions of female spectatorship within this larger concern, and as such has wider political implications. Although Silverman resists essentializing femininity, ironically, her primary focus on lack (and the gaps it produces in film and theory) produces a totalizing picture, blanketing the gaps needed for feminist transformation, even as she points out that when women make films outside of the dominant cinema, diverse and new discourses can emerge. Perhaps, too, our fantasies can lie outside of the three she mentions outlined by Freud—"castration, the primal scene, seduction and [the fourth added by her] of being beaten" (p. 216). Silverman insists that the possibilities are richer than they appear once the variations depending upon the positive or negative Oedipal crisis of masculinity and femininity are factored in. Still, I feel that these scenarios, much like Doane's readings of the woman's films, once again close down the range of our desires within conventionalized narratives.

In Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film, an excellent companion to The Desire to Desire, Christine Gledhill brings together fifteen years of feminist film criticism on melodrama. Her introduction places the articles his-
historically and theoretically within the development of feminist film theory. In addition, she historicizes melodrama by retracing its theatrical and fictional forms as they emerged in France and England and, later, America. Although many of the articles rely on psychoanalytic criticism, this volume aims to develop a historical specificity for the "melodramatic imagination," in "white Anglo-Saxon cinema, particularly as it was produced in Hollywood" (p. 1).

The first section reprints three germinal articles on melodrama and film. Simultaneously concerned with bourgeois social relations and personal morality, the family romance of the melodrama becomes an ideal site to play a duet of Freud and Marx, according to Thomas Elsaesser in "Tales of Sound and Fury." Geoffrey Nowell-Smith continues this dual exploration through his consideration of "Minelli and Melodrama." Like Elsaesser, he argues for the radical potential of melodramatic excess to rupture the space of bourgeois and patriarchal relations encompassing the family plot (as Hitchcock called it) and within narrative cinema generally. This celebration of the genre's distancing is called into question by Mulvey, who provides a feminist critique of these pioneering articles in "Notes on Sirk and Melodrama." Outlining the importance of address and point of view to the genre, she observes that in this instance both have tried to construct a female viewer. This female spectator, however, sees differently from the male; so, for instance, the excess of All That Heaven Allows (1956) produces different meanings for women. The combination of female sexual expression and maternal repression in a melodramatic film creates contradictions for the female spectator that may not yield distance through excess but instead may seem all too familiar in their excess.

Gledhill arranges the articles to form a continuous dialogue, circling the plot of melodrama, as the films circle the story of woman's sexuality and its repression within the family. As Mulvey has answered Elsaesser and Nowell-Smith, so, later in the volume, Maria La Place corrects what she sees as a flaw in all their arguments. Where each of them attributes the origins of Hollywood melodrama to British and continental sources, she claims the American genre of "woman's fiction" dating back to the nineteenth century as another source of the woman's film. La Place's historical reading of Now, Voyager (1946) is one of the best articles in this superb collection. By examining the promotional material
accompanying the release of *Now, Voyager*, La Place choreographs a reading of the film within a triple context: the diversion of women's struggles for autonomy into consumerism that began in the 1920s and continues to the present; the icon of Bette Davis, a star whose personal life was portrayed as a palimpsest for the film's heroine, Charlotte Vale; and the continued significance of an autonomous women's culture of fiction into the twentieth century in the popular novels of Fanny Hurst, Edna Ferber, and Olive Higgins Prouty (the author of *Now, Voyager*). Where E. Ann Kaplan, in "Mothering, Feminism, and Representation," points out that male directors dominated the genre, precluding a feminine (or feminist) perspective, La Place reminds us that many of the woman's films were based on best-selling contemporary novels that had been written by and marketed for women. La Place finds that during the 1930s, social and sexual pressures from feminist and class antagonisms erupted into popular culture; *Now, Voyager* thematizes resistance to the containment of female sexuality and desire for autonomy as much as it celebrates female renunciation.

Many of the articles analyze the bizarre attraction Hollywood has displayed for Freudian themes. In Freud's version of the family romance, the (male) child fantasizes that he is a foundling with two different parents of a higher class than his real parents. This fantasy is replaced by another in which he fantasizes that he is the illegitimate son of an upper-class father. These scenarios imply a relationship between sexuality and class within the family plot; however, Freud never elaborated the class element of the fantasy. The repression of the class tensions underlying Freud's "plot" meshed with American ideology; in many ways Americans have been more comfortable addressing sexual repression than class tensions, so the family melodrama emerged as a vehicle in which class differentials were transformed through sexual differences, and thus depoliticized. Furthermore, in her analysis of *Broken Blossoms* (1919), Julia LeSage discusses racism as another repressed social structure encoded within the family romance. As various articles historicize the psychoanalytic themes of the films and their subsequent positioning of the female spectator, they assert the importance of viewing melodrama against a social terrain, because the ideological processes of the films are related to the historical moments of their production. For instance, LeSage points to early-twentieth-century fears of the "yellow peril" and
miscegenation that circulated within the family plot in Griffith's case.

By the time one has finished this volume, Gledhill's collection feels as claustrophobic as the domestic spaces portrayed in the films. The relentless return to the scene of the family plot and its endlessly repeating saga of madness, marriage, and motherhood begins to close in on the reader. As I read this collection one rainy Saturday afternoon interrupted by squabbling children, I experienced the cramped horror of my bourgeois family: a home cluttered with objects, its members forever repressing desire yet immersed in emotion.

Tania Modleski's *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory*, a lively, well-written reading of a number of Alfred Hitchcock's most important films, also looks at the construction of woman's home and heart through an analysis of the relationship of marriage to murder in Hitchcock's oeuvre. She finds another, more subversive space for the female spectator to challenge gender ideology, when masculinity and its films display the hysterical symptoms associated with the woman's film. Choosing films from each period of Hitchcock's career, Modleski argues against both the (mostly male) critics who adulate Hitchcock as a "master" and the (mostly female) critics who condemn Hitchcock as irredeemably sexist. On the one hand, those auteur critics who stress Hitchcock's genius and his uncanny ability to focus on the "important" themes, like the conflict between a man's sense of "love and duty" (as Hitchcock himself described his first feature-length sound film, *Blackmail* [1929]), repress the fact that most of Hitchcock's victims are women and that their murders or rapes function as a kind of punishment for female independence. On the other hand, she castigates feminist critics who have unproblematically accused Hitchcock of extreme gynophobia, without considering the ways the films also construct femininity as a rebellious position, fueled by anger against the patriarchy. His films embody a paralyzing contradiction for woman, who is both constructed by male desire as other and despised for her difference.

Modleski challenges much of the current thinking on the construction of the female spectator. She argues that, because of the contradiction of the woman within Hitchcock's films, the position of the male spectator is loaded with its own contradictions. He is at
one and the same time subject and object of the gaze, identifying
with woman as victim and with woman as angry subversive. Be-
cause woman is neither solely masochist nor transvestite, the mas-
querade she wears, like the costume donned by the second Mrs.
de Winter in Rebecca, is a re-presentation of an assumed presenta-
tion which has been forced upon her as much by her identification
with the (m)other as with her desire to please the father. Thus,
Modleski argues that woman's position within the patriarchy
becomes extremely complex; at times, she is the outsider, at
others, she colludes with masculine power over femininity. The
"strong fascination and identification with femininity" in Hitch-
cock's films reveal the "patriarchal unconscious" and subvert the
"claims to mastery and authority not only of the male characters
but of the director himself" and ultimately of the spectator—both
male and female—making these crucial films for feminist revision
(pp. 3, 4).

Modleski provides convincing new readings of many of Hitch-
cock's most frequently evaluated films. In addition, she introduces
her readers to some of Hitchcock's earlier and lesser-known films,
such as Blackmail, which depict virtually all the obsessions Hitch-
cock revealed in his subsequent work. Moreover, Modleski takes
on the various critics of this and other films for failing to unders-
tand the significance of rape as a violent crime against women. In
critical discussions of Blackmail, quite a few male critics (and the
filmmaker himself, at one point) have condemned Alice White,
the protagonist, for overreacting to what quite clearly a female au-
dience sees as a rape. They have called it an "apparent" rape
(Claude Chabrol and Eric Rohmer), or "violent love" (Donald
Spoto), or a "forceable embrace" (Raymond Durgnat) when Alice
stabs the artist-attacker with a bread knife. In patriarchal culture,
a woman's point of view is bound to be discredited, and this oc-
curs at least twice in the case of Blackmail—once within the film,
as Alice's lover, a police detective, refuses to allow her to speak
once he has determined that he can frame the blackmailer who
holds the evidence of Alice's guilt, and then again by the male
critics who judge Alice guilty by reinterpreting self-defense as
murder. In challenging the masculine adulation of Hitchcock,
Modleski points to the provocative readings of Freud by Eve
Kosofsky Sedgewick on the construction of masculine heterosex-
uality through male identification with the father. But Hitchcock
Paula Rabinowitz

may also be our father, a father of the feminist critique of the patriarchal unconscious, and so Modleski takes much feminist criticism of Hitchcock to task for its failure to recognize the ambivalences working within his films’ depictions of femininity. Modleski dares us to confront the anger of female spectatorship as a complex, sometimes overwhelming, sometimes powerful position for action.

Modleski’s work raises the question of why (in the words of one of Hitchcock’s foremost critics, Robin Wood) “save” Hitchcock for feminists? Her study in the “abjection,” to use Kristeva’s term as Modleski does, developed in Hitchcock’s films provides us with a theory for understanding the ways our pleasures are already constructed out of “the dialectic of identification and dread” (p. 13). In a controversial move, Modleski questions why Marxist-psychoanalytic feminist critics have come to value avant-garde cinema. A connection between identification and identity within narrative cinema may signify differently for the female spectator. Modleski tantalizes us with this theoretical question; her answer comes in the form of a practical criticism of the films themselves.

Feminism emerged within a patriarchal culture that oppresses women; Modleski insists that we, as feminist critics, remember this contradiction. She is interested in understanding the ways we are complicit in the construction of a culture which is damaging us and in the ways we can maintain a strong political commitment to a feminist transformation of that culture. By understanding the shifting series of relations we experience to our culture, we can begin to see[k] changes. We can inherit the mantle of “Hitchcock’s daughters,” becoming those who turn the mirror as women on woman and develop a different image.

We see cinema differently as women; we read theory differently as feminists. Perhaps, as Laura Mulvey suggests in her autocritique, “Changes: Thoughts on Myth, Narrative, and Historical Experience,” the moment for a “negative aesthetic” founded on a binary model of psychoanalysis, in which the pre-Oedipal mother stands in opposition to the symbolic father, is past. Placing her own films and essays in a historical context, Mulvey argues that “the psychoanalytic has to try to take on the political and the historical problems raised by change.” The various readings of female spectatorship provided by these five books insist that femininity remains a fluid state—multiple, contradictory, poised
between identity and difference. To varying degrees they attempt to place femininity into a changing historical moment, a moment marked at present by heterogeneity. This celebration of multiplicity and difference which marks current feminist discourse owes its origins to two sources—French theorists who wrested the concept from Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida; and lesbian, black, and other minority political challenges within American feminism. Attending to the heterogeneous spectators of film requires reworking the relationships between the intrapsychic process of subjectivity and the social formations of sex, gender, class, and race. But can we organize around images, when they appear differently to each of us? The knot tying together female spectatorship is not easily unraveled without decolonizing theory, sending it back into local movie theaters as well as into new cinematic forms. Feminist theorizing about cinema means seeing through the gendered I, rescripting the narratives and images of femininity to include the multiplicity of women's differing visions as we challenge the (psychoanalytic) assumptions of subjectivity those narratives and images encode. Clearly, as these five volumes demonstrate, psychoanalytic theory has been extremely productive for feminist work in film. Just as clear, I believe, is how much more work we need in order to historicize our differing understandings of gender and representation.

NOTES

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1. Space does not permit me to discuss Charlotte Brunsdon, Films for Women (London: British Film Institute, 1986). Also, while this article was in press, two new collections were published: Constance Penley, ed., Feminist Film Theory (New York: Methuen, 1988); and Laura Mulvey, Visual and Other Pleasures (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); as well as Constance Penley, The Future of an Illusion: Film, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).