

Feminisms

The Key Debates

Mutations and Appropriations
in European Film Studies

Series Editors

Ian Christie, Dominique Chateau, Annie van den Oever

Feminisms

Diversity, Difference, and Multiplicity
in Contemporary Film Cultures

Edited by

Laura Mulvey and
Anna Backman Rogers

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Editorial

The original aim of the *Key Debates* series was to revisit the concepts and indeed controversies that have shaped the field of film studies. Our intention was two-fold: to clarify what was initially at stake in the founding texts and also to clarify lines of transmission and re-interpretation in what remains a hybrid field of study, which has “appropriated” and thus modified much of what it uses. The four volumes published to date take different approaches to this central mission, reviewing how early film theory adopted and developed literary theories of “strangeness” (ostrannennie); shifting concepts of subjectivity engendered by film; the variety of ways that film’s audiences have been conceived; and the persistence of debate around film as a technology.

From the outset, we were conscious of another debate that played a vital part in shaping both modern feminist scholarship and film theory, which owed much to Laura Mulvey’s seminal essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” published in *Screen* 16/3 in 1975. It therefore seems highly appropriate that this second phase of the *Key Debates* series should start with a volume that takes stock of how nearly half a century of debate has surrounded and continues to link concepts of feminism and film theory. We are even more delighted that this is co-edited by Laura Mulvey, as one of the group who originally conceived the series, in dialogue with Anna Backman Rogers.

When we launched this book series in 2010, after a phase of preparation which began in 2006, we felt that as scholarship in the history of film theory developed, there was a need to revisit many long-standing assumptions and particularly so in light of the changes in media devices and viewing practices. Further volumes are now in preparation, as we recognize that pervasive digital media have not made film, or the concepts and debates that it gives rise to, redundant. On the contrary, there seems more need than ever to clarify and refocus fundamental issues such as screen experience and narrativity in the light of our contemporary media environment.

London / Paris / Amsterdam / Groningen

Ian Christie, Dominique Chateau, Annie van den Oever

Preface

We are living in exciting but highly challenging and troubling times. 2014 was the year in which *Time* magazine included the word “feminism” in a poll of irritating words readers might like to have banned; artist Allen Jones was given a major retrospective at the Royal Academy; Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott dismissed a campaign against gendered children’s toys as egregious “political correctness”;¹ Zoe Quinn and Anita Sarkeesian had their lives threatened and were forced out of their homes during the Gamergate scandal; students at Columbia University carried a mattress around campus in a show of support for victims of rape and sexual violence who were being dismissed and ignored; David Fincher’s *GONE GIRL* was released to critical acclaim and feminist opprobrium over its use of rape as a mere narrative trope; comparatively scant attention was given by the media to sexual crimes perpetrated against women in areas of the Middle East and Iraq controlled by ISIS; the Hollaback video went viral but was met with backlash; actresses Shailene Woodley and Salma Hayek publicly rejected the word feminist and the “Women Against Feminism” group was formed; the apologist hashtag “#NOTALLMEN” was created in response to the mass killing spree of 22 year-old Elliot Rodger (a follower of the Men’s Rights movement) in Isla Vista, California; and Beyoncé took to the stage for a seventeen-minute set at the MTV Video Music Awards, which she performed in front of the word Feminist (causing bell hooks to denounce her as “an anti-feminist, that is, a terrorist” and Roxane Gay to defend her as “incredibly empowered. She is sexual, yes – but on her own terms”).²

And yet it was also the year in which Malala Yousafzai received the Nobel Peace Prize; Norway put in place legislation to ensure that fifty percent of every executive board is female – and Germany, Iceland, Finland, Spain, France, and the Netherlands decided to follow suit; a report backed by UN Women on gender in international cinema was published; the Swedish Feminist Initiative party gained more traction; Rebecca Solnit, who coined the term “mansplaining,” published her book *Men Explain Things to Me*;³ members of the band Pussy Riot were filmed in conversation with feminist scholars Rosi Braidotti and Judith Butler; physicist Fabiola Gianotti was appointed the Director General of the CERN particle physics laboratory; the pro-choice film about abortion *OBVIOUS CHILD* was named independent film of the year and awarded best directorial debut by the National Board of Review; the launch of UN Women’s HeForShe campaign gained public attention due to a rousing speech given by the twenty-four-year-old actress

Emma Watson; film director Jane Campion was head of the jury at the Cannes Film Festival; the African Women in Cinema blog was created as a symbol of unity between African female filmmakers; actor Samantha Morton declared solidarity with survivors of abuse across the UK in the wake of Operation Yewtree and the revelation of long-standing sexual abuse crimes by prominent public figures; and the end of 2014 also saw the publication of Jacqueline Rose's *Women in Dark Times*,⁴ which calls for a radical and newly engaged form of feminism.

When we started planning the contents of this book, we decided to produce a collection of essays that spoke to the manifold ways in which feminism is made manifest as both theory and practice in the field of film. In reflecting on progress or (the lack thereof) since the second wave of feminism, on current issues, and on what the future may hold, we realized that we would have to draw upon a diverse range of scholars for whom the term feminism might have different meanings. This book speaks to that difference and plurality of perspective and rejects a reductive form or definition of feminism. To reflect this, we have commissioned essays that address historical debate as well as contemporary trends, that draw upon new and emerging theoretical models and, in some cases, examine controversial debates such as pornography. Our aim, therefore, is not to limit the scope of feminism but to illuminate the number of fruitful ways in which, as both film theory and praxis, it has informed the recent past and continues to be a vital framework for viewing contemporary media phenomena. In choosing the title *Feminisms*, our aim is to acknowledge the sheer scope of feminism as a philosophy and as a form of activism that works in multiple and complex ways within modes of representation and expression. As such, feminisms may be united in an aim to end patriarchy, but as a movement it encompasses manifold ways and means of achieving this end. This book aims to contribute to the feminist conversation by foregrounding notions of diversity, difference, and multiplicity while engaging with a historical context.

About the Book

Part one focuses on new perspectives offered on the female as narrative agent and body within television and film. Janet McCabe investigates the ways in which Nordic noir has recuperated and refigured the female protagonist as an agent within a patriarchal society and distinctly male genre. Through the tropes of personal and national identity, she explains how the female agent obscures and challenges borders (both geographical and social) while revealing the inherent complexities of doing so within a patriarchal framework.

Anna Backman Roger's essay on Lena Dunham's *GIRLS* examines the extent to which this popular series can be read as a critique of postfeminism; she argues that Dunham's narrative centers on the physical and mental symptoms effected from striving for an impossible image of success in the form of "the can-do girl."

Resolution can only be sought by renouncing this highly specific image of happiness and the bonds that seek to sustain it through what Lauren Berlant has termed a relationship of “cruel optimism.”⁵ It is her contention that *GIRLS* implicitly calls for this renunciation of postfeminist values.

William Brown’s essay on the politics of the gaze as figured through images of Angelina Jolie draws on gender and cognitivist theory to argue for a more expansive definition of female beauty. Brown looks to both the past and the future in asking what has changed in terms of the production, circulation, and reception of images of women since the publication of Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” in 1975. This is especially pertinent in an age when the female body is ever more dematerialized and technologized. What does it mean to engage with the female body as a form of cyborg?

Lucy Bolton focuses on the star personages of Judi Dench and Kate Winslet as brought to bear on the legacy of British writer and scholar Iris Murdoch in Richard Eyre’s film *IRIS*. Bolton approaches the notion of stardom as a narrative trope that is employed to shore up the viewer’s empathy towards images of the aging and ill female body and mind. Bolton makes clear the multivalent ways in which Murdoch’s work and her (notoriously private) personality have been mediated and reworked through new media and performance. As such, Bolton speaks to the politics of how female identity is constructed on screen and the multiple ways in which this image can be interpreted through the process of fictionalization of biographical facts.

Part two focuses on theoretical developments within contemporary contexts. Ingrid Ryberg’s work to date has analyzed the phenomenon of feminist pornography as a mode of address. She draws especially on the work of Teresa de Lauretis and various proponents of queer theory in order to delineate the notion of a “safe space” for spectatorship and to call for an expanded representation of bodies and bodily affect. Her sociological and practical work in the field provides an empirical basis for a new kind of feminist cinema. Here, she provides an enlightening survey of her work in the field.

Sophie Mayer’s essay mines a wide array of work that has been done on queer theory. Mayer takes in a variety of perspectives and oeuvres to demonstrate how the lesbian archive, in particular, is made “joyously visible” as an affective and disruptive counter politics. Through the highly original concepts of *auteure* poetics and apparitionality, Mayer argues that queer cinema always insists, subverts, and underscores hegemonic cultures.

Anu Koivunen’s essay on the turn to affect in theory provides a substantial overview of this exciting development within feminist film theory. Taking the work of Vivian Sobchack on Jane Campion’s *THE PIANO* as her starting point, Koivunen outlines the ways in which embodied and personal responses to visual culture have become an increasingly vital way of approaching difference and multiplicity both within modes of representation and spectatorship.

Geetha Ramanathan's essay answers to and complements the aforementioned essays in her analysis of feminist modernity in black women's narrative films as evinced in their use of sound. Ramanathan demonstrates how the much neglected role of sound can be used as a subversive tool. Sound, she argues, can be used as a strategic and deconstructive force for opening up subject positions and helping to question dominant assumptions that have taken hold, especially in Anglo/American film theory. Her work provides a vital interjection, via recuperation of the aural, into the conversation about how female subjectivity is constructed on screen.

Part three on history and practice addresses experimental and activist perspectives and developments. Jenny Chamarette's essay on new experimentalism in the films of Shirin Neshat and Gillian Wearing, which draws upon the work of Audre Lorde and Marie-José Mondzain, constitutes a nomadic approach to mapping difference through performance. By taking two disparate artists, Chamarette creates a dialogue by which ethical, political, and creative concerns are spoken through multiplicity and plurality over unity and universality. In arguing for the importance of difference, Chamarette's concerns are ultimately ethical: for this difference is also the generating force for creative production that does not homogenize or silence.

Leshu Torchin's essay on activism in the light of the second wave of feminism offers an exciting and vibrant overview of how technology is being employed to create collectives and collective agency. Her analysis is a reminder that the histories of feminist film theory, film-making, and activism have been deeply imbricated since the 1970s and cannot be studied in isolation. In a landscape in which a deeply depressing and reactive anti-feminist backlash has taken place, Torchin makes the case for women coming together through a variety of media and answering back to, or questioning, power structures that still seek to subjugate women and hold in place hegemonic and outdated patriarchal ideals.

Veronica Pravadelli's contribution centers on developments in US women's indie filmmaking. In looking at the concerns that have unified women's filmmaking within this dominant landscape, Pravadelli makes clear that collectivity has superseded the notion of authorship; even if expressed through diverse aesthetic strategies, themes of cultural and political identity have loomed large in feminist filmmaking. By mapping what has changed since the early nineties, she argues that women filmmakers are adapting and recuperating the "rules" of dominant cinematic discourse for their own purposes to thrilling effect.

Part four centers on two feminist film journals that have survived from the groundbreaking days of the 1970s to the present. Annette Brauerhoch offers an incisive analysis of the history and achievements, since 1974, of *Frauen und Film* – a publication that has systematically sought to deconstruct hegemonic images of the female body and identity. Brauerhoch argues convincingly for its importance as both a historical and political document for the feminist movement. The ac-

companying essay by the *Camera Obscura* collective (Amelie Hastie, Lynne Joyrich, Patricia White, and Sharon Willis) covers the journal's origins, its collective editorial policy, and how its key political preoccupations have altered according to changes in media as well as with the emergence of new ideological issues and debates. Both these essays provide an insightful overview of the innovative writing these journals have produced and how they continue to be an all-important benchmark for debate and development in the field of feminist film studies.

Part five is comprised of two dialogues. Laura Mulvey and Martine Beugnet discuss the recent emergence of a “transgressive cinema” in France and the relevance of its women directors and its focus on the body, corporeality, and the senses to feminist film theory. Beugnet places this cinema within the context of French experimental film history and also demonstrates the way that affect theory and “haptic visuality” illuminate its characteristic style. In its form, this dialogue purposefully opens up the discussion to current trends and concerns. Miranda July spoke with Anna Backman Rogers about her most recent film *THE FUTURE* expressly in relation to how the unbearable and unspeakable can be imaged. This occasioned a discussion about borders and the ways in which feminist filmmakers are increasingly addressing technology as a tool that unites and facilitates creativity and connectivity but also isolates and fragments human attempts at communication. She characterizes her film as a nightmarish vision of the world in which creativity is abandoned in favor of stability and normality. As such, she questions, in her work generally, what it means to lead a good life and the relation between self and other.

Laura Mulvey and Anna Backman Rogers, December 2014

Acknowledgments

We are exceptionally grateful to Amsterdam University Press for offering us this opportunity to readdress these historical debates and situate them within a contemporary context. It is our hope that this collection of essays will help to forge new pathways in feminist thought, analysis, and activism. In working on this book, we have come to realize how many positive and truly exciting developments are taking place right now in the feminist film community, but also, for our work to continue to thrive, we must be open to the diversity of thought and practice that this term encompasses.

We are indebted especially to Viola ten Hoorn whose ceaseless efforts and professionalism has made the process of piecing the essays together so much easier for both of us. We also express immense gratitude to Jeroen Sondervan for his support and enthusiasm for our project and his accommodation of our working process. We also thank heartily the editorial board of the *Key Debates* series, in particular Annie van den Oever and Ian Christie who have offered invaluable help and advice to us both.

Two essays in this book are reprinted with the kind permission of *Camera Obscura* and *Film Quarterly*, and we are very grateful for their enthusiastic cooperation with the project: these essays have added a crucial component to the book.

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Laura Mulvey and Anna Backman Rogers
London and Gothenburg, December 2014.



Introduction: 1970s Feminist Film Theory and the Obsolescent Object

Laura Mulvey

Working on this book with Anna has for me been an illuminating and exciting experience, but it has also in some ways been disorientating. Due to our decision to concentrate on contemporary issues, new perspectives on recurrent debates, and contributions from relatively young scholars, I have experienced at first hand the generational gap between now and my own early writing about women and film. As a result, this introduction reflects on changing histories and ideas that have affected the film and feminism conjuncture over the last four decades. But there is a particular twist of fate for me: the opportunity to look backwards offered by this introduction exactly coincides with the fortieth anniversary of the publication of my essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” This accident of timing has made it difficult for me to avoid considering some of the questions raised by the “1970s” and the various aspects of feminist film theory and experimental practice that are rooted there.

Looking back, the decade clearly stands at the end of an era: politics, economics, and the cinema itself were all, quite soon, to undergo radical changes. In the UK, the decade’s film culture was defined and unified by its extreme experiments in critical writing and in filmmaking, movements that overlapped and influenced each other. Of course, by and large, it was the various “theories” (psychoanalysis, Marxism, and semiotics) that characterized the experiments and have rendered them so controversial, especially in the context of feminism and film studies. It is sometimes forgotten that the cultural context that produced the theoretical essays and the experimental films, often themselves experimenting with theory, was not academic. And there has always been an uneasy mismatch between the polemical and insistently radical work of the time, certainly not intended for a student audience, and its rather too abrupt adoption into “film studies” once they ultimately arrived in the academy. (For instance, to go to my personal story: I left university in 1963 and although I gave a couple of lectures in the aftermath of “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” my first academic position was not until 1980.) But that intellectual and creative environment, the utopian desire to fuse radical aesthetics with radical politics, energized the 1970s; although the movements that had fuelled its ideas ended with the decade, its influence per-

sisted for some time, probably fading away during the 1980s. Margaret Thatcher's election in 1979 rapidly transformed the political and economic condition of the United Kingdom. Under various pressures, experimental film either went into decline or evolved towards other media heralding the present eclipse of the 16mm format that had sustained the film production of the time. Less parochially, beyond the borders of the UK, neoliberalism, globalization, and their political and social fellow travelers gathered momentum. From the perspective of the cinema, the arrival of VHS in the 1980s saw the first fragmentation (leaving aside television) of film spectatorship. The 1970s would be the last decade in which films could only be viewed by the public, collectively, projected and in a darkened theater.

I am re-rehearsing these points that are, of course, quite well known (and that I have made before, at greater length, in various contexts¹) for a purpose: to emphasize the lack of continuity across the decades. I argued at length in *Death 24 x a Second: Stillness in the Moving Image*² that changes in modes of spectatorship between the 1970s and the late 1990s render the premise and argument of "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" archaic. To all intents and purposes, the obsolescence of those habits of filmgoing affect the mentality of the decade with a similar obsolescence: its utopianism and the belief in progress that was so formative for the early years of the Women's Liberation Movement failed to survive the setbacks of the 1980s. Furthermore, the feminist theory and the feminist films of the decade have since been roundly and widely denounced; and the ideas associated with the time seem to have only occasional bearing on the work of scholars today. It might, indeed, be tempting to accept that those ideas have lost whatever currency they might once have had. As feminist film theory moved forward to engage with and benefit from ideas associated with the politics of race and queer theory, 1970s film feminism was left looking somewhat white and heterosexual.

However, such an all-encompassing rejection would, from two points of view, be mistaken. In the first instance, it might be worth going back to some of the neglected issues that underlay or generated the politics of "visual pleasure." Secondly, it is more rewarding to think about time, and a period that has now become history, as a confusion of temporalities than as a linear succession in which decades and eras follow each other in chronological order. And this argument, needless to say, is more in keeping with feminist attempts, whether those of historians or of experimental filmmakers, to interrogate traditional history, reconfiguring its assumptions and greatly expanding its social scope. Both the form and the content of history as narrated primarily from a male subjective consciousness have by now been challenged from multiple points of view, and certainly not only by women. But women, aware of their collective irrelevance to traditional accounts of history as well as their collective absence from its construction, have every interest in imagining feminist ways of conceiving time.

In her essay “‘Women’s Time’ in Theory,” Emily Apter discusses Julia Kristeva’s “Women’s Time” in conjunction with recent aesthetic debates in the US on obsolescence. She suggests that the *démodé* has “a multivalent capacity as an aesthetic function of women’s time.”³ Reflecting on Moyra Davey’s photographs, she comments that: “Davey’s work, in its focus on the aging of modernism, poignantly engages with the psychic attraction to period aura that attaches itself to outmoded things.”⁴ And she argues that the *démodé* as a mechanism “makes possible the radical dispossession of time. There is a temporal violence to outdating; when it erupts it loosens periodicity’s possessive perimeters around spots of time and releases arrested images into the future.”⁵ She continues: “In this reading, it is precisely the ‘dated’ character of Kristeva’s *temps des femmes* that matters, for it describes the anachronistic resurgence of ‘seventies theory’ in the guise of feminist theory now, itself focused on time and periodicity.”⁶ And she ends by commenting: “There is then a ‘becoming feminist’ of time theory itself.”⁷ Needless to say, I was struck by Apter’s argument, as it clearly coincides with my aspiration that, precisely in its obsolescence, feminist film theory of the 1970s might still re-emerge in a new context and for unexpected uses. Furthermore, in the very citation of its aging, modernism is liberated from the detrimental doubling of the “post-”formation that petrifies it in anamorphous past and in subordination to its supposed successor. This in itself is a reminder of the complex temporalities of the modernist avant-garde as opposed to the somewhat clichéd aesthetic of historical citation that characterizes postmodernism. Ultimately, Apter draws attention to the strategic importance of time, history, and temporality for feminist theory. This discussion of a particular confusion of time evokes Terry Castle’s *The Apparitional Lesbian*, cited by Sophie Mayer in her essay in this volume. In the experimental cinema she discusses, the ghosts of repressed, unacknowledged lesbian loves refuse to be laid to rest, returning in “small” or “poor” films, bringing together this form of apparitionality with traces of theory and theoretical filmmaking to resist the fullness of representation. Although not necessarily central to Mayer’s argument, it is interesting to see ghostliness and resistance to temporal linearity materialize together.

These two “figurations” of temporality – the obsolescent, the ghost – suggest, first of all, that feminism should think radically about configurations of time, resisting (as, indeed, has often been argued before) the chronological and the linear that are blind to the persistence of the past in the present. This is, in itself, a theoretical position. But both are also searching for ways of bringing divergent “women’s times” together, although there is an obvious contrast between silence and erasure in the past that contemporary lesbian theory is bringing to a poetic consciousness and the over-wordiness of feminist 1970s theory, its flaunting of intellectual excess. One floats, the other is rooted in a particular moment. The first step in any re-cycling of feminist theory should be to locate it within the specific mentality and the ideas that women were attempting to articulate at the

time. To return to the analogy of obsolescence: an archaic or *démodé* object derived its use value from its place in a given social-economic system but returns later with an altered meaning and significance attached to it. Thus, and as a subsequent step, any re-appropriation or re-cycling of feminist theory today should neither be “as such” nor a strange survivor lingering and aging across the chronological decades but rather rethought in terms of women’s contemporary oppressions. And it seems to be widely acknowledged that, with the economic poverty and precariousness of neoliberalism, the loss of a socialist aspiration, and the massive rise of religion of all kinds, women are newly vulnerable. Several of the essays in this book suggest that, whatever advances there may be in terms of women’s equality and women’s “right” to the possession of their own sexuality (whether lesbian or heterosexual), there is a greater darkness than in the more utopian 1970s. Janet McCabe uses “nordic noir” to explore the ways that women, and particularly migrant women, are victims of violence and misunderstanding in the television series she analyzes. From a very different perspective, Anna Backman Rogers demonstrates through *GIRLS* that even once it is individually owned and liberated into experiment, women’s sexuality and desire are confused by the very darkness of its advanced, privileged, and commodified context. Although in the 1970s Marxist psychoanalytic feminism attempted to think across the economic and psychical, it was hard then to make the links and connections out of the workings of a social unconscious into the other materiality of injustice and exploitation. As this book demonstrates, feminist theorists are now working to connect these missing links.

I want to look back briefly and sketchily to the development of feminist thought in the 1970s. And then I want to speculate about ways in which the cinema has and might still function as a social and symbolic terrain in which to decipher the fluctuations in the meaning of femininity across differing ideological and economic contexts. First to reiterate: above all, 1970s feminist theory (film and beyond) is associated with the influence of Freud and the use of psychoanalytic ideas for a feminist critique of patriarchy. And it is this theoretical conjuncture that has attracted most opprobrium. At the time, the appropriation of Freud seemed reasonably straightforward: as feminists searched for a way of understanding the sources of women’s oppression, questions of sexuality and gender came more and more to the fore. This point may seem banal, but for the Women’s Liberation Movement it was urgent and novel. The well-known slogan “the personal is political” led directly to the unspoken of the sexual in the everyday. The encounter between feminism and psychoanalysis, rooted in the 1970s, continued to be elaborated in the 1980s. As Sally Alexander put it in an essay first published in *The History Workshop Journal* in 1984:

Feminism looked outward at the social forms of sexual division and uneven destinies that claim the two sexes, but the critical look becomes an inquiry

into the self and sexual difference and asks “what am I a woman, and how am I different from a man?” No social relationship is left unturned, if only by implication, in this endeavour.⁸

Alexander points out that psychoanalytic theory “poses the issue of psychic reality – a reality like Marx’s concepts of commodity fetishism and exploitation will not be encountered through empirical observation.”⁹ It was this that made psychoanalytic theory both exciting and useful to feminists: it made the invisible visible and it provided a vocabulary and a set of concepts that could enable a first articulation of the place of sexuality in women’s liberation.

It is easy to forget that the early feminist critique of Hollywood cinema was the direct legacy of the Women’s Liberation Movement’s revolt against sexually exploitative images such as adverts and Miss World. Although many of us at the time – for instance in the UK, Pam Cook, Claire Johnston, Elizabeth Cowie, and me – had an already given cinephile involvement with the cinema, politically we analyzed it for its exemplary place in “the society of the spectacle.” Thus questions of cinema, initially at least, were above all questions of politics. Psychoanalysis and semiotics enabled feminists to grasp the gap between “women” in their social context and, to adapt Teresa de Lauretis’s term, “woman” as a signifier that referred to the male psyche and the patriarchal unconscious. As Teresa de Lauretis pointed out in her 1984 book *Alice Doesn’t*:

If feminists have been so insistently engaged with practices of cinema, as critics, filmmakers, and theorists, it is because the stakes are especially high. The representation of woman as image (spectacle, object to be looked at, vision of beauty – and the concurrent representation of the female body as the locus of sexuality, site of visual pleasure, or lure of the gaze) is so pervasive in our culture, well before and beyond the institution of cinema, that it necessarily constitutes a starting point for any understanding of sexual difference and its ideological effects in the construction of social subjects, its presence in all forms of subjectivity. Moreover, in our “civilisation of the image,” as Barthes has called it, cinema works most effectively as an *imaging machine*, which by producing images (of women or not of women) also tends to produce woman as image. The stakes for women in the cinema, therefore, are very high and our intervention most important at the theoretical level [...].¹⁰

If Freud’s theory of the sexual instincts made possible a feminist, political interpretation of questions of sexuality as such, they had a particular relevance to the representation of woman on the screen. I want to reflect on, or rather speculate about, the question of the “woman as spectacle” from a different perspective, one that takes a different road from the psychoanalytic but one in which the sexual, and thus psychoanalysis, are never far away. In a juxtaposition between two

completely differing social and symbolic contexts, the Hollywood of early feminist theory and post-revolutionary Iran, I would like to suggest that femininity is, in both cases, understood as a signifier of the sexual. The cinematic languages that then materialize, first of all, indicate the shifting and unstable nature of the signifier and then confirm the centrality of female sexuality in a society that attempts to repress it as well as in one where it is commodified as spectacle. This brief discussion is an attempt to introduce political and economic factors to debates about the psychic and semiotic image of “woman.”

It is important to remember that the cinema that preoccupied early feminist film theory was primarily Hollywood. The reasons for this seemed clear: the “woman as spectacle” and “narratives of desire” lay at the heart of studio system cinema and thus lent themselves particularly to psychoanalytic criticism. But other reasons were not so clear at the time and reach beyond the psychoanalytic to the social and the economic, above all to the place of the Hollywood film industry in the United States, in terms of both its national and international history. In this sense, while Freudian theory might illuminate the sexual drives and instincts that gender Hollywood cinema, this very investment in spectacle, in woman as spectacle and woman as signifier of sexuality, has roots in material histories that demand other explanatory approaches. Mary Ann Doane, in her essay “The Economy of Desire” (in *The Desire to Desire* of 1987) locates her argument that the female subject is, *par excellence*, both consumer and consumed in a complex chain of commodity exchanges, in a wider historical context:

The development of the cinematic institution is frequently associated with the rise of consumerism. Overproduction toward the end of the nineteenth century, together with Henry Ford’s development of “line production” in 1910 and its intensification during World War I, led to a situation in which there was an excess of material goods and a scarcity of consumers, a condition that led to the perfection of advertising and marketing strategies geared toward a mass audience. Positioning the labourer as consumer was also an effective means of countering an emerging resistance to the industrial and corporate structure on the part of the workers.¹¹

This close connection between Hollywood cinema and commodity culture fed into an ideology of homogenization that led to the almost complete exclusion of images of race or of the working class as “workers” on the screen. In response to these areas of repression and erasure, “spectacle” took on extra special radiance, designed to attract and freeze the gaze. And the investment in the white female star as enhanced spectacle, its universalizing implications, could contribute to covering over the ideological cracks with an erotic sheen. Furthermore, the US depended on its film industry for marketing its products abroad. From the end of World War I, Hollywood became *de facto* an international cinema so that, having

mastered a homogenized system of cinematic representation at home, it could be more easily exported transnationally or, in today's terminology, globally. Glamour, a concept that was popularized in 1920s America (originally derived from an association with illusion or magic), evokes the distracting and fetishizing aspects of sexualized imagery that is designed "to-be-looked-at," be it the screen or the star that appears on its surface. To my mind, these various underpinnings of Hollywood glamour and its investment in the spectacle of femininity reach a final but extreme point in the 1950s and the Cold War. Through Hollywood, the US could present itself to the world as "the democracy of glamour;" the economics and politics of capitalism could acquire an allure of desirability in contrast to the image of Soviet communism. Capitalism could signify the pleasure of consumption, while communism represented the toil of production. It seems to be no accident that Marilyn Monroe would symbolize the epoch, almost as though Hollywood, as the national imaginary, was satirizing itself in this precariously constructed image of whiteness and the sexual. Here, psychoanalytic theory returns with renewed relevance: an argument that started off with the question of voyeurism returns with the question of the fetish. In Freud's theory, the fetish is an object that attracts and holds the gaze in a displacement from the sight of something that provokes anxiety. Freud originally argued, of course, that the male gaze has to be protected from the sight of the "castrated" female body. But the concept can be extended by its Marxist use and, as I suggested in *Fetishism and Curiosity: Seeing with the Mind's Eye*, the two easily reinforce and entwine with each other in relation to the cinema.¹²

Drawing attention to the part played by American national cinema, Hollywood, in its international affairs, in its cultural and economic colonialisms, creates a link across worlds to the cinema of the Islamic Republic. Two considerations are key here: after the 1979 revolution in Iran, cinema was abruptly purged of American films and their cultural tropes while simultaneously subordinated to the principles of Islamic modesty. In this context, the image of woman emerges in a reversal of the Hollywood excess, her significance as a signifier of sexuality persists, but raises very different aesthetic questions about how these "signs" were to be managed and their meanings to be translated into the language of cinema. In practical terms, Hollywood imports that had dominated Iran (since the British-American coup restored the Shah to power in 1953) were cut back to almost nothing, and Film Farsi, the popular cinema of the Pahlavi period, was eradicated. Women's appearance on screen came to be strictly regulated and rigorously censored in keeping with the religious ideology of the regime but also as a cinematic return to zero, a public rejection of the decadence and "Americanization" associated with the Pahlavi monarchy.

In the Iranian cinema that subsequently and gradually emerged, erotic femininity was signified by its erasure. Furthermore, in addition to the problem of woman as visual object on the screen, cinematic and narrative contact between

the sexes were subject to rules that demanded a new visual grammar. The familiar cinematic language – in which point-of-view shots, exchange of looks, and close-ups in particular articulated relations between men and women on the screen – gave way to a stripped-down, minimalist cinema in which the camera kept a distance from its profilmic figures. This enforced visual minimalism, and the rejection of any association with the generic nature of Hollywood, created a dialogue with the small, independent art cinema that had grown up precariously and under censorship since the 1960s. Both the new regime and the independents rejected Hollywood's cultural imperialism and its commercial aesthetic; both wanted cinema to be opened up to the everyday lives and problems of the poor.

The question of women was further complicated by the implications of veiling. Negar Mottahedeh and Hamid Naficy have both argued that once the Islamic Republic imposed the veil on women, the erotic implications of the look emerged as an articulated and conscious fact of Iranian social life.¹³ Inevitably, the issue of the look extended into the cinema and to the new film aesthetic. Under the rule of modesty, the cinema screen was understood to be a public space so that women had to appear veiled in the face of the male spectator at all times. Mottahedeh sums up the paradox: "Iranian cinema's address as a tribute to the carnality of the filmic gaze, and its principled rejection of cinematic voyeurism, produced the national cinema as a woman's cinema."¹⁴ And Naficy also points out that:

The social rules of modesty, the Islamicization of culture, cinema and the film industry, and the filmic aesthetics of veiling and looking served to represent women as modest and chaste, preventing them from becoming sexual fetishes. Yet these representations also replicated the dominant-subordinate relations of power between men and women in society at large.¹⁵

But he goes on to make a crucial point:

Thus "purified," the film industry became open to women as a proper profession as long as Islamicate values were observed. Thus there was a trade-off for the imposition of the veil which was that, once veiled, ordinary women could appear in the public sphere legitimately and forcefully, where they could engage in professions usually reserved for men. Cinema became the beneficiary of this doubled-edged sword. For that reason, while the social and professional roles of women in the industry became stronger and more forceful, their screen images continued to be fraught with ideological tensions.¹⁶

In this further paradox, with the Islamic Republic's support for cultural cinema, a number of women have become directors in Iran, making films that have

pushed, where and when possible, at the boundaries of representation, focusing on those ideological tensions and legal subordinations that Naficy mentions. Once women can claim a critical voice, the status of “woman” as “signifier” is necessarily challenged and modified.

In the first instance, this sketchy juxtaposition between the Hollywood studio system era and the cinema of the Islamic Republic of Iran is intended to draw attention to the difficulty women pose for patriarchal society and how that difficulty emerges symptomatically in their different cinemas. However, alongside the theoretical-psychoanalytic and semiotic questions that male representations of woman pose for feminists, new voices, questions, and social contexts are introduced by women filmmakers. A number of essays in this book discuss and analyze feminist films that gradually bring the marginal and the unspeakable into social and cultural recognition. Rakshan Bani-Etemad, one of the most important women directors working in Iran, has focused on the social significance and the image of motherhood in a country in which mothers are both idealized but also heavily oppressed by their lack of legal rights. In her films, Bani-Etemad begins to break down the connotation of suffering silence associated with the mother. Here there are two important factors: the filmmaker as a woman challenges male cultural domination by making films in a cinema dominated by male directors both globally and historically. At the same time, she challenges the one-dimensional and idealized image of motherhood, opening it out to infinite emotional complexity. But the level of emotion then brings with it the problem of articulating pain and trauma often beyond the reach of ordinary language. Beyond silence, in confrontation with the inadequacy of language, these women begin to express the problem of expression, especially for the silent suffering that haunts motherhood. While representing both the actual lives of women and the difficulty of representing their pain, Bani-Etemad succeeds in combining an aesthetic of social realism with the complex *mise-en-scène* of melodrama.

I began this introduction by emphasizing the divide between my feminist beginnings in the 1970s and the present. And I have tried to recapitulate the way that, at the time, feminist “1970s theory” provided an instrument for the analysis of images of woman under patriarchal society in which femininity and sexuality were displaced and distorted misogynistically. And, to reiterate, the cinema was the social and symbolic terrain in which these images flourished and fluctuated. Quite clearly these kinds of problems of representation persist and still demand analysis. But rather than simply suggest that the theories of the past are straightforwardly relevant to now, I prefer to see them as the kind of *démodé* objects discussed, as I mentioned earlier, by Emily Apter. At the same time, out of their very obsolescence they might revive an interest in the history of feminist thought, its whys and wherefores. In an unpublished paper (which I cite with the authors’ permission) Monica Dall’Asta and Jane Gaines reflect on the problem of retrieving a history of women in silent cinema. They note that:

Objects don't tell stories but stories can be told with objects. Now, a peculiar characteristic of the objects of the past is that they resist the kind of causal concatenation that is typical of historical narration. An object is itself not a fact, and it is the narrative that constructs facts in such a way as to provide linkages between documents. Historical objects, however, can be somewhat resistant. This is because the historical objects are "severed" from their original context, removed to another time like unrelated monads [...]. [T]he gap might be seen as productive to the extent that it prompts multiple narratives, no one of which can pretend to exhaustiveness.¹⁷

From this perspective, early feminist theory (as object and document) might be severed sufficiently from the "now" to be able to produce multiple narratives that lead, in some cases, nowhere, but also to theory as experimental, alongside the avant-garde cinema of the time.

In her recent book, Jacqueline Rose has pointed out that, however far women may advance socially and in terms of progress in equality and rights, these undoubted gains fail to cover the "dark times" or "landscape of the night" in which so many women live.¹⁸ The essays of this book that analyze recent women's filmmaking bear witness to a constant struggle to bring these difficult-to-articulate issues to the screen. And the essays on iconographies make it clear that the female body is still essentially marked by instability and uncertainty. These are the two sides of the feminist political and theoretical coin. It is through the further development of analyses of these kinds, and very particularly the ideas that have developed out of considerations of both lesbian and black aesthetics, that a renewed feminist politics might both be able to find its place in a world "darkened" by unexpected new waves of misogyny but also address a new generation of feminist activists.

PART I

New Perspectives: Images and the Female Body



Disconnected Heroines, Icy Intelligence: Reframing Feminism(s) and Feminist Identities at the Borders Involving the Isolated Female TV Detective in Scandinavian-Noir

Janet McCabe

As a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country.
As a woman my country is the whole world.
– Virginia Woolf^f

The hunt for the murderer of Nanna Birk Larsen (Julie R. Ølgaard), unfurling over 20 days in October and November, translated into 20 hours of (subtitled) television drama that allowed its characters to truly breathe. The Danish crime thriller *THE KILLING* (*FORBYDELSEN*, 2007) plunged us deep into the dark cavernous depths of the human psyche: it was a complex, messy, and often highly unsettling experience. Over the intense, claustrophobic 20 days of series one, which had more intricate plot twists than stitches in the now legendary cream-and-navy Faroese jumper, every delicate turn and subtle shade of a character was mined – and still there was more to excavate, if not elude. It was, however, with DCI Sarah Lund (Sofie Gråbøl) in her raggedy knitwear where the series' pulsating dramatic core lay. Here was a strong yet deeply flawed female character. Detachment, never quite belonging anywhere, and always more comfortable in silence defined an unyielding sense of who she was. Far from unique, she shared similar characteristics with another socially awkward Nordic noir TV heroine, the Swedish detective from *THE BRIDGE* (*BROEN/BRON*, 2011-present): Saga Norén (Sofia Helin). Norén may be somewhere on the autistic spectrum, rarely sparing the feelings of others, but her obliqueness nonetheless has something important to tell us about the condition of being female in what Jacqueline Rose has called “dark times”² while taking us deep into that landscape involving injustice and inequalities.

Like other modern Scandinavian crime fiction, including the *MILLENNIUM* trilogy³ and *MISS SMILLA'S FEELING FOR SNOW*,⁴ *THE KILLING* and more recently *THE BRIDGE* have psychologically complex female investigators at the center of stories that simmer, startle, and slowly unravel. There is, of course, nothing particularly new about the smart, ever resourceful female investigator. She has long been a key figure of the modern crime genre, often defined as an amateur sleuth rather than professional detective: From Lois Cayley (1899) and Hilda Wade (1900) to Agatha Christie's Miss Jane Marple (1926) and more recently Smilla Jaspersen and Lisbeth Salander. Norén, like Salander, would appear to have Asperger's syndrome (not that it is ever diagnosed) and strives to depend on no one but herself. Still, this new generation of Scandinavian TV homicide detectives have a longer television ancestry in which characters like Lund and Norén have absorbed the sexual politics of earlier shows featuring female TV cops while, at the same time, offering something new, something different. Like Det. Sgt. Christine Cagney (Sharon Gless), Lund has cultivated a steely resolve to navigate the androcentric politics of the traditional male working environment in which she operates, where sexism prevails regardless; like Det. Mary Beth Lacey (Tyne Daly), she has a challenging job while trying to raise a child; and like DCI Jane Tennison (Helen Mirren), she has an instinctive empathy with the murder victim, nourishing in turn an all-consuming but resolute preoccupation with bringing the killer to justice. Moreover, Lund and Norén share with Tennison in their representational DNA what Gunhild Agger refers to as "all the dilemmas inherent in the aspiration to achieve equal status, as well as the compromises made."⁵

Still, Lund and Norén mark a gendered departure (of sorts). They are representational types who slip easily across (national) boundaries, are psychologically more complex and inherently more flawed and contradictory precisely because these textual females are produced in and through a storytelling form and TV format consumed with defining new rules for talking about gender politics and subjectivities, representation and power. Contradiction and paradox are no longer the preserve of theoretical inquiry⁶ but are embedded deeply into the very representational fabric that produces women like Sarah Lund and Saga Norén. It is the aim of this essay to ask why these Scandinavian homicide detectives, extremely isolated and lacking in social graces but highly accomplished at what they do, have evolved into such compelling characters so eloquently constructed to speak directly to our continued age of troubled emancipation; and how, in turn, this female character and other representational types chart the motion of a broadening feminist discourse as she travels beyond Scandinavian borders and into different mediascapes, from the United Kingdom to the United States. In creating a different sense of geography, an alternative cartography of the female experience, these navigational movements involving bodies, spaces, subjectivity, and identity embrace different (often unanticipated) issues of recognition, repre-

sentation, and social (in)justice and modify understandings of what we might mean by “women’s rights” and emancipation today.

Distinct categories of victim and heroine may uncomfortably blur, but the gruesome cases more often than not involving sex crimes and brutal murder, most commonly of women (often at the social margins – immigrants, prostitutes), bring forth a female investigator who challenges beliefs and attitudes toward representing the feminine in terms of (in)qualities and (in)justice but also the body, both social and corporeal. These women are produced within a grammar of struggle involving internal social hierarchies with new claims for recognition profoundly shaped by accelerated globalization and the hegemony of neoliberalism. Struggles over female subjectivity at the borders identify where social struggles entwine with cultural struggles, the local (regional) entangle with global (transnational) claims for visibility, collective rights interlace with individual autonomy. In the new politics of recognition, different questions about who matters and what types of bodies and stories matter most are being profoundly shaped by powers that increasingly extend beyond traditional boundaries, including modern territorial states. Nancy Fraser put it best when she wrote,

feminist struggles are transnationalizing too. [...] Contests that used to focus chiefly on the question of *what* is owed as a matter of justice to members of political communities now turn quickly into disputes about *who* should count as a member and *which* is the relevant community.⁷

My point is that these women perform ambiguity precisely because they are being represented within ambiguous narrative flows (rather than spaces) accommodating competing claims defining “emancipation” and social (in)equalities. These women function inside the law; they are, in fact, never outside its jurisdiction. They are representatives of a sovereign state, charged with enforcing its laws. But in and through how these sleuths solve crime, often compromising other inequalities to secure a conviction, reveals uneasiness in the power of the law to protect women as well as how female bodies are disciplined as a consequence. As the parameters for the way we argue for (social) justice changes, thanks largely to the globalized world in which we live and the resultant cultural challenges to liberalism and secularism, these socially awkward women come to represent what has rarely been seen before on our television screens: she defies old (generic) rules and promises “the coming age of a different law”⁸ for representing the female self differently.

Uttering the new is never easy, however, and Lund and Norén find themselves relentless targets of social and political opprobrium, subject to the institutions of the law and, what Michel Foucault called, a “deployment of alliance”⁹ with its networks of kinship and familial ties. More often than not, these mechanisms of social regulation and constraint combine to censor the woman and often silence

her ability to speak differently. For example, Lund is forever being interrupted. Never quite given permission to finish what she has to say, she is exposed unreservedly to endless scrutiny from those around her. No wonder Lund has cultivated an enigma of impenetrable stillness. Feminist heroine or dysfunctional misfit? Relentless detective or borderline sociopath? It is in what is withheld and how Lund defies those easy categorizations of mother, daughter, and wife where the representational force of this female character truly lies. Where this essay seeks to intervene is in how this female representational type produced in and through various encounters at different borders makes visible the new politics of feminism(s) – identifying new sites of struggle and possible strategies of resistance (however limited). In and through various narrative flows and cross-border activities, this essay will seek to consider whose stories are told, but how in the telling others are often compromised, deferred, or silenced, with some forgotten entirely; and how in the refiguring and relocation of these stories alternative perspectives on identity and different sites of struggle come into existence, but only after the textual journey has been made.

Travelling Tales / Shared Public Stories

Before anything else, it is important to recognize how these crime stories originating from Scandinavia have struck a universal narrative chord. In the wake of the remarkable success of Stieg Larsson's MILLENNIUM trilogy (THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO, THE GIRL WHO PLAYED WITH FIRE and THE GIRL WHO KICKED THE HORNET'S NEST), stories told at the periphery have led to the worldwide literary phenomena known as "Nordic noir." This international publishing trend has, in turn, created new opportunities for television, with a distinct sub-genre of TV crime proving particularly amenable to cultural exchange. Sharing stories across borders confirms what Joseph Straubhaar said about how "cultural proximity is cultural shareability [...referring] to common values, images, archetypes and themes across cultures that permit [...] flow across cultural boundaries."¹⁰ Series like THE KILLING and THE BRIDGE tackle directly the corrosive effect of crime at a time when matters of security as much as justice are being reframed by new challenges ushered in by the complex, often perplexing impact of flows and processes that trespass national perimeters.¹¹ Each of these dramas offers a response in some shape or form to how cultural divides and the swelling schisms in northern Europe are affecting the ability to deliver social justice; and how, as a consequence, these questions are having an impact on what we argue for when we talk about "rights" and "citizenship." Season two of THE KILLING, for example, explores how the foundations of the liberal order are being disputed, internally because of the failures of assimilation and multicultural policies, and externally as a result of the "war on terror" and the backlash it has provoked, as Lund "discovers" the slaughter of two women

and two children in the process of solving the brutal murder of human rights lawyer Anne Dragsholm (Sarah Gottlieb). In the course of her investigation, Lund travels to Helmand and uncovers the murder of Afghan women and children by Danish Special Forces, in cold blood before incinerating their bodies, and concealed by a government eager to protect military funding and its international reputation as a peacekeeping force. In the third and final installment, the kidnapping of Emilie Zeuthen (Kaya Fjeldsted), the young daughter of billionaire business tycoon Robert Zeuthen (Anders W. Berthelsen), forms the dramatic core of a story about an international financial corporation entwined with a national government dealing with an economic crisis. *THE BRIDGE* also confronts these issues as it ferries knowledge about social injustice and economic inequity across the border between nation-states. Season one focused on the hunt for the so-called “Truth Terrorist,” a serial killer with a social conscience (similar to the sociopath holding Emilie Zeuthen for ransom, as repayment for an unpaid “debt” owed by a global financial corporation); while the second featured eco-terrorism and female bodies poised to contaminate Europe with deadly viruses that they are (unknowingly) incubating.

More specifically, while these stories may travel and translate into other broadcasting ecologies (more of which later), it must be acknowledged that these series emerge from inside specific national TV broadcasting systems with a particular approach to storytelling. These TV stories are imagined in a public service ethos and function to legitimize national broadcasters’ role within the cultural life of a particular nation, at a time when television is increasingly produced and consumed globally. *THE KILLING* produced by DR (Danmarks Radio), Denmark’s public service broadcaster, is a co-production with ZDF Productions,¹² Germany’s second public service broadcaster based in Mainz, Rhineland-Palatinate. ZDF is also responsible for *THE BRIDGE*, with its co-producing partners Sveriges Television (Sweden) and DR. Other companies¹³ involved in the production include Film i Skåne,¹⁴ a regional (rather than nation-focused) film center based in the Øresund (Danish)/ Öresund (Swedish) region of southern Sweden and Greater Copenhagen¹⁵ and speaks directly to the transnational ambition of *THE BRIDGE* as well as its way of seeing the world as a consequence. Along with Sveriges Television (SVT) and DR, both leading national public TV broadcasters in their respective countries, Norsk Rikskringkasting (NRK), the Norwegian State-owned radio and television public broadcasting company, is another co-producer of *THE BRIDGE*. Views may differ, but the essential function of public service broadcasting is to actively drive debate and stimulate larger questions about what kind of society an individual nation-state wants to be. Essentially, stories like *THE KILLING* told by public service broadcasters are obliged to explore different perspectives and the social diversity found in the public life of the nation as it legitimizes culture and its value in the global marketplace. This context of where the story grows provides a formal framework for the pursuit of

argument, deliberation, and dialogue about particular spheres of value in which local, national, regional, global, trans-migratory, religious, and cultural affiliations as well as gender and sexual politics will necessarily be balanced.

These stories are also given added piquancy by the fact that such monstrous crimes are being committed in a part of the world long associated with enlightened social democracy. Of this Western-based liberalism, Francis Sejersted writes:

The Scandinavian model is marked – to cite just a few of its characteristic traits – by comprehensiveness of social security systems, institutionalised universal social rights, a high level of public support, and a high level of equality, which grew out of a combination of public commitment to the principle of universalism and equality of income distribution, which in turn, is partly attributed to the strength of the trade unions.¹⁶

Maintaining the welfare, civil liberties, and individual freedom of all citizens, irrespective of background, speaks directly to a moral and political commitment to the fundamental principles of social egalitarianism and human rights. Difference and diversity emerge as less important than an intrinsic belief in the notion of a common humanity where everyone is entitled to equal respect under the law. While confidence in these ideals has been challenged in the wake of political assassinations and unease over broken borders, these principles have nevertheless long been a mobilizing force behind Scandinavian statehood. So strong, in fact, that this sense of social inclusiveness and tolerance may in fact account for the jumper worn by Lund. As Gråbøl explains: “I was brought up in the 70s in a very left-wing, politically active scene and I wore those sweaters. To me, a sweater like that tells of a person who deep down believes in soft values, togetherness.”¹⁷ Such commitment to universal liberalism, human rights, and democratic values, aspiring to delimit the range of diversity that ought to be circulating in public life, and embedded so deeply into the very cultural and social fabric of the region, has further implications for what we mean by emancipation and “women’s rights.”

“What Is the Matter with You?” Divided Bodies, Gendered Borders, and Global (In)justice

On the professional surface at least, gender seems irrelevant. Feminism is practically constitutionally enshrined, and accomplished women are everywhere within a series like *THE KILLING*. We see them inside city hall and the council chamber in season one – from Troels Hartmann’s political adviser Rie Skovgaard (Marie Askehave) and the chair of his party, Lisbeth Hansen (Helene Egelund) – and in government in season two with Leader of the Opposition Birgitte Agger (Bene-

dikte Hansen), and as Center Party leader Rosa Lebech (Sara-Marie Maltha) in the third season. There are the legal practitioners, from forsvarsadvokat (Vibeke Hastrup) acting for Theis Birk Larsen (Bjarne Henriksen) to Advokat Magnusson (Lane Lind) representing Hartmann, as well as those inside the police department, with Deputy Commissioner Ruth Hedeby (Lotte Andersen) and, of course, DCI Sarah Lund, the homicide detective with aspirations after 25 years of being a tactical crime analyst. There is an implicit assumption that women have achieved professional equality with men, and this narrative itinerary has translated into the US version with its accomplished women in public life: from campaign advisor Gwen Eaton (Kristin Lehman) to Ruth Yitanes (Lee Garlington), the union organizer-turned-Seattle City Council member with political clout to deliver a constituency, and Sarah Linden (Mireille Enos), the homicide detective in the Seattle Police Department.

This representation of women in the workplace, however, does not simply adhere to a liberal feminist ideology of agency and lifestyle choice. Neither does it speak to the central tenets of power feminism¹⁸ or postfeminism, in which “the gains forged by previous generations of women have so completely pervaded all tiers of our social existence that those still ‘harping’ about women’s victim status are embarrassingly out of touch.”¹⁹ It is almost as if the equality debate is beyond feminist inquiry while remaining at the same time profoundly political. This collective sentiment, in which equality at work constitutes a form of social egalitarianism, is committed to recognizing and protecting the rights of everyone, irrespective of background and difference. There is never any discussion about women not having it all, because the right to work is *never* in question: it is, in fact, a norm, with the right to work a basic human (rather than female) entitlement. *THE KILLING* shares with *THE BRIDGE* this basic assumption. No one would ever question why Lund would want to work for a living; and despite Norén’s distinct lack of social skills, there is no reason to suspect that, based on ability alone, she would not have achieved career parity with her Danish counterpart, Martin Rodhe (Kim Bodnia).

Still, while the State may uphold the liberty of its citizens who, in principle, are “free and equal,” the representational paradox of these female characters discloses what Deborah Siegel describes as a “growing sense of living between the aspiration and the reality of equality.”²⁰ For this character type, along with her foreign sisters, remains subject to techniques of power and systems of alliance in which other affiliations will inevitably be weighed. This poses important questions, of which one in particular should be stressed: How do these gendered representational types navigate within their very formal DNA internal ideologies, double standards, and limitations as a condition of being female in the contemporary world?

Nowhere is the paradox more evident than in the sexual pathology of the crimes. Cases often involve a mutilated, sometimes sexually violated female

body. It would be wrong to say that men do not suffer at the hands of serial killers, but it is the “gender-specific” trauma exacted on the female body that is of significance here. It is the rapists, murderers, and social psychopaths that habitually split the world according to sex and inflict a particularly disfiguring type of gendered power on the female body. It is, for example, the indispensable old family friend, Vagn Skærbæk (Nicolaj Koperniku), who abducts and savagely rapes (vaginally and anally) Nanna, someone he has known since childhood. More importantly, the themes of rape and sex crime, torture and exploitation, gender and power enter into the sex wars but also give rise to what Foucault calls a “society of blatant and fragmented perversion.”²¹

Bodies “so thoroughly saturated with sexuality”²² remain vulnerable to the powers that control them and result in a general disquiet pervading the conduct of the law. Sex and sexual behavior more often than not deliver a female victim, especially a sex worker, as a discourse taken “both as an object of analysis and as a target of intervention,” as Foucault describes it.²³ Written on and (often with alarming brutality) through the female body, sex determines a borderline between the individual and the State, between private guilt and collective culpability, and the way in which we draw those boundaries defining the “who” of justice in the first place. Women like Sonja Lindberg (Maria Sundbom), a homeless prostitute and drug addict in *THE BRIDGE*, represent an intimate cartography of social justice at the periphery. Chemicals may induce disconnect, but with her fragile, almost ethereal physique, Sonja maps the uneasy social fault lines of the region, from homelessness and poverty to addiction and sexual exploitation. She roams the urban wastelands as another commodity that the city has to sell; and given that highlighting of a specific regional atmosphere and located-ness forms part of the appeal of these formats when sold abroad,²⁴ her body troubles the tourist map. Her abuse at the hands of men like Jesper Andersson (Henning Valin Jakobsen) serves in this way to question the core claims of liberalism over representation, where some are not accorded an equal voice or as fairly represented under the law.

Travelling a step further into more privileged spheres of influence where gender equality is supposedly taken for granted, sex inevitably has a way of damaging reputations or even silencing, leaving women with neither narrative credibility nor social reputation. In *THE KILLING*, Rie Skovgaard loses both her government job and Hartmann as her lover over alleged sexual indiscretions. Flirting with Paul Dessau (Jakob Cedergren), who is the advisor to Hartmann’s opponent, Paul Bremer (Bent Mejding), in exchange for information is evident of an adulterous affair. The more she protests, the more attention is stubbornly drawn to her mortal flesh. Libidinal drives exile Rie from political influence and consigns her to narrative obscurity. Once in power, Hartmann acquires yet another attractive, highly efficient advisor. Bracketing her with Therese (Linda Laursen), ex-aide and erstwhile lover who Rie, in turn, replaced reveals a narra-

tive trajectory where smart, ambitious, professionally accomplished women are portrayed as almost interchangeable. The true impact of this morality tale involving the exchange of sexuality and alliance, sex and power only comes into existence as it unfolds. Even Rie's US equivalent, Gwen Eaton (Kristin Lehman), finds that her love affair with Darren Richmond (Billy Campbell) holds her ambitions in check and that she too must pay a high narrative price for being heard. As Jacqueline Rose put it, "An outspoken woman is a threat, not just because of the content of what she says, the demands she is making, but because in the very act of speaking, her presence as a woman is too strongly felt."²⁵ Codifying sex gives a body to the rules of political alliance almost completely; and this bio-power efficiently takes charge of these bodies, reinstating the authority of men in the material world of political power and positioning woman as body rather than subject and regulating her accordingly.

THE BRIDGE is no exception: it starts with a female corpse placed precisely in the middle of the Øresund Bridge. The border connecting the Swedish industrial city of Malmö (and regional center of Skåne) with the Danish capital of Copenhagen passes directly through the fabric of the female body. It is the (ob)scene of the border. Disconnecting and disconcerting, this lethal engagement with intimate female geographies becomes rerouted on the Bridge of the Americas that serves as the crossing between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez in the US version of THE BRIDGE (2013-present), and redirected into the Euro Tunnel linking northern France with Kent in southern Britain in THE TUNNEL (2013-present). In each series, it quickly emerges that the body is not one but two. The recognizable top halves belonging to a prominent and respected (Swedish, French) politician (a judge in the US version) quite literally gives a face to the political establishment of the respective nations; and the lower portions are the unidentified legs of a (Danish, British) prostitute, translated in the US version into an unknown Mexican girl. Mutilated bodies, social divides, different states: it is the reproductive function of the female body as representational parts that brings into play an entire catalogue of social justice – poverty, drug addiction, immigration, homelessness, mental illness.

In their careful placement on the border, these bodies may speak intently to which borderline spaces are valued more highly than others, but also in the peripatetic exchanges necessitated by the relocation from one broadcasting territory to another, specific struggles involving the local start to emerge. Known for human trafficking and as a haven for drug cartels, Ciudad Juárez is where in the last 20 years or so hundreds of women have been slain, others simply disappearing without a trace. In illuminating the travesties of lives trapped by the border while at the same time perpetuating them, the serial killer draws attention to that vital strand of feminism which makes concealed histories visible: how women suffer in ways that often go unnoticed. Substituting the issue of immigration and trafficking for homelessness, or the murdered and missing girls of Ciudad Juárez for

the neglected ones who are abused unseen on the social fringes of the more cosmopolitan Copenhagen/Malmö border, the format as it travels reveals the full extent of social injustice and the numerous patterns of (dis)advantage involving women in its accumulative movements in challenging, often unexpected ways. But the journey also makes visible that, when it comes to crime, the victim, especially if a woman, is often overlooked. Injustice is not only about the “who” as much as how state territoriality and borders drive a wedge deeply into those very definitions of whose stories get told, whose voices are heard, and how lives compromised by the margins are understood or not.

As struggles against local patriarchal injustice trespass into other forms of discrimination within individual territorial states and beyond, “women’s rights” and (mis)representation become entangled in other forms of alliance in the context of an increasingly fluid and dislocated cultural world. Series one of *THE KILLING* deals with female sexuality and crime but crucially in relation to its public recognition. Another suspect is teacher Rahman “Rama” Al-Kemal (Farshad Kholghi). With Rama missing, Lund and Jan Meyer (Søren Malling) bring in his “accomplice” Mustafa Akkah (Jali Kazim) for questioning, interrogating him in the presence of a female translator wearing a hijab. Language, miscommunication, and misrecognition soon lead to further confusion over whose story matters most. “She was ill and could hardly walk,” Mustafa confesses. It soon transpires that “she” is not Nanna at all but a young Muslim girl called Leyla Jamal trying to escape an arranged marriage. So fixated is the public investigation on what has happened to Nanna that the private fate of Leyla passes almost unseen. Sensing that she had no choice other than to be trafficked silently out of her community, Leyla speaks directly to the vulnerability of women concealed beyond the public sphere and in the domestic realm – the private home. That this story momentarily becomes indistinct from Nanna’s is more than about the policing of cultural practices migrating across national borders but a deep-rooted sense that there is something not quite right, a “feeling” of inequality that exists beyond the emancipatory rhetoric embedded in legislation and the rule of law. A red herring, maybe, but this “minor” narrative – shaped and steadily articulated in a public-service-infused series mix of police procedural, political thriller, and domestic drama – reveals the politics behind women’s rights to tell stories publicly. But what also emerges is how crimes committed against women are often reframed to become political, in which the female bodies are pressed into service to justify other political claims and the rights of one community over another, where women like Leyla fall through the gaps of cultural (mis)interpretation and public hypocrisy to simply disappear. Systems of alliance shaping (mis)representation, from the familial (a girl “feeling” forced into marriage / “belonging” to a culture that values arranged marriages) to the overtly political, are themes running through the series. Not even Lund can escape.

In the US version, Linden may struggle as a single mother to raise her son Jack (Liam James), but she is always positioned as doing her best. Her limitations are explained through her own disrupted childhood in foster care, with ex-social worker Regi Darnell (Annie Corley) acting as moral guide, but there is no doubt that the Linden character remains deeply invested in entrenched myths of US motherhood as she works hard to keep her son close. The Danish version makes no such concessions. Lund may try to be different, but she is *never* beyond the power of familial alliances. The narrative keenly demonstrates that there is no absolute outside where systems of alliance are involved, because one is always subject to its jurisdiction. Lund has Vibeke Lund (Anne Marie Helger), her mother, with opprobrium shading this complex if tender relationship. Lund asks her mother to stay before her wedding (1:5). “Stay with your boyfriend, you mean ... and take your son to school while you work?” Vibeke replies. “Never mind. It was just an idea.” This disconnect between mother and daughter is visualized: the two are separated by doorframes and shot at a distance in opal light, using a pallid palette. It is from the perspective of the familial that we get to know Lund and her intangible limits.

“Is this the kind of mother I’ve brought you up to be? You haven’t even talked to Mark [Lund’s son] while you’ve been here.”

“It’s been a busy week.”

“He’s twelve. You know nothing about him or his life.”

“I have to go.”

“Did you know he had a girlfriend?”

“Our relationship is special. He’s very independent. We’re not in each other’s face. And I know about his girlfriend.”

Lund is lying, of course. Later she tries to bond with Mark (Eske Forsting Hansen), asking him about his girlfriend, with whom he had already broken up: “You don’t give a shit. You’re only interested in dead people,” is his only reply. Without another word, he scoots off. The camera remains fixed on Lund, who is momentarily paralyzed by love but gives in to the resignation that she cannot reach out in that way. There is nothing left to say: nothing to say. She turns and walks back to work. It is illustrative of how compelling a terse, monosyllabic and uncompliant character can be in part because she speaks so eloquently of a response to the machinations of power and its system of alliances that demand something else from her.²⁶

Gråbøl said that it was her choice to take Lund in an unsociable direction. “I said I wanted to play an isolated person, unable to communicate and I’d like her to be at peace with that, so she’s not even reaching out.”²⁷ Still, her disconnect emerges as an empowerment strategy to look at the crime differently. Far from being “emotional,” Lund is solemn and distant, introverted and reticent. Silences

hang, Lund stares: she has a “feel” for the crime scene. It is not instinctive but rather based on hard investigative work and an uncompromising ability to “look” and see what others do not. What compels us is the stillness of Gråbøl’s performance and what is concealed rather than revealed, which gives nothing of Lund’s inner life away. Her position in the *mise-en-scène* as alone and isolated, often filmed through car windscreens or with the background almost fading into darkness, suggests an ability to shut out distraction. Silence allows this character time and space for her epiphanies. Stories of (in)justice thus come into existence after this investigative path has been well-trodden; but let us be clear: these crimes committed against women (Mette Hauge in season one and Louise Jelby in season three) often go unnoticed precisely because the authorities do not seem to care enough to investigate – until Lund, of course. It is precisely because a woman is investigating that the “crime” comes into view, and this arrival through awareness calls into question the assumptions behind the deeds.

While others may read Lund differently, defining her obsession with dead bodies as not quite right, there is another female detective who is always on the verge of being annexed to mental illness. One of the key characteristics of Saga Norén is her inability to observe social niceties. Unable to gauge what is appropriate, she changes her top without shame in the office, walks into a bar and asks a man who smiles at her if he would like to have sex, or answers a question as to whether she has children with detachment: “No. Why would I?” Supposedly Norén has Asperger’s, which makes it difficult for her to make sense of the social world, to communicate, and to interact with others socially. Helin has spoken publicly about how difficult it was to play Norén, confessing,

I was very uncertain at the beginning because [...] Saga is so strange. And I am so completely her opposite. I’m almost completely ruled by my emotions. [...] My brain moves in clues, but Saga thinks squarely – I could almost feel my brain changing as I played her.²⁸

What emerges in the way Helin talks about performing a character with Asperger’s is less about someone with a disability as much as about inhabiting a particular sensibility defined as feminine. Like Salander, and to a lesser extent Lund, Norén finds it difficult to initiate and sustain social relations. She struggles to make connections and maintain friendships. She is not good at the unwritten social roles, amusingly so when she confesses to colleagues that “I got my period this morning” after Rohde suggests she try sharing her private life with work colleagues. However, the fact that her Asperger’s goes undiagnosed and is in fact barely mentioned says something important about being a woman in the social world. Given that it is relatively well known that the way autism presents itself in females often makes it more difficult to diagnose, there is also the hint

that the true hidden disability is that of being a woman. Being out of step with the world is illustrative of the experience of being a woman within it.

This observation takes on additional cultural implications when comparing Norén to Detective Sonya Cross (Diane Kruger) in the US version. Unlike Norén, Cross emerges as far more vulnerable than her Scandinavian counterpart. While suffering from the same inability to self edit, Cross is aided in her attempts to negotiate the social world by her boss, Lieutenant Hank Wade (Ted Levine), who adopts a far more benevolent patriarchal role than Norén's superior. As a consequence, while Cross seems out of place in the borderlands of America, Norén appears from a different world entirely. Her physical presence, as she awkwardly stomps around in brown leather trousers, boots, and a long flowing coat with a body she does not quite inhabit, eloquently speaks of how out of step this woman is with the social world around her. Such a comparative reading, of course, has cultural implications, with Cross's US brand of psychological frailness only coming into view next to the Scandinavian cool of Norén and *vice versa*. Helin alluded to as much when commenting on the migrating morality surrounding her sex scene, with the British making so much more of Norén's sexual peccadilloes than the Swedes. "No one noticed. It's not so strange here.' Women's sexuality is just not a big deal in Sweden, she adds."²⁹ Still, being withdrawn and seemingly uninterested in others, appearing almost aloof, also affords her a unique perspective on the world around her.

While the Asperger's almost saves Norén from being a woman subject to alliances, it also hints at moving beyond the politics of gender. Her so-called disability allows Norén to travel beyond the ambiguity of difference and adhere without sentiment to those universal standards of human rights and democratic values. As she drives up in her vintage green Porsche and takes control of the situation with her usual bluntness, she emerges as a character able to deliver equality and social justice precisely because she can do so without recourse to difference, including gender. She works tirelessly through the night, fails to sustain romantic partnership (despite the late night reading of library books such as *Codes for a Better Relationship* and *Emotions in Social Relations*), has few boundaries when it comes to cross-examination, and finds it difficult to lie. Just as she has no compunction about preventing an ambulance carrying a heart-attack victim from crossing her crime scene, or seeing her partner arrested, she can deliver on that collective universal promise of belonging to humanity without any social allegiance to difference.

With her long tousled blond hair, pale complexion, blue eyes, and leather trousers, however, Norén, and the actress who plays her, "looks" right. Imperfections aside, particularly given the media cacophony surrounding that scar on Helin's top lip, the picture of femininity presented by the actress announces where she is placed in the world. Her body and her dress (with fashion shoots branding her with a retro Scandinavian cool) profoundly mark her as belonging

to Swedish culture but also as privileged. Bodies that have previously been interpreted as narrative sources of erotic attraction or social injustice are also representative of a contemporary state of the feminine ideal. Agency over one's body has become a central issue for feminists, for third-wave feminism, and postfeminists. Norén / Helin, on the surface at least, speaks to the neoliberal democratization of feminine beauty "exported globally as aspiration."³⁰ The women at the center of the other adaptations – Elise Wassermann played by Clémence Poésy (THE TUNNEL) and Cross played by Kruger (THE BRIDGE) – share similar physical attributes. It attests to an ideal image of femininity and how it continues to travel widely as the norm. These modern female bodies have gone global, with the two adaptations not only part of an international TV franchise but also the export of an appropriate Western brand of female corporeality. It is a body that speaks directly to a global conversation about femininity and the correct female body to which we must aspire. Defined by cosmopolitanism and being bilingual, Poésy (French) and Kruger (German-born) are both former models. Both have thus had careers in the style industry, as international models and the face of particular fashion brands: Poésy for the Chloé fragrance and modeling for Gap, most prominently in the 2008 autumn campaign – a Gaelic *ingénue*-ness which in turn shapes her "disability" in THE TUNNEL. Likewise, Kruger is known as a brand ambassador for the Swiss watch manufacturer Jaeger-LeCoultre. She also became global "spokesmodel" of L'Oréal in 2009 and a year later became the face of "Beauty," the new fragrance for Calvin Klein. Susie Orbach put it best when she said:

An individual woman's identity is bound up with the capacity to represent herself physically as part of the brand called woman. That womanhood itself requires a particular kind of body and this body is styled in a manner which is recognizably modern, recognizably thin and recognizably endowed with fashion's current contours.³¹

These texts may have migrated into different territories, but the standard for female beauty remains as impossible as ever.

Conclusions: Global Movements and Travelling Femininities

The popularity of these Scandinavian-based crime stories has contributed to a surge in traffic from the periphery to older, more established metropolitan centers of television production. Revealed in this tangled web of trade, translation, and acquisition rights is the way in which series such as THE KILLING and THE TUNNEL are conceived of as truly global products, designed to migrate beyond geo-linguistic markets and adapt to the located-ness of different territories. These nomadic texts, built to migrate across boundaries and customized for local

broadcasting territories and its audience, may carry particular narrative elements and characters, but studying the cross-border connection and how these forms are translated reveals how the local will interpret (or not) specific subjects.

Lund, in particular, steps across various jurisdictions. Physically banished to the furthest outreach of the nation, she works as a passport officer at a seaport on the southern most tip of the Danish island of Falster where, as Strange puts it, the “ferry traffic keeps her busy.” Almost losing touch with the outside world, her job title has changed; she is a lone figure on the night shift. This is where she starts season two, before her final exile to Iceland, but she never complains. Neither Lund nor Norén function in any one society, which in turn allows them to navigate their respective public spaces, almost unnoticed at times, but also to travel and adapt themselves in such a way as to make these women seem indigenous in new territories. But this travelling femininity is also partly because these women evade any easy definition as they busy themselves evading established systems of alliance and defying various centers of power – the law, medicine, and politics. The more these characters challenge those who would define them, the more these women make visible how modern society itself remains gender-perverse.

Lena Dunham's *GIRLS*: Can-Do Girls, Feminist Killjoys, and Women Who Make Bad Choices

Anna Backman Rogers

Lena Dunham's series *GIRLS* is a cultural phenomenon. Dunham herself writes the majority of the show, has directed some of the episodes, and plays the main character Hannah Horvath. She has stated that she wants to investigate a neoliberal and postfeminist world in which young women are coming of age in the era of social networking, readily available medication for depression, and financial crisis as well as the significance that "this is the first generation who can expect to do less well than their parents did."¹ The show examines, then, the detrimental effects of this climate and, as such, can be read as a critique of postfeminist thinking. Having previously only made two feature-length films – *CREATIVE NON-FICTION* (2009) and *TINY FURNITURE* (2010) – Dunham was championed by filmmaker and producer Judd Apatow, famous for controversial films that investigate masculinity in crisis. Much has been made of Dunham's artistic and middle-class background as well as her link to Apatow, which enabled her to collaborate with a team of writers and show runners at HBO. She has fought back against this charge of elitism and privilege by stressing both the relative normality of her upbringing and decrying her need to answer such accusations as a woman working in a male-dominated industry. *GIRLS* premiered in May 2012 to mostly positive reviews and Dunham herself went on to be nominated for eight Emmy awards and two Golden Globes for her work on the series. She is only twenty-eight years old. Despite its popularity, the show has also received opprobrium from critics who have accused Dunham of whitewashing, superficiality, and myopia. This essay intends to take this criticism as a starting point in order to unravel some of the ways in which, on the contrary, the show can be viewed as a critique of the postfeminist culture it palpates. Denunciations of the show, then, will be taken as valid but from the perspective that Dunham reflects on and subverts the tenets of the postfeminist lifestyle. Moreover, the show's limited outlook draws attention to the myriad social groups and alternative ways of living that must be suppressed in order to strengthen the hold of neoliberal values recuperated as feminist choice.

Introduction: “I Am Not The Ladies.”

A young couple (Hannah and Adam) are having sex in an unkempt, dimly lit, dingy flat. The woman’s flesh wobbles and undulates as her partner forcefully approaches orgasm inside of her. We hear the slapping sound of his pelvis meeting hers and the panting sound of their breathing as he pins her down onto the bed with his full weight. “I knew you wanted it this way when I found you on the street with your Cabbage Patch lunchbox [...] you’re a dirty little whore and I am going to send you home to your parents covered in cum,” he states aggressively before clumsily pulling off his condom and masturbating onto her. As the scene draws to a close, he asks her where she would like him to ejaculate onto her body; the young woman ponders having the luxury of “so many choices” while he shouts at her to “touch herself” (a position into which she cannot contort her body). Having finished with the role play, he offers her an orange-flavored Gatorade: “No, thanks I’m good [...] that was so good – I almost came,” she sighs. The camera remains resolutely objective throughout the sequence, which compounds its visceral, seedy, and unpleasant nature – there is no place to which our attention can be averted. So opens “Vagina Panic,” the second episode of the first season of *GIRLS*.² From this description, one might assume that this scenario represents a forced and rather horrid sexual encounter; yet the female protagonist has chosen this for herself. Hannah is a young woman who actively invites degradation into her life at this point in the series. Is this depiction of bad choices leading to humiliating sexual relations offering anything in the form of a feminist critique of postfeminism? Is it even possible for a girl to become a young woman in such a hostile environment?

This sexually frank and unglamorous *mise-en-scène* functions as a discomfortingly comic statement about sexual liberation and the ubiquitous concept of postfeminist choice. If the protagonists of *Sex and the City* tended regularly to remind one another that they “have it all [...] great jobs, great apartments, great friends, great sex,”³ this moment between Hannah and Adam in *GIRLS* undercuts that notion by presenting postfeminist choice as privileged, in class terms, as well as potentially damaging to women. In fact, what the show has made ever more apparent, over the course of its three seasons to date, is that while choice itself is something of a myth, it is only extended to a specific and privileged demographic. For this is a young couple who have a financial safety net of sorts: both have access to family resources, neither of them work for any sustained period, they speak a peculiar and awkward language inflected with self-help platitudes. Most importantly, Hannah, the young woman in question, views her sexual activity as an important part of self-exploration and discovery of her identity. As Roxane Gay notes in her critique of the show: “*Girls* also represents a very privileged existence – one where young women’s New York lifestyles can be subsidized by their parents, where these young women can think about art and in-

ternships and finding themselves and writing memoirs at twenty-four.”⁴ The show demonstrates that this form of empowerment is fundamentally disempowering for the young women who subscribe to this postfeminist philosophy and for those who have no access to it. The limited scope of the show’s address tells us something crucial about the privilege of having a choice.

Three days after the first episode of *GIRLS* premiered on HBO in 2012, Dodai Stewart, a contributor to the Feminist online site Jezebel, wrote: “Does *Girls* have the right to be all-white? Of course. But we, the public, have the right to critique the insular, homogenous world a young woman with the good fortune to have her own TV show has chosen to present. Because it’s exclusionary, disappointing, unrealistic, and upsetting. And it perpetuates a sad trend.”⁵ It is not my intention to disagree with Stewart’s perspective, for *GIRLS* does delineate precisely the rarefied and privileged world of a group of young, white, middle-class women all of whom have reached varying stages of higher education. Dunham’s demographic is indeed highly specific in both its representation and its appeal, and this is the point. Although much of the critical discourse surrounding the series is pertinent in its critique of the show’s myopic perspective, it tends to misconstrue Dunham’s authorial voice with the diegetic world and the characters that she has created. It is my contention, then, that *Girls* is, in actual fact, an extended nightmarish – albeit comic – vision of a generation raised on a culture of Sex and the City and neoliberal – or what Hilary Radner refers to as neo-feminist – notions of self-actualization, self-fashioning, self-empowerment, autonomy, and flexibility.⁶

While Lena Dunham herself may be, somewhat ironically given the nature of her narratives, one of the success stories of her generation, and has been fashioned by the media as such, the world of crisis that is *GIRLS* does not claim to speak for or to anyone in any universal fashion, in spite of its title. Indeed, Dunham playfully tackles this in the pilot episode by having Hannah state, “I could be the voice of my generation; or at least a voice of a generation.” It is relentlessly and deliberately unappealing in its portrayal of selfish, entitled, narcissistic, self-important, and self-pitying young women – and as such the show’s critics have missed the point; for the show is limited in scope because it is about boring people with a limited outlook on life. *GIRLS* does not proffer positive role models for young women, for which it has been criticized, it (perhaps inadvertently) indicts a particular image of womanhood that serves pernicious structures at large and, moreover, painstakingly examines the mental and physical symptoms caused directly by this aspirational model of selfhood. If the title of the show does not denote community and sisterhood, it is because the formation of these kinds of bonds is all but impossible under the conditions of the culture the show explores. *GIRLS* does not set out to be a heartwarming and empowering viewing experience: it is depressing, often dark, and offers little in the way of redemption. *GIRLS* is the end game of postfeminism.

In other words, the show centers on a group of women who represent what Anita Harris has aptly characterized as “the can-do girl”; these women seemingly have it all and have a sense of entitlement to a promised future.⁷ They have been inscribed into a culture which dictates that success is the sum of self-invention, yet they find that the horizon of expectations this sets up rests upon a precarious set of severely constrained and controlling choices. Coterminous with this is the figure of the “at-risk girl,” who always and everywhere is written out of this given image of success in order to shore up, in particular, hegemonic structures and ideologies – in this case, neoliberalism. *GIRLS* offers to the viewer a world that is sustained through what Lauren Berlant has termed a relationship of cruel optimism. Berlant defines this relationship as:

[T]he very vitalizing or animating potency of an object/scene of desire [that] contributes to the attrition of the very thriving that is supposed to be made possible in the work of attachment in the first place. [...] One makes affective bargains about the costliness of one’s attachments, usually unconscious ones, most of which keep one in proximity to the scene of desire/attrition.⁸

In other words, we unwittingly sustain this destructive bond because it is deeply imbricate with our collective idea of what it means to be able to carry on: it enables a malign form of hope. Berlant writes: “its form provides something of the continuity of the subject’s sense of what it means to keep on living and to look forward to being in the world [...] the fear is that the loss of the promising object/scene itself will defeat the capacity to have any hope about anything.”⁹ What does it take, then, to end this restrictive relationship and forsake a privilege that works in favor precisely of nobody?

Later on, I will address the idea of what it might mean to abandon this kind of hope and the labor that this requires; as Sara Ahmed puts it: “[i]t is hard to leave happiness for life. There is always a gap between becoming conscious of what is lost by living according to an idea of happiness and being able to leave [...] a gap where things happen, where lives are lived and lives are lost.”¹⁰ In its depiction of a specific form of female suffering, *GIRLS* unintentionally speaks of all that must be denied in order to maintain this form of hopeful pain. The vision the series portrays and, by extension, the system of social hierarchy that it reflects are reliant on the denial of those at risk. Again, Roxane Gay points out that:

We all have ideas about the way the world should be and sometimes, we forget how the world is. The absence of race in *Girls* is an uncomfortable reminder of how many people lead lives segregated by race and class. The stark whiteness of the cast, their upper middle class milieu, and the New York where they live, forces us to interrogate our own lives and the diversity, or lack thereof, in our social, artistic, and professional circles.¹¹

Furthermore, what it renders apparent is that every “can-do” girl is perilously close to failure all of the time; indeed, this powerful image is thoroughly unattainable. There is a price to pay for the unexamined retention of this bond and the upholding of the cultural values that sustain it – *GIRLS* is the antidote to *Sex and the City* (the latter’s trajectory, predicated as it was on romantic destiny, is re-interpreted and reduced here to something as crass and random as a Facebook timeline); this is a neoliberal culture in crisis, the fracturing of specific notions of selfhood – a world of breakdown, addiction, disconnect, and superficiality.

This cruel optimism cannot be sustained; if *GIRLS* makes one thing apparent, it is the lengths to which these women will go to invoke ever-more desperate forms of ritualistic behavior in order to cope with a situation that was already always unraveling. I will explore here the meaning and detrimental effects of maintaining an atmosphere of cruel optimism – that is, a culture that induces madness – in order to preserve the critical but impossible image of the can-do girl; I also examine the subtle ways that the show intimates at lines of flight from this model in the unlikely form of its central male character Adam, whom I will characterize, taking my cue from Sara Ahmed, as a feminist killjoy. For it is in the cracks and fissures effected by the discrepancies between Dunham’s authorship, her onscreen character, and the *zeitgeist* she palpates that the show’s feminist critique emerges – and that critique must be given voice to or named by an outsider; it is telling that within a neoliberal and postfeminist world, that voice is a male one. As Adam says to Hannah, whose expectations he has once again spectacularly failed to live up to: “you’re all secretly sad and shit.” The remainder of this article will outline, using *GIRLS* as a case study, just some of the ways in which postfeminism functions as a harmful barrier to a life in which it is possible for us all to thrive.

Postfeminism and Choice: “I Have Work, and Then I Have a Dinner Thing, and Then I Am Busy Trying to Become Who I Am.”

The strategic recuperation of certain feminist principles by neoliberalism has been noted by many feminist scholars such as Imelda Whelehan and Nancy Fraser.¹² Fraser writes of this detrimental confluence of values: “[d]isturbing as it may sound, I am suggesting that second wave feminism has unwittingly provided a key ingredient of the new spirit of neoliberalism. Our critique of the family wage now supplies a good part of the romance that invests flexible capital with a higher meaning and a moral point.”¹³ This form of co-option, which repackages feminism as a lifestyle choice, also serves to de-politicize it. The personal is severed from the political so that notions such as self-expression, individuality, and self-actualization (often made manifest through consumerist choice) are read as the expression of a feminist impulse; as Hilary Radner puts it: “for the neo-feminist [...] moral choice revolves exclusively around her sense of her own fulfil-

ment.”¹⁴ While postfeminism dictates to young women that they are the sum of their choices, the reality is that, as Harris notes, “apparent opportunities for self-invention and individual effort exist within circumstances that remain highly constrained for the majority of people.”¹⁵ Moreover, what does not fit into this picture is any sense of collectivism or mass agency, for the ideal subject under neoliberalism is self-sufficient, self-surveillant, and assumes responsibility only for herself. Harris has noted how feminism has been made to coincide with the ideal version of the late modern self so that “opportunities for choice, individual empowerment, personal responsibility, and the ability to be ‘what you want to be’” are utilized in order to construct young women “as ideal flexible subjects.”¹⁶ Caught within this double bind, young women are told they benefit both from feminist ideology and concomitantly from labor conditions that enhance opportunities for self-invention via perpetual adaptability.

Unlike *Sex and the City* which eventually cleaved choice onto an unbridled form of consumerism, *GIRLS* does not function as a vehicle for product placement; rather, choice is expressed through the concepts of “authentic selfhood,” individuality, and freedom, and the notion of labor under late Capitalism is problematized or ironized through the fact that these young women refuse to, or constantly fail to, gain or sustain employment. Moreover, if we are to believe that the contemporary young woman truly is the sum of her choices, *GIRLS* offers to the viewer characters who continually make decisions that have a deleterious effect on their wellbeing. They are able to adopt the language of the ideal neoliberal subject (“Am I the only one who prides themselves on being a truly authentic person?” asks Hannah), but the trajectory to embodying that ideal is paved with disaster. One way in which the principles of self-invention and flexibility are inscribed into the series as a woefully misappropriated form of feminist self-empowerment is in the show’s myriad and sometimes controversial sex scenes. Choice and adaptability are equated with a highly confused form of sexual empowerment and the obliteration of boundaries. Regardless of the complex developments that take place in the relationship between Hannah and Adam over three seasons, she admits to both her parents and her friends that she has chosen to try to date a man who treats her like “monkey meat” and who makes her feel “delusional and invisible.” Hannah continues to see Adam because their escapades provide her with fodder for her short stories. He frequently makes sardonic comments on her use of Twitter and Facebook during their meetings, as if to suggest that she lives her life in order to make a pithy status update. Hannah is someone who requires an audience in order to feel she exists.

Hannah’s inability to extend her thinking beyond her own neuroses and needs means that she misses Adam entirely; in a rather moving scene in which Hannah berates Adam for not telling her about his alcoholism, he says: “I’m not going to f***ing talk your ear off about sh*t you don’t ask about. You don’t want to know me. You want to come over in the night [...] then you want to leave and write

about it in your diary.” In this case, choice manifest as sexual empowerment also requires that the personal be disregarded. I would argue that this way of engaging sexually but avoiding intimacy is predicated on a postfeminist culture of celebrating pornography and sex work, the mainstreaming of which Ariel Levy has argued is anything but “rebellious and liberating.”¹⁷ Hannah needs Adam to objectify her in order to shore up her assumption that she is making adult decisions and experimenting with her sexuality. She confirms this when she tells her ex-boyfriend Elijah: “I experiment [...] like right now, I am seeing a guy who I allow to hit me on the side of my body.” As such, Hannah’s sexuality is played out in what Diane Negra calls an “imitative” mode; as is the case with the stripper or lap-dancer, she adopts various guises and feigns sexual pleasure; in the process of doing so she moves increasingly further away from actual intimacy with Adam.

To be clear, I am not arguing simplistically that women cannot have ambiguous sexual desires but rather that Hannah’s need to couch her sexual relationship with Adam in terms of choice and empowerment actually prevents her from drawing close to him – she treats him as a dildo and he responds accordingly. Their sexual encounters are nearly always captured in the same distanced, observational, and diffusely lit *mise-en-scène* outlined in the description opening this essay. They meet in Adam’s apartment, which despite being dirty is seemingly an impersonal, un-lived-in, and transitory space; indeed, the nature of his home contributes to his characterization as an ambiguous figure about whom we know very little until the end of the first season. This is because Hannah herself has not taken the time to get to know him. Their relationship is fundamentally impersonal and conducted in an always comic and ironic tone. When they are not together, she does not hear from him for weeks or occasionally receives a sexually explicit text message that is not actually intended for her at all. Hannah’s notion of sex exists in the virtual realm, both literally and figuratively. They perform sex for each other, just as they do for us. The objective and cold distance we feel when watching them copulate is also the emotional chasm between them. Yet, Hannah’s asides to her female friends reveal that she craves an emotional intimacy that Adam fails to deliver to her on a weekly basis. Devastatingly, she mistakenly believes they are a couple simply because he “touched” her face and told her “to be who you are.” She fails to realize that it is her (dis)empowering choices that are preventing her from forming this kind of loving bond with him. Her need to cling to one incident of small kindness is indicative of how used she has become to what is tantamount to emotional self-abuse.

The Can-Do Girl and the Feminist Killjoy: “I Don’t Think You’d Really Understand My Problems, Since You Seem to Have a Tremendous Amount of Willpower and General Togetherness.”

GIRLS investigates the fractious nature of selfhood lived within a risk society and a moment of extreme crisis. It portrays the psychic and physical effects of what it means to be enchained to a version of success that is predicated on effort, self-invention, and constant availability. As feminist principles have become increasingly merged with the rhetoric of individualism, the young woman is presented as the ideal model to embody and espouse the qualities required to withstand the pressures of the current economic climate. As Harris notes: “[i]deally young people should become unique, successful individuals, making their own choices and plans to accomplish autonomy [...] the obligation for youth to become individuals is therefore constructed as a freedom, a freedom best expressed through the display of one’s choices and projects of the self.”¹⁸ The display of one’s choices and projects of the self is played out, more often than not, in the virtual world in GIRLS. This process of self-actualization taps into and is fuelled by phenomena such as the selfie, Twitter, and Facebook. This construction of selfhood is dependent on social networking: one does not exist unless one is seen. In other words, both self and other are rendered as an object to be dissected and consumed. It is fitting for instance that having broken up with Charlie, her anodyne boyfriend of four years, Marnie falls back in love with him through obsessing over pictures of him on Facebook; and that the girls’ friendship is validated via Instagram; and that after the editor of her e-book dies, Hannah tirelessly tracks down stories about his demise on Gawker instead of “mourning quietly,” as Adam puts it. All forms of intimacy are mediated through the virtual. Indeed, Hannah wonders at her inability to feel anything real at all. Just as the boundary between the virtual and actual is erased, so is the line between integrity and over-exposure. Dunham’s almost militant nakedness in the series has been touted as a political and feminist maneuver, but in terms of the diegetic environment this is merely another symptom of Hannah’s inability to draw boundaries between the public and the private, her own neuroses and the behavior of others and the actual and the virtual. She proudly states: “I am planning to write an article which exposes all of my vulnerabilities to the entire Internet,” to which her friends respond “doesn’t your depressing twitter feed already do that?” Hannah cannot give anything of herself in reality because she has given herself over entirely to the solipsism of the virtual realm. She may believe she is part of an online community, but the reality of her life belies this.

The characters from GIRLS are representative of Harris’s notion of the “can-do” girl since they come from, generally speaking, an advantageous socio-economic background, are well-educated, and have inherited a horizon of expectations that matches this foundation. Ahmed notes that “[t]he promise of happi-

ness is the promise that the lines we follow will get us there, where the ‘there’ acquires its value by not being ‘here.’ This is why happiness is crucial to the energy or ‘forward direction’ of narrative.”¹⁹ In *GIRLS*, the overarching *mise-en-scène* of repetition, stagnation, extreme stasis, and boredom effected through matches on action, still framings, circular dialogue, the use of stereotypes and motifs works against the values of progression, achievement, and growth that are so redolent of the *zeitgeist* the show explores. Which is to say that there is no “forward direction” to this narrative; indeed, the show’s very title designates a state of permanent liminality. Notably, all three of the show’s seasons to date open with a graphic match of Hannah sharing her bed with a different partner – namely, her best friend Marnie, her ex-boyfriend Elijah, and, finally, Adam. The implication given, then, is that Hannah is a person who never progresses in life: she merely replaces one person with another in order to put a stopgap between herself and her problems. Dunham, as a director, has long been associated with what has come to be known as the Mumblecore aesthetic and a corpus of films that explores crisis, liminality, indecision, and lassitude, an association that she utilizes to full effect in *GIRLS*. As is the case with many characters in Mumblecore films, the central figures in *GIRLS* are as troubled by notions of who they should be and what they should do – as a set of clichés to which they could or should subscribe – as by their inability to act in any decisive manner. They live out their lives as conditional and always provisional. The constant striving for a future happiness figured as a specific set of images that connote success but never attaining it (a false promise sustained through cruel optimism) precipitates psychic fracture and compulsive behavior as a form of control. Hannah’s OCD is conveyed to the viewer over three painful episodes that detail every tic and idiosyncrasy of her illness. This may be done, at times, to comic effect but the overall implication is that we are witnessing a young girl unraveling. We cannot laugh for long at someone who is essentially struggling to maintain a grip on her mental well-being. The imperative to accommodate flexibility, availability, self-reliance, and continual diligence results in the attrition of self-esteem, mental health, feeling, and connection outside of oneself.

So is there a way out of this? I would argue that there is, and it has to do with refusing to inherit dominant narratives and expectations. It comes with welcoming unhappiness and rejecting one’s duty to approximate signs of thriving. This amounts to an eschewal of images and objects that have been invested in collectively and affectively as right or correct. In not subscribing to a set of clichés that designate what a good and successful life is, new pathways are opened up. This is not an easy task according to Ahmed, who writes:

It is hard labor just to recognize sadness and disappointment, when you are living a life that is meant to be happy but just isn’t, which is meant to be full, but feels empty. It is difficult to give up an idea of one’s life, when one has

lived a life according to that idea. To recognize loss can mean to be willing to experience an intensification of the sadness that hopefulness postpones.²⁰

It is my contention that in *GIRLS*, this sense of misplaced hopefulness is undermined visually by what I have called the Mumblecore aesthetic, but it is Adam who names the loss of this hopefulness.

Conclusion: “No. You Are the Wound!”

I realize it may seem peculiar that I am singling Adam out as a potentially feminist voice within the series given his sexual proclivities, from which we as viewers are never spared. It is not that I wish to sidestep the problem of his sexual addiction – an addiction which keeps him from drinking – and his often disrespectful behavior towards women but rather to reframe it in terms of his self-awareness and his perspicacity when it comes to the behavior of others. Like all the other protagonists in *GIRLS*, Adam is deeply flawed and often repellent, but he has enough self-knowledge to recognize both symptomatic behavior (he knows that there are other ways to have sex, for instance) and the cause of this behavior. His role in the series could be likened to that of the wise fool or the absurd man. Although he grows to love Hannah, he is often disgusted by her selfish and myopic attitude towards things. Adam refuses to place value in the things that are prized by his community and by his girlfriend; he is the quintessential loner: the outsider looking in. He makes the other characters uncomfortable and for that he is deemed to be the most dislikeable of them all. He is flagrantly weird. By refusing to make others happy by satisfying their preconceived expectations (most notably played out in the scene in which he asks Hannah if she wants him to be her boyfriend), and by rejecting an inherited horizon of expectations and values, Adam is able to forge his own path and in doing so forms surprisingly genuine and affective bonds with those around him. He learns to give himself over to Hannah while retaining a vital sense of himself, and he is the only person who speaks the truth to Marnie: she never loved Charlie, she just loved her idea of him. Unlike the other characters who are trapped in destructive cycles of repetition, isolation, boredom, addiction, and delusion, Adam changes, evolves, and grows over the duration of the show’s three series, and because of this he is the only person who is able to connect in a meaningful way to all the other protagonists. This has nothing to do with a teleological sense of progression or the achievement of a specific end but rather has to do with creating an impasse or holding space that allows for growth and creativity within an environment that serves to stifle any positive form of becoming-other. Through Adam, *GIRLS* tentatively calls for the rise of the troublemaker and the killjoy – and after all, feminism is the history of making trouble.

Destroy Visual Pleasure: Cinema, Attention, and the Digital Female Body (Or, Angelina Jolie Is a Cyborg)

William Brown

Portuguese artist Julião Sarmento's *The Real Thing* (2010) is an installation piece that features some 150 images of women arranged on a rectangular table in frames of various sizes. Most of the images are portraits of celebrities, although some pornographic images are mixed among them. In the configuration that I saw at a solo exhibition of Sarmento's work at the Musée d'art moderne et d'art contemporain in Nice, France in August 2014, at the center of *The Real Thing* was a portrait of Angelina Jolie. The work would seem to suggest, then, that not only is Jolie an indispensable figure in any consideration of contemporary femininity but that she lies somehow at its heart.

Through its title, *The Real Thing* engages with various aspects of contemporary (Western?) society. Firstly, it suggests that the "real" is constituted visually in and through images; we do not see the real Angelina Jolie at all but a photograph of her, and yet it is only when one exists in images, it would seem, that one becomes "real." Secondly, it suggests that there is a gendered aspect to this construction of reality through images: women in particular are the bearers of the attention of viewers, men and women. Thirdly, although images are exposed as constituting reality (thereby suggesting that reality is socially constructed rather than something that objectively exists out there "to be discovered"), it is paradoxically in constituting women as "things" ("the real thing") that they become "real." That is, in becoming an object (of the gaze), one becomes "real," but one loses one's "subjectivity" (i.e., one's reality as a human agent) in this process. Fourthly, that this "reality" is one defined by commodification is exposed by Sarmento's use of a well-known Coca Cola advertising slogan as the title of his work ("It's the real thing" was first used to advertise Coca Cola in 1969¹). In other words, only those (women) who have been commodified – as celebrities and/or as porn "stars" (something of a misnomer given the relative anonymity of many pornographic actors) – are "real." That is, one only exists if one garners attention, with winning attention being a/the major means of making money. Fifth, *The Real Thing* reflects back on those people who interact with it as a work of art

by asking them/us critically to engage with how it is through images that we construct what is “real.” For *The Real Thing* brings to our attention the way in which what we desire is constructed through images: images of pornographic actors and celebrities presented to us as real, such that our actual lives are made to seem dissatisfactory and unreal, such that we desire to become and/or possess the images that we see so as to feel real – even though patently we are real during every second of our existence, and not just those in which we feel what I shall term “cinematic.” In short, then, *The Real Thing* exposes how deeply ingrained capitalism is in humanity, such that it has been fully naturalized (making money is the only reality), while simultaneously exposing how there is a gender bias such that women are sold to us as objects (and in this process help to sell objects to us). Even if men and women look at these images of women, and even if many women can – thinkingly or unthinkingly – become part of this capitalistic image culture, the culture in which we live can thus be defined via this gender bias as patriarchal.

Forty years after the publication of Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975),² then, it seems pertinent to ask the question: what has changed in terms of the way in which images of women are produced, circulated, and received? In this essay, I wish to sketch an answer to this question, in particular by engaging with a cognitive analysis of the digitized star image of Angelina Jolie. We shall find that, although in 2015 we live in a society that has become more technologized than that of 1975, suggesting that many things theoretically have changed, little actually has changed – as *The Real Thing* and the (digitized) image of Angelina Jolie suggest.

Everything and Nothing Has Changed

“Everything” has changed since 1975 because we now live in a significantly more computerized era, in which information circulates globally, especially in image form, at almost instantaneous speed. What is more, while the Lacanian framework that Laura Mulvey employed in her “Visual Pleasure” essay might not be required in such a prominent fashion, it is clear that various of her ideas have sunk relatively deeply into mainstream Western culture, suggesting a redressing of sexual inequalities. To provide two examples, the Bechdel Test is a popular website that simply asks of films whether they feature two or more female characters, whether those female characters meet, and, when they do meet, whether those female characters talk about anything other than a man.³ The site makes clear that passing all of the tests does not make a film either “good” or “feminist friendly” (to use the site’s own terms), but the site nonetheless brings to attention the male bias in many (predominantly narrative) films from all over the world. The second example could arguably be the trend in early 2014 for women to post “no-makeup selfies” on Facebook and other social media sites. This

trend, supposedly started by author Laura Lippman after being outraged by comments regarding the appearance of 81-year old actress Kim Novak at the 2014 Academy Awards,⁴ quickly became linked to breast cancer awareness campaigns (in the UK if not elsewhere) – and at least in part calls attention to the pressure on women to apply makeup in order to offer visual pleasure to men, thereby reaffirming the way in which women are what Mulvey once called “to-be-looked-at” – as opposed to active agents.

Nonetheless, that both of these things exist also suggests the ongoing need for the propagation of feminist ideas precisely because little (“nothing”) has changed in terms of the patriarchal nature of the society in which we live. The “no-makeup selfie” trend itself perhaps suggests this as much as it works against the way in which women are “to-be-looked-at” in contemporary society: for the selfie still asks for women to be looked at (rather than to do the looking) – and potentially also becomes an exercise in who is the most “naturally beautiful,” as one commentator suggests in a *Guardian* article on the trend.⁵ I shall return to this notion of “naturally beautiful” later in this essay. In the era of “Photoshopping,” the fetishization of the “natural” is indeed deeply problematic, since what is often considered “natural” is in fact digitized (i.e., anything but) – including the star image of Angelina Jolie. However, before doing that, I should continue by saying that 2014 also saw a trend for “women against feminism” to post selfies online, but this time next to handwritten lists giving reasons why they disagreed with feminism. I cannot claim to have seen all of the images, but a common reason given is that many women participating perceive feminism to be exclusive, and in an equal society there should be no need for such sexual “discrimination.” Other participants make claims that it is only feminists who objectify women, while others affirm that they *want* to be looked at. We might suggest that one of – if not the – strongest legacies of first and second-wave feminism (if we are currently experiencing a third wave, as has been asserted since at least 1993)⁶ is precisely that feminism is debated in this open and exciting manner. In other words, feminism is not a unified movement – and perhaps should not be. Instead, feminism is multiple in its declarations and iterations. Nonetheless, I would perhaps concur with Angela McRobbie, who in 2004 wrote that the perceived lack of a need for feminism for reasons along the lines of “we are all equal now” is in fact misguided and is really the pushing forward of a neo-conservative individualism that paradoxically confuses equality with homogeneity.⁷ This confusion is paradoxical because individualism suggests difference (“everyone is different”), while collective movements suggest homogeneity (“we are together”). However, what is pushed is a *certain type* of individualism – and not genuine difference. This is made clear through McRobbie’s references to various postcolonial authors in her essay. The absence of non-white and non-Euro-American women from the Women Against Feminism Facebook group also makes this bias immediately apparent. It speaks of people who can afford to “do without” femin-

ism since they already belong to dominant groups within (Western) society. Furthermore, through – again – the emphasis on the visual via the use of photographs/selfies in the images, it speaks of how visuality is, indeed, a marker of power, and while some (white, predominantly young) women might be able to achieve some power, power as a whole remains the preserve of the white male (society is patriarchal). It is easy to celebrate individuality when you belong to the relatively homogeneous group that maintains hegemonic power.

If we accept the above, then we can come to two conclusions. The first is that while “everything” seems to have changed, in fact very little – perhaps nothing – has changed, with technology, the supposed signifier of change (“the Internet has changed everything”), being a marker of the intensification of a patriarchal and neoliberal system rather than a challenge to it – in terms of the production, circulation, and reception of images, especially images of women. Men still dominate the film industry, and numerous films are still made in which women are just to be looked at (more on this later), whether or not a woman takes on such a role by “choice.”⁸ The second conclusion is that, as Nina Power might put it, there has been a flattening of desire such that we live in an age of the “one-dimensional woman” (to go along with the one-dimensional man that Herbert Marcuse identified in 1964).⁹ Bombarded by media images that dictate to us what we should desire (with “cinema” and/or “the cinematic” being the umbrella term for what we are told to desire), we lose the capacity to develop our own desires and are not fulfilled by second-hand dreams – as *The Real Thing* suggests.

Attention, Cinema, Gender

In order to get to the specifically digital/digitized female body – as exemplified by films featuring Angelina Jolie – we should look at how the concept of attention is central to an understanding of film specifically and the “cinematic” society that we live in more generally. We shall do this by looking briefly at a growing strand of film studies, namely cognitive film studies.

As early as 1916, Hugo Münsterberg made clear that we can pay voluntary and involuntary attention to a film, highlighting in particular that our attention can be attracted involuntarily towards that which is “loud and shining and unusual.”¹⁰ Although vague, this formula nonetheless describes much of what many filmmakers endeavor to present to us when we watch a film. More recently, psychological studies of movement and motion perception and of attention have been used to argue that our attention is also attracted involuntarily to movements in our visual field, since we are constantly on the lookout for prey, predators, or mates.¹¹ The increased/intensified rate of cutting in contemporary cinema, as identified by David Bordwell, suggests, then, that contemporary filmmakers wish to arouse our attention and to keep it.¹² Furthermore, Bordwell also argues

that the shot-reverse and point-of-view system of Hollywood cinema relies on natural processes of vision and attention.¹³

What is true of the images as a whole is perhaps also true of what we see in the images: most images picture moving creatures, but they also picture humans and in particular human faces. Eye tracking studies suggest that the human face is a focus of attention whenever we see one on a cinema screen.¹⁴ This stands to reason: the human face attracts our attention both inside and outside of the cinema because it conveys to us information, in particular information about the emotional condition of the owner of the face, an emotional condition that might in turn inform us of the situation more generally in which we find ourselves, be that as human beings in a new environment, or with human beings in a film/on a screen (three examples of this approach in relation to film are Carroll, Plantinga, and Tan).¹⁵ Without wishing to downplay the importance of this emotional information, at present we need simply to know that the face, like many other aspects of cinema (its movement, its onset of new visual displays via cuts, its brightness, its loudness, and its unusualness), attracts our attention, often in an initially involuntary fashion.

This is important because we can see being constructed in this cognitive discourse a sense in which film viewing is based upon natural processes: we naturally attend to bright, loud, and unusual things, and we naturally attend to human faces – and so it makes sense for there to be a cinema that takes advantage of, or works with, these natural processes – such that cinema is enjoyable for us, since it arouses our attention and by extension our curiosity. However, there are more than just natural reasons for films to be constructed in the way that they are. For there is also an economic aspect to attention that, as Jonathan Beller (2006) has so lucidly discussed, involves keeping humans attending to certain things and not to others.¹⁶ In short, the more that one has the attention of the greatest number of eyeballs possible, the more economic power one has in terms of being able to commodify that attention via advertising. The cutting rate of Hollywood films has doubled, if not tripled, over the course of the last 70 years.¹⁷ Although humans blink and move their eyes, heads, and bodies, human perception is *not* like a film in terms of rhythm and rate of change. If Hollywood films do capture our attention by appealing to quite natural mechanisms, they therefore also do so via quite *unnatural* means.

Now, to say that cinema catches our attention involuntarily will perhaps seem counter-intuitive, because most cinema viewers of course pay willingly to go and watch a movie. However, in the spirit of Beller, we should acknowledge how humans make not just films (to assert this would be a tautology) but also the world itself increasingly “cinematic.” Many humans now inhabit urban spaces in which there is, to use Münsterberg’s terms, brightness (electric lighting), loudness (traffic), and the unusual (in the form of different kinds of innovation and fashion; note that the contemporary urban environment can be described in terms

similar to the war zone). Furthermore, humans have also filled their urban (and all domestic) spaces with screens that themselves feature loud, bright, and unusual images. My own experience of living in London suffices for examples: screens in supermarkets, screens in taxis, screens on Tube platforms, screens alongside escalators, and more pertinently screens in nearly everyone's hand in the form of a phone, a tablet, and/or a laptop. So habituated have we become to the ubiquity of screens that we live in a condition of seeming dependence: when my experiential field is too quiet, I take out my screen in order to get a hit of brightness, unusualness, and/or loudness. The argument to make, then, is not that we voluntarily go to the cinema to have our attention attracted via often involuntary means but that we have surrounded ourselves with screens that employ techniques developed in the cinema in order to attract our attention as much as possible.

The female face has a key role to play in capturing and maintaining human attention. Without space to explore in full detail, cognitive studies suggest that humans not only pay special attention to the faces of other humans but that the following female features are deemed most attractive and thus capture even more attention: perceived youth or neoteny (Symons); small lower jaws and noses, and large lips (Perrett et al.); higher cheek bones (Grammer et al.); open eyes and blonde hair (Oliver-Rodríguez et al.); smooth, unblemished skin and hairlessness on the body (Fink and Penton-Voak); a smile (Langlois et al.), and body decorations (e.g., jewelry; see Fink and Penton-Voak).¹⁸ All things considered, then, biologist Karl Grammer and colleagues assert that 24 is the age when a woman should reach her optimum attractiveness, thereby making her most fit for mating and becoming a mother.¹⁹ What these studies seem to describe, then, is *grosso modo*, many a Hollywood female starlet – meaning that Hollywood is perhaps “correct” to include young, smiling blonde women in its movies. We “naturally” find these women attractive because, the studies often contend, they have stronger genes to which we “naturally” would be inclined for purposes of reproduction.

There are, however, strong grounds to refute the accuracy of these (anger-inducing studies). There is, for example, an overwhelming emphasis on mating as the sole reason to look at a woman, and the results are often based primarily on the responses of college-aged, straight American males – meaning that the experiments are representative only of certain tastes and do not allow space for alternative ways of, or reasons for, looking. Furthermore, the “stronger genes” argument is plainly fallacious: every single human that is alive has equally strong genes since they have survived this far – and if such traits were the result of “stronger” genes, surely they would be more common than rare. In addition, not only do these studies perhaps only reflect the taste of college-aged straight American males but the taste of that demographic is not so much “natural” as also culturally/socially constructed – as various other cognitive studies would

suggest. Watching an episode of *CHARLIE'S ANGELS* (Ivan Goff and Ben Roberts, 1976-1981) directly prior to meeting a female of "average attractiveness" has been proven, for example, to lead young straight males to rate that female as less attractive than males who had not just watched the show (the so-called "Farrah effect").²⁰ Various studies confirm that Hollywood perpetuates the beauty equals goodness myth – and influences how people understand beauty and beautiful people in the real world, while Grammer himself admits that "[m]en who see films with beautiful women adjust their beauty standards accordingly as compared to controls."²¹ Since college-aged American males have grown up exposed to an increasingly intense battery of images of what female attractiveness is supposed to be (i.e., the "Farrah effect" becomes permanent), it is little wonder that studies replicate such findings.

The reason for this excursion into cognitive film studies is threefold. Firstly, it is at least to float the possibility that the would-be naturalization of certain film techniques – including the casting of certain types of women – as "better" because they appeal to our "natural" predispositions has, in fact, a political dimension that is regularly disavowed. Secondly, it is to reinforce the idea that what is "real" and/or "natural" is contingent, or the result of historical, social and cultural processes, as much as it is a product of biology – an idea that will be important when we consider the digital/digitized female body. And, thirdly, it functions as a means to consider the films of Angelina Jolie, whom I shall use as an exemplar of the digital/digitized female body in contemporary Hollywood cinema.

Jolie as Cyborg

Angelina Jolie's appearance – youthful features, high cheek bones, big lips, big eyes, big breasts, big smile, occasionally blonde hair, and ornaments (in the form of highly mediated tattoos, as well as jewelry) – would make of her the "perfect" film star from the cognitive perspective: viewers cannot but pay attention to her, meaning that, from the perspective of neoliberal capital, she logically has been commodified as a star. What is more, in regularly playing, kick-ass action heroines – that is, in movies that are brighter, louder, and feature much in the way of "unusual" imagery (we do not regularly see exploding cars in the real world), Jolie functions as the almost ideal film star because she supposedly demands attention while also starring in films that themselves demand attention. Indeed, from the cognitive perspective, why Hollywood took so long to work out that action heroines can make money seems a mystery. However, as we shall see, there is also regularly something about Jolie's characters that exceeds society, an uncontainability that belies the very unnatural appeal of a star that otherwise seems so "naturally" to command our attention. Repeatedly in her films, this is rendered through the identification of Jolie's characters with digital technology.

Jolie's characters have been associated with digital technology since the start of her career. *CYBORG 2* (Michael Schroeder, 1993) saw Jolie play "Cash" Reese, a cyborg designed to destroy a rival tech company, but which begins to develop feelings for martial arts instructor "Colt" Ricks (Elias Koteas). In *HACKERS* (Iain Softley, 1995), she played computer hacker Kate "Acid Burn" Libby, who becomes embroiled in a plot to expose a fraudulent employee at a large corporation before a virus causes shipping fleets to capsize. Jolie played the iconic computer game character Lara Croft in *LARA CROFT: TOMB RAIDER* (Simon West, 2001) and *LARA CROFT TOMB RAIDER: THE CRADLE OF LIFE* (Jan de Bont, 2003), as well as Commander Franky Cook in *SKY CAPTAIN AND THE WORLD OF TOMORROW* (Kerry Conran, 2004), one of the first films to be created using an entirely digital backlot. Jolie often plays (tellingly ambiguous) heroines in action films that feature numerous digital special effects, including *GONE IN SIXTY SECONDS* (Dominic Sena, 2000), *ALEXANDER* (Oliver Stone, 2004), *MR & MRS SMITH* (Doug Liman, 2005), *WANTED* (Timur Bekmambetov, 2008), *SALT* (Phillip Noyce, 2010), and *THE TOURIST* (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2010). She has voiced characters in several digital animations, including *SHARK TALE* (Bibo Bergeron, Vicky Jenson, and Rob Letterman, 2004), *KUNG FU PANDA* (Mark Osborne and John Stevenson, 2008) and *KUNG FU PANDA 2* (Jennifer Yuh Nelson, 2011). She played Grendel's Mother in the motion capture version of *BEOWULF* (Robert Zemeckis, 2007). And latterly she played the title character in the heavily computer-manipulated *MALEFICENT* (Robert Stromberg, 2014).

Cristina Stasia has argued that Jolie's star persona marries two identities that previously were relatively fixed and stable – the butch and the femme – and turns them into the butch femme.²² However, while Stasia certainly gets to grips with some of the contradictions that Jolie seems to marry, she overlooks the role that technology plays in Jolie's films and in the construction of her star persona. Meanwhile, Charles Soukup has identified how in a range of recent Hollywood films, and not just ones featuring Jolie (although she is the "queen of technoscophobia"),²³ the female body wears and/or becomes confused with (combat) technology, meaning that viewers are invited to look at sexualized women as "machine-like" as well as to celebrate technology itself in a fetishistic fashion. However, while Soukup concentrates on technology in the form of gadgets and weapons (an important part of the Jolie persona, particularly in the action films mentioned above), he perhaps overlooks the way in which Jolie is technologized formally.

Cinema has likely only ever presented to us technological versions of humans, in that cinema itself is a technology that presents to us humans and parts of humans as fetish objects (especially faces); the fetishization of (parts of) the body enhances the functioning of cinema as (capitalist) fetish machine as a whole – with the fetish being, in the terms of this essay, that to which we pay (perhaps even unwilling) attention. However, in the digital era, this technologization

seems to have intensified and thus the fetishization process is to a certain extent crystallized: this is the “Photoshopping” of the female body in order to remove “undesirable” hair and to change body shape and facial features. The way in which this involves an intensified femininity is most clear in *BEOWULF*, in which we see a motion-captured Jolie morphed into the mother of the monster, Grendel (Crispin Glover), with a prehensile tail added to an emphatically feminized torso and chest. This is also suggested in *MALEFICENT*, in which Jolie’s appearance is similarly modified through a combination of digital and more traditional, prosthetic make-up techniques (much has been made of *MALEFICENT*’s “razor-sharp” cheekbones, which were designed as prosthetic bones by the film’s special-effects supervisor, Rick Baker).²⁴ Overall, then, it is not just that Jolie in her action films wields guns and uses computers such that there is a “techno-scopophilia” along the lines described by Soukup – movies as a means to promote various technologies by associating them with the sexualized glamour of the female star (the star commodity used to sell and/or to naturalize other, technological commodities). Rather, Jolie is *herself* rendered a kind of cyborg, in that digital technology has been inscribed into/on to her body in the digital age, making of her a post-human woman who somehow marries machine and flesh.

Most important for this essay is the way in which this “cyborg” persona has itself become naturalized. This logic extends beyond Jolie and to so many women in the media when we take into account the relentless Photoshopping of the female form; all women (as commodities) capture the attention of viewers who have been encouraged to pay greater attention to digitized female bodies from the first time they saw a screen. As humans come to demand hits of brightness, loudness, and the unusual from their screens, so might humans now come to demand this from women. In the spirit of Naomi Wolf, whether or not endorsing a particular product placement, the mythological beauty promoted through the use of digital technology underpins an entire industry of woman.²⁵ Society demands of women – and, more insidiously, women demand of themselves – that they conform to the Photoshopped screen images as well. In “becoming cinematic,” we supposedly “empower” ourselves. However, this “empowerment” is really the expression of our powerlessness in the face of the cinematic logic of capital.

Jolie is often presented in the media as the world’s most beautiful woman (ten different magazines have nominated her for this accolade), suggesting that the computer-generated is further naturalized/presented to us as real. And yet, looking more closely at her films, we can see that Jolie’s characters regularly demonstrate an inability to fit into the contemporary world – an excess that paradoxically betrays the “unnatural” processes of the patriarchal society that constructs her, attempts to naturalize her, and yet which cannot contain her. We can see this in various ways. For example, Lara Croft may be a kick-ass action heroine, but she also seems incapable of meaningful human relationships, as is clearly seen in *THE CRADLE OF LIFE*, where Lara shoots love interest Terry (Gerard

Butler) at the film's climax because he wants to take Pandora's Box, an artifact that Lara believes should be kept away from human beings. There is a sense, even, that Lara herself is a kind of Pandora's box, then, who must similarly be kept out of reach of men. Similarly, in *CYBORG 2*, *HACKERS*, *GONE IN SIXTY SECONDS*, *SKY CAPTAIN*, *MR & MRS SMITH*, *BEOWULF*, *WANTED*, *SALT*, and *MALEFICENT*, Jolie plays characters of which the "good" or "bad" nature is hard to determine. Either she is figured as a "good" character who otherwise engages in illegal activities (*HACKERS*, *GONE IN SIXTY SECONDS*); or she is misunderstood as a bad character when in fact her motives are good, or at least reasonable/"human" (*MR & MRS SMITH*, *BEOWULF*, *WANTED*, *SALT*, *MALEFICENT*); or Jolie is inhuman and thus hard to understand (*CYBORG 2*, *BEOWULF*); or she is a good but threateningly "butch" ex-girlfriend whose otherness is marked by an eye patch (*SKY CAPTAIN*). Even in *ALEXANDER*, there is something "unnatural" about the mother-son relationship between Jolie's Olympias and Colin Farrell's Alexander.

In other words, time and again, Jolie's characters, despite being incarnated by the most beautiful woman in the world, somehow exceed or elude easy categorization. As an agential female who takes charge of her own destiny, there is something uncontainable about Jolie – and her characters must suffer on some level as a result. Perhaps this is equally clear in several of Jolie's more "serious" roles – as Legs Sadoovskiy in *FOXFIRE* (Annette Haywood-Carter, 1996), as Lisa in *GIRL, INTERRUPTED* (James Mangold, 1999), for which Jolie won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actress, as Mariane Pearl in *A MIGHTY HEART* (Michael Winterbottom, 2007), and as Christine Collins in *CHANGELING* (Clint Eastwood, 2008). In each of these films, Jolie's characters are punished through familial separation (*A MIGHTY HEART*, *CHANGELING*), through incarceration (*GIRL, INTERRUPTED*), and/or by being alone (Legs leaves the girl gang at the end of *FOXFIRE* and is never seen again).

In sum, then, there is clearly something transgressive about Jolie, as wrought through her associations with the butch femme and, more particularly, through the techno-scopophilia that is associated with her. In many, if not all, of her films, Jolie is presented as a figure to be looked at. If she is also an action heroine that is more active than passive (a formula for maximum attention!), this aspect of her persona is contained through the liminal status of her characters (often bad, often hard to understand) and the fact that many of the characters face unhappy, or at the very least lonesome, endings. This seeming contradiction – she is to be looked at (passive), but also an agent (active) – is resolved precisely through these unhappy endings, through her uncontainability: Jolie is presented as a commodity for consumption but never really as a human being; she is a commodity and not a woman. Upheld as the paragon of femininity, her films paradoxically convey the ongoing message that women face unhappiness if they try to achieve too much.

The glamour, the technology, and the products that Angelina Jolie's attention-grabbing features help to promote are revealed as not being the key to happiness through the films' ambiguous endings. Nonetheless, the capitalistic work of cinema has already been done by film's end: the pursuit of the "cinematic" (of becoming capital) has been posited. Jolie's already unusual features are enhanced digitally to make her a cyborg that combines technology and the flesh; an object of (male, techno-scopophilic) visual pleasure, Jolie helps to naturalize the culture of the digital, of the cinematic (and, coincidentally, of the ethos that violence solves problems). But, we repeatedly are told that this may not lead to happiness.

On the ontological level, digital technology may disrupt the usual distinctions between the representation of the sexes in cinema – since we have characters that morph between male and female and/or which are not gendered according to the traditional categories of male and female.²⁶ However, on a political level, gender clearly remains an object of fierce debate. The pleasure that is "naturally" taken in seeing quite unusual female forms serves to naturalize a certain kind of (digitally enhanced) femininity that the real world cannot hope to match (and so humans take refuge increasingly in the digital realm, in order to be/become as "cinematic" as possible). Although fraught with contradictions – as the uncontainability of Jolie's characters makes clear – it seems certain that much work still needs to be done so that women can break free from the neoliberal ethos that underpins the technological drive of the contemporary world (together with the postfeminism that this era supposedly brings with it). As per Mulvey's classic essay, perhaps there is much to be gained in trying to destroy easy, "cognitive" visual pleasure – and to endeavor to encourage humans to take different types of pleasure in different types of image, including those that are not obviously attention-arousing. Jolie might be presented to us as "the real thing," but, as Sarmiento's work conveys, she is anything but.

The Intertextual Stardom of IRIS: Winslet, Dench, Murdoch, and Alzheimer's Disease

Lucy Bolton

The film *IRIS* (2001) was directed by Richard Eyre and is based on the memoirs of Iris Murdoch's husband, John Bayley, *Iris: A Memoir of Iris Murdoch* (1999) and *Elegy for Iris* (1999). It is a film about the endurance of the love between Murdoch and Bayley over forty years, from their meeting as young academics at Oxford University to their old age together, as she becomes more confused, forgetful, and unwell due to the onset of Alzheimer's disease. The film is called *IRIS* and so is ostensibly about Iris Murdoch, and it stars Dame Judi Dench as the older Iris and Kate Winslet as the younger. The iconographical attributes of Iris Murdoch's star persona, consisting of intelligence, wildness, and Britishness, are essentially borrowed by Dench and Winslet. This intertextuality succeeds because the actors themselves stand for differing combinations of these attributes. In turn, as the two most well-known English actresses of the day personify Iris, they imbue her image with their sexuality, humor, vulnerability, and contemporary relevance. The film's legacy, however, is that the name of Iris Murdoch has become inextricably linked with Alzheimer's disease, and the image of the older, unwell, and no longer capable Murdoch is the prevalent persona that emerges from the film.

Peter Conradi, close friend and authorized biographer of Murdoch, described the two faces presented in *IRIS* as either bonking or bonkers: "Both sensationalisms reduced her to gross physicality, by-passing and demeaning the one thing about her that was truly remarkable – the freedom of her mind."¹ Although not always "gross," the film does dwell on Murdoch's physicality, whether she is swimming naked in the river as a young woman or urinating on the carpet as an elderly one. It is of course, a challenge to depict the workings of the mind on screen. As A.N. Wilson writes in his personal memoir about the Murdoch he knew, "In spite of a few gallant scenes in which Dame Judi Dench sat at a desk with a pen in her hand, however, the film – any film – was bound to fail in depicting what goes on inside, what happens in a person's secret self, to make them a writer; to make them, moreover, not any writer, but that writer. To make

‘them’ Iris Murdoch.”² The perspectives of Wilson and Conradi indicate the intensity of the personal perspectives on Iris Murdoch that have been written since her death. The film *IRIS*, co-written by Richard Eyre and Charles Wood, is a further perspective on Murdoch, and it is the specifically cinematic elements of this representation that I will explore in this essay, in particular the way in which the film depicts her femininity and her aging, in relation to aspects of her celebrity and the cultural pariah of dementia.

Teasing out the Star Images

Dame Judi Dench is one of Britain’s most successful and internationally well-known actresses. With her background as a Shakespearean actress, stalwart of British television drama, and BAFTA and Olivier award winner many times over, her role as *grande dame* of British acting is beyond question. Having played both Queen Elizabeth and Queen Victoria, and James Bond’s boss “M,” Dench had developed a profile as embodying British institutions.

Kate Winslet may not have the same on-stage theatrical credentials, but her roles in the film versions of British literary classics such as *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY* (Ang Lee, 1995), *JUDE* (Michael Winterbottom, 1996), and *HAMLET* (Kenneth Branagh, 1996), together with her famously down-to-earth attitude, saw her positioned as Britain’s “English rose” actress in Hollywood. The phenomenal success of *TITANIC* (James Cameron, 1997) had ensured that Winslet’s star persona was internationally established, and the role of Rose, along with that of Julia in *HIDEOUS KINKY* (Gillies MacKinnon, 1998) and Ruth in *HOLY SMOKE* (Jane Campion, 1998) led to Winslet’s image being founded on British sexiness: fearless about nudity on screen, when not bound up in the costume of a heritage drama. Sean Redmond argues that Winslet subverts the idealized aspects of English rose-ness, such as whiteness and thinness, and offers up an array of contradictory and transgressive qualities.³ Redmond describes Winslet as having an “independent spirit and unruly body.”⁴ In 2001, at the time *IRIS* was made, both Winslet and Dench were household names in the UK, lauded for their acting abilities and quintessential – cinematically exportable – Englishness. Each of them, then, seemed perfectly cast for the roles of the younger and older Iris Murdoch, herself a Dame, a Booker-prize winning novelist, and a figure of the Oxford philosophy scene.

In Richard Dyer’s terminology, the casting of Winslet and Dench can be considered to be a kind of double “perfect fit” with Murdoch in that “all the aspects of a star’s image fit with all the traits of a character.”⁵ Dyer describes a star text as being a structured polysemy made up of circulating inter-texts that change over time, and we can see the star personas of Dench and Winslet intersecting with each other and with that of the famous writer and philosopher Iris Murdoch to form the persona of the film’s eponymous character, Iris. Murdoch’s reputa-

tion as a writer of many popular and successful novels had been founded on her particular brand of intellectual fiction, its evocation of a certain strata of society embroiled in moral and sexual conflicts and complexities. Although she had taken part in some televised interviews and discussion programs, her public profile was quite guarded and private, and she was renowned for her secrecy.⁶ The public persona of Iris Murdoch thus benefited from its personification by two high-profile actresses and the iconographical attributes they bring to their characterizations of her. In a tripartite web of reciprocity, the star personas of Winslet, Dench, and Murdoch exchange elements of each other's star images; while the actors benefit, Murdoch's intellectual and professional achievements suffer, alongside the individuality of a woman who lived a life of nearly eighty years. The young Murdoch is portrayed as fierce and robust, with a lust for life and experimental sexual appetites. Murdoch's youthful persona, then, is inhabited by Winslet's "ballsy and unruly" star persona,⁷ borrowing the elements of nudity, wildness, and transgression. (The first sight of Murdoch in the film is an underwater shot of the naked swimming Winslet.) Likewise, Murdoch's older persona is seen through the familiarity, intelligence, and sensitivity of Judi Dench, which in turn brings with it added pathos in her depiction of the afflicted, vulnerable Iris. The idea that Britain's national treasure could be so stricken adds to the film's emotional pull.

The film also links Dench and Winslet in a very particular way. Both were nominated for Academy awards for this film: Dench for best actress in a leading role and Winslet for best actress in supporting role. This reflects the fact that there are fewer scenes of the young Iris in the film than there are of the older, but it also suggests that Winslet is perhaps treading in the footsteps of Dench, and that she will become British acting's *grande dame* in due course. Also, perhaps, that Dench is Winslet's young firebrand all grown up, conveying the longevity of her acting career and harking back to the idea of Dench as a younger actress. In the "Behind the scenes" featurette about the making of *IRIS* on the DVD, sentimentally titled "Talent for Life," Dench wonders whether the "beautiful lithe young" Winslet will worry that she "is going to end up like me."⁸ In the same set of interviews, director Richard Eyre refers to Iris Murdoch as "a star" and talks about the ways in which Dench and Winslet "share the same spirit" as each other. The suggestion is that perhaps these three women share the same spirit, which Martin Amis also suggested in his review of the film: "It is as if Dame Judi and Dame Iris were always on a metaphysical collision course. Her performance has the rarest quality known to any art – that of apparent inevitability."⁹

There is a trinity of stardom in operation here: Murdoch the mother, Dench the daughter, and Winslet the wild spirit. In other words, a trio of star personas in a circulating, intertextual relationship, so that Dench benefits from the belief that she was a fiery young wild star like Winslet and possesses the cultural grav-

itas to embody the older Murdoch; Winslet benefits from the idea that she may grow into or fill the shoes of Dench, and that she possesses sufficient strength and intelligence to portray the unconventional young intellectual Murdoch; and Iris Murdoch benefits from the currency of Dench's and Winslet's public personas now, which make her appear relevant, interesting, and approachable. Certainly their performances inflect the film's recreations of Murdoch's televisual and public performances with a lightness and sense of humor that is less readily apparent in those digital recordings of Murdoch available on YouTube, where Murdoch can appear wary and guarded.¹⁰ The film performances were feted for their authenticity, particularly Dench as the older Iris and Hugh Bonneville and Jim Broadbent as younger and older Bayley. Philip French finds it impossible to separate his memory of the real Iris and John from Dench and Broadbent in the film, and finds Bonneville's likeness to be uncanny.¹¹ Martin Amis finds Dench as what he calls "the mature Iris" to be "transcendent." Amis writes, "I knew Iris. I have respectfully kissed that cunning, bashful, secretive smile."¹² The great and the good of Oxford-educated cultural criticism find Eyre's film to be an authentic cinematic depiction of Murdoch and Bayley; although both express reservations about Winslet. French finds she "has the mannerisms if not exactly the right appearance," and Amis finds that she "is slightly hampered by the conventionality of her good looks." Aside from Winslet's physical appearance, which might interrupt the complete assimilation of her into young Iris, the film is lauded for presenting performances that convince those who knew the couple of the likeness. The film *IRIS* carries the cultural weight of the intellectual and literary icon Iris Murdoch; the perceived veracity of the account as derived from its basis on her husband's memoir, and the dramatic credentials of ex-National Theatre director, Richard Eyre, as its co-writer and director. As Peter Bradshaw observes, however, the film should really be called "John," as the focus is unremittingly on Bayley's perceptions of Iris Murdoch. Whether he is observing her unselfconsciously sing an Irish ballad in an Oxford pub, making love to one of her many suitors, or struggling to form a word on her notepad, the film's perspective is overwhelmingly that of the bemused, stammering Bayley as he observes her with unwavering but perplexed devotion.

Celebrity, Professional, Performer, Stars

If thinking about the star performances in the film along the lines of Dyer's structured polysemy helps elucidate how the elements of Winslet, Dench, and Murdoch's personas interrelate, then Christine Geraghty's re-examination of stardom and celebrity sheds light on the contemporary discourses at play in the film, how the texts circulating around *IRIS* impact upon the persona of Iris Murdoch, and how these relate specifically to questions of aging women and celebrity. Geraghty examines contemporary stars as celebrities, professionals, and

performers; categories that, she proposes, “contribute to a paradigm of the different ways in which well-known individuals ‘appear’ in the media” and “better help us to understand what film stars have in common with and how they differ from other mass media public figures.”¹³ Geraghty’s definitions are pertinent to understanding IRIS, and they can also be seen to overlap in this particular case. Winslet and Dench are clearly performers, and playing a well-known public figure draws attention to their skills as such, including their physicality and the ability to capture the mannerisms or style of their non-fictional subject. Geraghty notes that the concentration on performance works particularly well for the aging star, as it places value on experience “well beyond the pin-up stage.”¹⁴ Murdoch, as a novelist and philosopher, might be expected to be considered a professional whose fame, according to Geraghty, “rests on their work in such a way that there is very little sense of a private life and the emphasis is on the seamlessness of the public persona.”¹⁵ The effect of the memoirs and biographies, however, is to bring Murdoch into the sphere of celebrity: “someone whose fame rests overwhelmingly on what happens outside the sphere of their work and who is famous for having a lifestyle.”¹⁶ IRIS foregrounds Murdoch’s lifestyle: her sexual relationships, her penchant for wild swimming, or the domestic squalor in which she and Bayley lived. The fate of the aging professional in this case is to be subsumed by the ironic celebrity that the diminishing of her mental capabilities bestowed upon her.

The Aging Female Star

Within the last decade, there has been a welcome development in the study of older and aging women in culture and the media. The UK-based, AHRC-funded Centre for Women, Ageing and Media (WAM) has seen the creation of a significant body of publications and events focused on the visibility and representation of older women in public life, and publications such as *Female Celebrity and Ageing: Back in the Spotlight*, edited by Deborah Jermyn, have established a body of work concerned with aging women from classical Hollywood to new media.¹⁷

Josephine Dolan, a founding member of WAM, discusses the notion of “successful aging” and the increased visibility of older female stars.¹⁸ Contrasting media responses to the bodies of Helen Mirren in a bikini and Madonna in “revealing” clothing, Dolan exposes how the body of the aging star can still be “rendered the object of a pathologizing gaze if it fails the injunctions of ‘chronological decorum.’”¹⁹ In other words, Mirren is deemed to be shapely, well-toned and natural, whereas Madonna is vilified for embarrassingly revealing too much muscly, sinewy, flesh. As Dolan concludes, Mirren is the acceptable face of senior sexiness, whereas Madonna exposes “the wrong kind of flesh” for her age.²⁰ These opposing “types” of aging female bodies are expressed in even more forceful terms by Sherryl Wilson (another WAM participant). Wilson contrasts the

representations of aging women in the media as being either “she who is young-looking, full of youthful vigour and conventionally attractive,” with the “older woman as ancient crone, enfeebled and vulnerable”: both enduring tropes eradicate experience and history and represent “the strenuous disavowal of the ageing process.”²¹ Judi Dench avoids these polarities: having kept to the same short hairstyle and loose-fitting clothes across the decades, her star image has never been founded on sexiness or glamour. Dench cannot escape the scrutiny of the aging police, however, as Sally Chivers demonstrates when she writes that “Even Dame Judi Dench, so frequently praised for her insistence on a natural ageing appearance and not being afraid to look old, reportedly admits that she has turned to Botox for a little help around the eyes.”²² This unavoidable commentary on how “well” a female star is aging, coupled with the prurient assessment of whether or not she has succumbed to the knife or needle (and if so how successful she has been at disguising the procedures), persistently foregrounds aging physicality. *IRIS* embraces the visibility of the aging female body to some extent in the scenes of Dench swimming (besuited, however, as opposed to the naked Winslet’s swimming scenes), and taking a shower with her friend Janet Stone (Penelope Wilton). As the film’s perspective on Iris in these scenes is that of the loving eyes of John, or her friend Janet, questions of Iris’s physical aging are softened and her personhood is more dominant. Rather than the more familiar revulsion at an aging female body as a crone or repulsive spectacle, the eyes of those who love her convey Iris as a older woman surrounded by other older people, and therefore age-appropriate and not extraordinary. The film turns its pathologizing gaze instead on the aging female mind in an acutely precise and unforgiving way.

The demented older woman has featured as a spectacle in several recent films, and stardom has been central to the construction of that spectacle in the high-profile cases of Julie Christie in *AWAY FROM HER* (Sarah Polley, 2006), Meryl Streep in *THE IRON LADY* (Phyllida Lloyd, 2011) and Dench as Iris. The return of the elusive Christie, famed for her beauty and independence, playing an Alzheimer’s patient proved a topic of fascination for journalists and critics alike.²³ Streep’s performance as Margaret Thatcher attracted a similar kind of discussion about inevitability and “perfect fit,” as did Dench’s as Murdoch. Public curiosity and the desire to have a glimpse at how the reclusive elderly Margaret Thatcher ended her days and to see just how accurately Streep could impersonate the eminently caricaturable politician imbued the film with a degree of cultural capital similar to that of *IRIS*. All three actresses were nominated for Academy Awards, with Streep winning the Oscar. It seems that playing roles associated with the horrors of pathologized aging is seen as worthy of particular approbation. These dynamics between stardom, aging, and the body are not exclusive to female stars, but there are clearly specific issues that affect women playing aging women on screen – not least that, as Sonia Haiduc points out, “the titles of biopics show an

interesting penchant for familiarity in connection with women writers, in an attempt to convey the intimate, personal relationship (female?) writers develop with their work, and, indirectly with their persona.”²⁴ Films such as *JULIA* (Fred Zinnemann, 1977), *STEVIE* (Robert Enders, 1978), *BECOMING JANE* (Julian Jarrold, 2007), *ENID* (James Hawes, 2009), and of course *IRIS* may be about female literary figures with public personas, but their titles suggest familiarity and intimacy with their private subject: in this way, “the woman writer sometimes seems to be defined more by her (ordinary) first name than by her (extraordinary) place in history.”²⁵

The Female Philosopher and Novelist as Young or Old

Martin Amis writes that “Iris Murdoch’s fall could not have been more marked.”²⁶ The fear of Alzheimer’s disease has become a dominant social preoccupation as the population ages and medical advances have begun to offer more hope to those who suffer the social terrors of heart disease, cancer, or stroke. Dementia is something that cannot be avoided, hidden, or beaten: as the doctor says to John Bayley, “it will win.” *IRIS* begins with scenes of young and old Iris and John swimming together in rivers, and Murdoch addressing a packed Oxford dining hall. Although Murdoch begins to speak authoritatively about the value of education, she unexpectedly launches into song, attracting some surprised but tolerant expressions. We see the young Iris telling John that she had just written her first novel, and the older Iris sighing with exasperation at her desk over the difficulty she is having forming her words. A scene in which the older Iris and John do their shopping at the supermarket shows them to be lively and nimble conversationalists, as they develop the linguistic and philosophical concept of wholegrain mustard. The film conveys the idea that the couple were always eccentric, speaking to each other in their own private language, and that people looked at the two of them oddly (perhaps unsurprisingly) when they went nude swimming. A young Iris is shown going to a party with the infatuated young Bayley, where she slips on a flight of stairs and slides down on her bottom laughing wildly. Over a quiet drink in the pub, older Iris and John swap literary quotes and jokes. Iris has begun to display signs of confusion, realizing that she has just repeated herself, or cannot remember how to spell words. Poignantly, Iris observes, “we all worry about going mad, don’t we; how would we know? Those of us who live in our minds anyway. Other people would tell us.”

The film is edited to exacerbate the contrast between the ferociously bright young Iris and the confused and childlike older Iris, frequently as she is observed by John. Young John watches Iris kissing another woman in a café, and another man in her window, then there is a cut to old John watching Iris struggling to form the word “puzzled” with her pen on her notepad. The film is concerned to show how sharp, forceful, and independent she was as a young person. For

Roger Ebert, *IRIS* cheats as an “Alzheimer’s movie” because there is too much about the young Murdoch.²⁷ The sharp cuts to the older Iris dominate the trajectory of the film, however, and are sometimes over-determined. A scene where the sexually confident Iris decides it is time that she and Bayley make love, and takes charge to ensure he loses his virginity, cuts with excruciating contrast to a distressed, screaming older Iris needing Bayley to hold and calm her. A scene showing the young, fiercely intelligent and linguistically nimble Iris challenging, questioning, and driving forward a debate is swiftly followed by scenes where she cannot remember the name of the prime minister. Her dementia is even played for laughs when the elderly Iris watches Tony Blair on television delivering his “education, education, education” speech and cannot understand his saying this over and over again.

The film focuses on small details that show Iris as an older woman falling rapidly into illness, being unable to answer her doctor’s questions or recognize the book that she has written. There are some particularly harrowing scenes of physical difficulty such as when Iris urinates on the floor (which we hear but do not see) or when she tries to get out of a moving car. These scenes serve to make the film less about Iris Murdoch as an individual and more about the effects of Alzheimer’s disease, and are usually shown from Bayley’s perspective on her starkly depicted decline. It is, after all, an adaptation of Bayley’s memoirs, and it is his voice – not Iris’s – which is being heard throughout the film as he watches with the star-struck loving eyes of the young Bayley, or the anxious and terribly sad eyes of the old Bayley. As Iris inevitably falls into the place where Bayley says he can no longer reach her, she falls away from us too, as readers, spectators, and experiencers of the film and of her character. She becomes more removed and distant, and without a voice. When young Bayley observes how much she loves words, young Iris replies; “if one doesn’t have words, how does one think?” The film’s parameters are clear: Iris is shown to have lost words, and so concomitantly has lost the ability to think.

Dolan, Gordon, and Tincknell link *IRIS* with *SYLVIA* (Christine Jeffs, 2003) and *THE HOURS* (Stephen Daldry, 2002) as films in which “the woman writer’s success is systematically occluded by her mental collapse, while the price she pays for her creativity is presented as a high one.”²⁸ While there is no direct correlation asserted in the film between her wild younger self and her later affliction, this approach to the film does highlight the concentration on the physical aspects of Murdoch and not the cerebral or creative. The state of Murdoch’s diseased brain is conveyed through images of MRI scans and skull X-rays, immediately contrasted with the smooth, open face of young Iris, the vibrantly provocative livewire. Haiduc observes, “as her formidable self is gradually eroded to a caricature, the biggest losses are shown to be her autonomy and her language.”²⁹ In fact, the erosion is not gradual, it is starkly polarized, with the film showing no concern for the prolific writer’s middle age. The binary opposition between

young Iris/Winslet and old Iris/Dench compels the viewer to confront the element of tragedy that the film is so keen to convey, eliminating any nuance or subtlety in Murdoch's own voice or personality. Of course, it can be argued that Murdoch's voice is most vividly heard through her novels and her philosophical works, but what the film creates is a persona of Murdoch for mainstream culture, and the operation of this is profoundly telling about the ways in which the female creative mind has been represented on screen. Vitality, the way in which the persona of Murdoch the writer is occupied by Winslet, the transgressive English Rose, and Dench, the national treasure, can be understood as an exceptionally effective constellation of stars of stage, screen, and page, in the telling of a story of an elderly couple coping with the reality of dementia. As if to drive home the contemporary relevance and clinical impetus behind the film, there is a message from actor David Hyde Pierce on the DVD extras about living with Alzheimer's disease and how to seek support as a carer.

This concentration on the physical and practical elements of the life Murdoch and Bayley shared ensures that *IRIS* is not a film about the work of Iris Murdoch. As if by way of apology, it is often said when discussing the film that to make a film about a thinker is not easy. Margarethe von Trotta attempted this task with the recent film *HANNAH ARENDT* (2012). Von Trotta focused on the period in Arendt's life when she reported for *The New Yorker* on the trial of Adolf Eichmann, which led her to formulate her famous position on what she termed "the banality of evil." The film records the philosopher's observation of Eichmann in the witness box, her reactions to his testimony, and the development of her thinking by showing her discussing the issues with friends and colleagues and with her students. The film conveys the scandal that Arendt's suggestions caused, and gives her the floor of a packed lecture theater to account for her position and explain herself. This is a film about a philosopher who had a biography that many filmmakers would have chosen to foreground but who in this film is portrayed as a woman with a trajectory of thought and intellectual development. *IRIS* affords Murdoch the opportunity to make the occasional pronouncement which is in line with her philosophical concerns, such as "nothing matters except loving what is good" (delivered as the couple are washing up the dinner dishes), and she is shown at a lectern speaking some lines from Psalm 139, which are cited in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*.³⁰ These glimpses of her philosophical thought, however, are tied in the film to her relationship to Bayley, as he responds with the question "Am I good?" and by cutting to Bayley's adoring face as Murdoch talks about how "thy right hand shall hold me."

Sally Chivers assesses *IRIS* as a film about Bayley's care for his afflicted wife and notes that institutional care is presented as offering what Iris needs "in order to die happy."³¹ A scene of young Bayley chasing after young Iris on their bicycles has John shouting that he cannot keep up with her, and Iris replying that she is like Proteus and he has to keep hold of her. The next scene shows a panic-strick-

en Bayley driving round the streets trying to find Iris as she has wandered out of the house while his attention was distracted. Chivers describes how the film presents Bayley as a “selfless but inadequate life partner and sole caregiver”³² and demonstrates how, by the end of the film, his inability to keep the house clean or to stop Iris from running away leads inexorably to her institutionalization: “The new focus on the distressing state of the couple’s home allows audience members to gently shift from wanting Iris to stay at home with John to seeing the apparent need for her to enter an institution.”³³ The faces of the nurses are benign and welcoming, and we see Iris gently dancing in a world of her own, looking happy and content. In the next scene she is dead and John is left to say “she was so quiet when she died.” The illness has won, and Iris is beaten. The film’s residue is one of tragedy in relation to the defeated Murdoch and pathos in relation to the deserted Bayley as he fondles the slip that clothed her naked body, and a stone is shown sinking down through the water to the riverbed.

The Final Word on IRIS

This analysis of *IRIS* as a tripartite star text enables the operation of celebrity, performance, and stardom to be exposed as infused with questions of how women age on screen and in popular culture more widely. In a striking conflation of the three women, one scene shows Dench as Murdoch as she is becoming aware of her dwindling grasp on language and thought, arriving at a television studio for an interview with broadcaster Joan Bakewell. She is confronted with a large screen on which her younger self, in the form of the telegenic Winslet, is shown speaking to an interviewer with an eloquence and command of which she is no longer capable. This interweaving of media appearances and performances presents a particularly acute demonstration of the ways in which stardom and celebrity are put into play in this film. The scene highlights the ways in which the actresses inhabit Iris Murdoch and the operation of a dual naming of the stars in each figure: both Winslet and Murdoch are visible on the television screen, and Dench and Murdoch are visible to the spectator of the interview.

The inhabiting of Iris Murdoch’s persona as a vehicle for star performances based on her loss of capacity and a clinical exposition of the traumas of living with Alzheimer’s disease prompts an assessment of the ways in which female thinkers and writers are portrayed in popular cinema. At the forefront of this is the matter of whose perspective is being shown and whose voice is being heard. Then there is the question of which elements of the woman’s life are foregrounded – biographical, psychological, or intellectual – and whether the camera’s gaze is a pathologizing one. *IRIS* grimly illustrates how a star persona can be hijacked by a social concern or cultural preoccupation. In the last couple of years, the discovery of Murdoch’s correspondence with Philippa Foot and Brigid Brophy has drawn her bisexuality and adventurous love life into the forefront of

her public image. Although Murdoch's novels and philosophical writings are the subject of a great deal of academic and scholarly work, her private life continues to dominate her public profile. Even her appearance has been effaced as photographs of Kate Winslet and Judi Dench now adorn the covers of later editions of John Bayley's memoirs. Murdoch continues to be seen as a character in a dramatic biography rather than a uniquely influential contributor to British intellectual history, and the film *IRIS* has provided the drama with a stellar cast and *mise-en-scène*.



PART II

Theory in Contemporary Contexts



Imagining Safe Space in Feminist Pornography

Ingrid Ryberg

One early evening in September 2008, I squeezed in at the filmmaker Mia Engberg's workspace in Stockholm together with a group of about fifteen other filmmakers who had been invited to participate in her project *Dirty Diaries: Twelve Shorts of Feminist Porn*. In her invitation to the project, a few months earlier, Mia Engberg had written: "Let's come together and make creative porn on our own terms. Let's empower ourselves and change the view of sexuality and gender. It's a revolution and it starts NOW!"¹ This was our second meeting, and we would get together three more times before the short film collection was released on DVD in September 2009.² By then, the project had gained wide international attention, not least because of its financial support from The Swedish Film Institute. The news agency AFP spread the word internationally, and the project was even mentioned by Conan O'Brien on *The Tonight Show*.³ The meeting in September 2008, just like our other meetings, provided space for discussing our individual short films and creative processes, as well as the larger aims of *Dirty Diaries* as such. The main purpose of this meeting, however, was to go through legal details regarding profit and rights and to sign contracts guaranteeing that the performers in the shorts participated out of free will, were more than eighteen years of age, and consented to the short being exhibited as a part of *Dirty Diaries*. The invitation to the project had read: "The rules are simple; no one should be harmed and everyone must be older than 18. Otherwise, you're free to do exactly what you want."⁴

Dirty Diaries, and my own participation in the production as well as reception of the project, make up one of the case studies in my doctoral thesis *Imagining Safe Space: The Politics of Queer, Feminist and Lesbian Pornography*.⁵ The making of my own short, *PHONE FUCK* (Ryberg, 2009), became part of the participant observation that I, in addition to interviews and questionnaires, conducted for my largely ethnographically based project. In this essay, I summarize and discuss one of the main arguments in the thesis: the ways in which a figure of safe space is invoked in contemporary transnational feminist porn film culture, not least in production strategies. Elsewhere, I have discussed how feminist porn, aesthetically and politically, draws from feminist legacies politicizing sexuality and pro-

moting women's right to sexual self-determination and exploration, from the 1970s and onwards.⁶ In the following, I highlight how the figure of a safe space for sexual consciousness-raising and empowerment is mobilized in this film culture's production contexts, using *Dirty Diaries* as my main example. I also argue that, rather than trying to pin down or define the category of feminist porn as a genre or specific set of styles or rules, it is more productive to think of it in terms of an interpretive community held together precisely by the common concern with safe space. Importantly, however, while the figure of safe space functions as a guiding principle in this film culture, the strategies it results in are diverse and sometimes contradictory. I contend that the film culture should not be understood as providing a final answer or solution to the question of how to provide safe space for sexual empowerment but rather as providing an ongoing discussion and arena for trying out various strategies.

Recent Examples of Feminist Pornography

Dirty Diaries resulted in a widely distributed DVD, in theatrical releases in France and Finland, and in numerous screenings at international film festivals. As one of the filmmakers, I participated in several screenings and discussions of the project – in Sweden but also in Germany and Mexico. The far-reaching distribution and attention that a project such as *Dirty Diaries* was able to gain testify to a wide recognition of the notion of feminist porn in the last decade. A long and continuously expanding list of other examples of feminist porn filmmakers and projects, and news articles discussing the phenomenon in papers such as *BBC News Magazine*, *The Independent*, and *The Guardian*, prove that the question has gained broad public attention, that a niche market has opened up, and that the two notions of feminism and pornography are no longer necessarily understood as mutually exclusive.⁷ Feminist porn is described as a matter of finding “a middle ground in the porn wars,”⁸ and sex radical performer and filmmaker Annie Sprinkle's famous statement that “the answer to bad porn isn't no porn, it's to try and make better porn” is often invoked.⁹ Just like the announcement that the purpose of *Dirty Diaries* was “to make feminist and queer erotica as an alternative to the mainstream porn,” and “sexy films with a female perspective and high artistic quality,” several other cases also stress that feminist porn is about challenging dominant forms of pornography and offering alternatives based on feminist analysis.¹⁰ For instance, The Annual Good For Her Feminist Porn Awards in Toronto, which since its start in 2006 has played a crucial role in establishing the notion of feminist porn, declares:

In 2006 we decided that it's not enough to criticize adult films for not adequately representing the diversity of women's, trans folk's and in many cases men's – sexuality. So we decided to do something about it. [...] As feminists

and sex-positive people, we want to showcase and honour those who are creating erotic media with a feminist sensibility that differs from what porn typically offers.¹¹

In 2009, a European version, PorYes European Feminist Award, was started in Berlin, and in 2014, feminist pornography was a special focus of The Porn Film Festival Berlin, which since the start in 2006 has become a central arena for this film culture.¹² An increasing number of porn filmmakers also label their work as feminist, including Petra Joy and Anna Span in the UK; Tristan Taormino, Courtney Trouble, and Madison Young in the USA; Gala Vanting, Ms. Naughty, and Liandra Dahl in Australia; Jennifer Lyon Bell in the Netherlands; and Marit Östberg and Goodyn Green in Germany. Finally, recent journalistic and academic work focusing on these filmmakers and exhibition contexts have also contributed to establishing the notion of feminist porn. Examples include Anne Sabo's *After Pornified* (2012), *The Feminist Porn Book* (2013), articles in *Porn Studies Journal*, and my own work.¹³

A Site of Struggle: What Is Feminist Porn?

Despite a long and expanding list of examples, a commonly held definition, agreement, or set of rules of what counts as feminist porn does not exist. Criteria that are often mentioned by individual directors or events include that the work should depict authentic and genuine pleasure, and a diversity of bodies, types of people, and sexual practices; challenge stereotypes, conventions, and normative notions of gender and sexuality; and focus on women's, trans and gender queer people's desires, pleasure, and orgasms.¹⁴

What these qualifiers imply on the level of content and style is less definite. Visual strategies in this film culture differ greatly. For instance, Petra Joy "feel[s] the need to create an alternative to the flood of images that distort female sexuality and reduce women to their genitals" and "choose[s] not to portray any sexual actions that many women experience as degrading such as forced fellatio, extreme anal sex and cum shot into the woman's face."¹⁵ Candida Royalle, who started producing porn for women already in the early 1980s, also finds that the male cum shot marginalizes women's pleasure but finds it important to show explicit images of women's genitals.¹⁶ Other feminist porn filmmakers, not least of lesbian and queer porn, have instead embraced and appropriated porn conventions, as Ragan Rhyne and Eithne Johnson have demonstrated.¹⁷ In her analysis of the videos of the production company SIR Video, Rhyne argues that lesbian porn appropriates "conventions like the money shot, the meat shot, and the narrative format of mainstream porn, vacating these codes of their phallogentric language and reclaiming them for lesbian sexuality."¹⁸ Tristan Taormino, who has produced numerous films for the porn company Vivid Entertainment, has

chosen to avoid porn tropes such as cum shots on the woman's face but also embraces the sub-genre gonzo and rougher representations of sex.¹⁹

Dirty Diaries similarly display a great variety in visual strategies – from avoiding explicit imagery in *RED LIKE CHERRY* (Tora Mårtens, 2009) to close-ups of penetration in *SKIN* (Elin Magnusson, 2009) and *FRUITCAKE* (Ester Martin Bergsmark and Sara Kaaman, 2009) – as well as in film styles. The shorts in the collection were all shot with mobile phone cameras but stylistically range from experimental styles exploring tactility and the haptic in *FOR THE LIBERATION OF MEN* (Jennifer Rainsford, 2009) to DIY documentary style of *FLASHER GIRL ON TOUR* (Joanna Rytel, 2009) and *NIGHT TIME* (Nelli Roselli, 2009) to the narrative shorts *AUTHORITY* (Marit Östberg, 2009) and my own *PHONE FUCK*.

The aesthetic heterogeneity of *Dirty Diaries* and other examples of feminist porn reactivates long-running discussions about feminist film practice. Since the 1970s, feminist film scholars have posed questions about what feminist film practice should consist of, and many different strategies and notions have been suggested.²⁰ Parallel to and in dialogue with these discussions, women filmmakers have developed a vast repertoire of aesthetic strategies. As Alison Butler contends in her summary of debates around the concept of women's cinema, it is not possible to talk about a feminist film practice but rather “women produce feminist work in a wide variety of forms and styles.”²¹

Feminist porn's wide variety of forms and styles evokes what Teresa de Lauretis describes as a constitutive contradiction between affirmation and critique, specific to the women's movement and to women's cinema.²² This contradiction is played out politically and aesthetically in feminist porn's objective of empowering and affirming women's sexualities (often through a documentary mode) and at the same time of challenging and critiquing porn conventions (often through more experimental modes). De Lauretis's contention – that this tension should be regarded less as a problem than as the driving force in women's cinema – is useful also for feminist pornography. She suggests shifting the definition of women's cinema from a question of formal, stylistic, and thematic markers to a matter of address – “who is making film for whom, who is looking and speaking, how, where and to whom” – as well as of “political critique [...] and the specific consciousness that women have developed to analyze the subject's relation to sociohistorical reality.”²³ Considered in this way, feminist pornography is defined less by specific content or style and more by the ways in which it is based on a political critique of and challenge to dominant notions of gender and sexuality and aims to empower women sexually. Therefore, feminist pornography can be productively discussed as an interpretive community in which meaning originates not formally from a text or individual reader but is shaped by the context within which the text is written and read.²⁴

Following Lynne Pearce's definition of interpretive communities as sites of struggles and disagreements rather than as representing a fixed set of values,

and Jacqueline Bobo's discussion about black women as an interpretive community characterized by an "instant intimacy" and a "bond of collective concerns," feminist pornography can also be understood as a site of struggle where a number of political and aesthetic debates and disagreements are mobilized.²⁵ The collective concern that holds this interpretive community together is the idea about safe space as a precondition for sexual exploration and empowerment. This idea is not only evoked in a wide variety of visual strategies and content but also informs the film culture's production contexts.

Imagining Safe Space in the Production of *Dirty Diaries*

Our get-together with *Dirty Diaries* in September 2009 started, like all our other meetings, with a round where everyone was given the opportunity to talk, but Mia Engberg also stressed that people did not have to talk if they did not want to, just as they would also have the possibility to participate anonymously in the project:

One does not have to feel an obligation to be able to formulate oneself in front of everybody else. And one has the right to participate anonymously. [...] One does not have to be afraid of what grandmother will think [giggles] or whatever reason one might have for not wanting one's name [...] on the film. That is an important detail, because I think one of the reasons why there is not more women-produced pornography is [...] self-censorship and not daring to reveal one's dirty fantasies.²⁶

Mia Engberg's concern with providing a production context where all filmmakers would feel that their voice was heard – if they so wanted – and that potential problems regarding one's participation would be acknowledged is one example of how the figure of safe space informed the production of *Dirty Diaries*. The project's collective and collaborative structure, regular meetings, shared profit, and concern about not "[harming] anyone during the shooting,"²⁷ as it was put in the first description of the project, invoked principles and strategies central to feminist organizing and non-hierarchical and democratic meeting models that evolved from the second-wave feminist movement and consciousness-raising groups.²⁸ The strength in doing the project collectively and supporting each other was also emphasized throughout the production, where many participants worked on each other's productions. At our fifth *Dirty Diaries* meeting, in August 2009, a few weeks before the release of the film, Mia Engberg stated that, "we are together" in this project:

Within the next few weeks there will also be bad comments about this, especially on the net. [...] People will blog and write mean things. [...] People are

angry and think it is disgusting or unnecessary. [...] But then it is important to remember that we are many together in this and not to get sad or broken down.²⁹

The production phase of *Dirty Diaries* evoked the feminist film movement of the 1970s as organized through networks and collectives where women would help, support, and teach each other.³⁰ In 1975, E. Ann Kaplan underscored that collective film work makes “[w]omen’s movies [...] as valuable in terms of the process of making them as for the products that result.”³¹ Reflecting on women’s film in 1973, Claire Johnston similarly proposed that collective work “constitutes a formidable challenge to male privilege in the film industry; as an expression of sisterhood, it suggests a viable alternative to the rigid hierarchical structures of male-dominated cinema and offers real opportunities for a dialogue about the nature of women’s cinema within it.”³²

In addition to how emphasis was put on collectivity and support in the group of filmmakers, the contracts we signed at the meeting in August 2008 moreover raised questions about the collaboration between filmmakers and performers, about how to handle this relation, and about principles of safety and consent as central to the production. During the production phase of *Dirty Diaries*, these principles resulted in the exclusion of one short from the final collection after one of the performers wanted to withdraw her participation. These principles also informed discussions about the shooting of the sex scenes. When Mia Engberg in 2002 made her first feminist porn film *SELMA & SOFIE*, the performers were not told what to do in the sex scene but were allowed to do what they felt comfortable with.³³ Many other feminist porn filmmakers similarly avoid directing the sex too much and instead encourage authentic sexual encounters between the performers.³⁴ When I myself shot *PHONE FUCK*, the two performers preferred being directed rather than having to improvise or bring out too much of their own experiences in the performance. They saw their participation in the project as acting rather than as documentary portrayal. Hence, shooting and directing strategies vary in the film culture, but many feminist porn filmmakers stress that the dialogue and collaboration between filmmaker and performers is always crucial.³⁵ Concerns about safety in regard to shooting sex scenes also include discussions about safer sex. The importance of providing safe-sex barriers, gloves, condoms, and lube on set is emphasized, for instance by Tristan Taormino and by artist, sex worker, and activist Sadie Lune.³⁶

Concluding Remarks

When *Dirty Diaries* was released in September 2009, some critics were frustrated by the lack of a clear definition of the concept of feminist pornography and by the collection’s heterogeneity. Was this even pornography? some asked, while

others found it to be too hardcore to be called feminist. In her introduction in the DVD booklet, Mia Engberg herself also rhetorically asks what feminist porn is and replies: “All the filmmakers in the project have their own interpretation of the concept of feminist porn, and as such have chosen different ways of expressing it. It makes me very proud to see the range of inventiveness and the diversity among the films.”³⁷ The diversity among the films in *Dirty Diaries* is characteristic also of other examples of feminist porn and regards not only a wide range of styles and content of films but also a variety of production strategies, as exemplified above. Therefore, and drawing from De Lauretis’s discussion about women’s cinema, rather than trying to pin down a fixed set of stylistic, thematic, or practical strategies, the definition of feminist pornography can be more productively located at the level of the political critique and feminist consciousness that this film culture draws on and contributes to. It provides an arena for the discussion, politicization, and exploration of sexuality beyond dominant patriarchal and heteronormative representations. As an interpretive community, feminist pornography is defined by the common concern with and practice of imagining alternatives and a safe space for sexual empowerment.

Uncommon Sensuality: New Queer Feminist Film/Theory

Sophie Mayer

Is the Lesbian Still Apparitional?

We discovered who we were as we stepped into the void, the invisible, the blank screen, and named ourselves lesbian. That was the first step. There could be no semiotics if there were no sign.

– Barbara Hammer¹

Writing about her film practice in the 1960s, Barbara Hammer describes “the void, the invisible, the blank screen” that preceded her work as an American queer female filmmaker. In this, Hammer intuitively prefigures Terry Castle’s 1993 literary and social history *The Apparitional Lesbian* in which she captured, as if on film, the “ghost” of sexual loves between women that had been lost to visibility in history.² Between these two moments, the work of Chantal Akerman and Ulrike Ottinger, although already exhibited in Europe, entered circuits of festival distribution in the USA; and, as Dorothy Arzner’s back catalogue was recognized and reassembled, the portrait of the sound era’s first American female feature filmmaker as a butch dyke had emerged. Yet (or thus) by 1996, Cheryl Dunye could create Martha Page, a loving yet critical homage to Arzner, in her historiographic meta-fiction *THE WATERMELON WOMAN*. The character is a double in-joke both assuming and celebrating a knowing lesbian audience that would recognize, on the one hand, Arzner’s butch self-presentation and numerous rumored affairs with her stars; on the other, the queer anti-racist community documentary work and scholarship of Alexandra Juhasz, who plays Page.

Far from being apparitional, diverse lesbians are highly visible in the contemporary pop culture and *mise-en-scène* of Dunye’s Philadelphia. Video clerk Cheryl (played by Dunye) is cruised at work by wealthy white femme Diana, played – in another in-joke – by *GO FISH* (1994) screenwriter and star Guinevere Turner. And lesbians also inhabit the contrastive but interconnected historical worlds of black Philly and white Hollywood cinema that Cheryl researches. In her book *An Archive of Feelings*, Ann Cvetkovich notes that *THE WATERMELON WOMAN* not

only makes the lesbian archive joyously visible, along with homoerotic “star gazing” (to borrow Jackie Stacey’s term³), but also includes feminist film scholarship as a contributive formation of sexuality and identity.⁴ The screen is blank no more.

Page and her lover Fae Richards (Lisa Marie Bronson) in *THE WATERMELON WOMAN* are examples of Castle’s apparitional lesbians: they are both visible and invisible, depending on perspective. As Cheryl discovers through her interviews with Richards’ friends, lovers, and fans, both of them were legible as lesbian within their historical moment, but their sexuality was obscured by sanitizing forces of dominant history. It is this liminal state between visibility and invisibility that becomes the motor of Dunye’s film, the plot that drives Cheryl forward and that acts as a metonym for the work of queer feminist film scholarship. We are, the film suggests, engaged beyond the binary of visible/invisible inscribed by dominant culture: to do lesbian film theory is to work, in many ways, with the apparitional.

Cvetkovich’s definitional book demonstrates the diffusion of queer feminist film theory through cultural theory; yet, as Theresa L. Geller notes, this means that lesbian film theory may be apparitional.

Today film and media serve as a privileged archive in queer theoretical inquiry [...] I am frequently persuaded by the current interpretations of the popular culture archive forwarded by contemporary queer theorists, but I find myself troubled by the ends to which film and popular culture are put in the name of theoretical insights made apart from film criticism proper.⁵

Cvetkovich’s wonderful reading is a case in point of the shift from a medium-specific reading of gazes, bodies, desires, and framing to a more diffuse cultural history. She privileges *THE WATERMELON WOMAN* as an item of queer ephemera and a document of such ephemera, particularly its gently parodic depiction of the real-life Lesbian Herstory Archives as the Center for Lesbian Information and Technology (CLIT). Film and video, in Cvetkovich’s reading, are like the archive – accessible but still chaotic documents that generate affective cultures constituting lesbian counter-publics. Yet the elision that Geller notes, in which the contextualization of queer feminist film has shifted from an advocacy-based film criticism and film theory to a trans-medial cultural studies, is meaningful. In 2009, the editors of online film magazine *Reverse Shot*’s Proposition 24 issue on LGBTQ film note, parenthetically, that an article on *THE WIRE* (David Simon, 2002-08) “feature[s], as it turns out, the only lesbians discussed in depth in our symposium – a bias in the [predominantly male] writing staff or indicative of the marginalization of gay women in popular culture outside of television commenting and hosting? A topic for another time perhaps.”⁶

Reverse Shot's editors both frame and elide the issue that Geller raises, one that does indeed relate to "another time" and the relation of temporality to apparitionality, as seen in *THE WATERMELON WOMAN*. As B. Ruby Rich observed in the article where she coined the identifier New Queer Cinema, the moment queer cinema gained a Sundance audience, it was returned to a "bleak gender imbalance."⁷ While lesbian filmmakers, including Lizzie Borden and Sheila McLaughlin, had been present in the genesis of the movement, the approach of and to the market focused attention on white male filmmakers such as Gus Van Sant and Todd Haynes. On the one hand, poststructuralist theories of the author's death privileged the text over its maker, as can be seen in Nick Davies' superbly argued *The Desiring-Image: Gilles Deleuze and Contemporary Queer Cinema*, in which queerness recedes from lived experience through character and/or narrative politics to an aesthetics and/or affect.⁸ On the other hand, the market and popular/arthouse magazines continue to privilege the auteur. Lacking a challenge from an attendant and attentive queer/feminist theory, due to the turn to critical theory and then cultural history, this remains the generic white, straight, male filmmaker.

This academic/journalistic pincer matters because industry patterns (which mean that Arzner, with 13 features, is still the most productive American female feature filmmaker ever) and media coverage create a feedback cycle: lack of coverage leads to lack of opportunity. Patricia White observes that, as female filmmakers have been sidelined in queer film theory, and queer filmmakers within feminist film theory, apparitionality particularly afflicts lesbian auteurs:

If major is to minor as film is to video, feature to short, cinema to television, fiction to documentary, women – and thus lesbians and often transpeople – tend to labour in the latter category of each of these pairs [...] there are also lesbian works that deploy a certain "poverty" – in terms of means of production or aesthetic approach – in order to deflect audience demand for familiar stories, happy endings, repeatable pleasures, identity assurances.⁹

Due to its perceived difficulty of access, both in terms of distribution and legibility, minor queer feminist cinema contributes to erasure by omission within academic and critical cultures.

Yet this aesthetic choice – to be minor and/or apparitional – remains elective and political. As queer videomaker Hito Steyerl suggests:

The emergence of poor images reminds one of a classic Third Cinema manifesto, *For an Imperfect Cinema*, [which] argues for an imperfect cinema because, in [its] words, "perfect cinema – technically and artistically masterful – is almost always reactionary cinema." The imperfect cinema is one that strives to overcome the divisions of labor within class society.¹⁰

White and Steyerl both suggest that minor/poor cinema simultaneously circulates globally via both the Internet and the festival circuit, whose glocal dimensions Rich has charted, and also that this deterritorialization further contributes to its invisibility, reinforcing ghostliness, and apparitionality. Monika Treut's choice of title for her German-Taiwanese co-production *GHOSTED* (2009) points to the apparitionality both of the glocal and, within it, of queerness. It can be read as at once critical and political, particularly with regard to asymmetric human rights legislation and the homogenization of LGBTQI identities through and towards what Jasbir K. Puar calls "homonationalism."¹¹

Rachel Lewis observes that the lesbian minor cinema described by White is frequently involved, particularly in Europe, but also within US diaspora communities, with transnational mobility and solidarity, rejecting neoliberal models of identity. Lewis concludes that a minor cinema, in which apparitionality, illegibility, and instability are tropes of experimental narrative, still retains an urgent political charge when:

articulating a political economy of rights – a politics that not only encompasses legal and cultural recognition but also economic redistribution – is essential amidst neoliberal attempts to privatize subordination. It is precisely the above objective that a transnational lesbian cinematic consciousness must strive to accomplish if it is to become a progressive force for social, cultural and political change.¹²

In more recent essays, Rich has suggested that while surviving New Queer Cinema (predominantly white and cis male) filmmakers have shifted towards the narrative mainstream, the new New Queer Cinema has shifted geographically towards new margin/centers in the Global South. Rich cites as an example Lucrecia Martel, whose films feature both apparitional and vividly apparent lesbians but are rarely read or screened as queer.¹³

Amy Villarejo's *LESBIAN RULE* (2003) prefigures White in rejecting mainstream visibility as the privileged definition of a lesbian cinema, identifying apparitionality as a political and aesthetic strategy. She argues that visibility conflates representation and legibility, presenting as an achievement what is actually a reified conformity that benefits capitalism, a ruse that undermines the possibilities of a lesbian visual culture for deconstructing dominant optics. In Villarejo's analysis, Ottinger in *EXILE SHANGHAI* (1997) prefigures the mobile lesbian subject of Lewis's transnational cinema.¹⁴ Her configuration of the queer female subject disappearing into and through a politicized landscape as she traverses it is knowingly manifest in recent queer feminist documentary. In *FUTURE MY LOVE* (2012), Maja Borg searches for the lost potential future of a finished relationship by travelling to utopian architectural thinker Jacque Fresco's Venus Project in Florida; the film shifts from reflective video diary to expansive futurological

study in which Borg becomes the interlocutor rather than the central subject. Sarah Turner's *PERESTROIKA* (2009) sees the protagonist (who both is and is not coterminous with the filmmaker) falling out of love with her partner as she travels both towards Lake Baikal on the Trans-Siberian Express and back in time to memories and archive footage of a previous trip with her friend Sian Thomas, who died shortly afterwards. Ever-present as a voice-over, the protagonist is only ever visible as a reflection in the night-darkened windows of the fast-moving train – and, of course, in the movement of the camera and framing of the image.

What Queer Feminists Do Onscreen

Against this multifarious backdrop of Vigo, Cocteau, Dreyer, Pabst, “women’s weepies,” and the formal strategies of the avant-garde [Deren, Warhol, and Frampton], I intuited [on starting filmmaking in 1972] that I was venturing into a mother lode of possibility. – Yvonne Rainer¹⁵

Turner’s film, read through Villarejo’s study, suggests that Hammer’s practice was and is not simply to appear onscreen indexically or to film other lesbians engaged in lesbian activities but to use formal strategies to turn the “blank screen” into a lesbian screen, “a mother lode of possibility.” As Villarejo notes, making the lesbian appear onscreen as a stable, legible category has drawn attention away from the formal strategies mobilized by second-wave filmmakers, and particularly the significance of the theory film for lesbian minor cinema. Theoretically informed and simultaneously theory-critical, films such as *THRILLER* (Sally Potter, 1978) and *RIDDLES OF THE SPHINX* (Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, 1977) were the “mother lode” for the initial generation of feminist film theory, and only a few lesbian filmmakers, such as Turner and Trinh T. Minh-ha, and are still actively engaging with theory onscreen and off. Filmmaker Lisa Gornick testifies to the radical potential of queer women thinking onscreen as both a representational and formal challenge when describing her film *DO I LOVE YOU?* (2002):

In this film, I wanted to be like those men who go into cafés and talk and philosophise, but I wanted it to be women doing it. We don’t see enough women doing that, we don’t see enough women actively philosophising [...] this film is not complete, it’s about allowing the uncompleted though, allowing the lack of answers. It’s about allowing the doubt to be the philosophy.¹⁶

What queer feminists do onscreen – and to the screen – is theory.

Gornick powerfully asserts legibility as an alternative to representation, for reading onscreen embodiment and/as performance. Rainer, like Potter and

Mulvey and Wollen, envisioned performance – particularly alternative performance such as modern dance, performance art, and body art – as a formal strategy for doing theory (differently) on film. Jamie Stuart notes that, after Riot Grrrl absorbed the influences of these films and meshed them with punk to inform a queer feminist performance culture, even narrative lesbian cinema has been persistently attracted to the all-girl band as a trope of lesbian visibility. As Alison Piepmeier notes, citing Carolyn Dever’s concept of a “skeptical feminism,” feminist, queer, and trans theory are often done in demotic off-spaces such as zines, songs, blogs, community websites, teach-ins, and films, a shift that is often cited by demotic theoreticians as life-sustaining.¹⁷ In the words of filmmaker and novelist Virginie Despentes, “If I didn’t come from the world of punk rock, I would be ashamed of what I am. But I do come from the world of punk rock, and I am proud of not fitting in.”¹⁸

At the same time, Stuart notes that visibility is mobile in lesbian-authored films, shifting from the performer to the audience through desire:

scenes that show female characters performing for audiences that are largely female, and the use of close-ups shows how particular women in these audiences react to the performance. In many cases, it is an appreciative, desiring response [and] the performer is knowingly and often deliberately performing specifically to the female members of the audience.¹⁹

The potential for this consensual, cyclical gaze for doing theory is made evident in Sini Anderson’s documentary *THE PUNK SINGER* (2012), which focuses on riot grrrl Kathleen Hanna and numbers critical theorists as well as musicians among its talking heads. More theoretically oriented documentaries retain an emphasis on the performative, and dialogic, generation of new theory. Astra Taylor’s *EXAMINED LIFE* (2008) includes a number of contemporary philosophers performing monologues – hypnotically so, in the case of Cornel West. Only Judith Butler chooses to engage in a dialogue with a fellow Bay Area dweller, artist, and disability activist Sunaura Taylor, who is also the filmmaker’s sister. Butler and Taylor do queer, disability, and coalitional theory out on the street, both in the movement of their bodies and in their discussion of that movement. Beginning – like Rainer in her reinvention of dance – from the idea of walking as an everyday action, Butler and Taylor consider what walking while queer or disabled makes visible, and how bodies in motion are read into narrow identity categories, sometimes with violent consequences, due to stereotypical assumptions about that visibility.

The Mission district that Butler and Taylor think through with their bodies is also the site of Treut’s 1999 documentary *GENDERNAUTS*, which documents the transmasculine and genderqueer community in San Francisco in the late 1990s through on-the-street, “tour-guide” narration by trans-media theorist Sandy

Stone, including a performative scene in which she walks as “male” and as “female.” Everyday walking thus simultaneously emerges from, and is contextualized by, the drag king cabaret where many of the subjects perform. Since *PARIS IS BURNING* (Jennie Livingston, 1990), performative drag cultures – which bridge community and public spaces – have been a major locus for lesbian minor cinema’s ability to think through intersectional theories and lived politics of gender, sexuality, race, class, and ability, and an occasionally fraught coalitional space in which lesbian, trans, and intersex identities and theories have shaped each other.²⁰ As scholar and filmmaker Ingrid Ryberg notes, referring to Cvetkovich’s work on intimacy, such locations “may act as both a *counter public* and an *intimate public* space for queer, feminist, and lesbian subjects... it is in the tensions and dynamic transactions between these notions of publicness that the potential for a safe space can be both located and undermined.”²¹

Intersecting, performance and film think through each other particularly productively for queer and trans-feminist cinema. As Judith “Jack” Halberstam notes, “artists and activists are far more confident than academics about the meaning and potential of gender flexibility, and it has been in art and film, generally speaking, that we have seen a widespread celebration of new levels of gender ‘fluidity.’”²² Halberstam is introducing Rebecca Swan’s photobook *ASSUME NOTHING*, which accompanies Kirsty MacDonald’s 2009 documentary of the same name. Swan collaborates with trans performers and artists, whose work centers around a number of public installations and performances, as well as with Māori and Pasifika subjects whose embodiments and identities critique the Euro-Western idea of gender fluidity.

Wu Tsang’s documentary *WILDNESS* (2012) re-visions both the documentary politics of *PARIS IS BURNING* and the late 1970s theory films’ use of performance for a post-millennial trans cinema, one that is engaged with the trans-generational and transnational as well as transgender. In a manner reminiscent of calls to rescind the historical erasure of transwomen of color such as Stormé DeLarverie, Sylvia Rivera, and Marsha P. Johnson, rendered apparitional in histories of the Stonewall confrontation, *WILDNESS* documents the interface between a group of twenty-something queer/non-binary artists of color and the mostly older Latina transwomen in whose habitual bar, the Silver Platter, they hold a performance party called Wildness. Crucial theorizations of intersectionality and intervulnerability by Puar, Butler, and Ahmed are implicitly but knowingly brought to life onscreen through the differing performative embodiments across the generations. The Silver Platter her/itself is given voice through a voice-over delivered and co-written by Guatemalan-American transgender actress Mariana Marroquin.

The Many Body Eyes

[Consider] Assia Djebar's writings on women of Algiers, in which she spoke of the many body eyes – the breast, navel, sex organ, for example. The eye of the dominated is a site of multiplicity. And each site offers a sight, as well as a way of seeing or gazing back of its own. – Trinh T. Minh-ha²³

Intersecting with lesbian apparitionality, the visibility and audibility of ethnicity and/or migration necessitates readings that see closely, in the classic academic sense of “close reading,” and see differently. Attentive to this, Kara Keeling's *THE WITCHES FLIGHT* creates the most startling and useful formations in 21st-century queer feminist film theory through her consideration of the black femme. Arguing for the use of femme in contrast to female or feminine, Piepmeyer quotes zinester Hazel Pine on femme's strategic apparitionality: “the implied queerness of femme. The subversive nature of femme brought the double whammy to heteronorms by not only being queer, but a hidden queer,” as explored by stud filmmaker Campbell X in *FEM* (2007), a love letter to femmes voiced by butch performer Peggy Shaw.²⁴ For Keeling, African-American ethnicity is commonly held in contrast to femme-ininity, even as it redoubles hiddenness; thus the black femme offers a particularly potent site for queer feminist film theory. “Because she is often invisible (but nonetheless present), when she becomes visible, her appearance stops us, offers us time in which we can work to perceive something different, or differently.”²⁵

The visible, argues Keeling, is produced and affirmed by what she calls “common sense.” Deriving the term from Antonio Gramsci, Keeling argues for “common sense” as an apprehension licensed by, and maintaining, the status quo.²⁶ It is these common senses that render the black femme invisible; an uncommon sense – which is both imbricated with critical theory and evades and exceeds it – allows her to appear as apparitional, always-already present. Keeling's uncommon sense would perceive in Martel's films, for example, the urgent presence of young indigenous women in desiring relationships with bourgeois white teenage girls, and would also read the complex tensions between bois and femmes in Dee Rees's *PARIAH* (2011). Keeling writes of her own work, in a manner that resonates particularly with the use of sound in both films, that:

both the words on these pages and the music on the soundtrack might propel one into a “lyricism of the surplus” that, while evading currently accessible common senses, still can be felt – like an intuition or premonition, something unseen but nonetheless present(ly) (im)possible. The end of the world.²⁷

Ending the commonsensical world, Keeling begins it anew, as in Sara Ahmed's formulation of "killing joy as a world making project."²⁸

In a recent interview, Trinh suggests that, although its actions are palpable, such an uncommon sense remains defined by its lack of definition and its contingency on meeting new cultural conditions: "For me, being part of the feminist struggle is to continue, almost blindly and each time anew, to indicate the possibility of a different path of resistance, or simply being-with – one engaged in the perpetual task of 'gendering' and 'queering' dominant forms of thinking and practices, including one's own."²⁹ This follows closely on her uncanny but pragmatic suggestion, via Djebbar, for how these ways of seeing might take shape via "many body eyes." Like Keeling, Trinh resituates the non-white queer female body with respect to the cyclical gaze described by Stuart, whereby to-be-looked-at-ness generates a powerful looking. Trinh's citation of Djebbar's formulation recalls the pre-eminent work of 1990s queer feminist film theory, Chris Straayer's *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies* (1996), which, beginning with the suggestion of the "hypothetical lesbian," complicates representational visibility by considering characters as rhetorical figures and/or strategies for negotiating subjectivity.³⁰

The suggestion that multiple body eyes may generate a new erotic is borne out by *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure*, whose editors and contributors represent a spectrum of feminist art, academia, and activism.³¹ Intersectional feminist porn, which includes lesbian, trans, disabled, and POC producers and performers reflexively negotiating specific modes of fetishization and exoticization, is Trinh's "site of multiplicity," codifying new ways in which "the many body eyes ... [are] gazing back." *The Feminist Porn Book* suggests that it is exactly through the reflexivity generated by this excess, as well as by control of the means of production, that the lesbian rule can be broken: at once hyper-visible and intentionally apparitional, the bodies in intersectional feminist porn use the performative strategies of theory film to solicit an uncommon sense located in desire.

Ryberg sums up both the political and theoretical generativity of intersectional feminist porn in the title of her essay: "Every Time We Fuck We Win."³² Essays by filmmaker and activist Tobi Hill-Meyer, performer Buck Angel, and academic Bobby Noble demonstrate that trans visibility is greater in feminist porn than in non-porn cinema, with an embodied frankness that refuses apparitionality, ambiguity, erasure, or mainstreaming. Noble notes that:

trans-formed masculine pleasures and their dissemination across the incoherence of trans bodies have crystallised a new feminist porn sexual grammar that reconfigures masculine sexuality. [...] How is it that feminist porn – some thirty years after the infamous feminist porn wars – has become not only a means of depicting transmasculine sexuality in productive ways, but a potent interlocutor and champion?³³

Noble does not answer his question in the essay, and yet the collection as a whole suggests that such a turn has been accomplished, not only for transmasculine sexuality but for engagements in queer feminist film/theory.

In a Queer Time and Place

A film rests in a can until it's screened but a book can be opened at any time by anyone in any country. It doesn't require a darkened room, a special location or equipment. I thought a book could be a portal to my films. Perhaps my films, a life's work, could reach a new audience through the words and stories of my life. – Barbara Hammer³⁴

One potential answer to Noble is that a number of queer feminist filmmakers who were excluded and challenged during the 1980s sex wars not only continued to make films that explored the desiring eyes of the body, but also – of necessity – to theorize their own work and the work of their peers and influences. Hammer, Rainer, Abigail Child (who was identified with the Bad Girls art movement), and Michelle Citron, as well as Despentes, were criticized for their representations of the sexual body, particularly the female body, from and for a queer female gaze. All have gone on to publish influential books about their practice, as “a portal to [their] films,” or what might be called auteurepoetics, a mode of practice in which filmmaking, film theory, and life writing enmesh in a complex assertion of *lived* authorship.³⁵ Although their work runs counter to poststructuralist theory, it is not anti-theoretical. Moreover, for these filmmakers, the author is inscribed not as intention but as performative labor; rendered, one could say, apparitional, as in the magic trick that is a dominant trope in Child's early filmmaking. Auteurepoetics is an apparitional strategy in which the author appears as and through her work, and in desiring relation to her audience.

Like Trinh, Hammer, Child, and Citron have all taught within the US academy, which has fostered a fragile but generative network of queer and/or feminist theory film-making since Maya Deren's establishment of an academic circuit for experimental film screenings and publications.³⁶ As Child writes, “Among lesbians the story is a form of sex talk – a joint whereby the community and the couple are of the same body. Proximity is difficult but brings us tongue to tongue.”³⁷ The book acts as a contingent “queer time and place,” to borrow Halberstam's title, resonating with the marginal and precarious locations in which queer feminist film and film theory continue to be done.³⁸ Hammer's void may be, finally, not ideologically but economically re-activated. Or rather, ideology expressed via economics. Austerity policies have targeted marginal communities in a vicious circle that not only closes down spaces of exhibition and publication but narrows access to education.

Non-diegetic queerscapes are aligned with, and as important as, the diegetic queerscapes that Helen Hok-Sze Leung defines as “contingent and tangential uses of public space by sexual minorities and to public acts and expressions of desire, eroticism, and sexuality that momentarily disrupt what heterocentric ideology assumes to be an immutable, coherent relation between biological sex, gender, and sexual desire.”³⁹ Keeling notes, crucially, that “[b]ecause she marks a highly contested and contingent mode of existence [...] the black femme sets us to work on questions of survival, including considerations of affective labor, excess, and the (re)production of value,” the urgent questions that, in relating to migration, Lewis suggests face the queer feminist filmmaker.⁴⁰

Steyerl’s *The Wretched of the Screen* considers the “affective labor, excess, and [...] (re)production of value” of digital film and video as a way to re-embody concepts of digital art/queerscapes. *52 THUESDAYS* (Sophie Hyde, 2014) once again demonstrates feature cinema’s elasticity as a theoretical location, offering, in its simultaneously linear and fragmentary narrative of a family in transition documenting themselves with digital media, a new model of queer time and place that accounts for both digitality and economic precarity.⁴¹ Steyerl offers a definition that brilliantly captures what Hyde’s film dares to theorize, and how:

A kiss is a wager, a territory of risk, a mess. The idea of reproduction condensed into a fleeting moment. Let’s think of reproduction as this kiss, which moves across cuts, from shot to shot, from frame to frame: linking and juxtaposing. Across lips and digital devices. It moves by way of editing, exquisitely flipping around the idea of the cut, redistributing affects and desire, creating bodies joined by movement, love, pain.⁴²

Queer feminist film/theory is a Möbius reel of *NITRATE KISSES* (Hammer, 1992) and digital cuts. No longer a blank screen, it is still a site kept fresh by contestation, in which one can assume nothing. Therein, a kiss is a theory, articulated “tongue to tongue” through performative embodiment. Rather than face the absence of semiotics, these films/theorists produce uncommonly sensual figurations that exceed, and thus cancel, semiotics, entering – as apparitionality enables – territories of risk.

The Promise of Touch: Turns to Affect in Feminist Film Theory

Anu Koivunen

In an essay on the critical reception of Jane Campion's *THE PIANO* (1993), Barbara Klinger highlights the powerful affective impact expressed and discussed by many, even if not all, female viewers.¹ The quote from Sue Gillett's essay is illustrative: "*The Piano* affected me very deeply. I was entranced, moved, dazed. I held my breath. I was reluctant to re-enter the everyday world after the film had finished. *The Piano* shook, disturbed, and inhabited me. I felt that my own dreams had taken form, been revealed. I dreamed of Ada the night after I saw the film. These were thick, heavy and exhilarating feelings."² Anecdotal evidence and accounts of the film experience as an "emotional roller-coaster" were indeed commonplace in the critical reception. In his book on Jane Campion's authorship, Dana Polan even argues that as a film about "a range of emotions and experiences associated with a feminine realm," *The Piano* evolved into a cultural symbol for the 1990s phenomenon of "chick flick" and "one of the supreme signposts of the art of feminine sensibility."³

While Klinger uses Gillett's and others' accounts of emotional viewing experiences as a stepping stone to discuss the neglected affective dimensions of the art film as a genre, in my reading they also mark the emergence of a new critical interest in experience, embodiment, affect, and emotion. To describe feminist film theory as taking "a turn to affect" since the 1990s is, of course, to simplify historical development, to choose one plot over other potential ones, to impose a sense of drama, and to be highly selective in gathering data.⁴ The reception of *THE PIANO* also features a multitude of critical perspectives as questions of genre (melodrama), authorship, and aesthetics (costume) were raised alongside the question of female spectatorship and the cinematic construction of gender and sexuality. *THE PIANO* was interpreted through both the matrix of psychoanalytic theories and postcolonial criticism of the whiteness of the female gaze.⁵ This variety of critical perspectives notwithstanding, this essay focuses on the appearance of affect as a critical question since the early 1990s, tracing and highlighting how new critical vocabularies emerged to foreground questions of experience and embodiment in studying film viewing. This critical re-orientation, it is argued, introduced new theoretical paradigms of phenomenology and new

materialism into feminist film theory while also coinciding with a critique from within of the semiotic and psychoanalytic legacies of the 1970s and 1980s. Furthermore, and importantly, the focus on affect entailed a radical refiguring of the female spectator as questions of distance and proximity were reformulated and the key concept of gaze was reconceptualized as touch. In this manner, then, this chapter takes issue with narratives that describe feminist film theory as a closed case of semiotic and psychoanalytic theories of apparatus or an approach limited to questions concerning the representation of women in film. Furthermore, this essay problematizes disciplinary histories that imply paradigmatic sea changes in theoretical frameworks, while also problematizing celebratory evolutionary narratives of how-feminists-finally-understood-the-power-of-emotions or how-feminists-finally-got-the-permission-to-feel.⁶

Emotion Trouble: Updating the Female Spectator

Tracing the theoretical debates in feminist film scholarship, it is evident that what may be termed emotion trouble was in the air around the time *THE PIANO* was released.⁷ Not surprisingly, the question of emotion or affect⁸ was most explicitly brought up in studies on melodrama, which, during the 1980s, was established as the major forum for investigating the question of female and feminist spectatorship.⁹ The pressing issue for feminist film and television scholars was how to conceptualize and investigate the sensory aspects of the viewing experience of melodrama within a critical language of the subject that, due to its semiotic and psychoanalytic frameworks, seemed to make the question impossible. In Jane Shattuc's words, "the affective power of the melodramatic text" was a problem feminist criticism had failed to resolve and needed to "own up to."¹⁰ Many scholars were simultaneously discussing the failure of available critical vocabularies to focus on the affective powers of film viewing. This was, it was argued, both a methodological and political problem.

In her 1992 essay on *MANDY* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1952), Annette Kuhn pointed out how "questions concerning affect in spectators' responses to films are also virtually ruled out of order in text-centred criticism."¹¹ When attempting to account for a cinema memory, to theorize the historicity of film viewing and the way cinema frames individual and social memory, Kuhn encountered the limits of the film theoretical language: "Emotion and memory bring into play a category with which film theory – and cultural theory more generally – are ill equipped to deal: experience."¹² Pursuing the question further, Kuhn summarized a methodological dilemma:

How can film theory address itself to the emotions films evoke, to the ways in which such emotions enter into people's fictions of the past, their own past? Any affective response to a film – and indeed recollections of such a response

even more so – threatens to elude attempts to explain or intellectualize: not because the latter are somehow inadequate in the face of the former but because each category (memory/feeling as against explanation/analysis) seems to inhabit an entirely distinct register.¹³

E. Ann Kaplan formulated similar critical questions about the affordances of the psychoanalytical and Marxist theories of subject in her response to the *Camera Obscura* special issue on “The Spectatrix,” a major forum for summarizing two decades of feminist film theory in 1989. Kaplan described the changes in her own thinking also in terms of reconceptualizing the affective dimension of film viewing. In her own words, she had previously studied the reading of films as “a result of a delicate, perhaps unconscious, negotiation between the historical positions/ideologies any text is seeking to present, and the frameworks/codes/local ideologies and individual psychoanalytic constructs that spectators bring to texts.”¹⁴ Reflecting critically upon this position, she now drew attention to the omission of the question of identification and the related issue of “emotional connection.” “Admitting” that *STELLA DALLAS* (1937) – the melodrama by King Vidor that has both provoked and inspired many feminist scholars of melodrama – continues to make her cry, Kaplan offered a revised account of how viewing, identifying, and feeling co-exist:

The tears happen because I identify with Stella’s loss of her daughter at the end of the film – her inability to share in her wedding, her self-denying self-regulation to a sphere outside her daughter’s new life. I would now argue that, along with desiring identity via identification, we also desire emotional connectedness. Identity is constructed in the process of establishing emotional connection. We respond to being “hailed” because the process of subject-formation offers both identity and emotional connectedness.¹⁵

Echoing what D.N. Rodowick has termed “political modernism,” E. Ann Kaplan identified the problem in “anti-realism theory that made it difficult to use the word ‘emotional’ in recent feminist film theory.”¹⁶ What needed to be done was to take into account how “identificatory processes involve emotional needs for symbiosis, wholeness, becoming one with an Other” instead of assuming “a cerebral, non-emotional kind of text and corresponding spectator response.”¹⁷

In other words, the questions of experience, affect, and emotion were articulated as a necessary updating of psychoanalytical, semiotic, and Marxist theories of the viewing subject and the workings of film narration and the cinematic apparatus. The self-critical feminist voices were many at this point – the field of feminist criticism and feminist politics renegotiating its agenda in dialogue with postcolonial studies and queer theory. Patricia Mellencamp concluded in 1995: “Regarding affect, feminist film theory has an extremely limited model. Strange

that given the many pages devoted to ‘the film spectator,’ we didn’t think to ask what or how she was feeling.”¹⁸ While the highly affective issues of pleasure and desire had been key questions for 20 years of feminist film theory, with Annette Kuhn calling dominant cinema “the pleasure machine,”¹⁹ Mellencamp was harsh in her assessment, deeming pleasure as “a catchword that has become almost meaningless.”²⁰ Furthermore, she asked how it was possible that feminists have omitted to investigate the affect of fear.

Coinciding with a turn to history and archives and to studies in historical and material viewing cultures and practices in cinema studies, the feminist critical interest in affect and emotion reads as a further chapter in discussions of the “female spectator,” the key theoretical trope of the 1970s and 1980s. Summarizing the theoretical developments in 1995, Linda Williams concluded how “any theory of spectatorship must now be historically specific, grounded in the specific spectatorial practices, the specific narratives, and the specific attractions of the mobilized and embodied gaze of viewers.”²¹ In her influential essay on the “body genres” of pornography, horror, and melodrama, Linda Williams argued persuasively for the importance of studying film viewing as an embodied practice. These low status genres of the “spectacle of a body caught in the grip of intense sensation or emotion,” aiming to elicit a visceral viewing response (sexual arousal, shuddering, tears), Williams suggested, challenged theoretical models built on classical realist narrative cinema and its action-centered, goal-oriented narration.²² Furthermore, structured around “the spectacle of a ‘sexually saturated’ female body,” offering “what many feminist critics would agree to be spectacles of feminine victimization,” and targeting and appealing to both male and female audiences, these body genres challenged theories of gendered spectatorship as either active or passive, sadist or masochistic.²³ In Williams’s words, “these ‘gross’ body genres which may seem so violent and inimical to women cannot be dismissed as evidence of a monolithic and unchanging misogyny, as either pure sadism for male viewers or masochism for females.”²⁴

From View to Touch: Displacing the Doctrine of Distance

As a result of the critical interest in experience, affect, and emotion, feminist theories of spectatorship were reformulated in relation to questions of distance and proximity. In “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey famously called for a radical aesthetics that would “free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics and passionate detachment.”²⁵ The objective of this affective grammar of distance was to destroy “the satisfaction, pleasure and privilege of the ‘invisible guest,’” and, hence, the traditional film, which for female viewers, so it was believed, would at its most be a matter of “sentimental regret.”²⁶

“Passionate detachment” is an apt term to describe the deconstructive project of feminist political modernism, suspicious of the force of emotional engagement in the service of sexist ideology. To quote Mary Ann Doane, the theory of the image underpinning the cinematic apparatus was founded on sexual difference, positioning male and female viewers differently in relation to the image: “historically, there has always been a certain imbrication of the cinematic image and the representation of the woman.”²⁷ This closeness, she argued, entailed “a certain over-presence of the image” for the female spectator: since “she is the image,” “the female spectator’s desire can be described only in terms of a kind of narcissism – the female look demands a becoming.”²⁸ Consequently, Doane revisited psychoanalytic theories of femininity, extrapolating a theory of female spectatorship as masquerade as “an act of denial of the production of femininity as closeness, as presence-to-itself, as, precisely, imagistic.”²⁹ To read Doane’s 1982 argumentation thirty years later is to become aware of a profound shift in critical perspectives within feminist film criticism: what the 1990s scholarly interest in experience, affect, and emotion entailed was a re-examination of the notion of gaze and, fundamentally, a re-valorization of proximity as an embodied aesthetic.

In 1992, Vivian Sobchack’s monograph *The Address of the Eye* marked a new interest in what Dudley Andrew had called “the neglected tradition of phenomenology in film theory.”³⁰ Feminism had shown little interest in phenomenology within or without the context of cinema studies. And as a form of subjective or impressionistic criticism, or as a philosophical stance that conceived of experience and consciousness as genderless, phenomenology had seemed of little relevance to poststructuralist film theory. However, in 1990, Gaylyn Studlar highlighted the potential of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy for feminist criticism in enabling a new conceptualization of the self in the viewing experience – the sensory presence of the world in the self – and a notion of intentionality in theorizing spectatorship.³¹ Studlar argued: “Instead of allowing an essentialist male paradigm for perception and understanding to become the general paradigm for ‘human’ experience that negotiates the female out of subjectivity, women must dare to reinvest in spectatorial intentionality and participate in phenomenology as a kind of ‘dialectic between disclosing a world and understanding one’s self in front of this world.’”³²

Although never established as a major popular tradition within film theory, Sobchack introduced in *The Address of the Eye* a critical language for discussing film viewing as an embodied, sensory experience. Drawing on “semiotic phenomenology” rather than on Maurice Merleau-Ponty as many other feminist scholars would do in the 1990s, and not explicitly engaging in questions of gender, sexuality, or skin color, Sobchack’s project was to theorize “the embodied nature of the film experience” and “vision as it is embodied, vision as it is per-

formed, vision as it signifies, vision as it radically entails a world of subjects and objects to make sense of them and of itself as it is lived.”³³

Significantly, Sobchack’s theoretical project takes issue with the doctrine of distance and objectification inherent in Lacanian and Marxist theories of the cinematic apparatus. Reading Jean-Louis Baudry’s discussion of how the cinematic apparatus constructs subjects ideologically in the service of dominant ideology, Sobchack calls his perspective objectifying and alienated as “Baudry represses his own lived-body experience of vision in its entirety,” splitting “vision’s intrasubjective and intersubjective modalities” and rupturing “the dialectical relations and reversible exchange that normally occurs between them.” For Sobchack, the model reads as schizophrenic and paranoid since the “hapless and helpless” spectator here is “perceived merely as a body-object, an ‘apparatus’ less powerful in its effects than the cinematic apparatus – the film’s powerful and monstrous body that possesses the power of invisibility.”³⁴

What is at stake in Sobchack’s project is the restoration of a notion of intentionality and an ethics of embodiment into film theory by conceptualizing both film and viewer as material beings, engaged in an intersubjective relation. “If we are to understand how we understand the film experience, why it has significance for us, and why we care about it, we must remember that experience as located in the lived-body,” Sobchack argues and simultaneously ascribes film a task in the face of the contemporary historical moment, “the crisis of the lived body.” Writing in the beginning of the 1990s, Sobchack contextualized her theoretical project in an analysis of the effects of “the pervasive entailment of electronic mediation and simulation” on the human body, arguing that this “crisis of the real” has resulted in “[t]he lived-body’s struggle to assert its gravity, its differential existence, status, and situation, its vulnerability and mortality, its vital and social investment in a concrete lifeworld inhabited by others.”³⁵ From this perspective, Sobchack’s theorizing of embodied viewing reads as an antidote to these de-centering developments of emerging new media technologies:

Cinema thus transposes, without completely transforming, those modes of being alive and consciously embodied in the world that count for each of us as direct experience: as experience “centered” in that particular, situated, and solely occupied existence sensed first as “Here, where the world touches” and then as “Here, where the world is sensible; here, where I am.”³⁶

It is from this ethically grounded perspective that Vivian Sobchack discusses *THE PIANO* in *Carnal Thoughts. Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* as a “heightened instance of our common sensuous experience of the movies”:

The way we are in some carnal modality able to touch and be touched by the substance and texture of images; to feel a visual atmosphere envelop us; to

experience weight, suffocation, and the need for air; to take flight in kinetic exhilaration and freedom even as we are relatively bound to our theater seats; to be knocked backward by a sound; to sometimes even smell and taste the world on the screen.³⁷

Sobchack joins Gillett and others in describing her viewing experience of *THE PIANO* as an affective experience, and uses her own experience as a way to theorize how viewing in general engages one's body, affecting the sense of one's embodied self:

Campion's film moved me deeply stirring my bodily senses and my sense of my body. The film not only "filled me up" and often "suffocated" me with feelings that resonated in and constricted my chest and stomach, but it also "sensitized" the very surfaces of my skin – as well its own – to touch. Throughout the film my whole being was intensely concentrated and, rapt as I was in the world onscreen, I was wrapped also in a body that was achingly aware of itself as a sensuous, sensitized, sensible material capacity.³⁸

Sobchack uses her viewing account to articulate a notion of "vision in flesh" as a mode of primary embodied identification with the materiality of the film that pre-exists and grounds further, secondary and tertiary identifications with the narrative and characters: "the film experience is meaningful *not to the side of our bodies but because of our bodies*. Which is to say that movies provoke in us the 'carnal thoughts' that ground and inform more conscious analysis."³⁹ Sobchack illustrates her idea with an account of relating to the opening shots of *THE PIANO*:

At first, prior to this conscious recognition, I did not understand those fingers as "those" fingers – that is, at a distance from my own fingers and objective in their "thereness." Rather, those fingers were first known sensually and sensibly as "these" fingers and were located ambiguously both offscreen and on – subjectively "there," "mine" as well as the image's.⁴⁰

With this example, Sobchack illustrates how the distance between the viewing body and the film's body vanishes during "our primary engagement (and the film's) with the sense and sensibility of materiality itself," and "the cinesthetic subject" as "a subversive body in the film experience" emerges.⁴¹ While grounding her theory in an account of subjective experience and explaining "pre-reflective bodily responsiveness" as being "informed by the full history and carnal knowledge of acculturated sensorium" and "never a priori to historical and cultural existence" – and hence implying a historicity of embodied viewing – Sobchack nevertheless suggests that the engagement with the materiality of the film

occurs “in a primary, prepersonal and global way that grounds those later secondary identifications that are more discrete and localized.”⁴²

Sobchack’s phenomenological project is pursued further by Jennifer M. Barker who, in *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*, motivates her use of the concept of touch as a way to study “cinema as an intimate experience and of our own relationship with cinema as a close connection, rather than as a distant experience of observation, which the notion of cinema as a purely visual medium presumes.”⁴³ Again, film experience is theorized and generally valorized in terms of closeness: “To say that we are touched by cinema indicates that it has significance for us, that it comes close to us, and that it literally occupies our sphere. We share things with it: texture, spatial orientation, comportment, rhythm, and vitality.” However, echoing Laura U. Marks, Barker underlines how tactility, as a mode of being, contains a variety of modes: “caressing, striking, startling, pummeling, grasping, embracing, pushing, pulling, palpation, immersion, and inspiration.”⁴⁴ As a modality, touch is a potentiality.

Barker pushes Sobchack’s language of “a film’s body” further, discussing touch as “a style of being” that encompasses onscreen bodies, filmgoers, and films themselves. In her approach, “cinematic tactility occurs not only at the skin or the screen, but traverses all the organs of the spectator’s body and the film’s body.”⁴⁵ The analytical axis of distance versus proximity between viewer and film is undone as the same analytical language of “tension, balance, energy, inertia, languor, velocity, rhythm” is applied to both human bodies and the film’s body.

For Barker, as for Sobchack, the notion of tactility entails theorizing the viewing situation as intersubjective and reciprocal. As Barker argues, the “expressive, affective qualities of the film and the viewer’s affective response to those qualities are, in fact, two sides of a single structure that exists in the space between film and viewer, which we discover by making ourselves vulnerable to the film.”⁴⁶ What the word “vulnerable” connotes here is, interestingly, a paradox at the heart of the figure of the touch: the concept is invoked as an alternative to the “hapless and helpless” spectator of the apparatus theory, and yet the viewer’s position is characterized as vulnerable in order to highlight the material and aesthetic mattering of the film as a subject – not merely an object for the viewer.

Viewing as Vulnerability: Beyond Subject and Representation

The hapticity of viewing and a notion of vulnerability are associated also in Laura Marks’s discussion of intercultural cinema. In *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, Marks develops the concept of “haptic visuality” to account for the way cinemas address their viewers by reaching beyond, operating across, and mediating between different cultural contexts. Transnational, multicultural, postcolonial, and hybrid cinemas, Marks argues, operate

by evoking “memories, both individual and cultural, through an appeal to non-visual knowledge, embodied knowledge, and experiences of the senses, such as touch, smell, and taste,” appealing “to a haptic or tactile visuality inviting the viewer to respond to the image in an intimate, embodied way.”⁴⁷

Investigating how viewers perceive intercultural cinema, Marks moves beyond the realm of theorizing spectatorship and focuses on the vanishing of distance between film and viewer. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze’s film theory and his grammar of images, she distinguishes between optical visuality and haptic visuality. Whereas optical visuality invites a relation of mastery “in which the viewer isolates and comprehends the objects of vision,” “[t]he ideal relationship between viewer and image in haptic visuality is one of mutuality, in which the viewer is more likely to lose herself in the image, to lose her sense of proportion.” Therefore, Marks argues – as echoed by Barker in her discussion of cinematic tactility – “[h]aptic visuality implies making oneself vulnerable to the image, reversing the relation of mastery that characterizes optical viewing.”⁴⁸

Importantly, hence, not all visuality or viewing is characterized by hapticity or tactility. While initially suggesting hapticity as a quality of intercultural cinema, an address beyond the realm of representation, by invoking the notion of vulnerability and describing viewership as “making oneself vulnerable,” Marks also suggests that haptic visuality is to some extent a voluntary act, a mode of viewing. As such, it entails giving up distance and “mastery” and assuming the position of “losing oneself” and losing one’s “sense of proportion.” In other words, vulnerability as sensibility is an effect of the loss of distance. This vulnerability of the viewer entails, according to Marks, a risk of violence in unexpected confrontations, but it is also a positive potentiality. Indeed, she describes this vulnerability as mutuality and proximity of the viewer to the image, as “the particular erotic aspect of haptic cinema.” In her account, hence, there is a clear contrast between voyeurism that “relies on maintaining the distance between the viewer and viewed” and eroticism that “closes that distance and implicates the viewer in the viewed.” As developed by Marks, the notion of haptic visuality, characterized by “the search for ways to bring the image closer to the body and the other senses,” reads both as political aesthetics (addressing the ones between cultures and languages) and a revalorization of proximity as an aesthetic ideal.⁴⁹ While emphasizing “embodied ways” of viewing and “seeing with one’s eyes,” Marks is nevertheless explicit about her focus on cultural exchange: “I am exploring sense experience in cinema not to seek a primordial state of sensory innocence, but to find culture *within* the body.”

As theorists of viewing as touching, Vivian Sobchack and Laura U. Marks share a footing in phenomenology and its model of subjectivity which posits “a mutual permeability and mutual creation of self and other.”⁵⁰ This, as Marks summarizes, enables an understanding of film spectatorship as “a special example of this enfolding of self and world, an intensified instance of the way our percep-

tions open us onto the world.” Marks’s approach is informed by Sobchack’s theory of film viewing not as a “witnessing cinema as through a frame, window, or mirror” but as “shar[ing] and perform[ing] cinematic space dialogically.” For both, phenomenology is the framework that provides a productive alternative to Lacanian theories “grounded in the alienation of visuality from the body” and subjectivity based on “a fundamentally alienated selfhood.” Commenting upon the incommensurability of this phenomenological theory of film viewing with Deleuze’s cinema theory, Marks notes how Deleuzian cinematic philosophy is not a theory of spectatorship: “To talk about the states, histories, and circumstances of the individual people experiencing cinema, we need a phenomenology of individual experience. Deleuze says, ‘Give me a body, then.’ But his interest is not in exploring how cinema relates to the bodies we have already been given.”⁵¹

Indeed, it is a vital insight that Deleuze and his feminist followers are not interested in “bodies that we have already been given” but in the positivity and potentiality of difference. This is evident when reading Barbara M. Kennedy’s book *Deleuze and Cinema: The Aesthetics of Sensation*, published the same year as *The Skin of the Film*. It explicitly argues for a “postfeminist” approach that “moves away from a concern with subjectivity” and “outside a politics of difference or a politics of gendered subjectivities, to a micro-political pragmatics of becoming where subjectivity is subsumed to becoming-woman.”⁵² As if responding to the phenomenological foregrounding of the experiencing subject as a lived-body, Kennedy outlines a Deleuzian version of postfeminism as going beyond the lived experience and attempting “to bring back materiality and to understand the basis of experience as having a material and affective basis, as much as sociological, cultural or libidinal.”⁵³ Kennedy proposes a study of “a neo-aesthetics of the film experience as ‘an event’: an aesthetics of force and sensation, where ‘subjectivities’ are no longer purely contained in the image, or in the spectatorial psychic spaces, but through a melding of matter, the material of film, force, and sensation as movement, the ‘in-between’ of those spaces.” In this approach, the set-up of viewer, film, and context – with the analytical trajectories of subject/object, active/passive, distance/proximity – is replaced by a study of film “as a mind/body/machine meld, as experience, as sensation, as a perception-consciousness formation.”⁵⁴

Significantly, for Kennedy, sensation is conceptualized as “beyond of any fixed subjective positionality.”⁵⁵ In other words, there is no conceptualization of spectatorship as a subject. As Elena del Rio argues in *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance: Powers of Affection*, “[w]hile phenomenology largely operates within the realm of subjectivity – a subjectivity reconciled with its opposite pole, objectivity – Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism operates in a desubjectified field of forces.”⁵⁶

At the heart of Del Rio’s theoretical project is “the consideration of the film image as moving materiality/corporeality,” as “moving images that have an un-

limited capacity to move us.”⁵⁷ Film is understood not as “a scene of visual representation” but as an “affective event” and a site for the performativity of bodies: “bodies as doers, generators, producers, performers of worlds, of sensations and affects that bear no mimetic or analogical ties to an external or transcendental reality.”⁵⁸ As Del Rio argues, film as performance entails “a mobilization of affective circuits that supersedes the viewer’s investment in the image through representational structures of belief and mimesis.” For her, this approach to cinema is about restoring to “the body the dimension of intensity lost in the representational paradigm,” and drawing on Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza’s 17th-century philosophy, she offers the Deleuzian model as a way to focus on affects as “the powers of the body,” “the body’s active power to affect” and “its passive power to be affected by other bodies.”⁵⁹

While quoting Linda Williams’s discussion of body genres as a significant turn in feminist film theory, “reclaiming the affective as a legitimate category of critical/theoretical cinematic discourse,” Del Rio pushes Williams’s focus on excess and her notion of the sensational further, leaving the notion of genre behind.⁶⁰ Studying performance as “an affective and sensational force that disrupts, redirects, and indeed affects narrative form,” she identifies “affective-performative” images in which bodily powers of action are manifest.⁶¹ In this critical vocabulary, bodies on the screen and the viewing bodies are identified as a positive force, as “the body’s expressions are not exhausted by the pressures to perform according to cultural, linguistic, or ideological requirements.” Bodies, not language or discourse, are conceptualized as a radical political force, since “alongside the inevitability of conforming to these pressures, there always lies the possibility that affective intensity may provide a line of escape – in Deleuze’s words, a line of flight.”

Affect, here, in this desubjectified model, is not a subjective quality or a psychological or social emotion to be named but a capacity or intelligence of the body beyond or prior to language, discourse, narrative, and cultural matrix.⁶² It is here that the distinction between a phenomenological and new materialist or a Deleuzian approach to viewing as touching becomes clear. As Del Rio argues: “While for Merleau-Ponty, movement and affect are subjective phenomena arising out of an intentional and individuated rapport with the world, Deleuze regards the kinetic and the affective as material flows whose individuation and exchange do not rest upon subjectified intentions, but rather upon the workings of a non-organic, anonymous, vitality.”⁶³

Affective Scholarship

To investigate these turns to affect in feminist film theory is to engage in affective storytelling. As Clare Hemmings has argued, stories told about feminism (like any other stories) tend to be formulaic stories of progress, loss, or return.⁶⁴ The

trope of “turn” implies radical ruptures; and in some sense, the move away from theories of subject, of the decentering of female spectatorship as a critical concern and towards a critical interest in experience, affect, and emotion cannot but be read as significant re-orientations. The perspectives of phenomenology and the new materialism introduced new critical vocabularies and theoretical legacies into feminist film criticism, but they were, furthermore, introduced as gestures of explicit critique and outright rejection of earlier approaches.

What was rejected was the psychoanalytical, semiotic, and Marxist concept of gaze as a cultural, social, and ideological construct necessitating a distance between the viewer and the viewed. So wholesale and radical is this change of perspective that, reading Sobchack, Marks, Kennedy, or Del Rio, it seems almost impossible to understand the value of critical distance, the notion of “passionate detachment,” or the political goal of destroying the visual pleasure of narrative cinema. Likewise, a reader not familiar with the history of feminist film criticism might wonder why the body poses such a political dilemma – given that body, embodiment, and the sensorial for phenomenology and new materialism (even if in different ways) read as a site of ethics, potentiality, and positivity. The lack of intergenerational continuities and feminist genealogies results in a silence between the new approaches and the psychoanalytic, semiotic, and Marxist film theory as the other. In that sense, certain paradigm shifts have taken place and parallel, incommensurate critical vocabularies not communicating with each other have emerged – alongside new critical approaches and conceptualizations of cinema. In another context, as regards queer theory, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick introduced the concepts of paranoid and reparative reading to highlight the very different affective dynamic that characterizes deconstruction, critical theory, and “hermeneutics of suspicion” on the one hand, and the reparative attitude that, in her analysis, invests in hope, seeks positive affect, is attuned to contingency, and, therefore, assumes the risk of vulnerability.⁶⁵

However, as I have emphasized, the turn to experience, affect, and emotion in the early 1990s also occurred within the psychoanalytic, Marxist theories of the viewing subject.

Furthermore, the other of the affective turn, the psychoanalytic theories of film viewing, did not stand still. In *The Practice of Love* (1994), Teresa de Lauretis pursues the project of Freudian psychoanalysis and Peircean semiotics that she began in *Alice Doesn't* (1984), insisting on a notion of “the subject of semiotics” as “at once producer and interpreter of signs, and thus ‘physically implicated or bodily engendered in the production of meaning, representation and self-representation.’”⁶⁶ In her approach, this theoretical construct is useful for thinking about cinema as a realm where the connecting and bridging of inner and outer worlds of the ego takes place, identifying the embodied subject as the locus of signification: the subject as “the place in which, the body in whom, the significate effect of the sign takes hold and is real-ized.”⁶⁷ In fact, quoting Peirce, De

Lauretis wrote in 1984 that “The first proper significante effect of a sign is a feeling produced by it. This is the *emotional* interpretant.”⁶⁸ In De Lauretis’s Peircean account, the second significante effect, the *energetic* interpretant, is always mediated by the first, emotional ones. Even if, from today’s perspective, this can be read as a premonition of later turns to experience and affect, it is nevertheless a theory of the subject. As such, it reminds contemporary scholars of the internal distinctions and debates within the psychoanalytic film theory, warning against false simplifications.

As for Lacanian theories of the gaze, Kaja Silverman argued in *The Threshold of the Visible World* (1996) for a rethinking of love, that is, the importance of idealization in identification, and for reconceptualizing the unconscious of the viewing subject as a historicity of images. In a poetic manner, Silverman suggested an updated account of the gaze as “cultural screen” as the impersonal gaze of culture that a viewer’s situated, embodied look engages with. Hence, according to her,

To look is to embed an image within a constantly shifting matrix of unconscious memories, which can render a culturally insignificant object libidinally resonant, or a culturally significant object worthless. When a new perception is brought into the vicinity of those memories, which matter most to us at an unconscious level, it too is “lit up” or irradiated, regardless of its status within normative representation. Excluded from that privileged field, value will drain out of it.⁶⁹

According to this account, this quality of the look is not voluntary, an act of will, but unconscious: “One cannot characterize this motility of the look as ‘agency,’ since it resists our conscious attempts to direct it.” Aesthetics texts – films and images – are theorized as occasions to intervene, as “capable of moving immediately to a privileged site within the unconscious.”⁷⁰

While Silverman’s approach is subject-centered and grounded in a Lacanian conception of the visual, her model also, like De Lauretis’s, suggests points of dialogue with the phenomenological and new-materialist approaches to viewing as touching and intersubjective reciprocity. Like the Deleuzian models, Silverman too highlights the aesthetics as the realm that may escape or transgress the constraints of language, narrative, and discourse. Both De Lauretis and Silverman reject individualist notions of viewing, and both are interested in affirmative engagements – whether it is called love or vitality. However, the materialism of both De Lauretis and Silverman emphasizes the historicity of viewing as embodied and affective practice. Here, their approaches suggest points of dialogue with Laura Marks’s theory of haptic visuality as a question of “finding culture within the body.”⁷¹

Going back to feminist critics who in the early 1990s lamented the lack of critical concern for experience and affect, Jane Shattuc's call for analysis of the "political power of affect" deserves to be repeated.⁷² What is at stake when an experience or an affect is articulated, made the object of knowledge and the starting point of analysis? Why, in what sense, for what purposes, and for whom is such knowledge important? What is the place of concepts such as gender, sexuality, class, and race in critical vocabularies that oppose history, representation, and language? Self-critical analyses of the potentialities as well as limits and constraints of phenomenology or new materialism are yet to come: what kinds of research questions are allowed and prioritized, what are excluded or precluded? It is evident that the distance and non-communication in the 1993 reception of *THE PIANO* between affective viewing accounts, on the one hand, and the critical investigations of the gendered, sexualized, and racialized colonial imagination propelling fantasies of desire and transgression, on the other hand, still exists.⁷³ That distance has not been undone. Instead, the "bodies that we have already been given" (Marks) continues to be a question for those working with notions of representation and subject, whereas the aesthetic and the experiential are discussed with phenomenological and Deleuzian vocabulary. Facing this epistemological fault line which at times appears to be insurmountable, the critical questions posed by Annette Kuhn in 1992 serve as a call for all to reflect upon the complexities of studying experience, affect, and emotion:

[E]xperience is not infrequently played as the trump card of authenticity, the last word of personal truth; forestalling all further discussion, let alone analysis. Nevertheless, experience is undeniably a key category of everyday knowledge, structuring people's lives in important ways. So, just as I know perfectly well that the whole idea is a fiction and a lure, part of me also "knows" that my experience – my memories, my feelings – are important because they make me what I am, make me different from everybody else. Must they be consigned to a compartment separate from the part of me that thinks and analyses? Can the idea of experience not be taken on board – if with a degree of caution – by cultural theory, rather than being simply evaded or, worse, assigned to the realm of sentimentality and nostalgia?⁷⁴

Sound and Feminist Modernity in Black Women's Film Narratives

Geetha Ramanathan

Feminist film theory addressing black women's representation in film has steadily developed a series of subject positions that challenge the dominant assumptions of Anglo/Euro feminist film theory.¹ The feminist critical practice by which we designate some filmic and critical work as feminist, and others as black feminist, has preserved the "occult"² status of black women as subjects in academic discourse. As a result, the study of sound in black feminist films has been neglected, while sound in European and American aural female subjectivities in film has been explored in some depth. This emphasis on visuality, and Black/Anglo/Euro feminist film criticism's prioritization of the black female form, is an inevitable consequence of the ruling archetypes of black femininity in the Hollywood silent film era. Concerted efforts were, then, inevitably focused on discussing, analyzing, and contesting the visual iconography of black women on screen and, consequently, the use of sound in African American women's film has been an under-researched area. Notwithstanding my discomfiture with the term "black women's film," which is simultaneously homogenizing and separating, given the lack of attention to the auditory, I offer some scattered speculation on the value of sound and of studying sound. I use three films that could more usefully be called anti-colonial: Julie Dash's *ILLUSIONS* (1981) and *DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST*, (1991) and Omah Diegu's *THE SNAKE IN MY BED* (1995). I explore the hypothesis that sound is imperative to the entrance of subaltern women into modernity, that is, to the rights of all subjects, including the subaltern, to access public entitlements and juridical guarantees. For the female subject, this may be understood as having the right to be portrayed with dignity and the right to self-representation or legal representation.³ My conjectures and observations seek to foreground some strategies used by filmmakers' use of sound and its contribution to the participation of black women as modern anti-colonial subjects in film.

The Birth of the Black Voice in Film

Sound revolutionized the film industry in general, but its importance for black subjects as distinct from blacks in film, but including them, is incalculable. The transition brought with it an immense potential to rectify the dominant imagery of the black minstrel tradition and its assumptions about black masculinity in particular. Standard American film histories credit the coming of sound with Hollywood's release from the likes of the prototypical Uncle Tom of *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* (Edwin S. Porter, 1903) and Gus of *BIRTH OF A NATION* (D.W. Griffith, 1913).⁴ Sound liberated the corporeal black subject on to the screen. Being and "the certificate of humanity" were granted through voice.⁵ African American reviewers welcomed this new opportunity enthusiastically, reading the access to sound on screen as a signifier of racial advancement and the promise of greater participation in the public sphere. Daniel Haynes, who played the lead role in MGM's film *HALLELUJAH* (King Vidor, 1929), said "the Negro has finally broken through the shell of apathy and indifference and emerged in the light of the screen."⁶ Furthermore, the black actor's ability to be heard on screen was equated with the new possibility of claiming subjectivity in the public realm: a new birth of sorts that was understood as an "emancipation"⁷ from both the silent screen and from silence itself. This promise was, however, not fulfilled by Hollywood, and the "new birth" was overlaid and subtended by the racist template of the silent film era. African American film had to wait for independent film culture to explore fully the key importance of sound for black modernity.

According to Michele Wallace, in African American culture, the visual was the negative scene of instruction, while the aural was the positive.⁸ Notwithstanding the layers of complexity that subtend Wallace's seemingly straightforward statement, her comment helps to explain the overwhelming attention paid to visuality in African American women's film. For instance, commentaries on Julie Dash's *DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST*, which in all likelihood has had more written on it than any other film directed by an African American woman, offer very little information on the use of sound. And this despite the director's statement that she wanted to be the griot of her people. In African culture, the griot is the repository of cultural knowledge, the poet, and the storyteller of the people. Furthermore, the Los Angeles school of filmmakers that she belonged to had similar aspirations.⁹

For Anglo-Euro feminist criticism, the female voice in the diegesis is irrevocably linked to the physicality of the female body. Thus, in Hollywood films of the studio era, the speaking presence of the female subject was of little importance. These qualities of voice itself, as being subsidiary to the female body and its performative capabilities, were most startlingly illustrated by the Sternberg films featuring Marlene Dietrich. In Mulvey's formulation, male castration anxiety emerges in the cinema as a fetishization of the [white] female body.¹⁰ This, in

turn, carries over to the voice to leave its traces in the disturbances around women's speech in sound films. Amy Lawrence notes that this fear is discernible in classical Hollywood film, as women's voices are often less synchronized than the norm. The lack of perfect synchronization misaligns the voice from the speaking body. The issues to do with sound for non-African American women in Hollywood film are manifold. To begin with, the visualized female body strips the female voice of authority. Secondly, feminist criticism considers female speech a precondition for subjectivity. However, female speech is threatened in classical Hollywood film in two ways: the soundtrack itself is unraveled by the possibility of women's speech as noted above, and the soundtrack "fractures a woman's body and voice into irreconcilable pieces."¹¹ Thirdly, feminist critics might have been tempted to find the female subject's voice in the semiotic chora of maternal speech, but this is contested in orthodox psychoanalytic theory by the word of the Father and the interdiction against [female] speech.¹² And finally, any theory of the filmic apparatus's signifying system cannot afford to distinguish drastically between sound and image for fear of allowing sound to carry the burden of meaning.

Writing on African American sound in film, Ryan Jay Friedman makes a comparison between the status of Euro-American women's voices and black voices.¹³ I would contend, however, that his comparison is not completely persuasive. The physical presence of black women on screen, bodies allied to sound, was politically important in ways that render the subversions effected by an erotics of Euro-American women's sound through its scission and rupture of the diegetic space incommensurate to the political charge of black women's diegetic speech. Unlike the white female voice, the black female voice does not suffer the same interdiction against speech. The black male voice does not carry the same authority as the white male voice, and hence its imbrication in the black female voice does not threaten it. Furthermore, the psychoanalytic valence of the white paternal interdiction against white female speech does not hold the same charge against black female speech. Indeed, the black female voice seeks to dismiss the authoritative white male voice, as it holds no paternal authority over black female subjects; rather it is synonymous with political and juridical oppression. Finally, while the black image has been so identified with primitivism, the aural is associated with artistry, articulation, and the expressive speaking voice.

In part, due to the taboos against interracial relationships as translated into the Hays Code of 1929, a close analysis of the role of black women entertainers in early sound cinema presents an impossibly contradictory picture. While the erotic image of white femininity could be exploited for an assumed male spectator, the black female performers' image was more complex. On the one hand, the specialist performer, such as a singer, could not be visualized erotically, in order to accord with the prescriptions of the Motion Picture Association not to allude to interracial sex. But on the other hand, in her role as chorus dancer the

black woman could be fetishized to such a degree that the suturing process collapses, moving out of the diegetic scene, to present the white male viewer with a complete and total field of erotic surveillance but without impinging on the Hays Code of 1929.

Even as the criticism of the uses to which sound has been put are undeniable, it is crucial to remember that the unison of form and voice exemplified by the non-African American woman on screen was only a glimmer of a possibility for black women. One cannot overemphasize the notion that for black women, sound was imperative if they were to be *seen*. Sound, however, did not mean that black women would be able to represent themselves fully; here, I am referring to both juridical and aesthetic uses of “representation.” Consequently, notwithstanding the claims made for the political uses of sound in the above discussion, it did not guarantee a public discursive authority that would definitively establish black women’s speech. Modernity, then, was not necessarily a given.

For black women playing entertainer roles, the singing voice may have been significant as a draw to both black and white audiences. However, such celebrations are given short shrift by the uses to which the black voice is put. Following Kaja Silverman,¹⁴ Friedman argues that because black performances were seen as commodity elements, in keeping with the Harlem Renaissance’s fashionable rage for the negro, subjectivity was scarcely to be secured in the context of the myriad encapsulations of the performer.¹⁵ Yet, a film such as *THE EMPEROR JONES* (Dudley Murphy, 1933) would query that contention in that Brutus Jones undergoes a transformation that leads him to the existential and away from the performative while the film itself is able to capitalize on the performative. Any frame that features lead actor Paul Robeson and a white man shows Robeson dwarfing him, even when the man has the gun, and arguably even when Robeson is in chains. It is as though Robeson, the actor, escapes the diegesis in a threatening manner. The existential and the performative are best seen in the final sequences of the film. Robeson is a modern black figure in the swamp; the décor with its rich suggestions of sin, decadence, and self-indulgence portrays him as fully human, completely aware, and ready to acknowledge that he does not have one human ally on this island. His final confrontation is within himself. These subversions may have gone largely unnoticed and absorbed into the “primitivist” trope that the film plays to. Nevertheless, the literary framework of the film suggests a possibility for more progressive uses of sound in African American film. Friedman’s exploration departs company from Ed Guerrero’s critical perspective, which maintains that “with cinema sound, it [Hollywood] refined and advanced the reproduction of the slavery motif in terms of content, scale, and verisimilitude.”¹⁶ Guerrero further discusses the delusional establishment of slavery as a viable, harmonious institution through the many musical numbers in the plantation films between 1930 and 1935.¹⁷ Examining the scoring of films with some African American presence, one critic argues that the scores of film served as a

“shortcut” to signifying black identity on screen, in keeping with the fetishization of blackness performed routinely in popular venues during the Harlem Renaissance.¹⁸

The use of sound, then, while opening some venues and congealing others, was nevertheless crucial to the formation of black identity with reference to modernity. Clearly, the plantation genre imprisoned both African American men and women in an unchanging and romanticized past that bore no relationship to reality and history. Nevertheless, there were some crucial differences in the representation of black women entertainers in comparison to white women entertainers. Received knowledge dictates that these specularized versions of black women singing,¹⁹ as in the Lena Horne corpus, severely reduced the possibilities of viewing black women as engaged subjects in society, unlike roles such as Alma in the silent *WITHIN OUR GATES* (Oscar Micheaux, 1920) or the mulatta protagonist, Louise, of the melodrama *SCAR OF SHAME* (Colored Players of Philadelphia: Frank Peregine, 1927). The same is true of non-African American women in silent film, as Amy Lawrence confirms: “In silent film, despite the privileging of the image, women were always represented as *speaking* subjects.”²⁰ I call attention to this in order to suggest that entrance into modernity had been realized in a select number of silent films by African American directors but that participation in modernity was not so directly apparent in the classical Hollywood sound cinema. However, in mainstream film, neither the insinuations of primitivism – sounds of “jungle” drums in an expressionistic tenor – in the soundtrack, nor the specularization of fetishized colored bodies succeeded in completely stifling black men and women’s public address.

Friedman’s reappraisal of specific films of this period reveals a complex relationship between the spectacle in the diegesis, the soundtrack, the diegetic auditory viewer, and the film’s visual auditor. Such a rereading emphasizes the importance of the soundtrack *per se* for the African American woman’s representation. He contends that black women performers were not commodified in the same manner as white women. Hierarchically, as commodities, their bodies did not carry the same “exhibition value”;²¹ however, they did carry some “fictive” value which referred to the real world.²² In the film *ON WITH THE SHOW* (Alan Crosland, 1929) where Ethel Waters plays herself as the singer, the viewer is barred from seeing her as erotic, in keeping with the Hays Code. Thus, even in the most specularized of scenarios, the black female is offered to the viewer directly as a performer, detached from the diegetic-looking apparatus which would signal her eroticism cinematically. In the case of a singer such as Waters, her real world authority, or what Friedman calls her “fictive capital” rather than that which comes from “exhibition,” prevents the white viewer from enjoying erotic surveillance. To conclude, the unity of a black female performer’s body and voice was effective as a public utterance breaking through the illusionistic world of the diegesis. While the case for such an overdetermined address

to the audience should not be overstated, the songs themselves might deal with issues outside the cabaret frame, such as the great migration, through which its real-world referents would introduce a modicum of modernity to the reified illusionistic spectacle offered by the white chorus ensemble epitomized by Florenz Ziegfeld Jr.'s lines. Friedman is quite compelling when he concludes his reappraisal: "In the early backstage musical, racial difference from the films' white norm has the paradoxical effect of allowing African American vocal performers to appear on screen as singular individuals, without being subsumed into the abstract-uniform bodies of the films' showgirls."²³ Thus, film sound was successful, at least in interjecting some historical referents into an ahistorical spectacle of showtime with its replication of dominant racial and patriarchal hierarchies.

The Griot in Black Women's Film

Sound in relationship to black women's visibility in Hollywood film is the subject of Julie Dash's *ILLUSIONS*. The film illustrates the dilemma of the black women's voice in American film history using sound to expose diverse facets of the active exploitation of black women's voices and suppression of their image on screen. This throws into relief the complex and diverse uses of black voices during the 1940s: namely the invisibility of the black performing voice. Esther Jeeter, the playback singer, played by Roseann Katon, is compelled to synchronize her singing to the white star's lips in the studio film being produced. Jeeter is not seen in the film that is being scored in the studio, which is of course *de rigeur* for a playback singer, but it is her singing voice that is synched to the white woman's lips, not the other way around. In this reversal, her voice is absorbed by the white woman on the cinema screen. Esther also desires to be seen; as her voice is detached from her body, her presence as a black woman is obliterated. And even when the synchronization is deemed successful because of Esther's care in modelling her singing around the white woman's lips, her voice is heard a second later than the lips that mouth the words. Dash subtly presents this delay as a metaphor for the blocking of black women's public speech. Notwithstanding the use of Ella Fitzgerald's song, the sequence conveys the imperfection of modernisms that fetishize the black woman's singing persona but block the woman herself. If for Anglo-Euro women the problem was to secure authority through the voice-over or the speech detached from the body, for the African American woman both kinds of authority are evacuated by the transposing of the black female voice on to the white female body. The "phantasmatic body" – the unity of the body from which the voice comes that Mary Ann Doane suggests is the norm for Hollywood filmmaking – is the "illusion" that Esther seeks, a completeness that is denied her by the "substitution" of the white body. The story the

film tells is of the black female voice's disembodiment and its service for the industry.

The metaphor that Dash uses is not intended to undercut the critique of the limited role of the female black performer in the sound cinema of Hollywood's classical era;²⁴ rather it is to accentuate the double excision of both voice and physical presence on screen in order to enhance the exaggerated visibility of white female presence and black subordination. The *mise-en-scène* of Cecil B. DeMille's early *DON'T CHANGE YOUR HUSBAND* (1919) illustrates this phenomenon. The white female figure is the only one upright at the center of the frame and is surrounded by black cowering figures at her feet, at her left, and at her right. Dash's scenario in *ILLUSIONS* is an analogue of sorts with reference to sound rather than visuality.

In *DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST*, Dash presents the female voice as embodied; she allows black women to write history, narrate the personal, and direct the future. She looks to the oral epic tradition to find the voice of the female griot in a film whose visual imagery would be bereft of historical and cultural import without the speech of three women – Nana, Eula, and Yellow Mary – who represent black women of very different experiences. Dash's *mise-en-scène* takes black women out of the kitchens they had been confined to²⁵ and puts them in cinema studios and wide open spaces. By taking black subjects out of situations or formations that foreground their hierarchical status in American society as iterated in the sound films of the plantation genre,²⁶ Dash departs from the convention. The Sea Islands off the coast of the Carolinas in the US is the actual setting of the film and is vital to the plot. On a Sunday in 1902, the Peazant family are recorded having lunch before some of them leave the islands for the mainland. Critics' response to the film acknowledged its central circle of community, but it is patent that the women, centered in the frame, exert their power through the power of speech that draws the community together. In the frame, they are shown gesturing, talking, and using their bodies to draw the audience into their speech.

When the women speak and urge the community to hold together, their speech itself follows the intellectual and literary as distinct from the musical and entertaining that is normative in the Hollywood sound film. The women assume the authority of leaders of the community in their speech, which functions both as a form of public address and as a modernist rupture of the Peazant family's special Sunday lunch. The many viewers of the film have registered the difficulty of the speech; its cadence, its non-standard English, a claim to the authenticity of their speech – addressing other intimate members of the community (rather than the putative Cartesian male viewer or the Euro-American female viewer). As insider speech, it refuses to interpellate viewers as anything other than outsiders, distancing them from easy identifications. The listeners in the diegesis are themselves initially alienated, emphasizing the viewers' discomfiture. One critic, for instance, considers the movie “full of verbal and visual disassociation.”²⁷ The

visual could allure the outsider viewer, but the speech forbids it. Eula, raped and carrying a child, addresses the “shame” she and Yellow Mary, the prostitute are expected to carry:

Eula: As far as this place is concerned
we never enjoyed our womanhood
Deep inside, we believed that
they ruined our mothers, and
their mothers before them [...]
Even though you're going up
North, you all think about being
ruined, too [...] You're going
to be sorry, sorry if you don't
change your way of thinking
before you leave this place.

Completely without a skein of melodrama, the director, following the epic formula, allows her heroes to tell their tales, not of a straightforward heroism but a truth-telling of what had not been spoken before: the women's burden of rape, of slavery, of prostitution.

The speech dares the most sympathetic female viewer to identify with the women, such is the enormity of their experience and the courage with which they narrate it. The *mise-en-cadre* and the cinematography are unabashedly modernist as is the manner in which the narrative emerges: it is built by the visual scenes that tell bits of both the *grand récit* and the local story, for instance in the sequence where Nana and her grandson discuss their lives, their histories, and their futures. The total avoidance of all but one scene from the past links the present and the past conveying the epic narrational style. Dash's film uses “an imperfect modernism,” a cancellation of realism and its illusory wholeness, while not abandoning the recognizable referent – the real history. And this is adduced through the women's speech.

It is, of course, a theoretical exercise to posit viewers based on viewing positions,²⁸ and therefore it may be salutary to explore the responses of women to the film. While the vast majority of feminist non-African American critical scholarship has concentrated on the experimental filmic techniques introduced by Dash,²⁹ and although mainstream criticism was uneven,³⁰ African American critics including Toni Cade Bambara and bell hooks have discussed the visual in terms of black female subjectivity.³¹ Furthermore, Jacqueline Bobo avers that “Black women viewers reclaimed the film [IMITATION OF LIFE]³² beyond its critical reception as they later would with *Daughters of the Dust*.”³³ The women's sense of the history of their culture is also conveyed through the use of Yoruba on the soundtrack, which evoked memories of the musical patterns they had experi-

enced in childhood, the sounds that allowed notions of their history to surface. Christian Metz notes that off-screen sound is never really “off”; thus the sound provides a viewing context for the women wherein the real of history is foregrounded.³⁴

One woman specifically commented on the power of Nana Peasant saying to her grandson Ely regarding the rape of his wife, Eula: “You don’t own her” and she then elaborated on its continued relevance to cultural issues in the contemporary moment. Such a strong connection then testifies to the relevance of referential speech, culled from the real, to the entrance of black women into modernity. The insertion of black women as griots, usurping an older tradition in the service of modernity, is a strategy that is used successfully to combine an exigent realism at odds with filmic realisms but entrenched in literary manipulations of realism.

Omah Diegu’s *THE SNAKE IN MY BED* (1995) lends itself to comparison with *DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST*, as it similarly looks back to the “ancestral archive” to represent the modern condition.³⁵ Extensive discussion on whether the modern can actually be conveyed in a traditional modality has been to some extent resolved by an understanding of the need to research African histories, particularly the non-colonial, and the personal to present an African modernism/modernity.³⁶ Omah Diegu claims an identity as a [cinematic] griot and narrates her own story. Following the traditional role of the griot, she assumes the responsibility of giving her son knowledge of his heritage. The address is intimate as Diegu observes, “As his griot, my son is my primary target audience hence I addressed him directly.”³⁷ The film is comparable to Ingrid Sinclair’s *FLAME* (1996) in the use of “bush narratives” and the authorship of one of the chief protagonists in the voice-over. Both use the female voice-over but where the diaristic and literary models frame *FLAME* and prop up the film, pausing to shift to flashbacks and photo-reportage, Diegu’s film puts pressure on the voice-over and the narrator/author/auteur/griot to trace her own struggle to participate in modernity. Although there is no harmonizing of the soundtrack to the visual in *FLAME*, they combine to close the narrative in a satisfying way even if it leaves open the question of whether the two freedom fighters have found a place in the new postcolonial nation.

THE SNAKE IN MY BED matches the visual to the soundtrack using abstract expressionism, realizing its imperfect modernism through the discrepant relationship between the realism of the soundtrack in relationship to the image and *vice versa*. The film opens with bright imagery and figures in a landscape that seem to conjure up the griot’s imaginative world. The first-person narrator relates, in voice-over, the story of the Ibo princess Onwuero and the prince Isa who walk across the seas. At one point, the prince is transformed into three fish. Both the sea and the skies in this scene are not depicted in a conventional cinematic way. The landscape, for instance, is very different from the vastness de-

picted in *WEND KUUNI* (Gaston Kabore, 1983) or the majesty of the land before colonization as in *CEDDO* (Sembène Ousmane, 1977). These films inscribe the geographic reality of Africa and paradoxically also its land as mythical. In many cases, the landscape itself functions as a character in the non-urban films. Rather, the images in *THE SNAKE IN MY BED* mimic the griot's knowledge of an anterior past. A trenchant, direct question is interjected into the folk story, as the narrator asks the audience what they would do if their prince had turned into three fish so far from home. Should the princess stay in the alien land where her prince has turned into fish, or should she take the difficult road back to her people? If the narrator's own story – told to her son who serves as the off-screen primary auditor of his mother's migration to Germany from Nigeria – does not ever answer the question openly, it does insist on the women's entrance into modernity.

The narrator tells of the child's father's courtship; these sequences seem deliberately enigmatic even though the viewer does realize that the father is German and that he had spent eight years in Nigeria. However, the sequences do not really feature him. This is in part to emphasize the importance of the community's cultural practices and the sense of security the mother feels. It is the father, then, who is the outsider here.

While in the voice-over narration, the griot/mother tells of the father's courtship that "he was there, every day," it still does not present him but shows the mother as artist. These scenes are interspersed with shots that are symbolic in literary and filmic registers, for instance, one shot shows the open sky with a bird flying across. Dialogic narration allows the griot to bring witnesses to the story: through a conversation with a fellow artist, the story of the older German suitor's insistence on marriage and the pressure that he puts on her friends unfolds. The naïve mode of the narration and her explanation of the suitor's charms alleviates doubts about her one-sided narration. The narration itself is rendered more complex by her complaints about her family and friends, who view the suitor's persistence in a romantic vein. When the narrator struggles to assert her rights in modernity, the anti-modern tendency of such sentimentalizing is brought to the fore.

The traditional marriage ceremony, which makes use of ethnographic material, emphasizes the relationship between tradition and modernity, and as the customary marriage rites take up a significant segment, they convey the seriousness of the narrator's commitment to the Igbo community, particularly, the invocation to the ancestors. Performance elements enhance the griot's narration here, as the drums, the singing, and the libation offerings are heard. The full extent of the German's casual disregard for the culture is made apparent in the next sequence, when we find out that he is still married and that his German wife is still living with him.

The narrator's migration to Germany uncovers the depths of the father's deception and betrayal. The rest of the narrative is devoted to her efforts to ensure that her son is legally registered as a German national. This search, this journey is, of course, the story of the migration to the West, the loss of home, and the terrible disappointments of modernity.

Diegu's ethnographic explanation of her culture serves as a masterful and low-key assessment of what is civilized and modern. The visual does not follow the narrative soundtrack except in very oblique ways until the latter part of the film. Set in Germany, here the film uses the conventional format of the interview. The first half of the film, which covers the courtship, is punctuated by shots of lizards in varied scales, and of the female narrator as artist. The visual screen then functions as an analogue to the literary in using symbols. Still images proliferate. There are no flashbacks or depictions of incidents outside the marriage and one meeting.

The tone of the film becomes frenetic with the rapidity of a drumbeat, synchronized to the speed of the fingers braiding the narrator's hair. The extra-diegetic music is somber and interrupted by the diegetic sounds of the urban environment. Despite the pathos of the story, there is no hint of melodrama. The protagonist's isolation and fears in Germany are articulated using modernist techniques in the sequence that the protagonist fears for her life. The sharp combination of the large building and the voice produces an abstract expressionism that reveals her alienation, initiated by the father's doubts about the paternity of the son. Discussions about traditional Igbo practices regarding a child's claims are interlocked with the narrator's feminist demands that the child be recognized by his father. The traditional is discrepantly more in tandem with modernity than the bureaucratic modernity that the narrator encounters in Germany. The literary imagery of the narration accentuates the narrator's isolation. As the father had described himself as a puff adder and had reveled in stories about snakes, the narrator imagines a snake under her bed, a rich literary metaphor for treachery and betrayal.

Notwithstanding the support of two women who are shocked by the indelicacy of assumptions on the part of the German state regarding a black woman's demand that her son's status as a German be documented, her insistence on pursuing her claim distances her from all of them. None of them is able to support her fully; a significant point in terms of indicating that the quest for feminist modernity is essentially followed alone. In the penultimate sequences of the film, the visual becomes increasingly more abstract, and while the auditory is deeply tenuous, it steadies itself by refusing to give up the battle for modernity. Geometric designs of cars on the street accompany the story of the departure of the narrator from the city, afraid for her life. The near madness caused by her isolation is shown through an abstract display of colors even as the narrator speaks her way out of the brink of insanity. The narrator succeeds in her quest, but her telling of

her story has dwelt on the difficulties of the journey itself. Diegu's images of feet in motion as *leitmotif* of the stations of the journey, with the voice-over narration carrying the narrative line, suggests that realism is not necessarily imperative for women's entrance into modernity but that the soundtrack would have to carry the burden of the referential for this the feminist march on modernity to progress.

The use of film sound – both diegetic and non-diegetic as orature in complex and discrepant relationships with visual “imperfect modernisms” – has rendered it possible, notwithstanding the visual as the negative scene of instruction, for black women filmmakers Dash and Diegu to claim a speaking space for black women in modernity and postcolonial modernity.

The work of the two filmmakers, both affiliated with the LA school, testifies to a moment in independent black film history when the influence of African forms of orature challenge the Hollywood apparatus of the sound studio. *ILLUSIONS* functions as a statement on Hollywood's incapacity to feature both the voice and image of the black woman. Consequently, on screen, black women could not be “seen” and “heard” as modern subjects, even when they ostensibly had access to the legal system. *DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST* and *THE SNAKE IN MY BED* rectify this devastating inadequacy in mainstream film by recoding the tradition of the griot. The promise of full-fledged participation in modernity held out by the early sound film era is realized in their films where women speak with the authority of the griot and represent themselves as modern subjects.

PART III

History and Practice



The “New” Experimentalism? Women In/And/On Film

Jenny Chamarette

A Note on Positioning

As a scholar whose work often turns toward feminist, phenomenological, and situated approaches to the moving image, I have in the past been accused of “cherry-picking” the artists and works with which I think and write. In a sense, this is absolutely correct. My studies tend to rely on serendipity and an openness to new encounters with creative expression, in examples that are rarely constricted by singularities of form and categories of scholarly discipline. Consequently I have found myself described both as a dabbler and a dilettante. But I prefer to be described as restless: this latter term acknowledges my reluctance to situate myself comfortably within the well-worn pathways of disciplinary structures in the humanities. My writing here, in a volume about women, *Woman*, and the multiple crossroads of feminisms in 21st-century Film Studies, continues these peregrinations.

I cannot claim that the recent moving image works of Shirin Neshat and Gillian Wearing bear close resemblances in their formal structures or theoretical concerns. While they are both living contemporary artists working with the moving image, there is relatively little that connects them structurally or thematically. I do not consider gender alone to be a uniting force for their thinking and creativity, and I certainly do not wish to relegate their endeavors to some sort of biological essentialism. However, I want to draw attention to their work for emotional and intellectual reasons. First, I have been moved by and drawn to works by both artists over the past few years of research in contemporary film and art. Second, the serendipitous collision of creative concepts is one of the most fruitful ways in which feminism has made interventions in studies of film, and art. Some of the finest examples of this can be seen in the writing of Sara Ahmed, Mieke Bal, Laura U. Marks, Laura Mulvey, Griselda Pollock, and Emma Wilson.¹ A close examination of two female artists working with the moving image requires an understanding of their respective ethical, political, and aesthetic concerns, but also a closer engagement with feminist philosophy and feminist critical studies in the light of experimental filmmaking by and about women.

This opening note is therefore a *caveat emptor* on my own positioning as a feminist phenomenological critic, on the ways in which I arrange sets of feminist and gendered critical discourses around Neshat, Wearing, and others, and on the orientations of self-positioning and ways of looking at the world that emerge in these works as I explore them. Unfortunately, the scope of this chapter cannot permit a comprehensive exploration of female experimental filmmakers. Perhaps to do so would also risk essentializing to designations of gender the achievements of artists as varied as Peggy Ahwesh, Sadie Benning, Abigail Child, Julie Dash, Maya Deren, Germaine Dulac, Su Friedrich, Barbara Hammer, Jennifer Montgomery, Alexandra Navratil, Jennifer Reeves, Lis Rhodes, Aura Satz, Joyce Wieland, and so on. I admire the work, *inter alia*, of scholars such as Catherine Elwes, Lucy Reynolds, and Robin Blaetz,² journals such as *Millenium Film Journal* and *Moving Image Review and Art Journal*, and film organizations such as Cinenova and Electra in the UK, and the Centre Audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir in France³ who have brought to the attention of the scholarly and artistic community the importance of women's often underappreciated contributions to experimental forms of cinema. Nonetheless, here I hope that, by bringing together feminist philosophies of the image, and the experimental film work of two contemporary female artists, open encounters between these works will help to explore new territories of feminism and experimental film.

In/And/On

I want to draw attention to the conjunctions of this essay's title: women *in* experimental film, women *and* experimental film, women *on* experimental film. The prepositions and conjunctions of relation – that is, women's relation to their social, political, and embodied situations – have constituted both a historical interest and an ongoing issue of debate in feminist scholarship.⁴ The conjunction “women *and* experimental film” cannot be reduced to the descriptor of “women's film.”⁵ Consequently, just as I have made clear my own positioning with regard to the works I explore in this essay, I also want to make clear the purpose of the relations I am setting up in each case.

Women *in* experimental cinema become the dominant orientations of my thoughts in the case of Shirin Neshat's oeuvre. Her work itself emphasizes both female representation – in a manner drawing comparison with other contemporary Iranian cinema, as some have argued⁶ – and Neshat's own identity as a female Iranian artist working in experimental film and artists' moving image. By exploring Neshat's position as a woman in experimental filmmaking, I also acknowledge the ways that tensions arise between these two poles of identity: “Iranian cinema” on the one hand and “feminist experimental filmmaker” on the other. For instance, in relation to Neshat's work, we might contest the position of “Iranian cinema” as a diasporic concept, or indeed at best an example of

“good Orientalism,” introducing Anglo-European audiences to an unfamiliar cultural imaginary rather than containing at heart an “authentic voice” of Iran.⁷

I turn to the conjunction of women and experimental cinema in Gillian Wearing’s recent feature film *SELF MADE* (2010), not least because polarizations of gender are less prevalent in her work than in Neshat’s. Instead, relations and conjunctions of gender, race, and socio-economic status are emphasized through constructions of onscreen performance. In using the term “and,” I also recognize Wearing’s different trajectory to that of Neshat: while the stylized aesthetic of *WOMEN WITHOUT MEN* (2009) brings Neshat’s presence as artist to the fore, Wearing’s performative documentary renders her directorial presence almost invisible, and instead encourages more detailed attention to the trajectories of performance in the film. As a result, the collaborative performances of individuals within Wearing’s film, *SELF MADE*, bring about distinctions of class, race, and gender. Consequently, they raise questions of intersection and conjunction, which inevitably give rise to an understanding of difference as a crucial element both of contemporary intersectional feminist discourses and contemporary experimental film practice.

Lastly, it is important to address the notion of what is, if anything, “experimental” about the kinds of cinema produced by Wearing and Neshat. In each case, I discuss a recent feature-length film whose conditions of distribution and exhibition resemble almost seamlessly the “art cinema” of well-established female directors such as Chantal Akerman, Jane Campion, Samira Makhmalbaf, Haifaa al-Mansour, Sally Potter, Lynne Ramsay, Kelly Reichardt, Monika Treut, and Agnès Varda, among others. However, one potential indicator for experimentation, or indeed, experimentalism, in Neshat and Wearing’s work, is the transition that both artists have recently made from photography, video art, and moving image installation to feature-length, internationally distributed film, exhibited in cinemas. I would like to suggest that my encounters with the work of these two artist-filmmakers have resonances with a broader move in experimental filmmaking, away from the gallery and back into the bright-lit festivals and darkened auditoria of cinema. If this is a “new experimentalism” for the cinematic arts, then it also allows the recent work of other artists (Miranda July, Tejal Shah, Sam Taylor-Wood) to be considered along these lines.

Women In Film: On Not Looking the Same Way with Shirin Neshat

A young woman dressed in a pale summer dress, a black chador flowing down from her head, crouches close to the ground, her hands cupped around a charmed object. Shaded greenery frames this lone woman: we are in a courtyard garden to a large home, rhythmic music emanating from an entrance strung with colored lights in preparation for wedding festivities. Hidden by her black cloak and invisible to those preparing the wedding feast behind her, the young wo-

man's gestures are concentrated, enclosed, as she murmurs an incantation under her breath, filmed in close-up and filling the right-hand side of the frame. As a viewer of Shirin Neshat's feature-length film, *WOMEN WITHOUT MEN*, I am invited to sit in front of this woman as she crouches low and motionless, through the camera's lens. A voice whispers a name: Faezeh. The muted drumming halts abruptly: without moving, we have shifted into a different space, a half-world. She recognizes her name, turns, snatching up the object she had laid on the ground, fearing that she has been discovered. There is no one. Only the birdsong and the close-miked sound of the woman's breathing and digging remain. The voice calls her name again, and a third time.

A swift edit to another close-up of Faezeh's face then cuts away once more to a low level, medium shot – a full composition reminiscent of the perspectival tableaux of Persian miniatures (the medium in which Neshat first developed her artistic practice, in fact), but perhaps also a somber version of the tableaux of the late 19th-century French painter, Henri Rousseau. Within this tableau, Faezeh scrambles forward, confronting the screen and the ground, falling to her hands and knees. Feeling along the soil with her hands, she seeks out the source of that familiar voice, from underneath the soil that she had, moments before, been carefully scraping away in order to bury her enchanted object. She begins to dig – to the right, the middle, and the left of the frame – directed by that ghostly, interred voice. Rapid cuts between her distressed face, her ragged breathing, her scabbling hands, amplify the emotional intensity of the scene: there is someone, buried alive, or resurrected, below the surface of the earth. My spectatorial positioning situates me with her, alongside her – not through her eyes, but intimately close to the earth and to her hands. With swift movements, she unfolds layers of black cloth, revealing a woman's face: eyes closed, mouth open, dust streaked across her chin, cheek, and nose. A death mask.

Faezeh's rapidly tunneling hands reveal more cloth – a body, a glimpse of skin and flesh that becomes a hand – open palm upturned in grace or forgiveness. Her hand brushes across that of the buried woman, and as extradiegetic ascending piano and strings play out a very different, mournful rhythm to the upbeat drumming at the beginning of the scene, another cut reveals the initially lifeless woman to be breathing, as if breathing again for the first time. Holding both of her hands, Faezeh lifts her up, out of the earth, and the woman, her friend Munis, opens her eyes and gazes toward her. Now at a distance and hidden behind green foliage, we see the buried woman stand, her chador falling to her feet. In a 180-degree cut, she strides determinedly, her back to us, towards a pool of water. The lapping waters, crisply invoked through the film's soundtrack, consume her as she enters the pool, and a final, symmetrical, beautifully choreographed image from directly above closes the sequence, revealing a still frame within which Munis's body is submerged underwater, the skirts of her dress enveloping her, transforming her into a rose-like abstract image.

What is the purpose of this eager account of a segment of Neshat's film? Perhaps to illustrate a point. The description above accommodates, albeit idiosyncratically, the expectations of film analysis, drawing attention to detail, narrative, and spectatorial responses to the formally complex aesthetics of *WOMEN WITHOUT MEN*. By its nature, it attempts to describe the sequence from a semi-omniscient perspective, assuming that my own analytic description of the sequence would resemble those of others who have viewed the film. It is clear that affect is at work in this sequence. Cuts force the spectator to alternate between close proximity to the bodies of the protagonists, and a distanced, tableau-like composition, confusing and constricting the flows of identification or empathy that might be invoked if we were to stick closely, through our vision, to these women's bodies. But can it really be true to say that this sequence is universally affecting? Particularly in a film that sits at the interstices of Iranian and Anglo-American cultures – presenting Iran, but funded and distributed within a firmly Euro-American context – can it be assumed that the affect I experience necessarily constitutes collective affective responses beyond me? Can there be a collective “we” in the context of engaging with this film? These become feminist questions both of authorship and of spectatorship by virtue of Neshat's own concerns with the visibility of women in Iranian culture. Moreover, it becomes feminist, because feminism shares with postcolonial discourses of race, ethnicity, and hybridity an ethical attentiveness to issues of collectivity and issues of difference.

Neshat, an exiled Iranian visual artist based in New York, carries a distinctive voice, and significant commercial success, within international contemporary art. As an artist who extensively appropriates and critiques both the symbolisms of Persian culture, Islamic monotheism, and Christian rhetorics of flesh, mourning, and incarnation, Neshat was banned from returning to Iran following the exhibition of her first major work, *Women of Allah* (1993-1997). This controversial series of photographic portraits depicted high-contrast, black-and-white images of veiled women holding firearms or otherwise demonstrating their political resistance and, according to Neshat, female Shi'a martyrdom.⁸ Handwritten poetic and political verses in Farsi by contemporary Iranian women poets were superimposed over partially revealed faces, palms, and feet. The works themselves were considered incendiary in Iran and consequently resulted in both Neshat and her work being banned in Iran in 1996.⁹

Despite the international critical acclaim of her photography, video installations, and films, Neshat's work is still not shown in Iran. Neshat clearly identifies with her position in the Iranian diaspora, and her status as exile is frequently discussed in interviews and scholarship on Neshat. Much of Neshat's work is concerned with the conjoining of structural opposites: male and female, the real and the magical, formal stillness and choreography, political concreteness and poetic abstraction. Ranjana Khanna describes the image of woman in Neshat's work as invoking mutually contradictory and mutually conjoined conditions:

A face partially covered with a burqa, and inscribed with a poem you may or may not understand, nonetheless produces both a target and a threat, someone dead and alive, devout and defiant, propagandist and revolutionary, pure and complicitous, the martyr and the target, still and without space to move from the frame. All the images, with eyes inscribed or without eyes at all, seeing or blind, appear as a death mask. Never an identity, she is always an image, a singular-plural transcribed, transcribable, both located and definitely not.¹⁰

Although Khanna here discusses Neshat's first series of photographs, *Women of Allah*, the resonances with *WOMEN WITHOUT MEN* are apparent. The young women on screen in the sequence I described earlier are two of four female protagonists, each trapped or constrained in some way by the film's stylized vision of Tehran just prior to the British and American engineered military coup in 1953. Tracing the respective journeys of Faezeh, the devout young woman; Munis, an activist and Faezeh's close friend; Zarrin, a young prostitute; and Fakhri, a wealthy wife of an eminent military leader, the film alternates between Tehran and a semi-magical orchard garden beyond the city's borders. The garden becomes a retreat of safety for all four women, only for that peace and communal cohabitation to be destroyed by an influx of Fakhri's moneyed friends, and the eventual arrival of the military, followed by the police. The location of the two women in the sequence I have described is therefore both specific and symbolic, situated both within the world of a modernized, secular Tehran just prior to the coup, and beyond it, since the mythical garden of the sequence is saturated with iconic references to both European and Persian art, and is replete with both Christological and Islamic symbolism of resurrection and rebirth.

As Laura U. Marks has pointed out, exiled artists working between the contexts of the Middle East and America/Europe are frequently caught up in a "thick intercultural fabric spanning home and diaspora."¹¹ She argues that, in such instances, the kinds of feminist practices most likely to be visible in such works are predominantly Anglo-European in orientation, constituting a kind of "good Orientalism" that "does not pretend to be objective [and is] intended for Western audiences, to educate them about matters that are self-evident to Arab audiences or simply that concern Westerners more than Arabs."¹² While Marks specifically refers to Arab women filmmaking in the article cited above, her concern with "good Orientalism" crosses over into other Middle Eastern cultures, including Iranian and/or Persian ones. Consequently, the notion of Neshat's intercultural work educating Western audiences, through a reappraisal of traditional Iranian visual tropes, becomes an important means of negotiating but not ignoring the apparent divides between spectatorial attitudes, moral judgments, and female representation in her work.

Neshat completed *WOMEN WITHOUT MEN*, her first feature length film, in 2009, with funding from a range of European film funding initiatives. Shifting against a contemporary tide of filmmakers moving from cinema to gallery and artist's moving image, Neshat instead moves from the gallery to cinema – and more particularly still, to cinemas caught up within the complex industrial matrix of the film festival. *WOMEN WITHOUT MEN* was well received, picking up the Silver Lion for Best Director at the 2009 Venice Film Festival. Delivered in Farsi, the film is a loose adaptation of a contemporary novel by Iranian writer Shahr-nush Parsipur. Parsipur, who had been imprisoned by the Iranian authorities a number of times during her life, was imprisoned once again after the publication of her book, because of its discussions of female sexuality and virginity. Neshat's film, banned from exhibition in Iran, like all of her work, similarly deplores the impossibly restrictive positions of women both prior to and immediately after the military coup that forced out the democratically elected Prime Minister, Mohammad Mosaddegh in 1953, and transferred power overwhelmingly to the Shah, who remained absolute monarch for the next 26 years. The protagonist rising from the dead in the sequence I introduced initially is a young woman who kills herself in order to be free of the constraints of her life, fulfilling her wish to become a political activist in her immortal body. In as much as *WOMEN WITHOUT MEN* negotiates mutually contradictory positions, such as the (un)dead female activist, it also refuses conventions of narrative time and place. Historical Tehran blends seamlessly with a fantastical garden orchard. The garden is large enough to serve as a sanctuary for the women, and yet the passage between Tehran and the garden is timeless and unhindered by the physical demands of walking long distances in the desert. The crepuscular, blue-ish hues of the film barely reach into the realm of color at times: flesh-tones are as pale as sand; forests are like shadows.

The aesthetic poles in Neshat's work also play out in binary oppositions, particularly in the manner in which she examines the cross-cultural and countercultural particularities of Iranian and Western Anglophone culture. In an interview in 1999, Neshat states that:

I function as a translator, conveying the meaning of one culture to the other as I find a visual language to communicate to both sensibilities. The two cultures aren't merely different; they are completely contradictory. [...] The work has helped me zero in on the cultural differences, such as in matters of religion and equal rights, but also to address the universality of basic human events that take place in the world simultaneously, like the revulsion that comes from being controlled by governments – social, political or religious codes – and to address the bottom line that we all have emotions which are less cultural than natural.¹³

It is precisely the bi-cultural framing of Neshat's work that has attracted significant critical attention.¹⁴ In her statement above, Neshat opposes affect to culture, superposing them in a hierarchical relationship to one another. She suggests that emotions are a "natural" state, which she sets up as an ethical and shared alternative to polarized Iranian and Anglo-European cultural frames. And yet, it seems that the placement of the emotions within the realm of the "natural" allows a notion of "nature" to become interchangeable with a notion of the universal; "culture" remains the preserve of the particular. Furthermore, by describing emotion as natural, she also suggests that affect does not dwell within the house of culture, but rather that it sits beyond it, as a transcendent quality. Nonetheless, in the context of a film that is both symbolically and iconically rich, but which pertains to a hybrid cultural context of what Hamid Naficy would describe as accented cinema,¹⁵ the prescient issues of attempting to recuperate an Iranian identity, while acknowledging an incommensurable distance from contemporary Iranian culture do not seem to be easily rectified through claims of universal or transcendental affect.

I take as a launch point for this question of "universal affect" an engagement with the recent work of the French philosopher of the image, Marie-José Mondzain. Mondzain is a prominent figure in France in aesthetics and the history and philosophy of cinema and the image, alongside eminent peers such as Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Rancière and Georges Didi-Hubermann.¹⁶ However, compared to these other writers, her work has limited availability in English translation. Perhaps most well known for her essay, "Can Images Kill?"¹⁷ Mondzain's domains of inquiry reach across histories and iconographies of the image, from the gestures and behaviors of prehistoric humans in *Homo Spectator*¹⁸ to religious icons and the crisis of iconoclasm in the Byzantine Empire in *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary*¹⁹ to contemporary cinematic ethics in *Images (à suivre)*.²⁰ Neshat's comments about the "natural" affective power of her images bear close resemblance to Mondzain's claims about visibility and the ability of the visible world, image or realm to connect to our affective lives. In "Can Images Kill?" Mondzain writes:

The visible touches us insofar as it deals with the power of desire and obliges us to find the means to love or to hate collectively. Visibility encourages minds and bodies to have a constructive or destructive dialogue with such violence [...]. It is incumbent upon us to know where and how the violence of our images generates the force that is needed to live together.²¹

For Mondzain, then, affective collectivity demands ethical responsibility. The ethical possibility of living together is subtended by the implicit possibility of violence, and affect is a means of provoking and creating dialogue with this violence. Visibility – the possibility of looking – is in fact always subtended by the

affective awareness of violence: that awareness creates the possibility for collective experience. In 2007, Mondzain published a short article in the *Cahiers du cinéma* on the Iranian filmmaker-artist Abbas Kiarostami's installation, *LOOKING AT TAZIEH*, which reconfigured a recorded performance of the Iranian Shi'a passion play known as the Ta'zieh. Mondzain describes the installation as a way of seeing differently. She writes: "Culture appears here as that which, in its respect for difference, produces a relationship of universal recognition between subjects."²² I want to suggest that Mondzain argues the following: affective responses to cultural constructs create a recognition of cultural difference. It is this recognition of difference, rather than affect, or indeed culture, which in turn produces a universal commerce of intersubjective encounters. As such, it is the recognition of difference, rather than the sharing of cultural perspectives or affective experiences which creates the possibility of any kind of relationship between spectators and performers. Thus their positioning in Western or Eastern viewing traditions is not irrelevant, but rather deeply implicated in the possibility of mutual recognition as subjects, through cultural difference.

According to Mondzain, affect is a ground from which cultural difference emerges, and by consequence it is not a product of culture. Somewhat counter-intuitively, in both Neshat's discussions and Mondzain's, the positioning of difference seems to bring to bear something very important about affect: affect invites, evokes, and produces difference, not similarity. There is nothing, then, that I can claim about what I feel (even about a sequence as emotionally evocative and powerful as the sequence I described at the beginning of this section) that can assume as a basis for my argument, that an other – you, the reader, for example – can feel it too. In fact, whatever I feel will only bring about an acute awareness of the cultural differences, large or small, oppositional or contradictory, between the ways in which you and I experience affect in the world. There is no "we" that defines, constructs or invokes affective encounters universally. Neshat's film, *WOMEN WITHOUT MEN*, reveals affective non-commensurability by expanding its frames of reference, and particularly by negotiating the image regimes and monotheistic symbolisms of both Western Anglophone secular culture and Shi'a Islam. Effectively, the film produces an affective distance between the "we" and the "I" through its intertwining of cultural difference.

Neshat's positioning as a diasporic Iranian artist gives a particularly acute insight into the bicultural relationalities and contradictions that *WOMEN WITHOUT MEN* provokes. If affect is something that subtends cultural difference, and if an understanding of cultural difference is predicated upon affect, then affect is not necessarily a natural and thus universal quality. Instead, it is a condition of possibility for cultural difference to be acknowledged at all. In this case, affect invoked through the filmic image might be more appropriately described as an unachievable striving for shared emotional experience that in its failure establishes an ethics of living within a world of cultural contradiction. My extension

of Neshat's work and Mondzain's writing suggests that we can neither look the same way, from the position of our enculturated bodies, nor can we feel the same way, even through affectively powerful moments in film and art. Nonetheless, by not looking or feeling the same way, and perhaps by *never* doing so, the incommensurabilities of our affective conditions help us to understand better the ethics of our looking, which is ultimately an ethics of living together.

Gender has been a primary concern for Neshat's moving image works, not least in her video installations *TURBULENT*, (1998), *RAPTURE* (1999) and *FERVOR* (2000), and this becomes particularly prominent in *WOMEN WITHOUT MEN*'s tentative representation of a utopian matriarchy.²³ However, to think exclusively about the representation of women in the film would risk obscuring the positioning of Neshat as a woman working in the medium of film, through video art, high definition installation, and feature length fiction. This concern with regard to *WOMEN WITHOUT MEN*, as I have outlined through a reading of Mondzain, is more powerfully connected to the ways in which Euro-American feminisms interact with iconographies of Persian cultures; in other words, what is made visible in the culture clash that emerges in *WOMEN WITHOUT MEN*. These interactions between Western feminism and Persian politics might make claims for the semblances of shared affect – and particularly so in the beautiful, muted, often minimalist images of Neshat's film. But those conditions for collectivity are also underpinned by violence, and the rapid undoing of any claims for universal or shared feeling. When Faezeh uncovers Munis's undead body in the sequence I initially described, there is a complex metaphorical link between the living and undead female body, the potential for shared space, time, and emotion for Iranian and European femininity, and the always-failing potential of "good Orientalism" to produce a shared emotional space – in effect, empathy. If, then, we can think of affect, not as universal or shared, but as a disconnective interface – or a chiasmic encounter, in phenomenological terms – then the problem of "we" is only a problem when we imagine that we all look and feel the same.

Women And Film: Difference, Performance, and Gillian Wearing

These problems of sameness, and of the limits of empathy, are issues I would like to take further through engagement with a recent feature film by Gillian Wearing. In my discussions so far, I have turned first towards affect as a way of accounting for cultural and gender difference in Shirin Neshat's work. Implicitly, my account critiques the possibility of a "collective feminism" that elides the violent collisions of culture and politics, particularly within regimes of the image. As I mentioned at the outset, I cannot claim that Neshat and Wearing share connected values or discourses simply by virtue of their position as women making experimental and art film. However, the manner in which I discuss the work

of both filmmakers in relation to feminist and cultural discourses around difference does contribute to important ongoing debates in feminist film studies, particularly with relation to the intersections of gender, culture, and ethnicity.

SELF MADE came out in 2010, one of the last funded projects from the UK Film Council as was, together with Arts Council England and the Channel 4 Britdoc Foundation. A collaboration between the artist Gillian Wearing, the playwright Leo Butler, the method-acting trainer Sam Rumbelow, and a small group of non-professional actors, the film sits somewhat uncomfortably between the realms of documentary and reality TV, rather than fiction film. Wearing, who won the Turner Prize in 1997, has often been aligned with her Young British Artist contemporaries – Sam Taylor-Wood, Sarah Lucas, Steve McQueen, and Tracy Emin. In a similar move to McQueen and Taylor-Wood in recent years, Wearing has shifted from short video-based work into feature-length film for cinematic release and distribution: SELF MADE is the result of this. Wearing's previous work included confessional, intimate videos both of herself, and of others. Her video piece, CONFESS ALL ON VIDEO. DON'T WORRY YOU WILL BE IN DISGUISE. INTRIGUED? CALL GILLIAN from 1994, invited participants to make intimate confessions or fabrications on camera while wearing face-distorting masks.

In SELF MADE however, the seven participants, selected from hundreds of applicants in London and Newcastle, are not physically disguised. Instead they make use of method acting training in order to imaginatively develop a film in which they, as non-professional actors, will star. According to Richard Porton's article on the film in *Cineaste*, the "method" in SELF MADE follows the shape of method acting developed by Lee Strasberg and the Actors Studio from the 1950s onward,²⁴ though SELF MADE itself makes no reference either to Strasberg or to Constantin Stanislavski, whose "System" greatly influenced Strasberg's "Method." In particular, the performance techniques depicted in SELF MADE are drawn from the personal memories and the sensory and affective recall of the participants. However, as Lucy Reynolds has pointed out, the structure of the film itself draws more from television cultures than it does from contemporary video art, "as a potent point of mediation between the individual's private and public selves – a space of performance that elevates the ordinary to the pitch of drama, where video technology can act as a conduit through which citizens can express themselves."²⁵ SELF MADE lingers on the peripheries of reality TV, mass observation documentary, and performative drama.

In the context of this essay, and in order to explore the work of a female filmmaker, whose film does not specifically pertain to female or feminist representation, I want to turn briefly to a short speech by Audre Lorde, black feminist writer and poet. In an incandescent essay from 1984, Lorde shoots down the rhetoric of "universal" feminism while delivering the closing remarks at an American conference on feminist theory. The essay, titled with quiet fury, "The Master's Tools

Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," lambasts the conference at which she has been invited to speak for its failure to acknowledge the plurality and diversity of the feminisms it purports to uphold. She writes:

Advocating the mere tolerance of difference between women is the grossest reformism. It is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives. Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. [...] Difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged.²⁶

Lorde's advocacy of an active and productive engagement with difference – ethnic, social, cultural, economic, and gendered, still resonates closely with more recent media battles about feminism and intersectionality, some 20 years after this piece was originally written.²⁷ The fact that so little has changed, both in the recognition of difference, and in the recognition of differential and complementary modes of feminism, is a cause for some concern. If the ethics of film are to do with understanding how to live, how to die, how to speak, and how to listen – then surely difference, and understanding, respecting and recognizing that difference, needs to lie at the heart of that thinking. I am not speaking about tolerating difference, or assimilating difference, but acknowledging that within any given community, and particularly communities of scholars, the operations of power emerge quickly and the traces of that power obliterate difference just as quickly. Any sense of collective endeavor, any use of the term “we” also runs the concomitant risk of silencing, eliding, and ignoring difference.

The concerns with the relationships of vision and the image to the speaking subject that I outlined earlier in the work of Mondzain inspired some of the thoughts I encountered when viewing Wearing's *SELF MADE*. In particular I want to raise two concepts from Mondzain, pertaining to the image: vision and imagination. Trained in classical philosophy, Mondzain is concerned with the Byzantine theological relations of monotheistic religion to concepts of image, vision, and power.²⁸ She asks how images came to be seen by viewers as ways of transforming those viewers into speaking subjects,²⁹ and is interested in the emergence of Christian Byzantine theology that made such a significant intervention in the cultural construction of vision.³⁰ Mondzain's particular approach to vision plays on the twofold meaning of the term: vision as sight, and vision as the power of imagination. In her article “What Does Seeing an Image Mean?” she writes:

We do not see the world because we have eyes. Our eyes are opened by our ability to produce images, by our capacity to imagine. These capacities are why we need vision in order to be able to speak; this is why the blind can speak as long as their capacity to imagine is intact.³¹

This partly phenomenological envisioning of the world, made visible by the possibility of a personal and cultural imaginary, is where Mondzain's thinking can usefully bring together the work of Neshat and Wearing. Vision and the imaginary – terms so familiar to any scholar of visual cultures – take on a specifically cultural dimension, from the perspective of philosophy itself. Mondzain is of course not the only female or feminist philosopher to reintroduce the significance of social and cultural difference to philosophy *qua* philosophy, where she historically situates the nature of the imaginary in a cultural and epistemological relationship to the image, and to vision. Mondzain is not explicitly a feminist philosopher, nor a philosopher of gender; nonetheless her concerns with vision and the imaginary also bring about parallels with contemporary feminist philosophers such as Michèle LeDoeuff.³² In an inverse sense, while not specifically a philosopher of cinema, LeDoeuff's work has been brought into astute contact with Film Studies through the work of Catherine Constable and Rosalind Galt.³³

In her complex summary of many of her more lengthy discussions of iconoclasm, Mondzain writes:

[S]eeing the image is equivalent to detecting, in the visible, the presence of an absence. Any discourse on the image is nothing but an interminable oxymoron in which presence and absence, but also shadow and light, finitude and infinity, temporality and eternity, corruptibility and incorruptibility, passion and impassivity are constantly switching their meaning and changing places.³⁴

Talking about images and vision inevitably must acknowledge difference, opposition, and incommensurability as well as a capacity for imagination. Acknowledging difference both as a philosophical concept and as a material and representational actuality therefore becomes a vital component of philosophical thinking and cinematic ethics. By doing so, we acknowledge the invisible repressions and authorities that are always at work, both in the philosophical imaginary and in the cinematic image.

I return to *SELF MADE* now in order to talk about the relationships between represented difference in the cinematic image and the image of selves performed in Wearing's film. Much of *SELF MADE* is occupied with the training that the participants undergo in order to release recalled emotion through controlled moments of imaginative performance. In an early sequence, the participants, including Asheq Akhtar, a humanitarian worker from London, are undertaking a sense-memory exercise that requires them to imagine themselves immersed in a bath of water, which method-acting trainer Rumbelow asks them to visualize changing in temperature and water quality. The sequence, which films each of the participants at close range, focuses at some length on Asheq's obvious distress as he inhabits his sense memory of dirty bathwater. In an almost trance-like state of

suffering, Asheq struggles to breathe and to utter the long, drawn-out “ah” sound that is a regular part of the Method warm-up exercise depicted on screen. When asked what he was experiencing at the end of the exercise, he states, “Different rooms, different baths, different types of baths... different cultures, different worlds, different people, different animals, different everything.” Difference – and in particular the incommensurable difference between personal experience and the present moment – become a source of creative cinematic performance.

In a brief talking-head interview inset, Asheq mentions that he has “always been attracted to the darker side and people,” citing his background as an immigrant in Newcastle in the context of 1980s Britain. Subsequently, the camera’s uncomfortable proximity to Asheq’s weeping face is replaced with a more static and cinematically conventional series of shot-reverse-shots as Asheq then describes to Sam, the method-acting trainer, his vision of the white, middle-class family unit presented to him for his response in the workshop space in front of him.

The vision he describes is one that distinguishes mistrust, contempt, rage, disappointment, and the brief specter of Nazism and the Holocaust – references that Asheq mentions twice in quick succession in the two adjacent scenes. Asheq’s distress and vulnerability are translated on screen into scorn, as he describes his reactions not just to this middle-class white family but also to their representation, off screen and on screen. In this sequence, it seems that difference – the difference of experience, of affective memory, of perception, creates both a performance of intense vulnerability and an articulation of mistrust and alterity that reverses dominant presentations of privilege and looking. The white family unit is revised through Asheq’s description to reveal what discourses of privilege make absent: that socio-economic and racial privilege distorts creative capacity. What is revealed in Asheq’s onscreen performance are the ways in which his experiences of ethnic difference and childhood trauma also make perceptible the powerful undercurrents of privilege and violence in onscreen performance.

Where I earlier discussed Mondzain’s emphasis on notions of vision and image that elide and contain both what is visible and what is invisible, Asheq’s particularity of vision emphasizes both the visible impact of socio-economic and ethnic privilege, and the “invisible” creative and personal limitations of these kinds of performance stereotypes. Furthermore, Asheq’s imagination and his affective recall of life experiences bring about a creative and incisive critique of privilege, but in a manner where the legible traces of that affective recollection are not externally visible in his performance.

I want to recall again the words of Audre Lorde here, which seem to resonate with the creativity of Asheq’s performance and the ethically uncomfortable vulnerability I see presented here on screen. Lorde writes: “Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our

creativity can spark like a dialectic. [...] Difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged.”³⁵ Watching Asheq’s performance – both in the image of himself projected through the sense-memory exercise and in his articulated vision of privileged others – is a powerful and emotionally wrought experience. His performances throughout the film reveal a wide range of fear, gentleness, tactility, warmth, rage, violence, regret, and tenderness that all imply the perspective of perceptual difference as “other” to socio-economic and ethnic privilege. Nonetheless, these performances are always articulated through his body and his perception – a self-perception that is not fully commensurate with the ways in which his performance is represented on screen. In spite of their emotional intensity and physical proximity, sequences such as this in *SELF MADE* emphatically do not suggest a wellspring of shared experience among the participants but rather the intensity of singular experiences that bring creative performance into the present. By acknowledging the difference of his experiences, as working class, as a self-defined immigrant, as an abused child, as someone horrified by the misogyny he witnessed when his mother suffered domestic abuse, Asheq’s performance through *SELF MADE* also offers an opportunity to reflect on affect as a mode of exploring the creative power of difference. Perhaps most interestingly, in *SELF MADE* the sources of that creative power are only made visible through a mode of reflexive, experimental documentary, whose parallels with reality television, video performance, and contemporary film art practice enable the film to both critique privilege in these contexts and to open up a creative space for the complex representation of non-white and/or non-privileged performers.

Conclusions: Women On Film – A New Experimentalism?

This essay can only allow me to gesture towards what a restitution of difference in relation to contemporary experimental film might look like. Perhaps a starting ground for this is to reflect on the relations of power to vision and difference, to imagination and performance, to self-image and affect that I have outlined here. The cinematic language of performance in *SELF MADE* seems to gesture towards the creative capacity for articulating contextual difference that is also often disguised by dominant representations of white, male, middle-class performers on screen. Perhaps my best conclusion is to say that difference is a necessary vector that reminds us that no form of philosophical thinking is ever complete and that any aim for conceptual completion is an undesirable consequence of power itself. Feminist philosophies and philosophies of the image from Audre Lorde and Marie-José Mondzain, respectively, in their insistence upon qualities of difference, context, and violence, help to provoke new and creative encounters with the difference that is always there.

In commenting on, and describing in detail, some aspects of the contemporary filmmaking of Shirin Neshat and Gillian Wearing, I have brought these works into contact with discourses of universality and difference. These two philosophical and ethical issues are, I believe, at the forefront of contemporary debates in feminist theory and film studies. It is not enough to focus on the representation of women in film nor on the conjunction of women and filmmaking, even in an experimental mode. While the relationalities of gender to representation and to creativity hold key stakes in current feminist debates, it seems all the more important to acknowledge the intersections of other relations: cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic. If there is something “new” in the experimental films I have discussed in this essay, this “newness” owes itself to a renewed vigor in understanding, and finding creative productivity, in difference.

Conditions of Activism: Feminist Film Activism and the Legacy of the Second Wave

Leshu Torchin

Feminism, film studies, and activism are historically enmeshed. In the 1970s, the women's movement aimed to increase the presence and agency of women, whilst film studies recognized the value of visibility and popular culture within what is essentially a political project. *Women and Film*, a journal launched in 1972, saw women marginalized in industry, representation, and academe in lower level jobs, objectified images, and absence from the concern of male critics who celebrated auteurs and denigrated "women's pictures."¹ Cinema offered a site for identifying and combating subjugation. The debates and discussions have become more complicated over the years. Poststructuralism and identity politics challenged any claims to uniformity of womanhood (if ever any existed). Neoliberalism gave rise to a pernicious postfeminism, which suggested gains had been achieved and that empowerment could be found in the marketplace. And according to Sue Thornham, "We can no longer [...] assume a straightforward relationship between the film theorist and the political activist."² At the same time, the contemporary terrain of screen media (now expanded to include television and, more importantly, Internet technologies) has given rise to a robust and complex site where debates and discussions take place, and where the discoveries and concerns of feminists from the second wave find expression. Despite an increasingly depressing social and cultural landscape, where women disavow feminism, where they continue to occupy so little space in the industry, where rights seem to be stripped away, and where objectification is still widespread, feminist praxis – that combination of theory and politics – persists. Here we can find sites of feminist activism as scholars and filmmakers respond to contemporary issues of representation and industry.

Audiences and Representation 2.0

The semiotic, Marxist, and psychoanalytic turns of the 1970s called attention to the ways in which women were represented, and how such strategies reflected

the deeply embedded structures of power within the social and cultural world. This was where, as Claire Johnston observed, “the violence of sexism and capitalism has been experienced.”³ And it was where a cultural industry propagated a point of view that subsumed women’s perspectives. Articulations of these practices took on a polemical cast as, seeking to expose injustice with the hopes of changing it, even if the practices of change were not fully established (or agreed upon).

The legacy of this politically urgent interpretative practice has been found online, as young women (and some feminist men) take advantage of new technologies of production and exhibition to reveal and communicate points of dispute. Anita Sarkeesian’s *Feminist Frequency* video web series offers regular installments of cultural critique regarding representations of women in film, television, and video games.⁴ Her incisive reports include discussions of stereotypes and troubling tropes as well as harassment of women in online gaming. Meanwhile its broadly activist bearing resides in both its organizational constitution as a registered 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization and in its mission, which reads, “The video series [...] serves as an educational resource to encourage critical media literacy and provide resources for media makers to improve their works of fiction.”⁵

The critical function and its ancillary aims of transforming culture took on a capacity building aspect in 2012, when Sarkeesian launched a Kickstarter campaign to fund her series, “Tropes vs. Women in Video Games,” a continuation of her work on popular television and film culture. The campaign exceeded its funding goal of \$6,000 within one day and by the end of the month had accumulated \$158,922 with almost 7,000 backers. This allowed Sarkeesian to extend the initial project of five videos to include additional videos and a classroom curriculum.⁶

Kickstarter’s activist potential lies not only in this fundraising facility, but also in its cultivation of a what Pierre Levy called a cosmopedia, or virtual agora, where communities share in, enhance, and coordinate knowledge and skills.⁷ The backers of the campaign find a space of shared interests, and the orchestration of benefits keeps them returning. For instance, updates are released to backers in the years following the initial funding period. In the case of “Tropes vs. Women in Video Games,” these have included preview videos, outtakes (a mode of taking the backer “backstage” and into a space of increased intimacy beyond the affinity of interests), information about talks, and something titled “backer input,” which suggests that the site offers means of information exchange beyond the main comments section. In this way, Kickstarter offers an integral platform to foster support and community around critical interests in feminist cultural production and critique. There is a practical element through both funding and the collection of names and contact information (email updates are typical for backers of such campaigns). Meanwhile, the updates invite the funders into a

structure of sympathy and alliance with Sarkeesian and her project. In return, their support bolstered Sarkeesian's own enthusiasm for the project, who wrote in one public update:

I am extremely encouraged by all the backers of this project and the fact that so many of you care about the representations of women in video games. All of your kind words, support and encouragement have been much appreciated these past few days. I am even more determined and committed to creating this video series.⁸

Despite its capacity to foster advocacy projects, this knowledge space is not utopian. Before the 30-day funding period had elapsed, a loosely affiliated group of gaming forum members launched a campaign of harassment against Sarkeesian and her project. According to an update, this was a shockingly coordinated effort that included misogynist comments on her YouTube videos, efforts to flag her videos and report her Kickstarter campaign to have them removed and defunded, respectively, vandalism of her Wikipedia entry, and, most disturbingly, menacing messages that ranged from sexist jokes to rape and death threats.⁹

Sadly, this dark side of Internet-based mobilization has not waned and came to greater attention in August 2014 with “#gamergate,” when women involved in gaming culture were subject to increased onslaughts of abuse, intimidation, and “dox(x)ing” (the practice of publishing personal information about an individual, such as their home address). According to its supporters, #gamergate refers to rising concerns in ethics in games journalism, but all actions point to a culture war against women. Sarkeesian and Indie game developers Zoe Quinn and Brianna Wu received death threats that drove them from their homes. Sarkeesian was forced to cancel a speaking engagement following an email that referenced the 1989 Montreal massacre, and warned of a replay should she appear.¹⁰ This allusion to Marc Lépine's directed attack on the female students of École Polytechnique (launched with the cry “I hate feminists!”) brushes aside all pretense to a civil debate, and places these actions squarely in a context of political and social violence against women.

Despite these dismal scenarios, all is not lost as cyberspace nevertheless enables positive and productive means of taking action. In some cases, the online dimension becomes the activist arm of a cinematic project. Jennifer Siebel Newsom wrote and directed *MISS REPRESENTATION* (2011), which broadly tackled the issues of representation of women in popular culture, arguing in particular that the underrepresentation and disparaging treatment of women in power contributed to a continued absence of powerful women in the public arena. Its broad brushstrokes, data deluge, and didactic aesthetic may have limited its critical praise, but reviewers nonetheless noted its significance as a rallying cry.¹¹ And more importantly, Newsom developed organizations dedicated to channeling

this cry into action, first, in 2011 with MissRepresentation.org, dedicated to highlighting issues of women's representation, and then, in 2013 with The Representation Project, which has been more dedicated to leadership development and mobilization.¹² Using the website (<http://therepresentationproject.org/>) as a site of organizing, they recruit "leaders" from around the world, furnishing them with materials and instructions on potential actions. These include town meetings, letter writing campaigns, educational screenings (with guides provided online) to cultivate media literacy, and mobilization of online communities.

With the hashtag campaign, #notbuyingit, the organization and its community protest the use of sexism in marketing and consumer goods. Taking place on Twitter, the message (the tweet) was addressed to the offending company while the hashtag identified the message's affiliation with a larger community and project. As a metadata tag, the hashtag curates feeds by assembling like posts and boosting both visibility and searchability. Through the creation of a critical mass of negative attention and threats to profits, such a campaign pressures the company to withdraw its product or rethink its strategy. This is what happened in March 2013, when Solid Gold Bomb's "Keep Calm and Rape..." T-shirts were featured on Amazon.co.uk. The response was near immediate, with Solid Gold Bomb issuing an apology (albeit one not readily accepted) and Amazon withdrawing the shirts (albeit without explanation or apology). Moreover, it generated further awareness of rape culture marketed on Amazon, identifying additional items to be withdrawn (and discussed).¹³

The Representation Project has since developed the "Not Buying It" app, a tool to "create, join and win campaigns against sexism in the media." The app enables the user to upload images and to affix the hashtag with a message directed to the company. It also contains features that allow the user to find other campaigns and offenders (local and global) and to learn about victories, an aspect which can edify and supply potential new strategies.

Such actions might seem limited, but have some power, if primarily within the field of commodity activism, i.e., social activism that takes place within consumer culture. To be sure, the boycott has its uses, appealing to forms of civic participation in which one can feel empowered. Most famously, perhaps, in the US, there was the Montgomery bus boycott, which contributed to the public protest against segregation and resulted in policy change. These can be useful expressions of support for reform or solidarity with those taking collective action. At the same time, forms of citizenship cast through the lens of the consumer contribute to neoliberal logics that locate empowerment in the individual and the marketplace, moving away from collective action and politics. Such a complicated entanglement plays into the notions of feminist empowerment within post-feminism, wherein freedoms (political, economic, and social) are found in the pleasures of capitalism. Nevertheless, such problematic affiliations need not evacuate these consumer-based actions of their potential for social engagement,

collaboration, and capacity building. As Roopali Mukherjee notes with reference to the commodity activism around blood diamonds, neoliberalism may nonetheless contain gaps “within which reside opportunities, however impoverished they may appear, to craft social activism within the terms of neoliberal citizenship.”¹⁴ After all, one can see similar sensibilities applied to Kickstarter campaigns for feminist causes, in which buying in becomes entry to support. Online spaces complicate the ready divisions between capital and public, as privatized platforms cultivate and exploit the collaborative and participatory work of audiences and activists.¹⁵

It can be tempting to dismiss this app-and hashtag- based activity as “slacktivism,” that pejorative portmanteau of “slacker” and “activism” suggesting empty gestures over engagement. The term certainly points to the longstanding discomfort with the combination of politics and popular pleasures including social media, as well as to leeriness around publicity as empty spectacle. At the same time, marketing and publicity have been key features of human rights activism, which relies on the making public of an issue, and the making of publics around them.¹⁶ Here the hashtag is a tactic for a larger project – affiliated with an organization with distinct aims and missions – and even more broadly as a mobilizing tool to generate publics around a topic. Although drawing empowerment from a notion of the sovereign consumer has its limits and risks reinforcing rather than dismantling the capitalist structures that often feed misogyny, the capacity of this tool to organize people around issues of representation is evident. Perhaps more heartening, there is growing evidence that these “slacktivists,” – these social media – are more likely than their peers to volunteer, donate, or join in an action.¹⁷ As Anita Harris has been arguing, although not necessarily recognizable in terms of the older models of action, these merit recognition as political and transformative culture.¹⁸

It is not surprising that Internet technologies hold such promise for feminist activism. The current software and platforms of exchange have fostered a dynamic space for creating, remixing, and sharing information, helping give rise to “a site of collective discussion, negotiation and development”¹⁹ – a site where publics are formed and mobilized²⁰ and where users “[break] through the stalemate of mass media talking points.”²¹ This is a new site of the *détournement*, where memes and hashtags turn existing culture against itself.

In the 2012 US presidential debates, Republican candidate Mitt Romney clumsily responded to a question of pay equity for women, by describing his effort to find a qualified female applicant and receiving, as he stated “binders full of women.” The phrase resonated for its crude crystallization of objectification and absence of job parity among women. It became meaningful, mobile, and open to critical engagement and critique in radically playful ways. And the reaction was swift. A Twitter account was up before the end of the debate. Image macros saturated tumblrs and blogs: “No one puts Baby in a binder,” read one response

over an image of Patrick Swayze. The reference to *DIRTY DANCING* and marginalization reflect the combined pleasures and critique inherent in this form. The play continued into Amazon.com, where visitors wrote reviews of binders, often criticizing them for the failure to hold women effectively.²²

The examples of this activity are plentiful and often joyous as they build on the strategies of the 1960s Situationists. Through memes and subversive participation, these virtual activists (or pranksters) practice the semiotic (or media) jujitsu that devalues and resignifies the misogynist spectacle. Even fandoms, which at first glance would seem to cultivate a feminized space of devotional consumption of mainstream (and often masculinist) culture, offer occasions to develop alternative spheres of production and critique. Indeed, here we can find the crucial audience absent from the earlier critiques of culture. As Kristina Busse, Francesca Coppa, and Julie Levin Russo, among others, have demonstrated, this is particularly evident in fan fiction and vidding (production of fan videos), forms of user-generated content whereby a fan becomes producer, engaging and transforming the narrative universe of the object, not to mention the direction of the gaze.²³ Recalling the earlier scholarship that sought to restore value to denigrated genres (in particular the melodrama) and to their audiences, such practices reflect the complex negotiations around pleasure and popular culture, and reflect the agency of those who are not simply consumers, but those who critique and refigure the media they encounter. They speak back, publicly, to the producers in order to change the landscape.

Indeed, off-screen space is crucial for the activist function of any film or cinematic project. Many of the projects discussed thus far mobilize around issues of representation, using online media space to critique and organize. But interventions have taken a more material component, even as they take representation as their topic.

The award-winning filmmaker, Judith Helfand, offers copious examples of the value of off-screen activity as a component of film activism. Known for her humorous yet socially committed documentaries she has found potential for organizing in a range of sites, from the production process to film festival exhibition. Working with pioneer activist filmmaker George Stoney on *THE UPRISING OF '34* (1995), about one of the largest strikes in the history of the US, she explored the potential of the coalition model of filmmaking. The collection of testimonies afforded an occasion for people in the region to come together as they broke silence on a painful history and this participation energized participants, such as Kathy Lamb, an interviewee who went on to develop a monument to the strike in South Carolina. Rough-cut screenings or participants, labor and grassroots organizers, and teachers offered further opportunities for meeting, organizing, and receiving feedback that would help make the film more inclusive. Fine-cut screenings, held closer to the date of the documentary's airing on national public television, took on similar functions whilst also becoming meeting places to ex-

plore the outreach possibilities of the film (such as in a screening of the film in Atlanta followed by a “Taking the Film Back Home” workshop). One resulting project was the “Labor to Neighbor” initiative, where screenings at local events and homes brought together trade union activists with the local community for discussion and planning. To help facilitate the project, the filmmakers worked with the community to produce educational materials and discussion guides.²⁴

These early lessons continue to generate lasting outcomes. With the late Robert West, she founded Working Films (www.workingfilms.org/), which “train [s] and consult[s] filmmakers in audience engagement and work[s] with NGOs to use documentaries to enhance their programs, extend their reach, and move their missions forward.”²⁵ The goal is to foster partnerships between community actors (educators, advocates, NGOs) and filmmakers to create productive and sustainable relationships as well as social change. They regularly hold events such as Story Leads to Action where these potential actors brainstorm strategies of community engagement for works in progress and completed films. More than a local event, Story Leads to Action has traveled and has been featured at documentary film festivals including AFI-Silverdocs in the US and the feminist film festival, Birds Eye View, in the UK.²⁶

Helfand’s commitment to change extends to the landscape of the industry, following in the footsteps of Women Make Movies. Established in 1972, WMM tackled the issue of mis- and underrepresentation through a mission of altering the industrial landscape. Its initial mission was to train women in production, but with the success of its output (70 films and videos) came recognition of the equally limited avenues for distribution and exhibition of these films. WMM then stepped into that arena, offering screenings, sponsoring film festivals, and launching a distribution arm. On all fronts, WMM has flourished, generating international recognition and appreciation, whilst continuing and building on its mission to include representation of women of color and topics of social activism.

In keeping with this robust legacy, Helfand, along with Julie Parker Benello and Wendy Ettinger, founded Chicken & Egg Pictures in 2005 (<http://chickeneggpics.org/>),²⁷ which supports women filmmakers with grant funding and community-based mentorship. The only not-for-profit organization to fund and support female documentary filmmakers, Chicken & Egg plays a crucial role in combating gender inequality in the industry as it opens up spaces for more and varied stories to be told. Crucially, the support comes not only in financing, but also in the creation of networks and community for these filmmakers, which aids in the sustainable transformation to the film world.²⁸

This essay offers only the coarsest sketch of media worlds burgeoning with feminist activism and creativity, where women and media makers are working actively to change the landscape of cinema, popular culture, and politics. Online worlds are providing vibrant sites for promoting awareness of feminist concerns

and speaking back to those trafficking in regressive and repressive practices. At the same time, these worlds are not without their challenges, enmeshed as they are in practices of capital that can often prove more damaging and exclusive than liberating. Moreover, as thrilling as the online world can be, no action is complete until it is taken offline and into the community. It is here that the critical work, and not simply the work of critique, can take place.

US Independent Women's Cinema, Sundance Girls, and Identity Politics

Veronica Pravadelli

In the last twenty to twenty-five years, US independent women's cinema has developed into a recognizable form. To some extent, this form may be considered a genre, as most films share common traits that transcend authorship. On a broader level, this phenomenon comes out of a convergence between production trends and the rise of new film festivals, film style, and feminism. Contemporary US women's cinema is thus a ramification of cinematic and social transformations producing a new configuration of the relation between female authorship and the filmic form. More specifically, I would contend that US women's cinema is driven by the shared project of narrating the formations and the metamorphosis of female subjectivity within the precincts of identity politics. Of course, this is not a conscious choice as was the case of feminist avant-garde cinema in the 1970s and 1980s. But undeniably, women filmmakers are interested in tuning the "rules" of independent cinema to narratives in which differences of gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexual preference, etc. are key elements. Similarly, women are almost absent from other major trends or "sensibilities" in contemporary independent cinema, such as "quirky comedies" and "movies for hipsters."¹ In the following, I will discuss the historical formation and development of indie women's cinema by tying the analysis of films and authors to features of the industry as well as to theoretical standpoints in feminist/gender studies.

In contrast to Hollywood – where big budgets are rarely given to a woman, besides Kathryn Bigelow – women filmmakers are an important component of American independent cinema. The notion of "independence" is by no means a fixed and clear-cut definition, and over the years it has gone through changes and transformations both within industry practices and in scholarly work. For Geoff King, any effort to define independent cinema must consider industrial, aesthetic, and ideological perspectives.² Ideally, independent cinema is an alternative practice to Hollywood in all three domains. As Peter Biskind recalls, in the 1980s "there existed something of a consensus. The purists reigned."³ Hollywood sold fantasy, avoided controversial subjects, used stars, and resorted to genres, while indies thrived on realism, embraced contentious issues, used unknowns or nonfactors, and expressed personal visions.⁴ But later, things started

to appear more complicated and more nuanced. For example, in a recent reassessment, Yannis Tzioumakis has argued that Hollywood and independent cinema intersect at various moments and levels, especially from the 1980s when the majors created special divisions to distribute and then produce independent films.⁵ Scholars have defined independent cinema in many different ways, and the status of independence has depended primarily on an acceptance or refusal to see it in relation to Hollywood. Second, independent cinema has developed through different historical phases, not all of which are relevant to women directors, as for a long time their presence has been quite sporadic.

Even though the discourse on this filmic form is marked by different paradigms, I want to suggest that a more solid terrain for defining women's cinema, at least in relation to its emergence, can be found. Independent women's cinema appears during what many have defined the "Sundance-Miramax era," a period that started with Steven Soderbergh's *SEX, LIES AND VIDEOTAPE* (1989). Soderbergh's film won the Audience Award Dramatic at the Sundance Film Festival in 1989, and this launched the film's astonishing success. But that same year it was Nancy Savoca's debut *TRUE LOVE* (1989) that won the main competition, the Grand Jury Prize Dramatic. I would argue that this episode marks the beginning of independent women's cinema as we know it.⁶ This form flourished in the following years during which several directors made their debut always at Sundance. The development of indie women's cinema is in fact inextricably intertwined with Robert Redford's festival, and this marks a distinctive element on a par with production practices. While the number of women directors is not comparable to that of men, since the early 1990s women have become more and more numerous. In 2000, for example, 40% of the films competing for the Grand Jury Prize Dramatic were directed by women.⁷

The issue of identity politics has been a key element in women's cinema. In feminist cinema of the 1970s and the early 1980s, the core of identity politics was the representation of women's oppression "as women." But later on, cinema's take on this issue took on a different shape, in keeping with new developments in feminist theory. In the 1980s, women of color and lesbians started to question the assumptions of second-wave feminism, arguing that it was based on an essentialist framework that only addressed the oppression of white bourgeois women. For black and Chicana feminists, in particular, race had to be considered in conjunction with gender, and similarly, lesbians argued for the necessity of taking into consideration sexual preference.⁸ According to Teresa de Lauretis, a similar turn occurs in women's cinema with Lizzie Borden's *BORN IN FLAMES* (1983). This film shows the invisibility of black women in white women's cinema or of lesbianism in mainstream feminist theory. It clarifies that the female subject is constructed through multiple representations of class, race, language, and social relations. Its originality is the representation of woman as social subject and locus of differences.⁹

Indie women's cinema has somewhat "inherited" Borden's gesture and refashioned it to fit the formal rules of independent cinema. The protagonists of these films are often young women belonging to an ethnic community, and events take place within such a community. Likewise, the directors share their characters' ethnic belonging and identity, as women often choose to tell stories closely related to their biography.

As already mentioned, in 1989 the Italian-American Nancy Savoca opened this first wave of indie women's cinema with *TRUE LOVE* followed by *DOGFIGHT* (1991) and *HOUSEHOLD SAINTS* (1993). Allison Anders' debut was in 1992 with *GAS, FOOD, LODGING*, followed by *MI VIDA LOCA* (1993). 1993 also saw the debut of African-American director Leslie Harris with *JUST ANOTHER GIRL ON THE I.R.T.*: the film earned her the Special Jury Prize at Sundance. Darnell Martin, another African-American director, debuted in 1994 with *I LIKE IT LIKE THAT*. This panorama of excellent debuts is completed by Rose Troche's *GO FISH* (1994), a film holding several records. Shot in black and white, with a budget of only 66,000 dollars, it became the first film to be bought by a distributor during the Sundance Film Festival. *GO FISH* must also be remembered for its box-office achievement. Although at first its aesthetics did not seem so captivating, the film became a hit, thanks especially to the new "niche" lesbian audience.¹⁰ The film is indeed one of the most important works of New Queer Cinema. B. Ruby Rich, who coined the term, dates the birth of this new tendency from the release of many gay- and lesbian-themed films in the years 1991-1992. It was at that very moment that, thanks once again to the selection politics of some festivals (the Toronto Film Festival as well as Sundance), the phenomenon becomes visible.¹¹ *GO FISH* was explicitly promoted through its sexual contents, while Troche's Latina identity was left at the margins.

The intersection and combination of different identity categories does, of course, vary from film to film, and identity as such is not able to assure a film's critical success or its popularity with audiences. Nonetheless, identity politics was a key factor in the rise of women's cinema from the early 1990s to today. Moreover, such a perspective is in tune with the American debate on postmodernity and the postmodern subject, not only on an academic level but also on a wider socio-cultural one. The interest in and the success of these films did not depend solely on their subject matter, of course. It rested rather on the convergence between identity issues and aesthetic-stylistic options. Most of the films may indeed have had a particularly strong impact on the specific targeted audience, but their appraisal from both critics and audiences has generally been favorable.

TRUE LOVE tells the story of Donna (Annabella Sciorra), an Italian-American young woman engaged to be married to Michael (Ron Eldard). Events take place within the Italian-American community in Brooklyn, which is closed in on itself and impermeable to change. The neighborhood, full of meeting places where

ethnic identity takes shape, is not simply static: for women and younger people, the closed world of the community is truly claustrophobic. The narrative trajectory, especially that of women and Donna in particular, may indeed be read through the filter of claustrophobia. Unable to rebel against traditional gender roles, women are visually trapped in narrow and petty spaces – the suburb, from which the icons and lights of the metropolis are invisible, and the kitchen.

The best example of visual claustrophobia is the “bathroom scene” during the wedding banquet toward the end of the film. After Mike tells his newlywed that he is planning to spend the evening with his buddies, Donna rushes to the restroom followed by her female friends. The young woman sits on the toilet and cries profusely while her friends try to console her. In medium shot, the small group occupies the central area of the screen framed on both sides by the pinkish walls of the restroom: the protagonist is visually cornered in a narrow spot, unable to move. Savoca repeats the shot when Mike joins Donna, hoping to solve the argument. The affective distance between the two is rendered visually: Donna is shot from a low angle, on the threshold of the bathroom door and far away from Mike, who, closer to the camera, is shot out of focus.

Historically, comedy has been the basic “genre of integration,” to reprise Thomas Schatz’s effective formula – that is, a genre in which the individual, through marriage, integrates him/herself in a social order whose rules s/he willingly accepts.¹² In *TRUE LOVE*, such a process is clearly questioned. Man and woman have a very different attitude toward marriage: Mike considers it a trap, while for Donna it is the only scope of a woman’s life. Looking at the film in the context of the history of gender relations in America, it is clear that in *TRUE LOVE* the modern image of heterosexual relationships, known to social scientists in the 1920s as “companionate marriage,” has not yet emerged. Companionate marriage implied “that young people ought to be friends and perhaps lovers before embarking on the serious matter of marrying.”¹³ This model of marriage contributed to the end of the large patriarchal family and championed a new form of family life. As Nancy Cott has argued, the modern family became “a specialized site for emotional intimacy, personal and sexual expression, and nurture among husband, wife, and a small number of children.”¹⁴ This latter aspect is particularly important to our analysis, since it marks a fundamental difference between American and Italian-American cultures. Yet, this scenario is not simply “an Italian-American matter” and certainly does not start with Savoca’s debut. *TRUE LOVE* is part of a larger tendency in Hollywood starting at the end of the 1970s when comedy begins to represent the difficulty or impossibility of romance.¹⁵

The crisis of romance and the woman’s difficulty in voicing her dissatisfaction is related to the obsessive and oppressive presence of family and community. Donna always moves within the spatial boundaries of family or community: any action, decision, or gesture on her part is sanctioned by a “collective eye.” The formal structure of the film establishes a strong continuity between character,

family, and community and between public and private spaces. The narrative trajectory unfolds in streets, stores, working places, bars, and clubs, and inside Donna and Mike's family homes. The episodes are linked in a very effective way, since editing is fast and rather "nervous." The film furthers a sense of continuity between outside and inside, public behaviors and private feelings, collective and individual identity. Yet TRUE LOVE is also structured around a second pattern, the alternation between female and male episodes. Such a strategy clearly indicates the strong affective and cultural separation between men and women. Women and men tend to spend most of their free time with same-sex friends, since their worlds have so little in common. But their attitude is not symmetrical: while Mike prefers to spend time with his buddies, Donna's sole desire is to spend each evening with her fiancé.

The film relies heavily on crosscutting: female episodes tend to be set in domestic spaces, while male scenes usually take place in bars and work places.¹⁶ The structure of separation subtending the film envisions an unbridgeable gap between Donna and Mike, between male and female desires and expectations. Mike is childish and not ready to commit, while Donna's only wish is to get married. But we could also claim that Donna desires a "companion" rather than a traditional husband and that Mike cannot live up to that image. Therefore their future life as a couple promises to be a boring domestic ménage where fun is assured by same-sex friendship outside the home.

Since Italian-American culture is ruled by the law of family and community, the individual has little power to negotiate her identity *vis-à-vis* ethnic belonging. Obviously women pay the highest price. Savoca shows that it is not possible to live "in between," to look for flexible identities, to negotiate one's own relation to Italian-American culture. One either accepts or refuses ethnic identity. Though unhappy, Donna decides to remain within her community, as she can only belong there.

The identity issues tackled by Allison Anders in her first films similarly reveal a strong link to the director's own biography. GAS, FOOD, LODGING is set in Laramie, a small town in the desert of New Mexico, among white and Chicano underprivileged communities. The main characters, a single mother working as a waitress in a diner and her two teenage daughters, live in a trailer park. The protagonists are clearly "white trash." In Laramie there is absolutely nothing to do. There is just the hope to be able to go away one day. Trudi, the elder of the two sisters, keeps changing boyfriends, while her younger sister Shade attends the local Spanish-language movie theater daily to see classical Mexican melodramas featuring star Elvia Rivero. In the course of the film, we learn that Trudi has in the past been the victim of a gang rape and that this event has in some way triggered her subsequent promiscuity. The lives of the three women are marked by loneliness and male violence, and the daughters seem doomed to repeat their mother's "mistakes." As many episodes are very close to the director's biogra-

phy, the film was somewhat promoted as Anders' story and the filmmaker herself has encouraged such a reading. From her father's desertion when she was young to the gang rape, from the teenage pregnancy to being a single mother with two daughters, the film is full of references to Anders' personal life.¹⁷ Likewise, the interest in the Chicano community and culture is also linked to Anders' biography. Although born in Kentucky, the director spent the 1970s and 1980s in the Los Angeles neighborhood of Echo Park, a working-class area mostly peopled by Chicanos. It is in Echo Park, which is part of Central Los Angeles and not far from Hollywood, that Anders set her second film. *MI VIDA LOCA* tells the story of four girls who are part of a girls' gang and is considered to be the first film featuring Latinas as main protagonists. Length constraints do not allow me to discuss Chicano women's films here, but I would like at least to mention Patricia Cardoso's *REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES* (2002) and Aurora Guerrero's more recent *MOSQUITA Y MARI* (2012), set respectively in East Los Angeles and in Huntington Park (Southeast LA), two neighborhoods with a Chicano population of more than 90%.¹⁸

Other directors from different ethnic groups share Anders' predilection for strong women from a low social class, who, in the absence of reliable men, live autonomously and take care of their children by themselves. More generally, most of the films set in Italian-American, Chicano, and African-American communities prefer working-class and non-bourgeois contexts and characters. However, this imaginary is rarely combined with a realist or neorealist aesthetic, even if the choice of authentic locations does indeed anchor the films to a specific geographical reality. Anders, in particular, weaves together narrative, visual, and color elements whose overall effect is a combination of strength and beauty.

In *GAS, FOOD, LODGING* men exploit women sexually, only to desert them soon afterwards. "Sexual behaviors are conditioned by a frontier history of vagabond men 'who leave' and women who are left behind to set down 'roots' in the desert landscape. In evoking sexual difference as a central topos in the American frontier mythology, the film presents a revisionist picture of the modern West, focusing on the psychosocial challenges confronting adolescent sisters in a world traditionally identified with the individualistic prerogatives of male 'freedom' and sovereignty over women and nature."¹⁹ In this fashion, the film "invokes the social connections between the marginalized Anglo-women and Mexican-Americans."²⁰

The gender discourse is developed through the relationships between the two sisters and their parents, especially the mother. The story is narrated from Shade's point of view. From the very beginning, Shade's voice-over tells the viewer about her most intimate desires and thoughts. She fights her daily boredom by going to the movie theater where she is totally captured by cinema's fascination and force: watching Elvia Rivero on screen (the diva is a fictional one), Shade is inspired to carry out some important actions. On the one hand, she wants to find

a boyfriend for her mother so that she can hope to have a family again; on the other, she starts looking for her father. Shade also feeds her fantasy of the “family romance” by cherishing jealously a home movie showing her young father playing with his two baby daughters. But when she finally locates him, her dream is partially shattered. Her father is a man with no charm. He is a middle-aged man, working part-time jobs and living with another woman in a very modest dwelling. But unlike her mother and sister, in the end Shade starts a serious romantic relationship with a young Mexican-American, a development fostered by her love for Mexican cinema. In *GAS, FOOD, LODGING*, Mexican-American culture seems to be more profound and more deeply rooted than the Yankee one Shade grew up in. White working-class culture is dominated by an idea of fleetingness, of always being in transit, just like the men in Shade’s mother’s and sister’s lives. The title of the film underlines this well: it is a culture of “gas, food, lodging,” of a brief pause interrupting a long and continuous movement. Shade’s phantasmatic scenario is then the opposite of her mother’s and her sister’s: in the end, she seems to be able to actually change her affective life.

Besides being one of the most important films of New Queer Cinema, *GO FISH* marks the official beginning of New Lesbian Film in the mid-1990s. For B. Ruby Rich, New Queer Films present varying aesthetic vocabularies, but they all share a postmodern trait: they use pastiche and irony to get rid of a humanistic approach to subjectivity. These “works are irreverent, energetic, alternately minimalist, and excessive. Above all, they’re full of pleasure.”²¹ Queer cinema and the term queer are not synonymous with homosexual. Queer “represents the resistance to, primarily, the normative codes of gender and sexual expression [...] but also to the restrictive potential of gay and lesbian sexuality.”²² As a critical concept, queer defies conventional codes of behavior. “At its most expansive and utopian, queer contests (hetero- and homo-) normativity.”²³

If New Queer Cinema fostered “new ways of screening female intimacy as well as facilitated the transition of lesbianism into a more popular cultural arena,” it nonetheless focused mainly on narrating male trajectories.²⁴ For this reason, critics are averse to confining New Lesbian Cinema exclusively within the realm of New Queer Cinema. On the contrary, they underline its relation with previous lesbian films, both avant-garde and mainstream.²⁵ After all, like New Queer Cinema in general, lesbian cinema from the mid-1990s is formally hybrid: it mixes experimental strategies with more conventional narration, thus ensuring a certain degree of “entertainment.” The definition of New Queer Cinema is in this sense useful, as it points to a film form calling into question the rigid separation between narrative, experimental, and documentary cinema. It is important to remember that Rose Troche worked on 26 episodes of *THE L WORD* (2004-2009), the popular TV series following the lives of a group of lesbians in Beverly Hills. Troche directed several episodes, including the Pilot, but also worked as a writer and as an executive producer of the series.

Irony is *GO FISH*'s fundamental trait. It is exactly the film's light and playful treatment of its material that highlights the beginning of a new season for lesbian cinema. For some, it is a romantic comedy in which the image of the lesbian differs radically from previous portrayals. In particular, the film distances itself from narratives of "coming out," that is, stories recounting the process of someone's discovery of their own "anomalous" sexuality. The two screenwriters claimed they wanted to avoid yet another coming out pamphlet, or a film in which women "have sex with each other in excruciating circumstances."²⁶ In *GO FISH*, being a lesbian is a normal condition and the discovery-acceptance of lesbian sexual identity has long been established.

The film tells the loves and friendships of a small group of young lesbians in Chicago. The protagonists are portrayed in their daily life, in a whirlwind of confidences, phone calls, dinners, and nights out at clubs. Shot in black and white, the film alternates "realist" strategies – such as a hand-held camera following the characters around the apartment, or filming them while they talk – with explicitly fictional devices, such as jump cuts, voice-over, shots of details with a metaphorical meaning, and fantasy images. The double stylistic register fits the *mise-en-scène* of subjectivity, as *GO FISH* does not rely on the notion that the subject has a true nature that needs to be expressed. On the contrary, homosexuality – as any other identity – is performative. It is the result of daily acts and practices where eroticism and sexuality have a major role but are by no means the only experiences shaping lesbian identity. For example, clothes, haircuts, and accessories decorating the body are a fundamental part of the characters' lifestyle and identity. When Ely cuts her long hair short, she adopts the *dyke* masculine style of the whole group. Her decision is greeted with enthusiasm by all her friends who are happy to see that she has finally abandoned her hippy and old-fashioned style.

Like other lesbian films, *GO FISH* depicts the dynamics of a community rather than focusing on a personal trajectory. Individual choices, problems, and joys are discussed and shared or disapproved of by the group. The force of the collective is radicalized by its ethnic and cultural diversity, as the group includes an African-American, a Latina (probably a Puerto Rican, like the director herself), and some European-Americans.²⁷ The role of the collective is highlighted by some shooting techniques: for example, high-angle shots of the faces of four friends lying down to form a cross; or sequences joining several close-ups with jump cuts. From a narrative point of view, the relevance of the collective over the individual is particularly evident in two episodes. At one point the group takes one of their number to task for having had sexual intercourse with a man. Later, when Max and Ely finally become lovers, the event triggers a collective emotional involvement. In crosscutting we see the two women recounting the details of the erotic experience to their friends. While *TRUE LOVE* and *GAS, FOOD, LODGING* negotiate in a more balanced way the relation between individual and collective, *GO FISH* develops its discourse on identity by placing a greater emphasis on the

collective. As a result, Troche's film is more experimental from a narrative point of view and is less character-driven. Ultimately, these choices validate the formation of inter-subjective lesbian relations rather than the configuration of an individual I.²⁸

In the following years, a second wave of filmmakers changed the contours of indie women's cinema. While a few new entries were closer to the aesthetic sensibility and project of auteur/art cinema, others continued to work within the trajectory I have outlined so far. Sofia Coppola and Kelly Reichardt are notable examples of the first kind.²⁹ But for many others the stakes are still concerned with identity politics. In this scenario, New Queer Cinema continued to play a fundamental role. For example, starting with her first feature, *WALKING AND TALKING* (1996) and up to *PLEASE GIVE* (2010), Nicole Holofcener tackles the relation between economics, commodities, and women's bodies and lives, while Rebecca Miller, especially in *PERSONAL VELOCITY* (2002), explores the hiatus between female authenticity and performance. Both filmmakers investigate the status of woman and femininity in contemporary culture and in relation to the value system of the middle-class.³⁰ In the context of New Queer Cinema, Kimberly Peirce's astonishing debut stands out: in *BOYS DON'T CRY* (1999) Hilary Swank plays Teena Brandon, a female passing as a man and changing her name to Brandon Teena, who will be murdered for daring to transgress the gender divide. A year before, Lisa Cholodenko had made her breakthrough at Sundance with *HIGH ART* (1998), "a love story in which girl kinda gets girl"³¹ but also a lot more. B. Ruby Rich praised the film because it told "the truth about lesbian relationships" and showed that "behind every 'life partner' granola couple, there are twenty kinds of dysfunctional pairs with details that would make your hair curl."³² In her last film to date, *THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT* (2010), Cholodenko takes the representation of lesbian relations into a different direction. The film was very successful with audiences and was discussed and debated in all media – on television, in print, on the web – as is rarely the case with a woman's independent film. *THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT* focuses on the life of a mature lesbian couple in sunny LA. Nic (Annette Bening) is a physician while Jules (Julianne Moore) is trying to start yet another business. The couple have two teenage children who have the same unknown sperm donor father. When Laser convinces his sister Joni to track down their biological father, the family dynamics start to change. Paul (Mark Ruffalo), a co-op farmer and restaurateur in his late thirties, enters into his kids' family life despite their mothers' reluctance. As the relation between Paul and the family grows, problems also arise. Paul hires Jules to landscape his back yard, and their working collaboration develops into an affair, which jeopardizes the couple's ménage. In a bittersweet ending, Nic, Jules, and Laser take Joni to college and the trip seems to soothe Nic's anger and reconstitute the unity of the couple.

In just one film, Cholodenko, who co-wrote the script, has brought together all the most controversial aspects of the present cultural debate on sexuality: lesbian parenting and by extension same-sex marriage, artificial insemination, and unknown fatherhood. More generally, the film has shown that the notion of family is flexible and that its limits can be remapped at any moment. A comedy with a major dramatic event – Jules’ affair with Paul – Cholodenko’s film has been able to dissect the thorny questions of contemporary female identity and sexuality in the best tradition of women’s independent cinema. *THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT* rewrites the contours of identity politics beyond lesbianism. As gays and lesbians demand equal rights in terms of marriage and parenting, it is the very “nature” of the nuclear family – the cornerstone of American ideology – that gets questioned. Thanks to a very effective screenplay and an excellent cast, Cholodenko’s film has transformed the current debate on sexuality and family into a narrative machine able to please a large audience, beyond the precincts of the lesbian niche.³³

PART IV

Contextualizing History: New Frontiers in Feminist Journals



Suddenly, One Summer: *Frauen und Film* since 1974

Annette Brauerhoch

This journal is now the oldest existing feminist journal on film anywhere.¹

Berlin Film Festival, 1974. So much is certain. Not even founder Helke Sander is certain exactly when a press release announcing the arrival of the new journal, *Frauen und Film*, was circulated. Gesine Stempel has pointed out: “In those days the Berlin Film Festival took place in the summer. All you have to do is find out whether the festival of 1974 was in June or July. I still own the first issue, produced single-handedly by Helke Sander, hand-typed and held together by two paper clips. The press didn’t take much notice, but amongst those present at the launch I remember Sabine Zurmühl, later editor of *Courage*, Erika Gregor, from *Forum des Jungen Film* and Magdalena Kemper (then and to this day radio correspondent at the *Sender Freies Berlin*, today called *Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg*). The second issue, which I’m sure you have, has reprints of the hostile review of one journalist who attended the conference. I remember it taking place in the West Berlin Europa Center half way through the festival.”²

The first issues of *Frauen und Film* were written on a typewriter in the Deutsche Kinemathek office and generally designed and produced under conditions, “which would have given our male colleagues nervous breakdowns.”³ Improvisation has always been a feature of the journal, often out of necessity, later advanced to a credo by Sander’s slogan: “I like chaos, but I don’t know whether chaos likes me.” To this day, *Frauen und Film* has no office, no editorial address, not even a letterhead. It is published without academic or institutional affiliation. In 2012, however, a webpage was established.⁴ The journal started out as a quarterly, and, up to issue 27 (1981), Helke Sander was the only editor; subsequently, editorial collectives with addresses in Berlin, Frankfurt, Cologne, and Paris appear on the masthead. In the course of its existence, the journal has shifted from a quarterly to a bi-annual, annual, and then bi-yearly publication. The latest issues state, laconically under the date of publication: appearance irregular. And that is how things stand at the moment.

Frauen und Film was first distributed by the women’s collective *Brot und Rosen*, went briefly on to the *Orlando Women’s Press* before *Rotbuch Verlag*, a leftist publish-

er, agreed to take on the project with its 7th issue. “Although that issue was twice reprinted and sold over 3000 copies, the publishing house generally had to subsidize the printing costs and was never able to pay contributors”⁵ – conditions which have not changed over the last forty years. Stroemfeld/Roter Stern started publishing *Frauen und Film* in 1983 and is to be thanked for its continuing support and solidarity, as it still publishes the journal to this day.

The journal’s name is partly a tribute to its North-American sister publication *Women & Film*. More important in the German context, however, is its reference to history. In the 1950s the journal *Film und Frau* was an influential women’s magazine in post-war Germany and considered to be a trendsetter. Founded in 1946, it addressed fun-starved, luxury-deprived, hard-working women as consumers whose desires went beyond food and home, even if, in reality, they often still worked for sheer survival. The journal’s gold letters and its depictions of style and glamour were intimately connected to the world of film stars. And yet the magazine’s representation of female stardom only served to demonstrate that even actresses were “only women” working publically in film and their private kitchens alike. The magazine promoted a return to housewifery, after the emancipated war and immediate post-war years, a message that was sugarcoated with the icing of stardom brought down to the level of “everywoman.”⁶ In an ironic twist, *Frauen und Film* inverted the title of this landmark magazine, which continued to exist until 1967. By reversing the original “Film and Woman” to “Women and Film,” the iconic image of “woman” was replaced with a collective “women,” and the gaze was re-directed from women to film. Typographical changes were programmatic, too. For the first issue, the connecting word “and” was symbolized by the upheld mirror: a sign for the female sex, signifying the spirit of battle and equal to the upturned fist. Later issues showed the title in handwriting rather than formatted typographical letters.

The short foreword to the first issue was “borrowed“ from Nelly Kaplan: “At the beginning of film history women were pioneers alongside men. This is a fact mentioned by only a few film historical works. The women were quickly dispensed with. Where in film production are they?”⁷ Before developing a program to “examine the workings of a patriarchal culture in film, to recognize and define the beginnings of a feminist culture, to adopt its questions and develop them further,”⁸ *Frauen und Film* sought to provide a platform to fight “sexism in the media,” which was described as not just a matter of immediate struggle: “It resides in image composition, framing, iconography” and is “present also in areas in which there are no women present, for instance the way the news is organized.”⁹ From the beginning, the concern was a recovery of history, a rewriting and re-evaluation of women’s contribution to film history, a re/consideration of the working conditions of women in the industry, an analysis of current film productions, and a recognition of the social relevance of film. By drawing attention to stars like Asta Nielsen, film sociologists like Emilie Altenloh, or film

critics like Malwine Rennert, *Frauen und Film* acknowledged female pioneers and at the same time sought to make up for the failure of the first women's movement of the 20th century to take account of film and cinema as their medium.

Frauen und Film grew out of the same kind of activism that had led to the first International Women's Film Seminar held in the Kino Arsenal in Berlin in 1973, an event at which, to Helke Sander's surprise, "there were already enough of us to be able to fill a whole festival with our films."¹⁰ Those women working in film, radio, and television found in the journal a forum for the fight against sexism in the film industry as well as in dominant forms of representation. Almost a sort of trade paper, it strove to examine and improve women's working conditions in the industry, to heighten visibility, as well as to create an audience for feminist films. Miriam Hansen observed: "During this first phase, film practice was part of a larger strategy to build a public sphere for feminist politics [...]."¹¹ The focus was on educational possibilities, the accessibility of technology, and the visibility of alternative film. These aims went hand in hand with the longer-reaching tasks: how to distribute and exhibit films made by women in an era when the so-called "Autorenkino" dominated German cinema. To this day, those articles in *Frauen und Film* offer important insights into production conditions for women in the 1970s; similarly, they throw light, in a sporadic and non-chronological fashion, on the history of West Germany through an examination of its film culture.

The journal's beginnings were fuelled by energy derived from feminist protest against male chauvinism in the student movement of 1968. In film terms, that is, it was against exclusion and sexism in the leftist "Berliner Arbeiterfilm" (Berlin proletariat films) and against practices in film and television that primarily supported male directors, often disregarding ideas developed by female filmmakers, and paved the way for a "New German Cinema." *Frauen und Film* took issue with film politics as well as the politics of the auteur. Hildegard Westbelt, founder of Chaos Film (1979) – a distribution company for films by women – and initiator of the first cinema for women in Berlin, "Initiative Frauen im Kino" (1977), recalls the impact the journal made upon its appearance:

I will never forget the press conference for the first issue of *Frauen und Film*. It was a hot day in June. I believe that those pages, hectographed on blue paper (and the + between *Frauen und Film* was, quite in the spirit of the times, represented by a Venus mirror) will remain the most important publication in my own personal library, [...] my initiation to being political.¹²

And filmmaker Eva Heldmann remembers:

All of a sudden there was something concerning me. I was a student interested in film. But not before the appearance of *Frauen und Film* had I found a feminist perspective in print. It was electrifying. It was visible if only in leftist

bookstores. It had unusual covers, feminist collages by Sarah Schuman. Here I found opinions, reports and statements from filmmakers and film critics alike – more often than not all in one and the same person. And a solidarity never experienced before. It was fresh, new, and present – and it was not Hollywood!¹³

In the course of its forty years of existence, *Frauen und Film* developed from a hand-typed hectographed manifesto to a journal of academic film theory. It introduced, in the 1970s, a response from female filmgoers and (initially) women who were mainly documentary filmmakers to a film cultural scene highly dominated by the so-called *Autorenfilm*. Heavily funded, *Autorenfilm* made inroads for a male-dominated auteurist cinema, the likes of Schlöndorff, Wenders, Herzog, Kluge, and Fassbinder. These names, to this day, seem more synonymous with New German Cinema than Jutta Brückner or Ula Stöckl ever were. The journal pointed to inadequacies in funding policies, reported on film festivals, promoted experimental films by women, and introduced female filmmakers. The focus was on Germany and Europe, East and West. In comparison to North American fellow travelers, analyses of the workings of patriarchy in cinema and representation were not primarily derived from Hollywood. For instance, the second issue was almost exclusively devoted to a popular film from the GDR, Heiner Carow's *DIE LEGENDE VON PAUL UND PAULA* (1973).¹⁴

Other issues of the journal examined the commercially successful new wave of male-directed “women’s films” in the late seventies (for instance no. 19, 1979), the situation of women editors in the industry (no. 9, 1976), the practice of film funding, the question of feminist criticism (what is it and what is it good for?), and questions around pornography (particularly discussing *THE STORY OF O* no. 7, 1976 and no. 30, 1981). It also kept an ongoing interest in feminist counter traditions, actresses, the female spectator, and the female cinemagoer. Issue 28 in 1981 (“Trauer muß Sappho tragen?”) presented an “avant-queer” approach to film studies and injected lesbian perspectives into the feminist discussions. For quite some time, film criticism and the desire to make feminist films went hand in hand, and women professionals, who analyzed the field of film production, history, and reception, shaped the journal. This connection between filmmakers and their critical focus on production conditions with a more theoretically informed examination and re-evaluation of film history became looser as the years progressed. Ultimately, the balance tipped more to the side of theory.

In 1983, the Berlin editors declared the journal’s end. They believed that *Frauen und Film* with its feminist goals had, in postfeminist times, outlived its function. However, the Frankfurt group – Gertrud Koch, Karola Gramann, Heide Schlüpmann – were convinced that feminist criticism was far from obsolete. They took over the journal, adding even more theory to the existing critical feminist public interventions. In a specific inflection of Frankfurt School thought, the new group

of editors not only vested greater interest in theory but also in a theoretically inflected and motivated historiography. According to a review by Miriam Hansen, “what distinguishes the journal among its international cousins [...] is its theoretical affiliation with the Frankfurt School, its eclectic and often revisionist attempt to develop a feminist approach from that tradition.”¹⁵

Feminist theory’s initial engagement with male-dominated cinema was thus extended to male-dominated theory; but *Frauen und Film* also engaged critically with feminism itself. Long before German universities were ready to open themselves to the academic institutionalization of film and women’s studies, *Frauen und Film* adopted, as its task, the translation of texts by Anglo-Saxon feminist film scholars and their introduction to its German feminist audience. This in turn not only created a framework for defining *Frauen und Film*’s own theoretical position but also provided the groundwork for a future introduction of feminist film theory into course curricula in universities across the country. As Anglo-Saxon feminist film theory was strongly influenced by French psychoanalytic thought, its introduction contributed to a critical examination, in particular, of Lacan’s influence; this added a further dimension to those ideas drawn from psychoanalytic theory by Critical Theory or Jean-Paul Sartre’s psychoanalytic existentialism.¹⁶

The recovery of film history was an ongoing project for *Frauen und Film* (the theme issue for instance in no. 41, 1986), but the journal’s historiography was particularly concerned with the specific implications of the Nazi legacy as it extended into the film culture of the 1950s (no. 35, 1983). Furthermore, the journal provided its own take on “fascinating fascism,” particularly with a very strong critique of the film historical renaissance of Leni Riefenstahl (nos. 44-45, 1988). Translations of British and American texts brought questions of genre into focus (horror in no. 49, 1990, comedy in no. 53, 1992, war films in no. 61, 2000) as well as topics like masquerade (no. 38, 1985) and masochism (no. 39, 1985). These special issues used film to analyze the social and psychological constellations at stake. The journal’s editorial perspective always brought the particular inflection of the Frankfurt School tradition of thinking and (redemptive) criticism to the French-influenced Anglo-American theoretical perspective, insisting above all “upon the responsibility of the feminist critic to trace patterns of ideology even in her own fascination.”¹⁷

At the time when the PorNO campaign in the US and Germany (for instance in Alice Schwarzer’s journal *EMMA*) was at its height, *Frauen und Film* programmatically published a theme issue on “Sexuality in the workplace” and proclaimed in the introduction: “we are all for it.”¹⁸ To contest sexual harassment does not mean that the workplace can be cleared of sexuality as such. Instead of reproducing conservative ideals of love in marriage and relationships, criticism of sex in the workplace should aim at sublating those repressed and deformed forms of sexuality that can no longer be distinguished from the sheer mechanics of

power.¹⁹ Long before the arrival of animal studies in film, issue no. 47 (1989) looked at “man, woman and animal” (citing the title of a film by Valie Export) with, amongst others, an essay on racist metonymies and animal metaphors in Fritz Hippler’s *DER EWIGE JUDE* (*THE ETERNAL JEW*, 1940) as well as a look at the early films by Nell Shipman.²⁰ In the 1990s, topics included issues on fathers and daughters (no. 48, 1990), aging (nos. 50-51, 1991), ethnicity and gender (nos. 54-55, 1994 and no. 60, 1997), and extended to medial aspects of color and music (nos. 58-59, 1996). All these issues begin with one or two translations of English or French texts by feminist scholars (for instance, Anne Friedberg, Régine Mihal Friedman, Teresa de Lauretis, Tania Modleski, Mary Ann Doane, Maureen Turim, Richard Dyer) and continue with texts by members of the editorial board and other contributors, many of them recurring authors such as filmmaker theorist Noll Brinckmann, psychoanalyst Mechthild Zeul, film critic and theorist Karsten Witte, filmmaker Jutta Brückner, and many others. Throughout, the ongoing (re)examination of German film history is inflected by the critical concerns of the Frankfurt school: accepting certain aspects of cinema as a mass institution without a deterministic denouncement of mass pleasures as subject only to repressive ideology. Instead, the journal locates, within those structures, inroads for recognizing and enjoying pleasures the description of which goes beyond a mere reading against the grain and the manifestations of which are more than a fateful turning of oppression into pleasure as diagnosed in instances of female masochism.²¹ In the issue on fathers and daughters, feminist examinations of structural negations of the female gaze in cinema, for instance, which result in a form of identification which turns the female spectator into a “father-daughter” are complemented with a (re)turn to content: How does cinema in its father-daughter narrations address its own patriarchal implications? How is the restricted space left to female autonomy visualized in films like *THE HEIRESS* (William Wyler, 1949) or *CHINATOWN* (Roman Polanski, 1974)? Stories ranging from a realization of incestuous desire to the disempowerment of the patriarch can all be read as stories of cinema about itself and its libidinous relation to women. The apriority of the apparatus becomes transparent for the founding myths of (bourgeois) history.²²

The digital divide and its implications for the discipline of film and media studies on the one hand and feminism and gender studies on the other were addressed in no. 64 “The Old and the New” (2004) and no. 65 “Celluloid & Co” (2006).²³ These issues examined the relationship between “Women, Film, and Media” or “Film Studies and Media Studies,” and included texts about the pragmatics of digital film technology and the relation between art and technology.

Frauen und Film became a widely read and internationally recognized film journal, particularly in the US. Some essays that first appeared in *Frauen und Film* later appeared in American journals such as *October*, *Cinema Journal*, or *New German Critique* and *vice versa*. The journal never acquired an academic affiliation. As the

second Frankfurt generation of editors (Annette Brauerhoch, Heike Klippel, and Renate Lippert) continue the editorial work alongside their academic positions, *Frauen und Film* provides a forum for critical views outside of – and free from – academic institutions. While the frequency of publication has decreased, the volume of each issue has increased. The politics of naming persist in an insistence on material and sociological entities, (female) spectatorship with its components of identification, fantasy, and history. This is why in 2000, *Frauen und Film* celebrated its 25th anniversary programmatically with a film festival rather than a conference, in the conviction that no theory can survive without its subject: film, cinema, and its audiences.²⁴

In 2011, with issue 66, *Frauen und Film* returned to a once central concern: sexuality. Observing that in times of “naked truth on every channel,” the emancipatory interrogation of love and sexuality that marked 1970s film cultures seems to have disappeared in contemporary cinema as much as interest in questions of sexuality from film theory, a call for papers went out to examine the state of sexuality in current film culture. Interestingly, the papers received showed an ambivalent divide between a focus on pornography and on love and romance. Sexuality, in fact, seems to have disappeared. Historically, *Frauen und Film* had focused its critical reflections on predominantly male imaginations of female sexuality in film. Questions about “emancipated sexuality” in the 1970s, and the demand that female filmmakers represent female desire on screen, expanded into questions about cinema as a place in which gender hierarchies could be undermined in the interests of female as well as male audiences. In the sexuality issue, questions about how to approach sexuality in the cinema, with its new modes of spectatorship, dispersed into an interrogation of sexuality across various media. With the enormous diversification of the ways in which images are now watched and received, the significance of the Dark Room has diminished and with it, perhaps, the role of sexuality in the cinema as “liberation,” “subversion,” utopia, or hope.

The forthcoming issue (no. 67, 2015) takes on the urgent theme of migration, on topical, theoretical, and media technological levels, operating on the assumption that there is an intrinsic connection between cinema and migration. According to guest editor Nanna Heidenreich:

Films not only show how migration is imagined but reveal how society, politics, law and the police force deal with it. Technological images give migration a form and format. The history-forming power of films and videos suggests the need to engage in film *from the perspective of migration* itself. Video in particular has been addressed as the medium of migration – not as a medium of representation, but of time: creating images, sounds and montages not of but from within movements of migration. Historically these movements can be seen as a form of media *avant-garde* – from the VCRs and video shops of

the so called “guest workers” to digital recordings by the “Harragas,” who film their passage across the Mediterranean, images which then circulate on YouTube, in music videos, in documentaries and in cinematic narratives.²⁵

The issue thus discusses migration on the “big screen,” in exhibition spaces and in “minor formats.”

Despite the general trend in which changing media landscapes and shifting relations between film and “the media” are incorporated into institutional names, *Frauen und Film* cannot imagine changing its name to *Gender and Media*.

Frauen und Film is edited by Annette Brauerhoch, Heike Klippel, Gertrud Koch, Renate Lippert, Heide Schlüpmann.

(Re)Inventing *Camera Obscura*

Amelie Hastie, Lynne Joyrich, Patricia White, Sharon Willis

A man of about thirty strikes us as a youthful, somewhat unformed individual [...]. A woman of the same age, however, often frightens us by her psychical rigidity and unchangeability [...]. It is as though, indeed, the difficult development to femininity had exhausted the possibilities of the person concerned.
– Sigmund Freud, “Femininity”

The change seemed to have been accomplished painlessly and completely and in such a way that Orlando herself showed no surprise at it. Many people [...] hold [...] that such a change of sex is against nature [...]. It is enough for us to state the simple fact; Orlando was a man till the age of thirty; when he became a woman and has remained so ever since.

– Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*

Camera Obscura turned thirty in 2006. The editors eschewed, or neglected, marking twenty-five, a somewhat unformed age, in favor of the celebration of a moment of remarkable potential – perhaps radical changeability, as Woolf, if not Freud, would have it. We are marking this historical occasion by writing the history of the journal.¹ This essay therefore reflects on the history, theory, and practice of the journal as it has intersected with the history, theory, and practice of the discipline of film studies.

Most notably, the journal and its history have been unified by the very collective nature of *Camera Obscura* and thus through our shared intellectual curiosity, theoretical goals, and political investments. In what follows, this unity and our differences are equally apparent. The following sections – each pondering *Camera Obscura*’s theory and practice, each written by one of our editors – interact and intertwine with one another. At times, the observations interrupt one another; at other times, they continue a thought, occasionally reiterating a particular point and occasionally reframing the issues. Their organization is modeled after a collectively written piece entitled “Feminism and Film: Critical Approaches” that appeared in the first issue of the journal.² This present essay thus embodies the history and original aims of *Camera Obscura*. We have, nevertheless, altered the organization of that earlier model, refining it to meet our current needs. In this way, what follows embodies the transformation – and even contradiction – that

has been inherent to the journal from its beginnings. The original statement by the collective used the following section headings: context, text, methodology, production. We liked the simplicity of those titles, but we have added to them more descriptive subtitles. Furthermore, we have altered their original arrangement, which we feel better permits us to narrate the journal's history and its approach over the years. In this way, the idealistic and prescriptive nature of the original piece is transformed into the retrospective bent of this current essay – though we also clearly maintain the idealism of the original editors. Given our shared interests and history, similar points invariably emerge in all of the contributions here; yet given our differences, each contribution also gives specific emphases to select topics, calling attention to particular aspects of our theory and practice.

The first section, for example, tends to the journal's institutional history – or, perhaps more accurately, its anti-institutional history. Related to that is the history of the journal's editorial collective, and so the second section considers the complicated practice of collectivity that has defined not only the journal's operation but also its political orientation. There are some aspects of that orientation that have remained constant over the journal's history – most notably, a commitment to feminist theory and practice. Yet as section three elaborates, other aspects have shifted: no longer just interested in the question of sexual difference as originally formulated, *Camera Obscura* is also now interested in questions of difference more broadly defined, equally invested in analyses of race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, gender expression, and generation. In addition to broadening our political and theoretical scope to encompass such concerns, *Camera Obscura* has also enlarged the scope of the texts it addresses, moving beyond a consideration of cinema alone to other media formations and institutions (television, music, photography, medical imaging, digital productions, and so on) both in relation to and in distinction from those of film. However, despite these changes and the varied political, theoretical, and textual commitments that they represent, there is something that has always held (and continues to hold) the journal together: an ongoing intellectual verve and the epistemological excitement of active cultural engagement that both initiated the *Camera Obscura* project and continues to fuel the journal today. The last section of the essay thus attempts to capture some of the flavor of this energy and to clarify how it has both directed and redirected the journal over the course of its history.

All of these issues overlap; the sections therefore overlap as well. In perhaps classic *Camera Obscura* fashion, this is a truly self-reflexive piece: one in which the current editors reflect on their own and the journal's concerns, one in which the various contributions reflect one another, and one that, we hope, reflects the theory and practice, intellectual and political engagements, personal and professional motivations that define our work. Such reflexivity is an intrinsic part of that work: it undergirds both what we do (producing a text that situates and

critically comments on other cultural texts that themselves can be read as commenting on our cultural situation) and how we do it (processing such critique through our editorial practice of collective processing itself). Our approach to this history and overview has thus been personal, anecdotal, collective, individual, even sometimes contentious. It is a kind of living history that is as much about the present work of collectivity as it is about the journal and its original aims. We believe that it therefore not only describes but itself enacts the way in which *Camera Obscura* operates.

Context: A Brief History

Camera Obscura emerged as a collective feminist response to a paradoxical tension between the presence of the image of women on screen in mainstream film and the absence of women in both the fields of mainstream film production and the emerging disciplinary production of film theory. Issues of the representation of women in film were central to the journal's original project, foregrounded by an emphasis on alternative women's production and on psychoanalytic and ideological inquiries into commercial and avant-garde cinema.

The journal was founded by four women just beginning graduate school at the University of California, Berkeley: Janet Bergstrom, Sandy Flitterman, Elisabeth Lyon, and Constance Penley. They met while working on the magazine *Women and Film*, which had moved from Los Angeles in 1973 to be somewhat informally housed in the Pacific Film Archive. The four left *Women and Film* after two years because they wanted to engage with theoretical issues that were beyond the scope of the magazine and to experiment with the ideals of collective work. Its first issue was published in 1976, featuring discussions of Jackie Raynal's *Deux Fois*, the work of Yvonne Rainer, and Jean-Louis Baudry's theory of the cinematographic apparatus. Subsequent issues were produced sporadically for three years, then largely regularized at three issues per annum. Some key essays in their new venture, *Camera Obscura*, were collectively written, and the production of the journal was also collectively engineered. Members of the editorial group sought and received small amounts of funding through the University of California at Berkeley and the city of Berkeley for the first four issues. By the fifth issue, *Camera Obscura* was partially funded by a grant from the National Endowment of the Arts, which was renewed for almost two decades. The high level of design and production values was enabled by the large number of graphic artists and fine arts printing facilities in the Bay Area, many of them also receiving crucial support from the NEA.

In its later years, the universities affiliated with the editors have supported the journal in large and small ways, through minor grants as well as through housing the journal. These institutions include the University of Rochester's Susan B. Anthony Center (1985-1990) and UC Santa Barbara's Department of Film Studies

(since 1991). After ten years of “do-it-yourself publishing,” the move to the University of Rochester provided the journal with its first non-P.O.-box address. This move also coincided with a subsidy (from Johns Hopkins University Press) to publish the journal. *Camera Obscura* would later be published by Indiana University Press (from 1992 to 2000) and is now published by Duke University Press (as of 2000). These varied institutional affiliations mark the ways in which *Camera Obscura* has been tied to the broader development of film studies in colleges and universities, yet they have also allowed relative independence for its collective members and its production of ideas. They further display how the journal is a collective enterprise, not just in the make-up of its editorial board but also in the ways it brings multiple organizations and institutions together. Of course, the latter is true of most academic journals, but, in the case of *Camera Obscura*, every element of its production is sparked by the collective action of its editorial members.

Indeed, given its philosophical as well as material condition as a collective enterprise, *Camera Obscura* has been actively formed by its editorial members as individuals and as a body of feminists working together. An important theoretical scope of the journal – its commitment to continental philosophies like psychoanalysis, semiotics, and apparatus theory – was influenced by the journal’s original editors who studied abroad in France with teachers like Christian Metz and Raymond Bellour. These theorists themselves were early contributors to the journal, and so *Camera Obscura*, alongside other journals such as *Screen*, became an early leader in the larger turn towards continental theories in the evolution of film studies in the 1970s. Psychoanalysis functioned as a tool of interpretation for many *Camera Obscura* authors, as this approach provided a model for rigorous textual analysis to consider the intricate workings of gender relations and the concomitant oppression of women as manifest symptomatically in film.

This same form of analysis was an intimate part of women’s alternative production, also emphasized in the journal. As noted, the first issue of the journal showcased films by Jackie Raynal and Yvonne Rainer;³ the second included work on films by Chantal Akerman, Marguerite Duras, and Babette Mangolte;⁴ the double third-and-fourth issue included an essay on Dorothy Arzner’s *Christopher Strong*;⁵ and the fifth contained work on Sally Potter.⁶ Alongside this attention to women’s filmmaking practices, the second issue of the journal inaugurated a section entitled “Women Working,” which highlighted ongoing work by women theorists and historians alongside the films of women artists and activists. In this capacity, *Camera Obscura* early on documented such projects as *The Legend of Maya Deren* (which sought to collect all writings by the pioneer avant-garde filmmaker), published brief reviews of new work by a range of feminist filmmakers, and included reports on feminist conferences. Hence, “Women Working” offered an expansive definition of feminist work in film, combining creative and intellectual, cinematic and written production.

Camera Obscura was also known through its presence in other critical spaces, which helped to underscore its theoretical and collective project. For instance, as the feminist journal was emerging, board members Constance Penley and Janet Bergstrom contributed an essay to *Screen* (1978), in which they were identified as members of the “*Camera Obscura* editorial collective.”⁷ This contribution revealed something of a shared position between the journals, however contentious debates about theoretical production were in *Screen* during this time.⁸ It also pointed to the complementary projects underway in *Camera Obscura* between psychoanalytic/semiotic analysis and women’s filmmaking practices, as well as to the tensions and contestations between these projects within the journal itself. These tensions were largely borne out through the deep textual analysis that became the journal’s signature style. As the editors described it in the first volume of the journal, “Textual analysis considers the text (the film) as a dynamic process of the production of meanings, inscribed within the larger context of social relations. The text is seen not as a closed work, but as a discourse, a play of signification, dynamism and contradiction. This definition of text displaces the spectator as a fixed receiver of meaning; and implies an unfixing and unsettling of the spectator-screen relationship.”⁹

This early and historical pronouncement of a commitment to seeing the text – which ultimately includes the theoretical text as well as the filmic one – as a dynamic process was repeatedly enacted in the ensuing history of the journal, as it sought new texts and new textual approaches, the latter of which were often borne of moving-image media. While the journal’s original context “evolved from the recognition of a need for theoretical study of film in this country from a feminist and socialist perspective,” these goals remain current not only in the face of the threat of “postfeminism” (a sense that our work has already been done) but also in the continually expanding spaces of feminist inquiry, especially in those efforts to make that space broader and more inclusive.

Production: A Collective Fate

Those of us who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s know that the range of possible fates for collectives is limited. These unwieldy organizations strain with tensions that can easily tip their fragile balances. A collective can implode, reducing its size to a tiny kernel that threatens total collapse; it can explode, either by reciprocal purging or by expanding so far that it loses all shape. Or, the collective can mutate as the comings and goings of members redefine the group. In the case of *Camera Obscura*, of course, we have been dealing with two overlapping entities: the editorial collective and the journal itself. For all but one of the current editors (Constance Penley, who was part of the original collective), discovering *Camera Obscura* in a library, bookstore, classroom, or friend’s office had a distinct impact on our professional direction and development. Before we knew

the members of the collective, or understood the editorial practice, we were readers who, excited by this forum, aspired to place our work there. Indeed, the journal seemed to us to be carving out exactly the terrain that we hoped to inhabit as scholars in film, media, and feminism. So *Camera Obscura* made our work possible before we were recruited to make its work possible. And just as we were drawn to the journal through our own evolving networks of identification – professional and personal – so a shifting collective identification has continued to reshape the journal's project.

Surely the biggest force haunting collectives and collective work is temporality, both in the sense of history – it is a way of organizing work that many consider anachronistic – and in the sense of time consumed in the collective process. But equally important, in *Camera Obscura*'s case, is that its collective has persisted for nearly thirty years while its membership has undergone numerous shifts. While members have departed and arrived one by one, the evolving collective has taken a palimpsest form, as the editors embody the journal's various historical stages. Each new editor helps to reshape and reanimate the group, whose respect for the legacy of previous collectives casts change against the memory of past experience and practices. As a result, *Camera Obscura*'s culture allows for continuity that accommodates differences.

Camera Obscura's current shape is intimately tied to its history. Founded as a feminist collective in the 1970s, it remains marked by the legacies of both the feminism of the period (this includes the perhaps dated practice of consciousness raising) and the basics of left political organizing. The journal also profited incalculably from the cultural shift that women were producing within the university: more women were completing PhDs and producing scholarship in the area of feminism, film, and media studies. The journal participated in this shift, as the founding collective took as part of its mission to encourage emerging feminist academics by providing a venue for their work. They also mentored these new scholars, some of whom went on to join the editorial group. Of course, the strongest mark of the journal's history has been its commitment to a collective editorial structure and process.

Most important to the journal's success has been the collective's commitment to lively and unbridled debate. As it launched its project, the journal participated enthusiastically, even aggressively, in the fierce contests that shaped the emerging fields of film studies and women's studies in the US academy – along with the field of literary studies from which many of the original editors had migrated. *Camera Obscura* made its early marks in the field polemically, and its contentious nature resonated at the level of collective work. In contrast to many feminist enterprises of the period, *Camera Obscura* embraced dissent and contention. In our view, its commitment to thorough and vigorous debate leading to consensus has been its greatest strength, though this commitment has not been without casualties. This intellectually and often emotionally challenging process has proven too

time-consuming or overly demanding to some editors. And, surely, at times, we have achieved consensus on a political or theoretical point at the cost of disregarding other issues. For example, looking back on our history, it becomes clear that the early centrality of theorizing sexual difference left little room for consideration of homo/hetero-sexual differences or of other compelling social differences. That central commitment, of course, gave way – not without a struggle – as the collective’s perspective shifted both through its changing members and in the context of ongoing debates in the field. Not least among the casualties of our process may also have been our publication schedule, whose historical irregularities stemmed in no small part from the cumbersome process of arriving at a consensus on any given issue. At the same time, however, the insistence that serious intellectual exchange and discussion of political concerns must underlie both our editorial process and the shaping of each particular volume has given *Camera Obscura* the sharpness of profile that it maintains to this day. That is, while the journal reworks its theoretical and methodological commitments, as the collective’s membership evolves to represent new issues, approaches, and expertise, it continues striving to identify new intellectual currents and to intervene in ongoing debates.

Because *Camera Obscura* began as a feminist collective without any regular institutional support or endorsement, it has maintained an unusual degree of independence. *Camera Obscura*’s relative autonomy from institutions, departments, and professional organizations has significantly favored the collective organization. Indeed, many institutions would not have supported a journal that lacked (or refused) a hierarchical editorial structure. Only in 1985, when the journal was by any standard mature, did it find an institutional home at the University of Rochester when Constance Penley joined that institution’s English Department and Film Studies Program. Still, we have consistently chosen to distribute labor and decision-making across the group and its diffuse geographies, preferring not to consolidate either authority or accountability in a single editor or place. This means, of course, that we work largely without the kind of individual credit that any one academic institution might reward, but it also means that the editorial process must provide its own internal satisfactions.

Primary among these satisfactions is regular intellectual exchange. But equally important to us and to our mission is the sense that contributors expect us to experiment and to take risks. Moreover, functioning as a collective has allowed us to perform all of the primary review processes ourselves, without using outside referees. While we have taken criticism for this policy from some of the membership of Society for Cinema & Media Studies, it has allowed us to stay very close to developments in the field and to keep the journal on a course that we continually renew without the policing of disciplinary or field-specific boundaries. Rather, the content of the journal more closely reflects the concerns of the collective and its readership, since this policy has kept us in close dialogue with

one another and with our authors. Because at least two editors read every submission, and because the whole collective discusses acceptances and revisions, the commentary the author receives includes her/him in our conversation. This admittedly labor-intensive editorial process has produced at least three significant effects: it has allowed us to identify and promote the work of younger, emerging scholars, and it has generated a loyal readership eager to contribute their mature work to our pages and to encourage their students to submit some of their first scholarship to the journal. Thus, the editorial process has generated a scholarly community.

Our collective does not operate by any exact calculation or completely equal distribution of labor or participation but rather allows us all some flexibility in organizing our working lives. This means that we take turns shouldering a little extra work, providing the final push we need to conclude a project, or assuming responsibility for the all-important timekeeping that holds us to schedule. But the tradeoff is that no one person provides the primary leadership or bears the primary burdens of an editor-in-chief. In short, we carry on through a sense of mutual responsibility to both the journal and the collective. And this is how *Camera Obscura* maintains some continuity of profile and practice across the differences introduced by changes in the collective. As the membership has evolved from the original collective, invariably attracting feminist scholars for whom the journal provided a formative influence, we find that our work is sustained by a shared – and perhaps idealized – vision of the journal and by shared aspirations for its future, which depend on identifications both with the collective and with *Camera Obscura* itself.

Texts: Broadening the Scope

Camera Obscura was introduced with the subtitle “a journal of feminism and film theory.” As that title indicated, the journal focused on film as its object of analysis, using – and originating – new approaches in feminist, cultural, and critical theory to rethink cinema as well as, notably, using cinema to rethink feminism and critical theory. In particular, *Camera Obscura* was interested in the ways in which the film spectator is positioned and addressed by cinema’s visual and narrative strategies. The journal thus became known for its rigorous deployment of semiotic and psychoanalytic theories of textuality and the subject, as *Camera Obscura* attempted to produce both a systematic description of film’s modes of representation and an interrogation of the phantasmatic and ideological implications of the cinematic apparatus (especially its enunciation of and implications for relations of sexual difference). The great value of this approach was that it encouraged work that concentrated on the specific operations of cinema (particularly classical Hollywood cinema) and, thus, on the specific ways in which differences (primarily, at that time, sexual differences) might be constituted and

defined – or, in some cases, reconstituted and redefined – through particular cultural apparatuses, including film and other popular media. That is, by attending closely to cinema’s texts, institutions, and spectator relations, those affiliated with *Camera Obscura* (as editors, mentors, and contributors) emphasized how structures of desire and identification are formed, maintained, and reproduced – structures that are typically operative not only in the cinema but in phallogentric culture as a whole.

In this way, *Camera Obscura* aimed to avoid approaches to cinema that risked presuming the static existence of precisely those identifications, pleasures, and meanings that film and media studies scholars have taken as their objects of analysis.¹⁰ Instead of assuming that women, as members of a unified group with certain qualities determined by gender norms, simply have a fixed status in relation to cinema – whether as subjects or objects of vision, as audience members, authors, or images on screen – *Camera Obscura* attempted to interrogate how categories like those of gender, spectatorship, or spectacle are constructed and how subjects are made to see and to appear in particular (though not essential) sexed positions. Instead of treating popular cinema as a mode of escape from such social positions, the journal took seriously the way in which films have significant psychic, social, and ideological effects, how they – and those of us engaged with them – operate within delimited parameters. Instead of assuming that our responses to film are, in some way, our “own,” it considered how larger dynamics of desire and knowledge are inscribed in films and how these engender meanings and pleasures of which we are not fully aware. In other words, *Camera Obscura*’s emphasis on the specificity of cinema helped the journal analyze formations of media and culture in a truly critical way, refusing approaches that might be faulted for being too volunteeristic or naïvely pluralistic – both a too-easy validation of viewers’ experiences and enjoyments and an overly optimistic faith in filmmakers’ and film critics’ ability simply to make of films what they choose.¹¹

Yet while avoiding those problems, the journal arguably risked other pitfalls: some critiques of *Camera Obscura*’s project (including, importantly, self-critiques arising from journal editors and contributors themselves) suggested that, in its emphasis on how film’s strategies of representation and enunciation reproduce and reinforce those of phallogentric culture, *Camera Obscura* overlooked other possibilities for film, media, and culture. Critics claimed that, in its attempt to avoid a naïve pluralism, the journal tended to disavow the differences that do exist within media culture and our relationships to it – differences inscribed in texts through varying conventions and modes of address as well as differences elicited in readings by varying intertexts, discourses, and audience engagements. However, charges that *Camera Obscura* promoted a universalizing and monolithic theory of film are belied by a look at the range of its actual contents. From the beginning of the journal’s history, *Camera Obscura* editors and authors were interested

in alternatives to the (relatively) closed form of classical Hollywood cinema, and a number of essays that considered texts from other traditions and institutions were published. In particular, as elaborated in other sections of this piece, there was great interest displayed in the work of feminist, independent, and avant-garde filmmakers, with journal authors looking to various counter-cinemas in order to consider how films might undermine classical structures, rework Hollywood's modes of looking and narration, and thus establish other terms of desire and identification – a different spectator/screen dynamic that might then correspond to the different psychic and social dynamics to which the journal was (and continues to be) committed.

There have also long been essays that considered texts other than films. Indeed, the journal's growing interest in a variety of media forms followed from the aforementioned interest in alternatives to Hollywood cinema and in the work of independent artists and producers. Several of those artists and producers (Chantal Akerman, Marguerite Duras, Valie Export, Laura Mulvey, Ulrike Ottlinger, Sally Potter, and Yvonne Rainer, among others) worked not only in film but in other arenas as well (dance, performance, photography, video, writing), and that work intersected with their films in intriguing ways, raising questions of multi- and inter-media relations. And, of course, an interest in the ways in which image and narrative might be differently articulated in the work of different authors, operating with different codes and within different contexts, dovetails with an interest in the ways in which different media forms – even so-called dominant ones – might variously articulate modes of seeing and knowing. Thus, just as many filmmakers were also involved with other media, so were many film scholars. People who were trained in film theory began to consider how that theory applied – or failed to apply – to different media forms, leading to reconsiderations of both their objects and methods of analysis. Given that media forms are themselves often gendered in discourse (i.e., the history of seeing television as a “feminine” form or medical image technology as a “masculine” one), this question of inter- or cross-mediation opened, one might say, a “natural” area of inquiry for *Camera Obscura* – something discussed, for example, by many contributors to *Camera Obscura*'s 1989 survey of work on “The Spectatrix.”¹²

The institutional as well as textual links – and, importantly, the institutional and textual disjunctures – between film and other signifying/social formations (medical imaging, television, video, performance, urban space, advertising, etc.) therefore became a notable area of exploration for *Camera Obscura*, shifting its concerns from an exclusive focus on film to broader questions of media and culture. For example, in 1988, *Camera Obscura* published its first special issue on television studies, “Television and the Female Consumer,” which included essays on soap operas, melodrama, and “new woman” genres; television and domestic space; TV stars and fans; and early television's treatment of class and ethnicity, in addition to providing source guides on television research and archives and re-

views of other recent TV scholarship.¹³ Next was an issue on “Male Trouble” that included a dossier on the configurations of gender, generation, and sexuality in the television program PEE-WEE’S PLAYHOUSE;¹⁴ soon followed by an issue on “Popular Culture and Reception Studies” with essays on, among other things, amusement parks, burlesque, film exhibition in African American communities, rap music, and Elvis.¹⁵ Further indicating *Camera Obscura*’s far-ranging involvement in cultural studies, two special issues were produced in 1992 on “Imaging Technologies, Inscribing Science,” with work covering such topics as X-ray and laser technologies, fetal imaging and reproductive politics, AIDS, breast cancer, cosmetic surgery, constructions of transgender bodies and identities, and health educational and activist video.¹⁶ And many contributors to the well-known and aforementioned special issue “The Spectatrix”¹⁷ indicated their interest in broadening *Camera Obscura*’s traditional focus on “the female spectator” of film to include considerations of spectators of other technological and media forms, as well as, indeed, “other” spectators in general – those not necessarily nor solely delimited by binary sexual difference in the way that the term “the female spectator” typically implies. These (and other) special issues and dossiers helped to both inaugurate and demonstrate the developing interests of the journal, positioning it within the fields of visual and media studies quite expansively defined.¹⁸ In that sense, the change in the journal’s subtitle almost two decades after *Camera Obscura*’s introduction – from “a journal of feminism and film theory” to “feminism, culture, and media studies” – only made more visible and official the changes that had already taken place in *Camera Obscura*’s editorial emphases and aims as well as in the collective itself: the new subtitle first appeared, appropriately, in a 1994-1995 special issue on “Lifetime: A Cable Network ‘For Women,’”¹⁹ but, as elaborated, clearly by that time *Camera Obscura* had already established itself as a journal devoted to the analysis of a wide variety of media texts.

With this move toward a broadly conceived object of analysis came a move toward varied means and methods of analysis. Although “feminism” remained in *Camera Obscura*’s subtitle as a primary political and theoretical commitment, the journal expanded its notion of differences beyond a supposedly singular “sexual difference” to include multiple, overlapping differences (of race, nationality, sexuality, gender expression, age, and so on), suggesting an implicit critique of the unifying tendencies of a narrowly conceived identity politics. Similarly, while semiotic and psychoanalytic theories have retained a place of importance in the journal, other approaches (industrial and historical analyses, genre and star studies, ethnographic and reception models, analyses of race and ethnicity, postcolonial theory and critiques of empire, queer and trans studies, etc.) have also figured significantly in its contents. These approaches have been at times articulated in opposition to and at times articulated in concert with semiotic and psychoanalytic models, indicating the intellectual debates and academic shifts

with which the journal has engaged. In this way, *Camera Obscura* has foregrounded and even helped to establish a scholarly interest in moving within and between both disciplinary and identity categories.

As suggested, such changes in the journal go hand-in-hand with the shift from “film” to “culture and media.” Just as exploring a range of media texts meant considering how those texts may differ from the terms of classical cinematic ones, considering a range of subjects and categories of “difference” (aside from just that of “sexual difference”) meant exploring, in various ways, other media that historically have been significant in terms of those differences. That is, though the initial work of *Camera Obscura* suggested that classical film emphasizes structures of binarized sexual difference that are perhaps best approached through a psychoanalytic lens, other media may bring other issues and methods to the fore: for instance, television’s relationship to the domesticated family – and what that family disavows/excludes – may make sociologically inflected reception models of TV viewing contexts and/or queer theory models of TV textuality central concerns; likewise, the fraught history of US popular music, urban entertainments, and/or youth subcultures may make approaches that emphasize class, race, ethnicity, nationality, and/or age a particular focus in studies of those formations. As *Camera Obscura* began to consider multiple media formations, it thus also began, in a reciprocal and mutually dynamic relationship, to consider issues, theories, and methodologies beyond the ones it initially emphasized.

In sum, then, *Camera Obscura*’s shift from “a journal of feminism and film theory” to a site for “feminism, culture, and media studies” is intimately connected to the other issues under discussion in this essay – the history of the journal, its theoretical and methodological development, its political and intellectual charge, and its basis in a theory and practice of collectivity. Offering not a “naïve pluralism” but rather an informed and more radical one, *Camera Obscura*’s embrace of work on multiple media and subjects, from multiple perspectives and with multiple concerns, has allowed the journal to continue making an impact in film, media, and cultural studies without losing sight of either its initial vision or various options for the future. Indeed, in presaging and predicting many aspects of current work in film, media, feminist, and cultural studies (an interest in interdisciplinarity and intermediality; a critique of unified models of both textuality and subjectivity; a concern with media conventions in conjunction with media histories; an exploration of the ways in which various intertexts, discourses, and identifications intersect), *Camera Obscura* has provided, and will continue to present, a lens through which to view these fields.

Methodology: The *Camera Obscura* Effect

The heady appeal of the early years of *Camera Obscura* – a thrill elicited especially by essays written and signed by “the *Camera Obscura* collective” – lay, certainly for

an undergraduate becoming infatuated with the fields of women's and film studies, in its double affiliation with the women's movement, on the one hand, and with French theory, on the other. The by-now clichéd but one-time improbable merger between feminism and poststructuralist theory epitomized the identity of the journal, became its cultural and intellectual legacy, and still shades its reputation today. I say "heady appeal" because the journal's passionate feminism pursued affairs of the head much more than of the body: it fought on the academic front of the women's movement. The topicality demanded of the journal format heightened the urgency infusing the many books of French-inflected feminist theory appearing in the US and Britain during that period – books such as Jane Gallop's *The Daughter's Seduction* and Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose's *Feminine Sexuality* (both 1982). At the same time, by publishing reports on women filmmakers (primarily avant-garde), film distributors, and conferences, *Camera Obscura* maintained close ties with feminist practice, with the groundswell of women's media organizations – production collectives, distributors, and festivals – that sprung up internationally during the 1970s. The journal's feel of militancy was exciting – despite, or because of, serving two mistresses. The French connection made the journal chic; its edge of dogmatism signified rigor in relation to the "crunchy" US women's culture of the time. But without a concurrent culture of women's media activism, reflected in the notes on contemporary activities headed "Women Working" and the short reviews of important films headed "Matrix," as well as in the ads for such sister publications as *Heresies* and *Jump Cut* and small feminist distributor *Serious Business*, the journal's French fizz would have gone flat.

The journal's design, which remained consistent until the end of the 20th century, balanced its two affiliations to the feminist movement and French theory: plain white cover, fading to a shade of cream (quite similar to paperbacks from the French publisher Gallimard); a single black-and-white, academy ratio film image on front and back covers; the title rendered always in lowercase. Feminist authenticity and anti-hierarchical convictions were served by the do-it-yourself minimalist look and lowercase logo, while the asceticism and suspiciousness of visual pleasure preached in the art and theory of the period was sweetened with just enough fetishism of form. Indeed, its two affiliations were counterpoised – or locked in dialectical tension – in most aspects of the journal. Something about this combination was compelling.

Primary to the seeming contradictions that *Camera Obscura* posed was the status that the journal granted "male theory," or, simply, men. Unafraid to challenge the "bachelor machines" of male avant-garde filmmaking and masculinist theorizing, the journal nevertheless gave Christian Metz and Alfred Hitchcock exalted spots in its pantheon alongside such filmmakers as Laura Mulvey and Chantal Akerman. Raymond Bellour and Thierry Kuntzel, male gurus of the Paris Film Program, were also given pride of place in its pages. But the difficult prose and

even the admittedly patriarchal premises of Lacanian theory only enhanced the journal's aura of rigor, rigor, rigor, apparent most notably in its close textual analyses of experimental feminist work. In this venue – translating, editing, framing, even contradicting male-generated ideas (notably Bellour's contention in a conversation with Janet Bergstrom that "I think that a woman can love, accept and give a positive value to [classical Hollywood] films only from her own masochism") – the sisters were doing it for themselves.²⁰

It was this extravagant intellectualism, combined with the commitment to currency and wide relevance and with the always sexy subject matter of film and filmmaking, that made the journal emblematic of the moment of greatest consolidation of feminist film theory in the late 1970s and 1980s. Its American, rather than British or French, provenance probably gave it wider circulation, as film studies programs and small bookstores proliferated in the US, and certainly tinged its polemicism since interdisciplinary women's studies programs frequently resisted "male theory" in favor of a political orientation built solidly on American pragmatism. As part of the legacy of its first years, *Camera Obscura* still has passionate defenders and detractors even after its politics, look, subtitle, and collective membership have altered notably. This aura of controversy does not diminish but probably enhances the intellectual high in discovering that *Camera Obscura*'s so-called dogmatism is a chimera – one that fades upon closer inspection of its contents. It is true that the journal, in conjunction with important writings in the late 1970s and early 1980s by such scholars as Annette Kuhn, E. Ann Kaplan, Teresa de Lauretis, Pam Cook, and Claire Johnston, helped establish a canon of feminist films and filmmakers that excluded most straight documentary and narrative films and included few women of color, with experimental documentarian Trinh T. Minh-ha a notable exception. But it is important to note that *Camera Obscura*'s influence coincided, and in part defined, a moment in feminist film culture in which a symbiotic relationship existed between production/distribution/exhibition and theorists. Work by independent women filmmakers, including women of color, mushroomed in the mid-1980s (see for example, the enormous growth of *Women Make Movies*, the single US independent feminist distributor that survived the decade), and mainstream successes increased as well. There were more films than one journal could cover. Yet features of the journal in its current manifestation – including the revival of the "Women Working" feature – attest to the crucial role of this interdependence of theory and practice in "cinefeminism."

Another paradox alluded to above is *Camera Obscura*'s emblematic identification with the "sexual difference" paradigm of spectatorship – that is, with a psychoanalytic discourse that is fatally heteronormative, ahistorical, and abstract. An early kinship between the journal and the British journal *m/f* (whose psychoanalytically informed Marxism is profiled in *Camera Obscura* 3/4) made a significant impact on Constance Penley's 1988 edited volume *Feminism and Film Theory*, which

defines the field almost exclusively in terms of psychoanalytic approaches to sexual difference.²¹ Tania Modleski and Teresa de Lauretis, two feminist film scholars critical of the orthodoxies of “sexual difference,” did not participate in *Camera Obscura*’s survey of the field, the special issue entitled “The Spectatrix.” Yet in contradiction to the perception of the journal’s “straight mind,” not only have a significant number of queer women served as members of the editorial collective since the 1980s, but *Camera Obscura* has also published lesbian film theory extensively in more recent years. The inclusion of queer perspectives also opened the editorial offices and, for a time, the collective itself to male participation; gay men also joined straight male feminists on the advisory board. Concurrently, psychoanalysis, while engaged by many in the journal’s pages, ceased to function as a master – or master’s – discourse. Instead, it was wielded as part of queer theory or combined with, even contested by, other methodologies. In a context in which feminist criticism was being challenged to take on multiple axes of analysis, the critique of race and racism became central concerns of the editors and contributors, and the race-blind manner in which psychoanalysis had so often been used contributed to its loss of authority. Finally, as cinema yielded its dominance as object of study in the pages of the journal as in the field at large, cultural studies methodologies allowed lived social differences of race, class, nation, sexuality, and gender expression to be tangibly addressed.

The journal’s shifts in emphases are illustrated by the books that *Camera Obscura* has issued. Volumes based on special issues on masculinity, television, and science and technology coincide with a long stretch of the journal’s history in which all but Constance Penley from the original collective moved on to other things, and passionate new members (some of them still among us) came on board. The turn to history, which many commentators on the academic discipline of film studies saw as the “next big thing” after psychoanalytic feminism, is represented both in the most recent *Camera Obscura* book – an independently edited volume on women and early cinema – as well as throughout the journal. If we take the move to Duke University Press (2000) as marking the beginning of the journal’s current period, we must also situate this as a retrospective period in order to distill some of the energies, orthodoxies, and intellectual adventures traced in this piece.

Today, we are in many ways far away from the seemingly unified editorial point of view represented in those early issues of the journal. A diversity of topics, methods, and approaches, particularly as these are fostered in an emphasis on emerging writers, is characteristic of the current period. But in other ways, the journal remains consistent with its origins: *Camera Obscura* is passionate about ideas, about film, and its sister media. And its editors are just utopian – or perhaps arrogant? – enough once again to sign the current contribution as “the *Camera Obscura* collective.”



PART V

Discussions: Dialoguing Difference and Extremity in Contemporary Cinemas



Film, Corporeality, Transgressive Cinema: A Feminist Perspective

Martine Beugnet and Laura Mulvey

The dialogue I initiated with Martine Beugnet for this book is a formal continuation of a series of conversations that have taken place between us over several years. Although our theoretical approaches to cinema are, in many ways, radically different, I became extremely interested in the way that her use of haptic theory could advance feminist thinking about the “problem” of the woman’s body and its representation in cinema. Influenced by American film theorists Vivian Sobchack and Laura U. Marks, in particular, her knowledge of French cinema, both of the recent “transgressive” genre (on which our dialogue is focused) and the history of French film more generally, places her in a perfect position to reflect on the series of encounters that we cover here. In the first instance, the centrality of the body and “embodiment” in this cinema is, in itself, a challenge to traditional feminist thinking (in which I include myself) about the female body on the screen in relation to women’s avant-garde film. In a negation of the woman’s body as object of the look and its sexualization in all the multivalent forms of patriarchal culture, feminist experimental film tended to adopt a minimalist aesthetic, very often in combination with the theoretical or essayistic. Beugnet has traced the return of early, pre-minimalist engagement with the body (for instance in the films of Carolee Schneemann) in some performance and installation work by recent women artists. In our dialogue, however, she finds a similar preoccupation with corporeality in the “transgressive” feature film genre. While this is, in itself, of interest to film aesthetics, the unusual number of women directors associated with this cinema is of very particular interest to feminist film aesthetics. The work of the women directors discussed below has, of course, attracted a considerable amount of interest over the years, particularly due to their insistence on the corporal and their unhesitating willingness to display female sexuality on the screen, not as sanitized but as persistently associated with violence, sexual violence, bodily disintegration, and so on. Beugnet’s use of haptic theory and its acceptance of the bodily and the sensuous enables a feminist approach to these films that cuts across both the American theorists’ unwillingness to be limited by a feminist label and the particular directors’ unwillingness to be categorized by gender. Furthermore, Beugnet locates this eruption of the

body, its flaunting on the screen as a site of disgust, within particular social and historical contexts. She looks back to the moment in French history, the late 1950s and early 1960s, when a fetishized culture of feminine cleanliness, as well as the “whiteness” and polish of the modern kitchen with which it was closely associated, “masked” the atrocities of the Algerian war and the wounds that it left on the French male psyche. Beugnet suggests that the corporeality of recent women’s films may represent a return of that historic repressed. She also suggests, however, that the dematerialization of the female body in digital representation gives the insistence of the corporeality of the feminine an immediate, contemporary context. In our discussion, Beugnet extends these topics into areas of more aesthetic concern in which she reflects on the “transgressive” films’ use of a particular cinematic style that raises consciousness of other bodily senses to challenge the usual domination of the optical. Here she notes that the materiality of the human body may fuse with the materiality of film itself, confusing not only the interior of the narrative with the surface of the screen but also challenging the traditional distance between spectator and the cinema. Ultimately, she argues for a cinema that enables its spectator to think through sensuousness and sensation in a way that is of extreme interest to and relevance for feminist film theory.

– Laura Mulvey

LM: I am extremely interested in the way that you have written about a group of recent French films as “a cinema of transgression”¹ and, most particularly, that you have discussed their shared aesthetic in terms of corporeality and sensuousness. Perhaps you could begin by explaining how this critical encounter came into being?

MB: I became interested in this group of French films because I sensed they formed a distinctive thematic and formal approach, one that broke away from the filmmaking conventions and strategies of mainstream as well as classically *auteurist* cinema. I felt those films showed a willingness to return to cinema as the medium of the senses, in some ways reconnecting with the experiments that marked the early years of cinema’s existence, but with the aesthetic and thematic concerns of the late twentieth- and early twenty-first century. I related this trend to Antonin Artaud’s call for a “third path” in cinema (a form of cinema that would develop out of conventional narrative cinema – or psychological cinema as he calls it – on the one hand, and abstract experimental film on the other) because in this cinema, film is explored not so much as a narrative vehicle but as a form of embodied thought, as an art whose primary power is to move us both viscerally and intellectually.

The work of directors Olivier Assayas, Bertrand Bonello, Patrice Chéreau, Gaspar Noé, Catherine Breillat, Claire Denis, Virginie Despentes, Coralie Trinh Thi,

Pascale Ferran, Philippe Grandrieux, Bruno Dumont, and Marina de Van, to name but a few, are extremely diverse in their subject matter and style, but some of the films have jointly attracted the attention of critics and theorists because they share a willingness to address onscreen corporeality in sensuous, visceral, graphic, and in some cases horrific terms. Although these works remain within the boundaries of what can be loosely called narrative fiction cinema, the directors knowingly deploy an array of stylistic techniques, editing, lighting, framing, and sound effects that compete with or exceed narrative requirements and call attention to the materiality of the film itself. Not surprisingly, it is not only the directors but the work of some of their key collaborators that has gained recognition: I am thinking of Agnès Godard and Caroline Champetier's noted camera-work and photography for instance.

A number of the directors concerned engaged with the kind of cinematic corporeality I have described in order to evoke a contemporary state of existential *malaise*. Implicitly or explicitly, many of the films deal with the effect of exile, madness, illness, isolation, and exploitation. They evoke liminal universes, film worlds that are permeated with angst and, often, violence. Frequently, the relation of the subject to others and to his/her environment is one of profound disjunction, and the encounter with nature and the inanimate world is infused with fear, throwing into relief the vulnerability of the human body and of human subject-hood. But to focus solely on the more dystopian of the films is, I think, to miss out on the larger picture and its implications in terms of historical and aesthetic significance. For, it seems to me, part of the production of that period, and indeed, those films that still participate in this form of cinema today, are interested in exploring the "confusion of the limit between subjective body and objective world,"² but not necessarily as one of existential horror: in these cases it becomes, rather, a process of existential expansion. I am paraphrasing Vivian Sobchack who, commenting on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's memorable passage about the impossibility of safely establishing "the limit between the body and the world," stressed that the issue of mutual permeability can be put alternatively "in terms of existential ease or horror, awesome or awful encounters with inanimate 'things', inherence in the world or alienation from it."³

LM: To my mind, the cinematic strategies that you evoked a little earlier as "stylistic techniques" move between an aesthetic that has been traditionally associated with melodrama but also, in introducing materiality, relate to an aesthetic more usually associated with the avant-garde. The surprise, as it were, in the conjunction here is that they generate the states of "confusion" that you mention above very specifically around the human body and its limits. But to draw back for a moment, is the quotation from Merleau-Ponty specifically a comment on the human body in film? Clearly the cinema would be the medium *par excellence* to

experiment with and push the permeability of both, that is the body and the materiality of the medium...

MB: Merleau-Ponty used the word *flesh* to describe embodied consciousness.⁴ For him, consciousness does not arise in transcendence but through inherence of the body-subject to the world, to the material state of *flesh*. Crucially, however, in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, as in the existentialist school of thought, inherence does not amount to passivity (existence as predestination, the absence of freedom): the construction of the self happens through exchange, as an inter-subjective and reversible *process*, and Merleau-Ponty further insists on the porosity and continuity not only between subject and world but in the sense of an outer and inner self. Sobchack quotes from *Le Visible et l'invisible* rather than from *Le cinéma et la nouvelle psychologie* (1945), but in the latter Merleau-Ponty does talk about cinema's ability to show "*la conscience jetée dans le monde*" ("consciousness thrown into the world") and points to the simultaneous development of the cinema with that of a phenomenological approach in contemporary philosophy.⁵ In effect, for him, it is in the medium's aptitude to show (rather than *explain*) the inherence (temporal and spatial) of the self to the world and to others that cinema and phenomenology find a common ground. Although his analysis of the cinematic techniques that can make this happen is limited, he senses that the cinema is, as you said, the medium to experiment with the notion of the human body and its limits, the permeability of outer and inner reality.

Similarly, early film theorists as well as avant-garde filmmakers were interested in the productive confusion that emerges through the sense of continuity between the materiality of the human body and that of the medium. They stressed cinema's ability to explore the relation of subject to world not merely as a detached and observing camera-eye – a surrogate human subjectivity – exploring a pro-filmic that is passively waiting to be discovered and made sense of but as a dynamic relationship that shapes both the filmed and the one who is filming/watching. By extension, they thought of cinema as a medium with an ability to merge outer and inner vision as well as evoke inner feelings through images of the world. This has remained a key aspect of experimental filmmaking practice and film theory: I am thinking of Stan Brakhage's *Metaphors on Vision*, of course, but also Bruce Elder's *A Body of Vision*.⁶ Subjectivity as "un-difference" is also, unsurprisingly, a key feature of women film theorists and women's film practice. Carolee Schneemann's films are exemplary in their subversion of fixed subject – gendered – positions and their fusing of the human body and film body (Elder talks of Schneemann working "with the film's own flesh").⁷

Although, as I stressed before, the kind of cinema that I described earlier (a cinema of transgression, a "corporeal cinema," or a "cinema of the senses" if we have to give it a name – the denomination can vary) belongs to the broad category of narrative fiction film, there is a similar interest in unsettling or confusing the

border between subject and object, between the human figure and its animate and inanimate surroundings. It is a cinema that works within the broad conventions of the fiction feature film but favors de-familiarizing techniques: playing on duration, de-framing and de-centering shots, counterpointing the effects of medium and long shots with the frontality and hapticity of close-up and extreme close-up shots that do not so much fragment as fail to contain bodies within the confines of the frame. In effect, the physicality or viscosity of the filmmaking is often simultaneously played out on the bodies of the characters and inscribed in the filmic body itself – in the blurred, tumultuous images and chaotic sounds of Philippe Grandrieux’s films, for example, or in the split screens that appear at the beginning and at the end of Marina de Van’s, *DANS MA PEAU* (IN MY SKIN, 2002) or in Bertrand Bonello’s *L’APOLLONIDE (SOUVENIRS DE LA MAISON CLOSE)* (2011), both of which feature characters involved in body mutilation.

The films generally associated with the French “cinema of the senses” characteristically offer themselves to the spectator as deeply sensuous universes in which the audio-visual medium of film is used to evoke other senses (taste, smell, and, crucially, touch) so that they can be said to encourage a “tactile,” “haptic” gaze and empathetic involvement from the viewer. By extension, if the characters they feature are, as with any mainstream film character, caught in the web of signs that transforms bodies into codified, functional narrative components – gender, race, class, appearance, all meant to determine behavioral and emotional patterns – they also operate at the “micro level” (elemental alterations, or transformations that pertain to the level of affect). To borrow a now classic term from Deleuze and Guattari: they are figures of “becoming.”⁸

I am aware that I started my answer with Merleau-Ponty and that I am concluding with Deleuze who are, of course, unlikely bedfellows. Thinking about Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze in relation to cinema and to feminist film theory brings me back to my earlier comment concerning the coexistence of contrasted trends within a contemporary cinema of sensation: one that explores the limit between the body and the world in terms of existential horror, and one that explores the limit between the body as inherence in the world and existential expansion. In the context of this dual cinema, Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty are relevant in different ways. Merleau-Ponty talks about flesh, Deleuze about meat. They are both interested in zones of un-difference or indecidability, but where Merleau-Ponty envisages being-in-the-world as a process of conciliation between subjective body and objective world, Deleuze is interested in the shock of sensation, in disruption and disjunction.⁹

LM: Could you, at this point, comment more particularly on the remarkable presence of women in the cinema of transgression? I believe that these women directors don’t necessarily take to being categorized as “feminist” or even as “women.” But from your perspective, to what extent has this genre attracted women,

such as the ones you mention above, and to what extent has it enabled them to touch on questions of the body, violence, the fantastic, and so on in a way that is unprecedented in the history of women's cinema?

MB: Certainly, a number of the films appeared to blur the frontier between art cinema and the genres of excess – as Linda Williams coined them – namely horror and pornography. There is no doubt that the reworking of the conventions of the genres of excess, including the appropriation of a cinematographic language that breaks away from the safe standardized visions and set tropes of mainstream cinema, opens a space where a subversive, abject femininity can be explored, one that refutes the normalizing power of commodification and spectacle.¹⁰ This kind of visceral outburst, in the context of women artists' production, had happened in performance art, in experimental film, but not in feature film. It was a radical move, and there is no denying the intense satisfaction one may find in the way some of these films probe and upturn traditional tropes and willfully parade a femininity that revels in mess, dirt, and violence.

But if we think of transgression in broader terms, formal as well as thematic, it is possible that some of the denominations assigned to the French cinema of that period – I am thinking, for instance, of “French Extreme” – may have pre-empted or limited the way we look at them as an ensemble. In effect, it is also in the cinema that probes a sense of “inherence in the world” as existential expansion that we find some of the most arresting work by women filmmakers: I am thinking in particular about the work of Claire Denis (*NÉNETTE ET BONI*, *VENDREDI SOIR*, 39 *RHUMS*) and Pascale Ferran's (*LADY CHATTERLEY*, *BIRD PEOPLE*), though to a certain extent, some of Catherine Breillat's work on fairytales would also fit in this.¹¹ Although we readily associate them with the enduring and reductive power of archetypal representations (of women in particular), fairytales and costume dramas also open up spaces where non-commodified corporealities and desires can be explored. Denis's *VENDREDI SOIR* (*FRIDAY NIGHT*, 2001), with its very specific sense of a suspended time where modern life with all its trappings is brought to a standstill, is, in that sense, close to Ferran's *LADY CHATTERLEY* (2006) and *BIRD PEOPLE* (2014) and – at the crossroads between the beautiful and the abject – Breillat's *BARBE BLEUE* (*BLUE BEARD*, 2009) and *LA BELLE ENDORMIE* (*THE SLEEPING BEAUTY*, 2010). These films pay great attention to surfaces, textures, colors, and the haptic effect of camera work, as can be seen in the beautiful, lush display of fabrics and colors in Ferran's and Breillat's costume dramas, and in their powerfully sensual camera work and photography. Their films show their characters engaged in an intensely tactile relation to the world around them and, by extension, offer themselves to spectators as heightened sensory experience.

You could say that films such as *VENDREDI SOIR*, *LADY CHATTERLEY*, and *BIRD PEOPLE* exemplify what Vivian Sobchack describes as the “ethical grace”

of a cinema that yields to the “unity of the look” – the ability to evoke, through the operations of film, a subjective body/objective world relationship that is not merely a relationship of disjunction, appropriation, and consumption (of the object by the subject) but also one of continuous co-presence and reciprocity. As with De Van’s *DANS MA PEAU*, but without the recourse to horror, these films deal with the awakening of a female character to a world of sensation that, in turn, profoundly alters and expands these characters’ access to and understanding of the web of social, economic, and cultural relations that shapes their environment and determines the way they are supposed to live their life. Framing, camera movements, the variations in focus and depth of field, in the color, tone, and intensity of the audio-visual field work to create an enhanced awareness of one subject’s relationship with other subjects and with the world, animate (human, animal, and vegetal) and inanimate. In the way these films demonstrate a commitment to capture and convey the richness of even the humblest aspect of the profilmic reality through the texture and sensual properties of the images and soundtrack, they bring to mind the films of Yasujiro Ozu and the writings of certain early film theorists: Béla Balázs on the physiognomy of film, Jean Epstein on photogénie. Yet George Bataille’s writing on eroticism and Julia Kristeva’s on abjection are not far away. There is continuity in the approach, in particular for women directors who, in the filmmaking, straddle both aspects of this cinema of corporeality: the dystopian evocations of being-in-the-world as loss of subjecthood and bodily integrity, and the exploration, through the operations of film, of “the subjective body and objective world [...] passionately intertwined,” as Sobchack puts it.¹²

LM: You just mentioned Bataille, but you also mentioned Kristeva on abjection. Does the cinema of transgression relate to theories of the abject? That is, in Kristeva’s concept as developed in *Powers of Horror* (later taken up by feminists such as Barbara Creed),¹³ the abject is a residue of the mother’s body and emerges out of the subject’s only partially successful differentiation of the self from the all-encompassing maternal. On the face of it, although the abject seems to be relevant to this cinema, the maternal seems to be irrelevant. Do you have any thoughts about this?

MB: You are right, Kristeva’s concept of the abject is relevant in particular where the blurring of borders between subjective and objective occurs (the ultimate occurrence being that of the body turned corpse), but I am not convinced the maternal as such is a prominent trope of this cinema. It is present, of course. Some of the characters I have mentioned – Lady Chatterley, Nénette – are pregnant. It creates an interesting situation in *NÉNETTE ET BONI*, for instance, where at the end, Boni, the brother, decides to take care of his sister’s child. In Breillat’s *ROMANCE X*, thanks to parallel editing (birth is compared with the explosion of the

flat where the father of the newborn baby stays) and the documentary close-up shot (of the baby being born), the ending clearly associates birth with a moment of pure abjection, as an example of the feminine's power to blast asunder the familiar systems of meaning.

However, as with other cinemas, where French cinema most readily addresses the maternal in connection with the abject is probably in films that clearly belong to the horror and gore genre (traditionally not a prolific area of French filmmaking): I am thinking of *À L'INTÉRIEUR* (Julien Maury, Alexandre Bustillo 2007), where Beatrice Dalle plays a psychopathic killer determined to steal a baby from its mother's womb.¹⁴ I will spare you the details...

LM: I am convinced: the maternal is not a key point of reference for the "cinema of transgression"! To go back to some important points you made earlier... You have evoked the aesthetic strategies employed by the women directors of the genre very effectively in terms of the affect theories of Laura Marks and Vivian Sobchack, emphasizing the way that diegetically depicted textures (cloth, color, etc.) then infuse the cinematic image itself, suggesting a tactility that carries sensory experiences from the screen to the spectator. Although it has been argued (by Marks) that haptic cinema isn't necessarily "feminist" or does not even have to do with the "feminine," does a gender perspective throw an interesting light on the concept of the haptic as a political as well as aesthetic theory? In developing a concept of cinema based on the senses and sensuality, a critique of a prioritization of the optic has been key. Is there a political dimension to this?

MB: The critique of the prioritization of the optic is, it seems to me, where haptic theory meets feminist film criticism. If we define optical modes of vision as vision that is objective and distanced and organized according to the rules of perspective, that is, detached from its object and bent on interpreting, investigating, and visually "consuming" the object of the gaze, then both haptic theory and feminist film theory partly stem from a critique of the ways in which optical vision is naturalized and instrumentalized in cinema.

Both stress that in terms of representation and in terms of the organization of vision, the dominance of the optic – and the superseding of other senses and other modes of visual perception – is a historical process (of which cinema is a part through the development of the set of conventions that characterizes mainstream filmmaking). Cultural historians, Robert Muchembled and Michel Foucault amongst others, have traced this evolution of Western modes of perception and representation as far back as the Middle Ages, while noting that the advent of the industrial and capitalist era has accelerated the process of the prioritization of the optic. In *The Skin of the Film*, Laura Marks remarks on the apparent "atrophy of sensuous knowledge in industrial and post-industrial societies."¹⁵ For most critics of contemporary Western epistemology, it is through the optic

that the gaze is, potentially, transformed into a gaze of ownership. To put it simplistically, the way the optic relies on isolating the object of the gaze from its surroundings and on maintaining a distance between a seemingly omniscient viewing subject and the object of his/her gaze resonates with the capitalist mode of instrumentalization of desire and of vision as consumption. Although, for the development of her theoretical framework, Marks relies on thinkers that are not directly concerned with the political implications of such critique, her own interest is in “intercultural cinema” – a cinema of exiles, developing as a form of resistance to colonial and postcolonial modes of representation. She stresses the ways in which ocular centrism and optical vision readily serve the needs of the colonialist and capitalist appropriation of modes of representation. Though she differs from classic feminist theory in her rejection of the psychoanalytical model in particular (because of the latter’s depiction of all forms of visibility as forms of alienation), the critique of the optic creates a point of encounter.

Starting with “Visual Pleasure,” feminist film theory has demonstrated how the objectifying power of the camera gaze was, in mainstream cinema, typically put in the service of a male point of view, taking the female figure as its object of investigation and consumption. One often overlooks the fact that the development of feminist film theory went hand in hand with experimental film practice, which haptic visibility had been a part of from the start. Seeking to destabilize the visual field and to bring the attention back to the materiality of film, avant-garde and experimental cinemas have always explored ways of rendering the film image more tactile, less immediately “readable.”

Prior to becoming interested in a certain French cinema as a cinema of the senses, I had associated the political potential of the shift from optic to haptic primarily with experimental cinema, though it was also found in art cinema. The film most directly concerned with gender politics in this way was Sally Potter’s *ORLANDO* (1992), the concluding sequence of which neatly summed up the film’s complex exploration of politics and/as the construction of the gaze. You remember those humorous sequences of Orlando who, having recently turned into a woman, finds herself strapped into corset and hoop skirt, and attempts to negotiate the encumbered space of her English castle under the unflinching eye of the distant camera and against a soundtrack of peacock cries – by the book “to-be-looked-at-ness”... In contrast, at the end of the film, divested of her title and attendant material possessions, Orlando sits in a field while her small daughter, armed with a video camera, runs about, laughing and filming at random. The result, a sequence of dynamic, motion-blurred images of tall grass, trees, and sky, forms a lively evocation of the little girl’s empathetic and joyful relationship with her surroundings.

Agnès Varda includes a similar sequence in *LES GLANEURS ET LA GLANEUSE* (*THE GLEANERS AND I*, 2000). As is well known, in this documentary she experiments with the possibilities of a mini DV which allows her to film unencum-

bered by heavy equipment. At the heart of her project is the possibility to glean images and in particular to include the kind of visual material that is normally not deemed adequate in well-structured, productive storytelling.¹⁶ At one point, at the end of a sequence, she forgets to switch off her camera. Dangling freely from her wrist, the camera goes on recording the ground on which Varda walks, creating a sequence of experimental-looking footage, a kinetic evocation of the body-machine assemblage which the director decides to include in her film, accompanied by a jazzy soundtrack.

To go back to the cinema of transgression, in spite of the different strategies adopted by the directors concerned, one finds in evidence a willingness to question the optic as a form of visual mastery and, by extension, of the way the female body is reified, instrumentalized, and regulated within the contemporary politics and economics of the body. If, as Marks and Sobchack remind us, an economy of the look based on the observer's detached gaze tends to establish a one-sided relation of visual consumption or ownership, then the films' insistence on touch and tactility testify to a willingness to evoke a relationship based on reciprocity and debunk the tendency towards vision-as-consumption of which the female figure remains a primary object.

LM: Perhaps I could interrupt here? This might be a moment in which I can reflect on my rather contradictory relation to theories of the optical... In principle, I understand that a critique of optical vision brings haptic visuality and feminist film theory together. And Laura Marks's concept of the haptic in the context of intercultural cinema makes a key political contribution to the aesthetics of experimental cinema diegetically especially through the dispersal of a distanced vision into a sense of screen surface. And the way she brings economic structures and widespread cultural contexts together to bring a particular "movement" to life is fascinating. There are necessarily points of coincidence: for instance, from the perspective of Hollywood spectatorship as "masculinized" (my old "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" essay), a number of these points ring true. But my argument was fundamentally generated by questions of sexuality and of power. And I would still hold on to this critique: that images of women circulate at the heart of the society of the spectacle as objects of consumption, not only in cinema but also in other media, performance etc. To my mind, this circulation, and the power relations it signifies, cannot be detached from the sexual, which gives the optical its particular "drive" or power and is found to an exaggerated degree in a certain kind of cinema. Needless to say, the power of the gaze is also literally brought to bear in colonial and class contexts but is, by and large, detached from the spectacular that characterizes the economic structures of commodity culture and should (as a number of theorists have) be analyzed from a different political/economic position.

However, at a certain point, I find I balk at a totalizing critique of the optical as such. Without going into excessive detail, I associate, for instance, optical distance with tricks of vision and *trompe l'oeil* effects (on which the illusion of cinema is itself based) which have their own self reflexive wit – and, risking going out on a limb here, I would include perspective painting in this category with its generally incomplete and uncertain techniques. (In fact, I have never quite understood why the “Italian Renaissance” with its fascinating tensions between religious iconography and fragmented observation of the natural world has been so denounced – going right back to the old days of *Screen!* To use the perhaps more convincing aesthetic categories of heterogeneity and dispersal...)

However, this “defense” of optical visibility may well be due to the intractability of my age and my generation, as the optical has always been closely connected with processes of deciphering and interpreting. I have tried to think this approach through in terms of curiosity, that is, a drive to look associated with women, which does involve distance and inquiry but not mastery. I have been interested to see that Laura Marks specifically takes issue with the Brechtian active spectator due to his/her exercise of “critical” distance. To sum up this rather rough intervention, my continued investment in optical visibility contains within it both the inquiring pleasure of curiosity and the investigative critical gaze I have always associated with feminism...

MB: You are absolutely right. It is important to reiterate that what we are dealing with is *visuality*: a historical, evolving process. We have been discussing ways in which the optic can be instrumentalized, not “essential” qualities of optic vision. It is equally important to remember that haptic and optic are not opposite but continuous: often, in film, haptic effects happen through the passage from one mode of vision to the other. Reading your writings on curiosity, gaze, and the feminine for instance,¹⁷ I was reminded of this small, wonderful moment in *VENDREDI SOIR* when the character of Jean first appears and is “chosen,” as it were, by the camera and by Laure. So far, the camera – and the film – have been seemingly undecided about which story, which character to follow through. The film’s main character, Laure (Valérie Lemerrier), is in her car, stuck in a traffic jam. Denis uses slow shutter speed to capture the fast-walking crowd, which produces the characteristic impression of a blurred field of moving colors. One of the shots cuts almost invisibly into a medium shot of Jean (Vincent Lindon) in perfect focus, his silhouette delineated against a shallow depth of field, standing motionless, his precisely outlined face appears above the flow of passers-by. The contrast between sharpness and blur creates a delightful visual shock and (although the character is seen for the first time) an uncanny sense of recognition...

LM: I would like to get back to the political questions raised by some of the films made by women in transgressive cinema. Although we agreed that the maternal

did not play a central role in these movies, there is a sense that an insistence on the body – on disgust at the wounded female body – is a recurring motif. I have been reminded of recent American women artists who have been working with and around these ideas – for instance Marina Abramović or, closer to my interest, Cindy Sherman’s work in the late 1990s that explores the abject or disgusting aspect of the female body as it might be understood, that is repressed, perhaps particularly in consumer society. To get back to the French cinema that we are discussing, could you place a film such as *DANS MA PEAU* within the pressures of a society in which young women’s “surface appearance” is fetishized? Is there a kind of return of the repressed?

MB: Yes, the notion of a return of the repressed is pertinent, especially in the context of a cinema that borrows from the codes of the horror genre. In my discussion of Denis’s *TROUBLE EVERY DAY*, I envisaged the film in the context of a resurfacing of the colonial past as well as an evocation of the murky underbelly of global capitalism.¹⁸

Carrie Tarr described De Van’s film as a study of “the commodification of the individual in the context of socio-economic and cultural processes which turn human beings into instruments in a market and sexual economy.”¹⁹ *DANS MA PEAU*’s main character is a successful, “well adjusted” young professional woman, an up-and-coming executive working in a modern high-rise of the Parisian business district of *La Défense*. She inhabits a typically materialistic and competitive world that reduces the body, and, with particular (implicit and explicit) violence, the female body, to its cultural, socio-economic functions. Just after receiving a significant promotion, she starts mutilating herself, becomes obsessed with open skin and flesh. From then on, the visceral aesthetics of the sequences of mutilation, with their messy depiction of lacerated skin and open wounds, represent an increasingly radical disruption of the central character’s professional and personal environment – an environment that had initially been safely described through classic *mise-en-scène* and camera work. We could also compare Kristin Ross’s description of the car and the modern home as the emblem of social achievement and individualism in *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*²⁰ to the disturbing cynicism with which Manu, the heroine of *BAISE MOI* (2000), compares the episode of her rape with parking a car in the projects and having it broken into. The sequence is shot in a derelict warehouse, in the film’s typically drab, low-definition video look.²¹ Similarly, in my discussion of Denis’s *TROUBLE EVERY DAY*, I made references to Kristin Ross and I envisaged the film in the context of a resurfacing of the colonial past as well as an evocation of the murky underbelly of global capitalism.²²

This question of “surface appearance” can be traced in films that are very different in tone, however. In *BIRD PEOPLE*, Ferran starts by describing a constellation of characters reduced to precise professional and social denominations, in-

terchangeable workers and travelers trapped in the typically dehumanised, “any-space-whatever” environment of an airport hotel. Ferran’s filmmaking, however, implicitly challenges the unquestioned acceptance of such a state of affairs. Her sensuous treatment of the profilmic and her blurring of the limits between inanimate and animate and human and animal worlds (one of the hotel maids transforms into a bird, leading to exhilarating sequences of flying) emphasize instead a sense of continuity and reversibility denied by productivity-centered strategies of efficiency, standardization, and consumption. As Sobchack summarizes it: “[It is] the camera eye’s unity of the look [that] gathers the material world in the attentive and passionate embrace of its gaze, making little distinction between human flesh and the flesh of inanimate things – at the same time neither reducing human beings to mere objects nor reducing things by ‘raising’ them as subjects but only ‘for us.’”²³

Gertrud Koch and Miriam Hansen once stated that at a time when, “in current film theory, the linguistic paradigm has displaced phenomenological approaches,” Béla Balázs’s theory of film, and in particular, his “physiognomy of objects,” reminded us of alternative ways of considering the medium of the moving image.²⁴ In his writing, he envisaged cinema as a democratic form of expression where “all positions are available and intelligible, all objects assume the dignity of aesthetic perception and sublimation.”²⁵

Koch and Hansen wrote about this in the late 1980s. Given that the films discussed here are recent releases, the premise should be upturned: it seems that at a time when, in current film practice as in film theory, phenomenological and haptic approaches are challenging the linguistic models anew, films like Ferran’s offer us again what cinema as an art form is so well suited for, yet rarely realizes: the possibility to feel and think, through the operations of film, a reciprocal relationship between subjective body and objective world.

Directors resort to haptic strategies of imaging to explore anew such a relationship, or on the contrary, to stress the brutality of its denial. I have paired De Van and Ferran’s films. I could also have discussed *ELLE EST DES NOTRES* (Siegfried Alnoy, 2002) together with Denis’s *NÉNETTE ET BONI* or *VENDREDI SOIR* in similar terms. In effect, it is interesting to contrast this French cinema to other traditions of art cinema too. One could look at Ferran’s “unifying gaze” in relation to Sofia Coppola’s dystopian description of American girlhood in *THE VIRGIN SUICIDES* (1999). Coppola deploys a comparable attention to detail and creates highly sensuous images, yet her female characters are trapped in an oppressive world of objects and male gazes that progressively hollows them out, reducing them to ghostly emanations, scattered, clichéd visions created by adolescent imaginations and the fetishization of a few trinkets abandoned on a dressing table.

In effect, an attempt at contextualizing these kinds of echoes between American and French cinema would bring us back to the issue of film, the feminine

body, and consumer culture with which we started. As I said before, Kristin Ross's study of post-war French society remains a key source for me. In *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, she investigates the cultural impact of late capitalism and the fast-pace modernization undergone by France in the 1950s.²⁶ The American model – its insistence on efficiency and cleanliness, its fast cars and powerful aspirators – was embraced, she argues, as a means to counterpoint the reality of an “unclean,” murky history, to efface the memory of the disastrous conflicts and genocides of the recent World War as well as the traces of the colonial wars. Women were cast as central vectors of this change in their role as managers of the domestic space; their bodies, clean, groomed, and cinched waisted a symbol and evidence of the change. One of the most discussed films of this period is Agnès Varda's *CLÉO DE 5 À 7* (1962), shot against the backdrop of France's “dirty” war – the Algerian War of Independence. Cléo is a beautiful, smartly dressed young actress. But inside her fine-looking body, a cancer is growing. Its presence forces her to see beyond the appearances of the spectacle of a careless Paris in the spring.

You could say that in a contemporary cinema of excess, the cancer is not hidden anymore. In fact, in their films, De Van, Denis, and Breillat create a dual aesthetics to suggest that the discourses of corporate efficiency and corporeal disintegration are intimately connected.²⁷ In Breillat's *ROMANCE X*, the cold sterility of the hospital, which matches that of the young couple's designer domestic interiors, serves as the backdrop to the reduction of the female body to an object of medical investigation. In Denis's *TROUBLE EVERY DAY*, we see lab workers secluded in the sterile environment of cutting-edge scientific laboratories, removing neat slices out of the smooth, soft shapes of preserved brains. But science is of no help to the main characters who, infected with a disease contracted as a result of the exploitation of natural resources in ex-colonial land, have turned into blood-thirsty monsters who devour their victims.

LM: In our conversations you have suggested that the cinema of transgression and its insistence on the bodily might be a response to the disembodied nature of the digital. Could you say something about this? And also, might there be a sense of a “return of the repressed,” a refusal to “clean away” the detritus of society similar to Kristin Ross's argument in *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*?

MB: Cinema, as a machinistic art form, challenged by new forms of recording and watching moving images, is necessarily concerned with the explosion of virtual culture, the emergence of a “posthuman” perspective, and the increasing overlap of the biological and the cybernetic, which, as Katherine Hayles puts it, “privileges informational pattern over material instantiation.”²⁸

To a certain extent, the promises of the digital era echo and extend those of the post-war modernization as described by Ross: in the context of consumer cul-

ture, the digital brings with it not only the possibility to endlessly record, retrieve, and archive, it also erases traces of deterioration and “cleans” the image up. By extension, the digital treatment of the image tends to ground representation in a regime of timelessness from which “imperfection,” aging, and death are increasingly evacuated. In this sense, the often-quoted sequence of *LES GLANEURS ET LA GLANEUSE* where Varda turns her newly acquired, hand-held digital camera towards herself and films her aging body in close-up offers itself as a compelling film manifesto.²⁹

There is continuity in this, between art cinema and experimental cinema. In the latter, the physicality and vulnerability of the old medium of celluloid film has been hailed as a precious quality rather than a flaw, an element of superiority over the digital: film’s ability to deteriorate or age is a means to testify to human finitude. Women have been prominent amongst experimental filmmakers seeking to problematize the shift from analogue to digital by focusing on the old medium’s physicality: there has been a flourish of practices emphasizing the materiality of the medium in connection with the materiality of the human body, its organs and fluids – using menstrual blood, as in the case of Louise Bourke’s *JOURS EN FLEURS* (2003), or tears and spit, like the British artist Vicki Smith, to alter the surface of the celluloid film for instance.³⁰

The arguments advocating the advent of the digital as progress, however, are well known: there is new freedom to be found in “digital identities.” If technologies render our old flesh-and-blood bodies superfluous (to paraphrase Baudrillard),³¹ if identities, including digital identities, can be constructed anew, then gender and gender issues effectively become obsolete. Moreover, from touch screens to virtual grabbing, there is an emphasis on new technologies as enhancing embodied perception rather than rendering it obsolete and, indeed, as potentially challenging the cinematic paradigm of dominant optic visuality with more tactile and interactive models.

Yet on the whole, on our screens, stereotypes are, if anything, reinforced: whilst the female body retains its “privileged” status as object of commodity fetishism, “retouching” has become the norm in digital imaging. On the other hand, the construction of virtual identities has provided mainstream cinema with a steady stream of scenarios where hyper-feminized yet disembodied female characters (I am thinking in particular of a recent string of films in which Scarlett Johansson stars) stand in for the anxiety generated by the prospect of a world where traditional distinctions (gender, object/subject, human/post-human) may be disappearing. At the same time, for all the talk about interface, digital “communication” often appears to encourage a non-reciprocal, user-centered mode of image consumption. However, it is interesting to observe that haptic aesthetics, with its insistence on the tactile and the corporeal (including its most abject, disfigured, filthy incarnations) and their inscription in and through the medium’s material presence, emerges as a key strategy deployed by filmmakers, and

in particular contemporary women directors, at the same time as the establishment of digital electronics as the main mode of communication brings with it the prospect of “escaping” the so-called “shortcomings” of our flesh and blood bodies.

The recourse to haptic techniques of filmmaking and the extreme corporeality of the genres of excess can also be read in this context. In its flaunting of the body in all its visceral presence – cut up, opened up, filthy, soiled, and contaminated – extreme cinema offers itself as the counterpoint to digital postproduction’s perfected female body, a reminder of the existence of actual sentient gendered bodies beyond the dematerialized workings of digital imaging and communication.

Disconnection Notices: Interview with Miranda July¹

*Anna Backman Rogers Speaks to the Writer – Director – Performer about
THE FUTURE*

Anyone who has read Miranda July's short fiction will know that the surreal, or what could fall under the category of magic realism, is familiar territory to her. In her films this does not come across as mere affectation (a charge that has justifiably been leveled at a number of "quirky, offbeat," and therefore generic, "indie" films) because the surrealism is set to work on defamiliarizing the quotidian or even banal (consider the ingenious way she uses screens, from that of a computer to a car window, as a technique for distancing rather than as a window onto the world). In making us see things anew, July not only testifies visually to the world's wonder but also to what is unspeakable and unbearable. The sight of a young girl burying herself in her backyard in her new film, *THE FUTURE* (2011), or a father setting fire to his own hand in front of his two children in *ME AND YOU AND EVERYONE WE KNOW* (2005) are but two distressingly poignant images that stay in the mind.²

In a society of spectacle in which we are concerned with superficiality and surfaces, and the differences between the real and the virtual become ever more blurred, July is a filmmaker who concerns herself with creating images that break through a dominant regime of cinematic clichés. Her films present us with uncanny worlds – environments simultaneously recognizable and unfamiliar. If the viewer is willing to suspend his or her disbelief, it does not seem so impossible that a cat could deliver a monologue on isolation, longing, and death; that a T-shirt could become a fetishized object that represents a life buried and denied; and that a man could stop time, literally or mentally, before his girlfriend breaks up with him. Furthermore, such strange and implausible occurrences are the most affecting and haunting elements of her films. The reason for this is that we can recognize the emotions, which occupy the realm of the unfathomable or unnameable, at the heart of her narratives. July may render the ordinary extraordinary, but the result is all the more human for it.

In *THE FUTURE*, the surreal and the philosophical dovetail to both exhilarating and heartbreaking effect. Sophie (Miranda July) and Jason (Hamish Linklater), an underachieving couple in their mid-thirties (she teaches dance to small

children, he provides technical support to web users), decide to adopt a stray and sickly cat named Paw-Paw, who also happens to be the film's narrator. Given a month until they can collect this loquacious feline from the adoption agency, Sophie and Jason set about the task of trying to make the most of their last month of freedom from responsibility by "reprioritizing": "I've been gearing up to do something really incredible for the last fifteen years," says Sophie. What follows is a series of self-imposed rituals, the first of which is to unplug their Internet connection, intended to aid Sophie and Jason to become the people they always intended to be.

July herself has referred to *THE FUTURE* as a horror movie, specifically with reference to the character of Sophie. With every readily available distraction placed out of reach, Sophie is confronted with a void. Having set herself the task of creating thirty dances in thirty days (which she plans to showcase on YouTube eventually), she becomes paralyzed because of her need to gain recognition from the outside world. More concerned with how she appears to others than with creating something, she cannot move beyond her need to perform for someone else. She flees the challenge of self-reliance by initiating a relationship with a man named Marshall (David Warshofsky), a single parent living a comfortable life in the suburbs. He demands nothing of Sophie and is quite happy to gratify her need for attention. Sophie, in turn, never has to try (and therefore possibly fail) at anything ever again in her new life. In other words, this is a story about how it is possible for someone to leap from one kind of hell into an altogether more terrifying version: loneliness.

In this context, July's work correlates with that of a number of American independent directors (for example Kelly Reichardt or Gus Van Sant) due to her focus on situations of extreme crisis and transition. In her debut feature, *ME AND YOU AND EVERYONE WE KNOW*, she creates a suburban world populated with lonely people trying to overcome a peculiarly modern form of disconnect. This alienation is apparent most excruciatingly in the scene in which July's character meets face to face with an art-gallery executive and tries to persuade her to accept a video cassette of a performance piece, only to be told that she should send it in the post otherwise it will get lost. Developing the theme further, in *THE FUTURE* July sends her main protagonists into existential meltdown simply by divesting them of their online existence. However, whereas the earlier film presented and celebrated a world in which tentative and fortuitous connections could be made and, by extension, suggested the possibility and importance of community, *THE FUTURE* offers a markedly darker cinematic vision in which characters are in flight from themselves and from each other.

The interview was conducted by phone on October 7, 2011.

— Anna Backman Rogers

ABR: *THE FUTURE* seems far more disquieting in tone than *ME AND YOU AND EVERYONE WE KNOW*, though the new film has clear links with your stories. How do you relate *THE FUTURE* to your previous work?

MJ: In some ways I think that this new movie is more like *all* the rest of my work, and perhaps the first movie was a little bit anomalous in that respect. I love that movie but, as you point out, it is more hopeful than any single story in the book. Oddly, I was writing most of those stories at the same time as my first movie and then I wrote a few of the longer ones afterwards. I think of those longer stories as being more in the world of the second movie. So, as you've probably noticed, there are things in those short stories that are not totally real, for instance the character who has a relationship with a dark shape [in the story "Making Love in 2003"³], and I'm really comfortable in that territory.

After the first movie I knew that I wanted to make another one, but I didn't want to head right into it because I felt more self-conscious or aware than I wanted to be of what I was doing; so I went into performance which is a very old and familiar territory to me and, in a way, very free because it doesn't, for me, have a commercial or even critical anxiety attached to it. So I made a performance that had a talking cat, a dancing shirt, and the idea of stopping time in it. I was also drawing from the fact that I had just been through a breakup and was trying to start a new relationship. When the performance debuted in New York in 2007, I suddenly felt ready to make another movie and it seemed like a great challenge to make this story exist in a less avant-garde way and in a more "real-world" or narrative context. So that's how this came about, but I knew already when I was editing the first movie that the next one was not going to be able to be considered a comedy. I just had too much of my own darkness and I knew that to be really honest I had to make something that might even have a less broad appeal somehow. Things don't always end with a laugh.

I've found myself thinking a lot about death and about time in both a mundane and a dramatic way and I didn't want to dodge that. I remember writing the cat's final monologue after death and thinking that it was really hard because of course I don't know and nobody knows what happens then ... and yet I thought everyone is going to know if this is somehow untrue. It was the last thing I did, recording that and rewriting it and I really had to stretch beyond what I knew and be guided by some other sense.

ABR: All of your work draws upon the surreal, but it is especially notable in *THE FUTURE*. Why did you decide to relate some of the most difficult or even un-speakable emotions in the film through the mode of surrealism?

MJ: I think it's more that it wouldn't have occurred to me for this movie to use those surreal elements to show how wondrous and whimsical life is. I felt like I

was using them to explore feelings that are so unbearable that they are almost beyond words. I wanted to find some way to be truer in a sense; it wasn't enough to show, for example, Sophie looking guilty. I had to make it worse than that because she is literally fleeing part of her "self" at one point in the movie. So I tried to use it only where it seemed necessary to use it. I remember Hamish Linklater saying to me about that moment in which he stops time in the film that the act of doing it wasn't hard to believe in at all because nothing less than that would have been enough to show the feeling of heartbreak in that moment or that need to have control over it ... well, that was somehow reassuring to me.

ABR: It doesn't really matter if he has, or has not, stopped time there in the narrative because his world has ended anyway. He's stuck there in that moment of heartbreak.

MJ: Sometimes people ask me, "So do you want people to think that he really did that?" But it's just a metaphor. What I am trying to say there is that all that matters is how he feels and that's how he feels in that moment. There's no need to be concerned with anything other than that feeling really. Part of the great appeal of time to me as a subject for the film is that it's something very colloquial and familiar and there's nobody who does not think about it. Yet the moment you think about it you're in very surreal, philosophical territory. Even the least curious person would think about this and stumble over those kind of questions. There's some theory, I can't remember who came up with it, that all moments are actually happening at once. Well I have never really gotten my head around that, but it always makes me stop and think.

ABR: Both of your films engage with technology and the impact it has on our lives. The Internet, for instance, facilitates constant connectivity, but this leads in reality to a sense of disconnection; it also plays a vital role in mediating or documenting our existence to be seen or consumed by other people. This is explored very interestingly in *THE FUTURE*, for instance in the "thirty days, thirty dances" routine that Sophie actually fails to perform. What is your view of these themes in your work and do you have a particular stance on technology?

MJ: Yes, this is complex because obviously I have a desire to be seen; I wouldn't do a lot of the things I do otherwise. But it is sort of bizarre to watch that desire, that shameful desire that I have in me too and which I work hard to balance out with other more interesting desires in my work, become culturally pervasive and unabashed. It goes without saying that for someone in their twenties, I don't think the desire constantly to be getting feedback and attention is something to feel corrupt about because the world was already designed like that when that person came into it ... the world of the Internet was already there. But if you're a

little older than that, but not so old that you lived a lot of years without it like my parents have, then you're kind of caught in between because it's sort of alluring and there's a lot of great things about it as well, like the promise of it. For instance, "thirty days, thirty dances" could have been a great idea! But of course you know that this can't be your motor; the desire to be watched can't actually be the thing that is driving you, so there has to be something else that you're giving. So I guess for Sophie I wanted to isolate that: what if the desire to be seen is all that you're operating with. And, of course, if that was actually myself, I would become paralyzed in a way because that is not open-ended enough. That is inherently paralyzing to someone like me.

With regard to the Internet, it seemed really useful to me that you can send someone or a couple into a profound crisis simply by unplugging their Internet connection. Getting a character to the point of existential crisis is hard, it usually takes a while to do that in a movie, but here was something that we could all relate to. It has to do with time, and it has to do with the fact that we are constantly filling in all the gaps and cracks in the day when we don't know what to do next. So if you take that away, clearly what you are left with is all the gaps, the cracks, and all of the doubts. Of course, I believe that this is where art comes from. This whole process is really worthwhile because that's where all the new ideas come from. But that doesn't mean that it's easy, you know. It doesn't mean that I am not as addicted as the next person. It's just that I think it's such a worthwhile struggle to consider every day what the Internet is doing to, you know, what you planned to do with your day, and so of course what you planned to do with your whole life.

ABR: The theme of self-burial features in your short story "How to Tell Stories to Children" and in your performance piece *The Swan Tool*.⁴ In *THE FUTURE*, the young girl buries herself in her father's backyard. What is the significance of this powerful and disturbing theme?

MJ: In *THE FUTURE* it started out as this ritual, this very intense kind of ritual that a young girl might do. The idea being that it would somehow be transformative because it was harrowing. Also in the scheme of the movie, I needed there to be a moment where Sophie realizes that there is a real little girl involved in the relationship she has with Marshall and she does need to be watched, actually watched [as opposed to how Sophie needs to be watched]. I'll admit though that the image was a lot more intense than I realized it was going to be once we had shot it. The young actress was very game and was totally into it and then there was this moment when she panicked, as any of us would, when she was being pulled out of the ground. It was really difficult.

But there's no way around that if you're actually going to do it. Perhaps it does beg more explanation. Even as we were shooting it I was thinking that it looked

really creepy. But to me this idea of self-burial has a real resonance in my work, but it is an image that is sort of unresolved as well.

Notes

Preface

1. See “Tony Abbott Says Campaigners against Gendered Toys Should ‘Let Boys Be Boys and Girls Be Girls,’” *The Independent*, December 2, 2014, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/australasia/tony-abbott-says-campaigners-against-gendered-toys-should-let-boys-be-boys-and-girls-be-girls-9897135.html>.
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3. Rebecca Solnit, *Men Explain Things to Me* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014).
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4. Apter, “‘Women’s Time’ in Theory,” 14.
5. *Ibid.*, 15.
6. *Ibid.*
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8. Sally Alexander, “Women, Class and Sexual Difference in the 1830s and 40s: Some Reflections on Writing a Feminist History,” in *Becoming a Woman and Other Essays in 19th and 20th Century Feminist History* (London: Virago 1994), 104.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 37.
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12. Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity: Seeing with the Mind’s Eye* (London: BFI, 1996).

13. Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema, Volume 4* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 96.
14. *Ibid.*, 9.
15. *Ibid.*, 172.
16. *Ibid.*, 172-173.
17. Monica Dall'Asta and Jane Gaines, "Constellations: When Past and Present Collide in Feminist Film History" (paper presented at the *Doing Women's Film History Conference*, University of Sunderland, UK, April 13-15, 2011).
18. See Jacqueline Rose, *Women in Dark Times* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

Disconnected Heroines, Icy Intelligence: Reframing Feminism(s) and Feminist Identities at the Borders Involving the Isolated Female TV Detective in Scandinavian-Noir

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13. Others include Swedish Filmlance International AB; Film i Väst (Film in West), a Swedish film company located in Trollhättanm; Nimbus Film Productions, Denmark's third largest production company; and Nordisk Film- & TV-Fond, which aims to promote film and TV productions in the five Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden), but with distribution networks which extend as far afield as Brazil, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand.
14. Commissioned and financed by Region Skåne and the Swedish Film Institute, Film i Skåne has been in existence since 1995. Since October 2009, Film i Skåne AB is part of Business Region Skåne.
15. Itself a new geographical territory made possible by the construction of the Øresund (Danish)/ Öresund (Swedish) Bridge, this region features heavily in *THE BRIDGE* and is used extensively as motivating complex questions of security, jurisdiction, and governance shaping lives routinely travelling across national borders. Such migratory movements are replicated in the transnational-oriented conditions of production and distribution, based on new global networks of ideas, capital transfer, and forms of co-operation, which, in turn, are stimulating new creative opportunities and new ways of conceptualizing and thinking about how we produce local culture and give representation to the world around us beyond national borders.
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Lena Dunham's *GIRLS*: Can-Do Girls, Feminist Killjoys, and Women Who Make Bad Choices

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Destroy Visual Pleasure: Cinema, Attention, and the Digital Female Body (Or, Angelina Jolie Is a Cyborg)

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The Intertextual Stardom of Iris: Winslet, Dench, Murdoch, and Alzheimer's Disease

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Imagining Safe Space in Feminist Pornography

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25. Kara Keeling, *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, The Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 2.
26. *Ibid.*, 19.
27. *Ibid.*, 7.
28. Sara Ahmed, *Feminist Killjoys*, accessed September 5, 2014, <http://feministkilljoys.com/>.
29. Trinh, "What's Eons New?," 137.
30. Chris Straayer, *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies: Sexual Re-Orientations in Film and Video* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).
31. Tristan Taormino et al, eds. *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure* (New York: Feminist Press, 2013).
32. Published in Taormino et al, *The Feminist Porn Book*, 140-154.
33. Bobby Noble, "Knowing Dick: Penetration and the Pleasures of Feminist Porn's Trans Men," in *The Feminist Porn Book*, 304.
34. Hammer, "Aging Is Interesting," in *Hammer!*, 233.
35. Hammer, *Hammer!*; Rainer, *Feelings are Facts*; Michelle Citron, *Home Movies and Other Necessary Fictions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Abigail Child, *This Is Called Moving: A Critical Poetics of Film* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005); Despentes, *King Kong Theory*.
36. Theresa L. Geller, "'Each Film Was Built as a Chamber and Became a Corridor': Maya Deren's Film Aesthetics as Feminist Praxis," in *There She Goes: Feminist Film-*

- making and Beyond, eds. Corinn Columpar and Sophie Mayer (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009), 79-92.
37. Abigail Child, "Sex Talk (with Camille Roy)," *This is Called Moving*, 35.
 38. Judith "Jack" Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).
 39. Helen Hok-Sze Leung, "Queerscapes in Contemporary Hong Kong Cinema," *Positions* 9, no. 2 (2001): 426.
 40. Keeling, *The Witch's Flight*, 2.
 41. Sophie Mayer, "The Art of (Feminist Film) Work in the Age of Digital Reproduction," *cleo journal* 2, no. 2 (Summer 2014), accessed September 5, 2014, <http://cleo-journal.com/2014/08/21/the-art-of-feminist-film-work-in-the-age-of-digital-reproduction-2/>.
 42. Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen*, 188.

The Promise of Touch: Turns to Affect in Feminist Film Theory

1. Barbara Klinger, "The Art Film, Affect and the Female Viewer: *The Piano* Revisited," *Screen* 47, no. 1 (2006): 19-20.
2. Sue Gillett, "Lips and Fingers: Jane Campion's *The Piano*," *Screen* 36, no. 3 (1995): 286.
3. Dana Polan, *Jane Campion* (London: BFI, 2001), 4-7. On the reception of *THE PIANO*, see Stephen Crofts, "Foreign Tunes? Gender and Nationality in Four Countries' Reception of *The Piano*," in *Jane Campion's The Piano*, ed. Harriet Margolis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 143, 153.
4. For a discussion of the politics of affect and the narrative of turn in feminist and queer theory, see Anu Koivunen, "An Affective Turn? Reimagining the Subject of Feminist Theory," in *Working with Affect in Feminist Readings: Disturbing Differences*, eds. Marianne Liljeström and Susanna Paasonen (London: Routledge, 2010), 8-28; Anu Koivunen, "Yes We Can? The Promises of Affect for Queer Scholarship," *Lambda Nordica* 3-4 (2010): 40-64.
5. In *Screen*, *THE PIANO* debate was initiated by Stella Bruzzi, "Tempestuous Petticoats: Costume and Desire in *The Piano*," *Screen* 36, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 257-266; Lynda Dyson, "The Return of the Repressed? Whiteness, Femininity and Colonialism in *The Piano*," *Screen* 36, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 267-276; and Gillett, "Lips and Fingers," 277-287; and continued by Suzy Gordon, "I Clipped Your Wing, That's All': Auto-Eroticism and the Female Spectator in *The Piano* Debate," *Screen* 37, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 193-205; and Annie Goldson, "Piano Recital," *Screen* 38, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 275-281. For a collection of essays on *The Piano*, see Harriet Margolis, ed., *Jane Campion's The Piano* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
6. For an example of developmental narratives, see Marie-Luise Angerer, *Vom Begehren nach dem Affekt* (Zürich: Diaphanes, 2007).
7. With the term "emotion trouble" I am suggesting an epistemological turmoil not comparable to, but rather analogous with, the effects of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).

8. At this point, emotion and affect were used as interchangeable, as the Deleuzian use of affect had not yet been established.
9. See Christine Gledhill, ed., *Home Is Where the Heart Is. Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: BFI, 1987); Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Marcia Landy, ed., *Imitations of Life. A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991); and Jackie Bratton, Jim Cook, and Christine Gledhill, eds., *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen* (London: BFI, 1994).
10. Jane Shattuc, "Having a Good Cry over *The Color Purple*," in *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*, eds. Jackie Bratton, Jim Cook, and Christine Gledhill (London: BFI, 1994), 147.
11. Annette Kuhn, "Mandy and Possibility," *Screen* 33, no. 3 (Fall 1992): 235-236.
12. Kuhn, "Mandy," 237.
13. *Ibid.*
14. E. Ann Kaplan, "Response: The Spectatrix," *Camera Obscura* 20-21 (1989): 197.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Kaplan, "Response," 197; D.N. Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism. Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
17. Kaplan, "Response," 197-198.
18. Patricia Mellencamp, *A Fine Romance. Five Ages of Film Feminism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 256.
19. Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures. Feminism and Cinema* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), 21.
20. Mellencamp, *A Fine Romance*, 256.
21. Linda Williams, "Introduction," in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. Linda Williams (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 18.
22. Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre and Excess," *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 3-4.
23. *Ibid.*, 6.
24. *Ibid.*, 12.
25. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1989), 26.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator," *Screen* 23, no. 3-4 (1982): 76.
28. *Ibid.*, 78.
29. *Ibid.*, 81-82.
30. Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Dudley Andrew, "The Neglected Tradition of Phenomenology in Film Theory," *Wide Angle* 2 (1978): 44-49.
31. Gaylyn Studlar, "Reconciling Feminism and Phenomenology: Notes on Problems and Possibilities, Texts and Contexts," *Quarterly Review of Film & Video* 12, no. 3 (1990): 69-71.
32. *Ibid.*, 76-77.

33. Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, xvii. Unless specified, the quotes in the next two paragraphs are taken from Sobchack's *The Address of the Eye*, 267-268.
34. *Ibid.*, 267-268.
35. *Ibid.*, 300.
36. *Ibid.*, 3-4.
37. Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts. Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 65.
38. *Ibid.*, 61-62.
39. *Ibid.*, 60.
40. *Ibid.*, 63.
41. *Ibid.*, 65, 67.
42. *Ibid.*, 2, 63, 65. For a critical discussion of this idea in the context of lesbian, feminist, and queer porn culture, see Ingrid Ryberg, *Imagining Safe Space. The Politics of Queer, Feminist and Lesbian Pornography* (Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, 2012).
43. Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye. Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 2. Unless specified, all quotes in the paragraphs up to the next heading are taken from Barker, *The Tactile Eye*, 2.
44. *Ibid.*, 3.
45. *Ibid.*, 2.
46. *Ibid.*, 148.
47. Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film. Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 2. Unless specified, all quotes in the next three paragraphs are taken from Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 184-185.
48. *Ibid.*, 185.
49. *Ibid.*, 152. The subsequent quote is also taken from the same page.
50. *Ibid.*, 149. Subsequent quotes are taken from pages 149-150.
51. *Ibid.*, 150. For a different reading of Deleuze as a theorist of spectatorship, see Richard Rushton, "Deleuzian Spectatorship," *Screen* 50, no. 1 (2009): 45-53.
52. Barbara M. Kennedy, *Deleuze and Cinema. The Aesthetics of Sensation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 18, 21.
53. *Ibid.*, 21. The subsequent quotes are taken from Kennedy, *Deleuze and Cinema*, 5.
54. *Ibid.*, 5.
55. *Ibid.*, 108.
56. Elena del Rio, *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance: Powers of Affection* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 115.
57. *Ibid.*, 1-2.
58. *Ibid.*, 4. The subsequent quote is also taken from page 4.
59. *Ibid.*, 5-6.
60. *Ibid.*, 13.
61. *Ibid.*, 15. The subsequent quotes in this paragraph are taken from pages 5-6.
62. For an argument about the distinct meanings of affect and emotion as "follow[ing] different logics and pertain[ing] to different orders," see Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 26-28. According to Massumi, affect is "irreducibly bodily and autonomic," a feeling

- of “intensity” that is disconnected from “meaningful sequencing, from narration,” whereas emotion is defined as “subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of a quality of experience which is from that point onward defined as personal” (26-28).
63. Del Rio, *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance*, 115.
 64. Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).
 65. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 146-147. For a discussion of Sedgwick’s models as politics of affect, see Koivunen, “Yes We Can?”
 66. Teresa de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 298; Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, and Cinema* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1984), 183.
 67. De Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*, 299; De Lauretis, *Alice Doesn’t*, 183-184.
 68. *Ibid.*, 300; *Ibid.*, 173-174.
 69. Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (London: Routledge, 1996), 3-4.
 70. This and the previous quote are taken from Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, 4.
 71. Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 152.
 72. Shattuc, “Having a Good Cry”; Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings. Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 2.
 73. For a rare example of an attempt to combine critique of representations with affect theory, see Katariina Kyrölä, *The Weight of Images: Affect, Body Image and Fat in the Media* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014).
 74. Kuhn, “Mandy,” 237.

Sound and Feminist Modernity in Black Women’s Film Narratives

1. Michele Wallace, “Race, Gender, and Psychoanalysis in Forties Film: *Lost Boundaries*, *Home of the Brave*, and *The Quiet One*,” in *Black American Cinema*, ed. Manthia Diawara (New York: Routledge, 1993), 257-272; bell hooks, *Reel to Real: Race, Class, and Sex at the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Geetha Ramanathan, “Introduction,” in *Feminist Auteurs: Reading Women’s Films* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), 1-9 among others.
2. Ann du Cille, “The Occult of True Black Womanhood: Critical Demeanor and Black Feminist Studies,” *Signs* (Spring 1994): 591-628.
3. This can also be understood as the need for *Darstellung*: Portrayal as distinct from *Selbst-Vertreten*: Legal and civic representation. My own understanding of Spivak’s reading of Marx. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 278-279.
4. Gerald Mast and Bruce F. Kawin, *A Short History of the Movies*, 11th ed. (Boston: Longman, 2011), 219-233.

5. Hountondji quoted in Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Introduction to Writing Race and the Difference It Makes," in *Race, Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 1-21.
6. Ryan Jay Friedman, *Hollywood's African American Films: The Transition to Sound* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 2.
7. *Ibid.*, 1-28.
8. Michele Wallace, "Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Problem of the Visual in Euro-American Culture," in *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective*, eds. Hilde Hein and Carolyn Korsmeyer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 205-218.
9. Ntongela Masilela's "The Los Angeles School of Filmmakers," and Toni Cade Bambara's "Reading the Signs: Empowering the Eye: Daughters of the Dust and the Black Independent Cinema Movement," in *Black American Cinema*, ed. Manthia Diawara (New York: Routledge, 1993), 107-145; and Julia Earhart, "Picturing What If: Julie Dash's Speculative Fiction," *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture and Media Studies* 1, no. 38 (1996): 118.
10. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6-18. And reprinted in her *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 21.
11. Amy Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus: Women's Voices in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 5. On the importance of sound to female subjectivity, see also her "Women's Voices in Third World Cinema," in *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism*, eds. Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar, and Janice R. Welsch (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 406-421; and Geetha Ramanathan, "Murder as Speech: Narrative Subjectivity in Marleen Gorris's *A Question of Silence*," *Genders* 15 (Winter 1992): 58-71.
12. Mary Ann Doane, "The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 5th ed., eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 374-375.
13. Friedman, *Hollywood's African American Films*, 88-127.
14. Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).
15. Friedman, *Hollywood's African American Films*, 23.
16. Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 19.
17. *Ibid.*, 20.
18. Ruth Doughty, "African American Film Sound: Scoring Blackness," in *Sound and Music in Film and Visual Media: A Critical Overview* (London: Continuum, 2009), 325-339.
19. Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*, 3rd ed. (New York: Continuum, 1996), 125-132, 166-174.
20. Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus*, 4.
21. Friedman, *Hollywood's African American Films*, 90.
22. *Ibid.*, 102.
23. *Ibid.*, 126.
24. Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks*.

25. "Within Whose Gates: The Symbolic and Political Complexity of Racial Discourses," in *Oscar Micheaux and His Circle: African American Filmmaking and Race Cinema of the Silent Era*, eds. Pearl Bowser, Jane Gaines, Charles Musser (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 131.
26. Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*.
27. Jacqueline Bobo, *Black Women as Cultural Readers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 54.
28. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Boston: MIT Press, 1998); Linda Williams, ed. *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994).
29. See Earhart, "Picturing What If," and Karen Alexander, "Daughters of the Dust," *Sight and Sound* 3, no. 9, (1993): 22. Manthia Diawara and Gwendolyn Audrey Foster in the field of African/African American film criticism also contribute to the visual aspects: Manthia Diawara, "Black American Cinema: The New Realism," in *Black American Cinema*, 13-23, and Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Women Filmmakers of the African and Asian Diaspora: Decolonising the Gaze, Locating Subjectivity* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois university Press, 1997), 43-73. My point here is that few discussed sound.
30. Bobo, *Black Women as Cultural Readers*, 133-167.
31. Toni Cade Bambara, "Preface" to *Daughters of the Dust: The Making of an African American Film*, written by Julie Dash, with Toni Cade Bambara and bell hooks (New York: The New Press, 1992), xi-xvi, and bell hooks in "Dialogue between bell hooks and Julie Dash," *Ibid.*, 27-69.
32. My informal poll of the more than two hundred African American male and female students, from the 1980s to now, reveals that their families own a copy of the film *IMITATION OF LIFE*.
33. Bobo, *Black Women as Cultural Readers*, 52.
34. Christian Metz, "Aural Objects," in *Film Theory and Criticism*, 356-360.
35. Anthonia Kalu, "African Literature and the Traditional Arts: Speaking Art, Molding Theory," *Research in African Literatures* 31, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 48.
36. Geetha Ramanathan, *Locating Gender in Modernism: The Outsider Female* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 52-65.
37. Omah Diegu, "Omah Diegu: Artist, and Filmmaker of the Iconic L.A. Rebellion Movement," *African Women in Cinema Blog*, July 31, 2014, <http://africanwomenincinemablogspot.nl/search/label/Omah%20Diegu>.

The "New" Experimentalism? Women In/And/On Film

1. For examples, see Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Mieke Bal, *Thinking in Film: The Politics of Video Art Installation According to Eiji-Liisa Ahtila* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013); Laura U. Marks, "Thinking Multisensory Culture," *Paragraph* 31, no. 2 (July 2008): 123-137; Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Griselda Pollock, *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum: Time, Space and the Archive* (London: Routledge, 2008).

- ledge, 2007); and Emma Wilson, *Love, Mortality and the Moving Image* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
2. See Catherine Elwes, *Video Art: A Guided Tour* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005); Robin Blaetz, ed. *Women's Experimental Cinema: Critical Frameworks* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); and Lucy Reynolds, "Magic tricks? The Use of Shadowplay in British Expanded Cinema," in *Expanded Cinema: Art, Performance, Film*, eds. A.L. Rees et al. (London: Tate Publishing, 2011), 148-156.
 3. I am very grateful to Ros Murray for her research and scholarship on these organizations: without conversations with her, and her direction of the recent conference *Debout! Women's Activism and the Moving Image in France and Beyond* (Queen Mary, University of London, May 31, 2014), I would not have learned so much about their contributions to feminist filmmaking in the UK and France.
 4. See, for example, Susan James, Genevieve Lloyd, and Moira Gatens, "The Power of Spinoza: Feminist Conjunctions," *Hypatia* 15, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 40-58; Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Marks, "Thinking Multisensory Culture."
 5. Laura U. Marks makes explicit her critique of this elision of "women and film," and "women's filmmaking" in "What Is That and between Arab Women and Video? The Case of Beirut," *Camera Obscura* 54, 18, no. 3 (2003): 40-42.
 6. See, for example, Lindsey Moore, who states, "In Iran, as in more conventionally 'postcolonial' sites of knowledge production, the relationship between vision and embodied, gendered objects is both culturally specific and informed by cross-cultural encounter." Lindsey Moore, "Women in a Widening Frame: (Cross-) Cultural Projection, Spectatorship, and Iranian Cinema," *Camera Obscura* 59, 20, no. 2 (2005): 1.
 7. I will discuss this notion of "good Orientalism" later with regard to Marks's "What Is That and...." The work of Hamid Naficy in his contextualization of Neshat both within Iranian filmmaking and global, nomadic cinema is a key influence in my thinking here. See Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema, Volume 4: The Globalizing Era* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 469-480.
 8. Arthur Danto, "Shirin Neshat and the Concept of Absolute Spirit," in *Shirin Neshat* (New York: Rizzoli, 2010), 13. See also Talinn Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art: From the Street to the Studio* (London: Reaktion, 2014).
 9. Rosa Holman, "Holding a Mirror to Iran: Liminality and Ambivalence in Shirin Neshat's *Women Without Men*," *Screening the Past* (December 2013).
 10. Ranjana Khanna, "Touching, Unbelonging, and the Absence of Affect," *Feminist Theory* 13, no. 2 (2012): 223.
 11. Marks, "What Is That and....," 54.
 12. *Ibid.*
 13. Shadi Sheybani and Shirin Neshat, "Women of Allah: A Conversation with Shirin Neshat," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 38, no. 2 (Spring 1999).
 14. See for example, Eleanor Heartney, "Shirin Neshat: Living between Cultures," in *After the Revolution: Women Who Transformed Contemporary Art*, ed. Eleanor Heartney (Munich: Prestel, 2007), 230-251; see also Wu Chin Tao, "Worlds Apart: Problems of Interpreting Globalised Art," *Third Text* 21, no. 6 (2007): 719-731.

15. Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
16. For example, see Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005); Jacques Rancière, *Film Fables* (Oxford: Berg, 2006); and Georges Didi-Huberman, "L'image est le mouvant," *Intermédialités* no. 3 (2004): 11-30.
17. Marie-José Mondzain, "Can Images Kill?" *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 1 (Fall 2009): 20-51.
18. Marie-José Mondzain, *Homo Spectator. De la fabrication à la manipulation des images* (Paris: Éditions Bayard, 2007).
19. Marie-José Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).
20. Marie-José Mondzain, *Image(s) à suivre. De la poursuite au cinéma et ailleurs* (Paris: Éditions Bayard, 2011).
21. Mondzain, "Can Images Kill?," 25.
22. Marie-José Mondzain, "Looking at Tazieh: l'épopée et l'intimité," *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 626 (September 2007): 19 [my translation].
23. For a further discussion of gendering and audiences, see Maeve Connolly, *The Place of Artist's Cinema* (Bristol: Intellect and University of Chicago Press, 2009), 97-100.
24. Richard Porton, "Documentary Cinema and Reality Hunger," *Cineaste* (Summer 2011): 11.
25. Lucy Reynolds, "Behind the Mask," *Sight and Sound* 20, no. 11 (2010): 26.
26. Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press), 111.
27. An example of this in the UK was the social media outburst surrounding journalist Susanne Moore's unwitting transphobic comments made in the context of an article about social norms and female body appearance in January 2013. For a short account of this in the context of fourth wave feminism, see Ealasaid Munro, "Feminism: A Fourth Wave?" *Political Insight* 4, no. 2 (September 2013): 22-25; for discussions of intersectional feminism in other social media contexts from the US, see Susana Loza, "Hashtag Feminism, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen, and the other #FemFuture," *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, no. 5 (2014), doi:10.7264/N33770V.
28. Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy*.
29. Mondzain, *Homo Spectator*.
30. Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy*, and her "What Does Seeing An Image Mean?" *Journal of Visual Cultures* 9, no. 3 (2010): 307-315.
31. Mondzain, "What Does Seeing an Image Mean?," 308.
32. Here I refer particularly to Michèle LeDoeuff's book, *The Philosophical Imaginary* (London: Athlone, 1989).
33. See Catherine Constable, *Thinking in Images* (London: BFI, 2005), and Rosalind Galt, *Pretty: Film and the Decorative Image* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).
34. Mondzain, "What Does Seeing an Image Mean?," 309.
35. Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," 111.

Conditions of Activism: Feminist Film Activism and the Legacy of the Second Wave

1. Sue Thornham, "Introduction," in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sue Thornham (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1999), 9.
2. *Ibid.*, 1.
3. Claire Johnston, "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema," in *Notes on Women's Cinema*, ed. Claire Johnston (London: Society for Education in Film and Television, 1973), 2.
4. *Feminist Frequency: Conversations with Pop Culture*, www.feministfrequency.com/.
5. "About," in *Feminist Frequency: Conversations with Pop Culture*, www.feministfrequency.com/about/.
6. Anita Sarkeesian, "Tropes vs. Women in Video Games," Kickstarter Campaign, June 16, 2012, accessed October 29, 2014, www.kickstarter.com/projects/566429325/tropes-vs-women-in-video-games.
7. Pierre Levy, *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*, trans. Robert Bononno (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 1997), 13.
8. Anita Sarkeesian, "OMG! 1000 Backers! (and about That Harassment Stuff)," Kickstarter, June 8, 2012, accessed October 28, 2014, www.kickstarter.com/projects/566429325/tropes-vs-women-in-video-games/posts/242547.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Soraya Nadia McDonald, "'Gamergate': Feminist Video Game Critic Anita Sarkeesian Cancels Utah Lecture after Threat," *Washington Post*, October 15, 2014, accessed October 28, 2014, www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/10/15/gamergate-feminist-video-game-critic-anita-sarkeesian-cancels-utah-lecture-after-threat-citing-police-inability-to-prevent-concealed-weapons-at-event/.
11. Cf. Katie Walsh, "Review: 'Miss Representation' Exposes An Ugly Truth That Needs To Be Seen," *Indiewire*, October 18, 2011, accessed June 24, 2014, http://blogs.indiewire.com/theplaylist/review_miss_representation_exposes_an_ugly_truth_that_needs_to_be_seen; Moira MacDonald, "Miss Representation: Required Viewing for Teens," *Seattle Times*, January 20, 2012, accessed June 24, 2014, http://seattletimes.com/html/movies/2017279876_mr2omiss.html?syndication=rss.
12. The Representation Project, <http://therepresentationproject.org/>.
13. MissRepresentation (@RepresentPledge), "How Twitter Defeated 'Keep Calm and Rape' T-Shirts," Storify, accessed June 24, 2014, <https://storify.com/RepresentPledge/how-twitter-defeated-keep-calm-and-rape-t-shirts>.
14. Roopali Mukherjee, "Diamonds (Are from Sierra Leone): Bling and the Promise of Consumer Citizenship," in *Commodity Activism: Cultural Resistance in Neoliberal Times*, eds. Roopali Mukherjee and Sarah Banet-Weiser (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 126.
15. For more on this complex negotiation, see Jon Dovey, "Documentary Ecosystems: Collaboration and Exploitation," in *New Documentary Ecologies: Emerging Platforms, Practices and Discourses*, eds. Kate Nash, Craig Hight, and Catherine Summerhayes (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 11-32.

16. Meg McLagan, "Spectacles of Difference: Cultural Activism and the Mass Mediation of Tibet," in *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, eds. Faye D. Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 90-111; Thomas Keenan, "Publicity and Indifference: Media, Surveillance, 'Humanitarian Intervention,'" accessed October 11, 2014, <http://roundtable.kein.org/files/roundtable/keenan.publicity.pdf>; Leshu Torchin, *Creating the Witness: Documenting Genocide on Film, Video, and the Internet* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 12.
17. Georgetown University, Center for Social Impact Communication, and Ogilvy PR, *Dynamics of Cause Engagement (REPORT)*, November 28, 2011, accessed July 1, 2014, <http://csic.georgetown.edu/research/dynamics-of-cause-engagement>.
18. Anita Harris, ed., *Next Wave Cultures: Feminism, Subcultures, Activism* (New York: Routledge, 2008).
19. Levy, *Collective Intelligence*, 13.
20. Torchin, *Creating the Witness*, 17-18; 172-173.
21. Jessica Clark and Pat Aufderheide, "Public Media 2.0: Dynamic Engaged Publics," *Futureofpublicmedia.net*, February 2009, accessed July 1, 2014, www.cmsimpact.org/future-public-media/documents/articles/public-media-20-dynamic-engaged-publics.
22. Prachi Gupta, "Amazon Customers Review 'Binders Full of Women,'" *Salon*, October 18, 2012, accessed July 1, 2014, www.salon.com/2012/10/18/amazon_customers_review_binders_full_of_women/. Amazon reviews have also offered a site for critiquing offensive products, perhaps most notably "BIC for her" ballpoint pens. See Hannah Furness, "BIC Ridiculed over 'Comfortable' Pink Pens for Women," *The Telegraph*, August 28, 2012, accessed July 1, 2014, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/howaboutthat/9503359/BIC-ridiculed-over-comfortable-pink-pens-for-women.html.
23. See Kristina Busse, ed., "In Focus: Fandom and Feminism: Gender and the Politics of Fan Production," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (Summer 2009): 104-136.
24. Barbara Abrash and David Whiteman, "The Uprising of '34: Filmmaking as Community Engagement," *Wide Angle* 21, no. 2 (March 1999): 87-99. For more on Helfand's film-based activism, see Leshu Torchin, "How to Leverage a Film Festival: An Interview with Judith Helfand, Filmmaker and Co-Founder of Chicken & Egg Pictures and Working Films," in *Film Festival Yearbook 4: Film Festivals and Activism*, eds. Dina Iordanova and Leshu Torchin (St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies, 2012), 253-262.
25. "About Us," *Working Films: Linking Non-Fiction Film to Cutting Edge Activism*, www.workingfilms.org/.
26. Judith Helfand, interview by Leshu Torchin, August 17, 2011, New York City.
27. See Chicken & Egg Pictures, <http://chickeneggpics.org/>.
28. Torchin, "How to Leverage a Film Festival."

US Independent Women's Cinema, Sundance Girls, and Identity Politics

1. As James MacDowell has argued, “quirky sensibility” refers to indie comedies and comedy-dramas of the last fifteen years or so that can be identified by a set of shared conventions, such as: 1) a combination of different comic styles; 2) “a type of ‘self-consciousness’ in visual style which hints at a sense of surreal artificiality; 3) a thematic preoccupation with childhood and innocence”; 4) a tension “between ‘ironic’ distance from and ‘sincere’ engagement with protagonists.” See James MacDowell, “Quirky: Buzzword or Sensibility?” in *American Independent Cinema. Indie, Indiehood and Beyond*, eds. Geoff King, Claire Molloy, and Yannis Tzioumakis (London: Routledge, 2013), 54. For Michael Newman, “movies for hipsters” also concern a specific sensibility in indie cinema, and they can best be defined in terms of their appeal to a specific audience. These films pander to hipsters or are “models for hipster ethos and style.” As a matter of taste, “the cinema of hip is a cinema of aesthetic distinction, of outsider identities and cultish admiration.” See Michael Z. Newman, “Movies for Hipsters,” *American Independent Cinema*, 72. While Wes Anderson is considered the epitome of both trends – proof that these two sensibilities overlap on many accounts – it is interesting to note that Miranda July with *ME AND YOU AND EVERYONE WE KNOW* (2005) is the only woman director cited. Women’s presence or absence from specific genres in independent cinema can only be noticed here, but calls for further research.
2. Geoff King, *American Independent Cinema* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2005).
3. Peter Biskind, *Down and Dirty Pictures. Miramax, Sundance and the Rise of Independent Film* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 19.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Yannis Tzioumakis, *Hollywood’s Indies. Classics Divisions, Specialty Labels and the American Film Market* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).
6. Of course, this does not mean that Savoca’s is the first independent film by a woman director. Think, for example, of Lizzie Borden’s *WORKING GIRLS* (1987) and Susan Seidelman’s first films. These features, however, are more understandable in authorial terms. They do not set a trend like *TRUE LOVE*.
7. Christina Lane, “Just Another Girl Outside the Neo-Indie,” in *Contemporary American Independent Film*, eds. Chris Holmlund and Justin Wyatt (London: Routledge, 2005), 193-209.
8. See at least Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds., *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies* (New York: Feminist Press, 1982); Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* [1987] (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1999). For a useful overview of the development of identity politics, see Cressida Heyes, “Identity Politics,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2012), accessed September 20, 2014, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2012/entries/identity-politics/>.
9. Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 136-139.
10. Lane, “Just Another Girl Outside the Neo-Indie,” 202.

11. B. Ruby Rich, "The New Queer Cinema. Director's Cut," in *New Queer Cinema. The Director's Cut* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 16-32.
12. Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981).
13. Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 156.
14. *Ibid.*
15. See William Paul, "The Impossibility of Romance: Hollywood Comedy, 1978-1999," in *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood*, ed. Steve Neale (London: BFI, 2002).
16. On this aspect, see also Edvige Giunta, "The Quest for True Love: Ethnicity in Nancy Savoca's Domestic Film Comedy," *Melus* 22, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 75-89.
17. See E. Levy, *Cinema of Outsiders. The Rise of American Independent Film* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 379-380; Yvonne Tasker, "Vision and Visibility. Women Filmmakers, Contemporary Authorship, and Feminist Film Studies," in *Reclaiming the Archive. Feminism and Film History*, ed. Vicky Callahan (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 213-230.
18. For an analysis of Latina bodies and identities in *REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES* and *I LIKE IT LIKE THAT*, see Myra Mendible, "Chick Flicks. Postfeminism, Class and the Latina American Dream," in *Chick Flicks. Contemporary Women at the Movies*, eds. Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young (London: Routledge, 2008), 158-174. For an analysis of *MI VIDA LOCA*, see E. Ann Kaplan, *Looking for the Other* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 240-246.
19. Eva Rueschmann, *Sisters on Screen. Siblings in Contemporary Cinema* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 70.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Rich, "The New Queer Cinema. Director's Cut," 18.
22. Michele Aaron, "New Queer Cinema: An Introduction," in *New Queer Cinema. A Critical Reader*, ed. Michele Aaron (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 5.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Anat Pick, "New Queer Cinema and Lesbian Film," in *New Queer Cinema*, 104.
25. *Ibid.*, 103-118.
26. Karen Hollinger, *In the Company of Women. Contemporary Female Friendship Films* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 170.
27. Cfr. Lisa Henderson, "Simple Pleasures. Lesbian Community and *Go Fish*" in *Chick Flicks*, 132-157.
28. The role of the collective can in part be explained by Guinevere Turner's biography. Turner, who co-wrote the film with Troche, was a "commune kid." For Ruby Rich, this is one of the film's "ten origin myths." Cfr. B. Ruby Rich, "Goings and Comings, the *Go Fish* Way," in *New Queer Cinema*, 58-65.
29. Patricia White has explicitly stated that Kelly Reichardt "is solidifying" a standing as auteur in "the A-list European film festivals" and that she distances herself "from identity politics, finding the appellation 'woman director' limiting." See Patricia White, "Colonial Imaginaries: White Women and World Cinema Authorship" (paper presented at the Conference *Contemporary Women's Cinema, Global Scenarios and Transnational Contexts*, Roma Tre University, Rome, Italy, May 28-29, 2013).

30. See Michele Schreiber, "Their Own Personal Velocity. Women Directors and Contemporary Independent Cinema," in *American Independent Cinema*, 96-107. On Holofcener, see also Claire Perkins, "Beyond Indiewood: The Everyday Ethics of Nicole Holofcener," *Camera Obscura* 85, 29, no. 1 (2014): 137-159.
31. B. Ruby Rich, "What's a Good Gay Film?" in *New Queer Cinema*, 43.
32. *Ibid.*, 44.
33. Critical and scholarly work on the film is rapidly growing. See at least Jodi Brooks, "The Kids Are All Right, the Pursuit of Happiness, and the Spaces Between," *Camera Obscura* 85, 29, no. 1 (2014): 111-135.

Suddenly, One Summer: *Frauen und Film* since 1974

1. Editor's foreword to the reprint of Miriam Hansen's article: "'Frauen und Film' and Feminist Film Culture in West Germany," *Heresies* 16 (1983): 30-31. Reprinted in *Gender and German Cinema. Feminist Interventions*, vol. 2, eds. Sandra Frieden, Richard W. McCormick, Vibeke R. Petersen, and Laurie Melissa Vogelsang (Providence: Berg, 1993), 293-298.
2. Gesine Stempel, email message to author, November 11, 2009.
3. Julia Knight, "Institutional Initiatives," in *Women and the New German Cinema*, ed. Julia Knight (London: Verso, 1992), 102-121.
4. See www.frauenundfilm.de.
5. Ramona Curry, "'Frauen und Film' – Then and Now," in *Gender and German Cinema*, 301.
6. Compare my very first contribution to *Frauen und Film*: Annette Brauerhoch, "Moral in Golddruck. Die Illustrierte 'Film und Frau,'" *Frauen und Film* 35 (1983): 48-57.
7. *Frauen und Film* 1 (1974): 2.
8. "Das Programm für 'Frauen und Film,'" *Frauen und Film* 6 (1975): 3.
9. Helke Sander, "Nimmt man Dir das Schwert, dann greife zum Knüppel," *Frauen und Film* 1 (1974): 6 [my translation].
10. *Ibid.*, 11 [my translation].
11. Miriam Hansen examines *Frauen und Film*, women's cinema, and feminist film theory in West Germany. See Miriam Hansen, "Messages in a Bottle?" *Screen* 28, no. 4-3 (1987): 30-39.
12. Hildegard Westbelt, "Those Were the Days....," *Frauen und Film* 62 (2000): 164.
13. Eva Heldmann, in conversation with the author, April 20, 2010.
14. *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* (*The Legend of Paul and Paula*), directed by Heiner Carow, performances by Angelica Domröse, Winfried Glatzleder, Heidemarie Wenzel, and Fred Delmare (GDR: DEFA, 1973), Film.
15. Hansen, "Messages in a Bottle?," 3.
16. *Frauen und Film* 36 (1984).
17. Hansen, "Messages in a Bottle?," 34.
18. *Frauen und Film* 43 (1987): 3
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Frauen und Film* 47 (1989).
21. *Frauen und Film* 39 (1985).

22. See introduction of *Frauen und Film* 48 (1990): 3.
23. See “The Old and the New,” special issue, *Frauen und Film* 64 (2004) and “Celluloid & Co,” special issue, *Frauen und Film* 65 (2006).
24. It is not accidental that the same year saw the founding of the Kinothek Asta Nielsen by former editor Karola Gramann together with Heide Schlüppmann and others, an initiative which interlocks theory with archival work and cinema screenings as well as retrospectives.
25. Nanna Heidenreich, email message to author, October 16, 2014.

(Re)Inventing *Camera Obscura*

1. The authors wish to thank Constance Penley for the valuable information and assistance that she provided us in writing this essay, as well as for the invaluable inspiration that she continues to provide us in working with the journal. This essay was written on the invitation of editors Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson and subsequently published in *Camera Obscura* to inaugurate the publication of a series of short pieces by feminist scholars imagining “An Archive for the Future,” *Camera Obscura* 61 (2006): 1-25.
2. *Camera Obscura* collective (Janet Bergstrom, Sandy Flitterman, Elisabeth Hart Lyon, and Constance Penley), “Feminism and Film: Critical Approaches,” *Camera Obscura* 1 (Fall 1976): 3-10.
3. From *Camera Obscura* 1 (Fall 1976), see *Camera Obscura* collective, “An Interrogation of the Cinematic Sign: Jackie Raynal’s *Deux Fois*”: 11-26; *Camera Obscura* collective, “*Deux Fois*: Shot Commentary, Shot Chart, Photogramme”: 27-51; *Camera Obscura* collective, “Yvonne Rainer: Interview”: 76-96; and Janet Bergstrom, “Yvonne Rainer: Introduction”: 53-70.
4. From *Camera Obscura* 2 (Fall 1997), see Janet Bergstrom, “Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles”: 114-121; Elisabeth Lyon, “La Femme du Gange”: 122-129; and Constance Penley, “What Maisie Knew”: 130-136.
5. Jacqueline Suter, “Feminine Discourse in *Christopher Strong*” *Camera Obscura* 3-4 (Summer 1979): 135-150.
6. From *Camera Obscura* 5 (Spring 1980), see Jane Weinstock, “She Who Laughs First Laughs Last”: 100-110; and “Sally Potter on *Thriller*”: 99.
7. Constance Penley and Janet Bergstrom (for the *Camera Obscura* collective), “The Avant-Garde: Histories and Theories,” *Screen* 19, no. 3 (Fall 1978): 113-128.
8. See, for instance, *Screen* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1976). This issue has a contribution entitled “Why We Have Resigned from the Board of *Screen*” by Edward Buscombe, Christine Gledhill, Alan Lovell, and Christopher Williams.
9. *Camera Obscura* collective, “Feminism and Film,” 5.
10. Specifically, *Camera Obscura* attempted to go beyond the limitations of the “images of women” approach that was extremely common at the time of the founding of the journal, providing the basis for numerous courses on women and film, for educational films that attempted to counter media stereotypes, and for books such as Molly Haskell’s *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1973) and Marjorie Rosen’s *Popcorn Venus: Wo-*

men, *Movies, and the American Dream* (New York: Avon Books, 1973). These early attempts to engage with the representation of women in film were certainly important and, indeed, often more complex than typically acknowledged. However, as the phrase “images of women” suggests, such work tended to presume a fixed content to both “images” and “women.” In its most reductive formulations, it thus risked implying that a film’s meaning, defined through its content, is easily readable and that women, defined as a group, share certain traits indicative of an essential identity, such that one need only compare the two – film content and women’s reality – in order to determine the implications of the portrayal.

11. This, for instance, might be said of a certain kind of cultural studies work that applauds audiences for their resistant readings of texts without always carefully considering the ways in which such “resistance” might itself be inscribed within, exploited, and/or recuperated by dominant media and consumer industries.
12. “The Spectatrix” edited by Janet Bergstrom and Mary Ann Doane, *Camera Obscura* 20-21 (May-September 1989). Not only is the question of the applicability of film theory to other media forms such as television raised in the issue’s introduction (“The Female Spectator: Contexts and Directions” by Janet Bergstrom and Mary Ann Doane, particularly on pages 14-15 and 21), but numerous contributors also discuss this in regard to a wide range of media and practices (television, video, performance, music and youth subcultures, pornography and sexual subcultures, fan communities, women’s writing and reading, etc.). See, for example, the contributions by: Jacqueline Bobo, Giuliana Bruno, Charlotte Brunsdon, Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, Mary Beth Haralovich, Christine Holmlund, Lynne Joyrich, E. Ann Kaplan, Marsha Kinder, Annette Kuhn, Julia Lesage, Gina Marchetti, Judith Mayne, Patricia Mellencamp, Meaghan Morris, Margaret Morse, Constance Penley, Ellen Seiter, Lynn Spigel, Lesley Stern, and Chris Straayer. Significantly, two of these contributors – Sandy Flitterman-Lewis and Constance Penley – were members of *Camera Obscura*’s founding group; their broadening interests thus stand as an interesting testament to the broadening interests of the journal as a whole. The same might be said of many of *Camera Obscura*’s later editors (such as Lynn Spigel, Denise Mann, Julie D’Acci, Sasha Torres, and Lynne Joyrich), who are as (if not more) known for their work on texts other than cinematic ones than for work within the discipline of film studies proper.
13. “Television and the Female Consumer,” Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann, special issue eds., *Camera Obscura* 16 (January 1988).
14. “Male Trouble,” Constance Penley and Sharon Willis, special issue eds., *Camera Obscura* 17 (May 1988).
15. “Popular Culture and Reception Studies,” Lynn Spigel, special issue ed., *Camera Obscura* 23 (May 1990).
16. “Imaging Technologies, Inscribing Science,” Paula A. Treichler and Lisa Cartwright, special issue eds., *Camera Obscura* 28 (January 1992) and “Imaging Technologies, Inscribing Science 2,” Paula A. Treichler and Lisa Cartwright, special issue eds., *Camera Obscura* 29 (May 1992).
17. “The Spectatrix,” *Camera Obscura*.

18. *Camera Obscura's* shift from "film" to "media" both reflected and helped to solidify a similar shift in the discipline as a whole; work in other journals also marked this general disciplinary expansion. For instance, *Screen* early on published work on television, doing a special issue on Independent Cinema and British TV and then a special issue on TV more broadly in 1980 and 1981; see *Screen* 21, no. 4 (1980-1981) and *Screen* 22, no. 4 (1981). Even earlier than that – in 1978, between its volumes 6 and 7 – *The Journal of Popular Film* became *The Journal of Popular Film and Television*. And an early interest in video in other forums (for instance, in the journal *After-image*) also signaled work in the field that attempted to define moving image media in various ways, rather than just through film.
19. "Lifetime: A Cable Network 'For Women,'" Julie D'Acci, special issue ed., *Camera Obscura* 33-34 (May-September-January 1994-1995).
20. Janet Bergstrom, "Alternation, Segmentation, Hypnosis: Interview with Raymond Bellour," *Camera Obscura* 3-4 (Summer 1979): 97.
21. Constance Penley, ed., *Feminism and Film Theory* (New York: Routledge/BFI, 1988).

Film, Corporeality, Transgressive Cinema: A Feminist Perspective

1. Martine Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression* [2007] (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).
2. Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 286.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Linguis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968).
5. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Le Cinéma et la nouvelle psychologie" [1945], in *Sens et non-sens* (Paris: Nagel, 1949), 101.
6. Stan Brakhage, "Metaphors on Vision," in *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1978), 120-128. Bruce Elder, *A Body of Vision: Representations of the Body in Recent Film and Poetry* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997).
7. Elder, *A Body of Vision*, 236. In an interview about her film *FUSES* (1967), Schneemann says: "I wanted what was around us to be coming in and out of season, of frame, of focus, of flesh." Kate Haug, "An Interview with Carolee Schneemann," *Wide Angle* 20, no. 1 (1998): 45. See also: Martine Beugnet, "Tactile Visions: From Embodied to Encoded Love," *Carnal Aesthetics: Transgressive Imagery and Feminist Politics*, eds. Marta Zarzycka and Bettina Papenburg (London: IB Tauris, 2013), 175-198.
8. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 275-276. On "becoming-woman," see "Deleuze and Feminism," *theory@buffalo.edu*, no. 8, accessed December 2014, <http://wings.buffalo.edu/theory/archive>.
9. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (London: Continuum, 2004), 23. See also: Daniela Voss, "The Philosophical Concepts of Meat and Flesh: Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty," *Parrhesia* 18 (2013): 113-124.

10. See Martine Beugnet, "The Wounded Screen," in *New Extreme Cinema*, ed. Tania Horeck (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 18-38.
11. See Martine Beugnet, "Re-Enchanting the World: Claire Denis' *Vendredi Soir* and Pascale Ferran's *Lady Chatterley*," in *(Rétro)projections: French Cinema in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Joe Hardwick, special issue of *Australian Journal of French Studies* (2009): 197-212.
12. Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 286.
13. Julia Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection," in *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1-31. Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993).
14. See Ben McCann, "Pierced Borders, Punctured Bodies: The Contemporary French Horror Film," *Australian Journal of French Studies* (2009): 225-237.
15. Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 139.
16. See Martine Beugnet, "Poétique de la marge, essai sur *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (Agnès Varda, 2000)," in *Cinéma Contemporain: état des lieux*, ed. Jean-Pierre Eskenazi (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004).
17. Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity* (London: British Film Institute, 1996).
18. See Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation*.
19. Carrie Tarr, "Director's Cuts: The Aesthetics of Self-Harming in Marina de Van's '*Dans ma peau*,'" *Nottingham French Studies* 45, no. 3 (2006): 91.
20. Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).
21. Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation*, 54.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 301.
24. Gertrud Koch and Miriam Hansen, "Béla Balázs: The Physiognomy of Film," *New German Critique* 40 (1987): 177.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*.
27. See Martine Beugnet and Elizabeth Ezra, "Traces of the Modern – An Alternative History of the French Cinema," tenth anniversary issue of *Studies in French Cinema* 10, no. 1 (April 2010): 11-38.
28. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 2.
29. See Martine Beugnet, "Encoding Loss: Corporeality and (Im)materiality in the Age of the Digital," *Studies in French Cinema* 12, no. 3 (2012): 257-271.
30. See Kim Knowles, "Blood, Sweat, and Tears: Bodily Inscriptions in Contemporary Experimental Film," special issue on *Waste of NECSUS* (Fall 2013).
31. Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, trans. P. Beitchman and W.G.J. Niesluchowski (New York: Semiotext(e), 1990).

Disconnection Notices: Interview with Miranda July

1. This interview was originally published in *Film Quarterly* in 2011: Anna Backman Rogers, "Disconnection Notices: Interview with Miranda July," *Film Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (Winter 2011): 48-51.
2. *The Future*, directed and written by Miranda July, produced by Gina Kwon, Gerhard Meixner, Roman Paul, cinematography by Nikolai von Graevenitz, edited by Andrew Bird, music by Jon Brion, US distribution by Roadside Attractions (Berlin/Los Angeles, CA: Razor Film Produktion GmbH and Leopold LLC, 2011); and *Me and You and Everyone We Know*, directed and written by Miranda July, produced by Gina Kwon, cinematography by Chuy Chávez, edited by Andrew Dickler and Charles Ireland, music by Michael Andrews (New York/London: IFC Films and FilmFour, 2005).
3. Miranda July, "Making Love in 2003," in *Nobody Belongs Here More than You: Stories by Miranda July* (New York: Scribner, 2007), 107-129.
4. Miranda July, "How to Tell Stories to Children," in *ibid.*, 177-201; and *The Swan Tool* (performance held at various arenas and countries, 2000-2002).



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- . "Reading the Signs: Empowering the Eye: *Daughters of the Dust* and the Black Independent Cinema Movement." In *Black American Cinema*. Edited by Manthia Diawara, 118-145. New York: Routledge, 1993.
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