

Is the gaze male?

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Since the beginning of the recent women's movement, American feminists have been exploring the representation of female sexuality in the arts—in literature, painting, film, and television. As we struggle towards meaningful theory, it is important to note that feminist criticism, as a new way of reading texts, emerged from the daily, ongoing concerns of women re-evaluating the culture in which they had been socialized and educated. In this sense, feminist criticism differs in basic ways from earlier critical movements which evolved out of reaction to dominant theoretical positions (i.e. out of a reaction which took place on an intellectual level). Feminism is unusual in its combination of the theoretical and (loosely speaking) the ideological (Marxist literary theory alone shares a similar dual focus, but from very different premises).

The first wave of feminist critics adopted a broadly sociological approach, looking at sex roles women occupied in various imaginative works, from high art to mass entertainment. They assessed roles as “positive” or “negative” according to some externally constructed criteria describing the fully autonomous, independent woman. While this work was important in initiating feminist criticism (Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* was a ground-breaking text), feminist film critics, influenced by developments taking place in film theory at the start of the 1970s, were the first to point out its limitations. First, influenced by semiology, feminist theorists stressed the crucial role played by the artistic form as the medium for expression; second, influenced by psychoanalysis, they argued that Oedipal processes were central to the production of art works. That is, they gave increasing attention to how meaning is produced in films, rather than to the “content,” which had preoccupied sociological critics; and they stressed the links between the processes of psychoanalysis and cinema.

Before summarizing in more detail the French theorists whose influence shaped currents in feminist film theory, let me deal briefly with the reasons for using psychoanalytic methodology in chapters 2 to 5 of this book, those devoted to the Hollywood film. Why, given many feminists' hostile rejection of Freudian and Lacanian theory, do I see psychoanalysis as a useful tool?

First, let me make clear that I do not see psychoanalysis as necessarily uncovering essential “truths” about the human psyche which exist across historical periods and different cultures. Making trans-historical generalizations about human psychic processes is difficult since the means for verifying those generalizations barely exist. Nevertheless, the history of literature in western

civilization does show a surprising recurrence of Oedipal themes. We could say that Oedipal themes occur at those historical moments when the human family is structured in specific ways that elicit Oedipal traumas; for my purposes here, since I am concerned with a recent art form, film, and the recent theory of Oedipal problems (dating back to Freud), I am prepared to make claims for the relevance of psychoanalysis only to the state of industrial social organization characteristic of the twentieth century.

One could argue that the psychic patterns created by capitalist social and interpersonal structures (especially the late-nineteenth-century forms that carried over into our century) required at once a machine (the cinema) for their unconscious release and an analytic tool (psychoanalysis) for understanding, and adjusting, disturbances caused by the structures that confine people. To this extent, both mechanisms (film and psychoanalysis) support the status quo; but, rather than being necessarily eternal and unchanging in the forms in which we have them, they are inserted in history, linked, that is, to the particular moment of bourgeois capitalism that gave both their birth.

If this is so, it is extremely important for women to use psychoanalysis as a tool, since it will unlock the secrets of our socialization within (capitalist) patriarchy. If we agree that the commercial film (and particularly the genre of melodrama that this book focuses on) took the form it did in some way to satisfy desires and needs created by nineteenth-century familial organization (an organization that produces Oedipal traumas), then psychoanalysis becomes a crucial tool for explaining the needs, desires, and male-female positionings that are reflected in film. The signs in the Hollywood film convey the patriarchal ideology that underlies our social structures and that constructs women in very specific ways—ways that reflect patriarchal needs, the patriarchal unconscious. What does it mean to be a female spectator? Only through asking such questions within the psychoanalytic framework can we begin to find the gaps and fissures through which we can insert woman in a historical discourse that has hitherto been male-dominated and has excluded women. In this way, we may begin to change ourselves as a first step toward changing society.

Using psychoanalysis to deconstruct Hollywood films enables us to see clearly the patriarchal myths through which we have been positioned as Other (enigma, mystery), and as eternal and unchanging. We can also see how the family melodrama, as a genre geared specifically to women, functions both to expose the constraints and limitations that the capitalist nuclear family imposes on women and, at the same time, to “educate” women to accept those constraints as “natural,” inevitable—as “given.” For part of what defines melodrama as a form is its concern explicitly with Oedipal issues—illicit love relationships (overtly or incipiently incestuous), mother-child relationships, husband-wife relationships, father-son relationships: these are the staple fare of melodrama as surely as they are largely excluded from the dominant Hollywood genres, the western and the gangster film, that melodrama compensates for.

Using the framework developed by Peter Brooks, we might say that the western and gangster genres aim to duplicate the functions that tragedy once fulfilled, in the sense of placing man within the larger cosmic scene. But Brooks points out that we are now in a period when “mythmaking [can] only be personal and individual” since we lack “a clear transcendent value to be reconciled to;” so that even these genres, broadly speaking, fall into melodrama. All Hollywood films, taking this large view, require what Brooks considers essential to melodrama, namely “a social order to be purged, a set of ethical imperatives to be made clear.”

It is important that women are excluded from the central role in the main, highly respected Hollywood genres; women, and female issues, are only central in the family melodrama (which we can see as an offshoot of other melodramatic forms). Here Brooks’s definition of the way characters in melodrama “assume primary psychic roles, Father, Mother, Child, and express basic psychic conditions” seems particularly relevant, as is also his explicit linking of psychoanalysis and melodrama at the end of the book. Psychoanalytic processes themselves, he notes, reveal the “melodrama aesthetic” (we will see in chapter 11 that the directors of a recent feminist film, Sigmund Freud’s *Dora*, also view psychoanalysis as melodrama); but important for our purposes here is his comment that the melodramatic form deals with “the processes of repression and the status of repressed content.” Brooks concludes that “the structure of ego, superego and id suggests the subjacent manichaeism of melodramatic persons.”

Laura Mulvey (the British filmmaker and critic whose theories are central to new developments) also views melodrama as concerned with Oedipal issues, but she sees it primarily as a female form, acting as a corrective to the main genres that celebrate male action. The family melodrama is important, she says, in “probing pent-up emotion, bitterness and disillusion well known to women.” For Mulvey, melodrama serves a useful function for women who lack any coherent culture of oppression. “The simple fact of recognition has aesthetic importance,” she notes; “there is a dizzy satisfaction in witnessing the way that sexual difference under patriarchy is fraught, explosive and erupts dramatically into violence within its own private stomping ground, the family.” But Mulvey concludes that if melodrama is important in bringing ideological contradictions to the surface, and in being made for a female audience, events are never reconciled at the end in ways beneficial to women.

So why is it that women are drawn to melodrama? Why do we find our objectification and surrender pleasurable? This is precisely an issue that psychoanalysis can help to explain: for such pleasure is not surprising if we consider the shape of the girl’s Oedipal crisis. Following Lacan for a moment we see that the girl is forced to turn away from the illusory unity with the Mother in the prelinguistic realm and has to enter the symbolic world which involves subject and object. Assigned the place of object (lack), she is the recipient of male

desire, passively appearing rather than acting. Her sexual pleasure in this position can thus be constructed only around her own objectification. Furthermore, given the male structuring around sadism, the girl may adopt a corresponding masochism.

In practice, this masochism is rarely reflected in more than a tendency for women to be passive in sexual relations; but in the realm of myth, masochism is often prominent. We could say that in locating herself in fantasy in the erotic, the woman places herself as either passive recipient of male desire or, at one remove, as watching a woman who is passive recipient of male desires and sexual actions. Although the evidence we have to go on is slim, it does seem that women's sexual fantasies would confirm the predominance of these positionings. (We will look shortly at some corresponding male fantasies.)

Nancy Friday's volumes provide discourses on the level of dream and, however questionable as "scientific" evidence, show narratives in which the woman speaker largely arranges events for her sexual pleasure so that things are done to her, or in which she is the object of men's lascivious gaze. Often, there is pleasure in anonymity, or in a strange man approaching her when she is with her husband. Rarely does the dreamer initiate the sexual activity, and the man's large erect penis usually is central in the fantasy. Nearly all the fantasies have the dominance-submission pattern, with the woman in the latter place.

It is significant that in the lesbian fantasies that Friday has collected, women occupy both positions, the dreamer excited either by dominating another woman, forcing her to have sex, or enjoying being so dominated. These fantasies suggest either that the female positioning is not as monolithic as critics often imply or that women occupy the "male" position when they become dominant. Whichever the case may be (and I will say more about this in a moment), the prevalence of the dominance-submission pattern as a sexual turn-on is clear. At a discussion about pornography organized by Julia LeSage at the Conference on Feminist Film Criticism (Northwestern University, 1980), both gay and straight women admitted their pleasure (in both fantasy and actuality) in being "forced" or "forcing" someone else. Some women claimed that this was a result of growing up in Victorian-style households where all sexuality was repressed, but others denied that it had anything to do with patriarchy. Women wanted, rightly, to accept themselves sexually, whatever the turn-on mechanism. But simply to celebrate whatever gives us sexual pleasure seems to me both too easy and too problematic: we need to analyze how it is that certain things turn us on, how sexuality has been constructed in patriarchy to produce pleasure in the dominance-submission forms, before we advocate these modes.

It was predictable that many of the male fantasies in Friday's book *Men in Love* show the speaker constructing events so that he is in control: again, the "I" of identity remains central, as it is not in the female narrations. Many male fantasies

focus on the man's excitement in arranging for his woman to expose herself (or even give herself) to other men, while he watches.

The difference between this male voyeurism and the female form is striking. For the woman does not own the desire, even when she watches; her watching is to place responsibility for sexuality at yet one more remove, to distance herself from sex. The man, on the other hand, owns the desire and the woman, and gets pleasure from exchanging the woman, as in Lévi-Strauss's kinship system.

Yet, some of the fantasies in Friday's book show men's wish to be taken over by an aggressive woman, who would force them to become helpless, like the little boy in his mother's hands. A tour of Times Square in 1980 (the organization Women Against Pornography runs them regularly) corroborated this. After a slide show that focused totally on male sadism and violent sexual exploitation of women, we were taken to sex shops that by no means stressed male domination. We saw literature and films expressing as many fantasies of male as of female submission. The situations were the predictable ones: young boys (but sometimes men) seduced by women in a form of authority—governesses, nursemaids, nurses, schoolteachers, stepmothers, etc. (Of course, it is significant that the corresponding dominance-submission fantasies of women have men in authority positions that carry much more status—professors, doctors, policemen, executives: these men seduce the innocent girls or young wives who cross their paths.)

Two interesting things emerge here. One is that dominance-submission patterns are apparently a crucial part of both male and female sexuality as constructed in western civilization. The other is that men have a far wider range of positions available: more readily both dominant and submissive, they vacillate between supreme control and supreme abandonment. Women, meanwhile, are more consistently submissive, but not excessively abandoned. In their own fantasies, women do not position themselves as exchanging men, although a man might find being exchanged an exciting fantasy.

The passivity revealed in women's sexual fantasies is reinforced by the way women are positioned in film. In an interesting paper on "The 'woman's film': possession and address," Mary Ann Doane has shown that in the one film genre (i.e. melodrama) that, as we have seen, constructs a female spectator, the spectator is made to participate in what is essentially a masochistic fantasy. Doane notes that in the major classical genres, the female body is sexuality, providing the erotic object for the male spectator. In the woman's film, the gaze must be de-eroticized (since the spectator is now assumed to be female), but in doing this the films effectively disembodied their spectator. The repeated, masochistic scenarios effectively immobilize the female viewer. She is refused pleasure in that imaginary identification which, as Mulvey has shown, repeats for men the experience of the mirror phase. The idealized male screen heroes give back to the male spectator his more perfect mirror self, together with a sense of

mastery and control. In contrast, the female is given only powerless, victimized figures who, far from perfect, reinforce the basic sense of worthlessness that already exists.

Later on in her paper, Doane shows that Freud's "A child is being beaten" is important in distinguishing the way a common masochistic fantasy works out for boys and for girls. In the male fantasy, "sexuality remains on the surface" and the man "retains his own role and his own gratification in the context of the scenario. The 'I' of identity remains." But the female fantasy is first desexualized and second, "necessitates the woman's assumption of the position of spectator, outside of the event." In this way, the girl manages, as Freud says, "to escape from the demands of the erotic side of her life altogether."

But the important question remains: when women are in the dominant position, are they in the masculine position? Can we envisage a female dominant position that would differ qualitatively from the male form of dominance? Or is there merely the possibility of both sex genders occupying the positions we now know as "masculine" and "feminine?"

The experience of films of the 1970s and 1980s would support the latter possibility, and explain why many feminists have not been excited by the so-called "liberated" woman on the screen, or by the fact that some male stars have recently been made the object of the "female" gaze. Traditionally male stars did not necessarily (or even primarily) derive their "glamor" from their looks or their sexuality but from the power they were able to wield within the filmic world in which they functioned (e.g. John Wayne); these men, as Laura Mulvey has shown, became ego-ideals for the men in the audience, corresponding to the image in the mirror, who was more in control of motor coordination than the young child looking in. "The male figure," Mulvey notes, "is free to command the stage...of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates the action."

Recent films have begun to change this pattern: stars like John Travolta (Saturday Night Fever, Urban Cowboy, Moment by Moment) have been rendered object of woman's gaze and in some of the films (e.g. Moment by Moment) placed explicitly as a sexual object to a woman who controlled the film's action. Robert Redford likewise has begun to be used as object of "female" desire (e.g. in Electric Horseman). But it is significant that in all these films, when the man steps out of his traditional role as the one who controls the whole action, and when he is set up as sex object, the woman then takes on the "masculine" role as bearer of the gaze and initiator of the action. She nearly always loses her traditionally feminine characteristics in so doing—not those of attractiveness, but rather of kindness, humaneness, motherliness. She is now often cold, driving, ambitious, manipulating, just like the men whose position she has usurped.

Even in a supposedly “feminist” film like *My Brilliant Career*, the same processes are at work. The film is interesting because it foregrounds the independently minded heroine’s dilemma in a clearly patriarchal culture: in love with a wealthy neighbor, the heroine makes him the object of her gaze, but the problem is that, as female, her desire has no power. Men’s desire naturally carries power with it, so that when the hero finally concedes his love for her, he comes to get her. However, being able to conceive of “love” only as “submission,” an end to autonomy and to her life as a creative writer, the heroine now refuses him. The film thus plays with established positions, but is unable to work through them to something else.

What we can conclude from the discussion so far is that our culture is deeply committed to myths of demarcated sex differences, called “masculine” and “feminine,” which in turn revolve first on a complex gaze apparatus and second on dominance-submission patterns. This positioning of the two sex genders in representation clearly privileges the male (through the mechanisms of voyeurism and fetishism, which are male operations, and because his desire carries power/action where woman’s usually does not). However, as a result of the recent women’s movement, women have been permitted in representation to assume (step into) the position defined as “masculine,” as long as the man then steps into her position, thus keeping the whole structure intact.

It is significant, of course, that while this substitution is made to happen relatively easily in the cinema, in real life any such “swapping” is fraught with immense psychological difficulties that only psychoanalysis can unravel. In any case, such “exchanges” do not do much for either sex, since nothing has essentially changed: the roles remain locked into their static boundaries. Showing images of mere reversal may in fact provide a safety valve for the social tensions that the women’s movement has created by demanding a more dominant role for women.

We have thus arrived at a point where we must question the necessity for the dominance-submission structure. The gaze is not necessarily male (literally), but to own and activate the gaze, given our language and the structure of the unconscious, is to be in the “masculine” position. It is this persistent presentation of the masculine position that feminist film critics have demonstrated in their analysis of Hollywood films. Dominant, Hollywood cinema, they show, is constructed according to the unconscious of patriarchy; film narratives are organized by means of a male-based language and discourse which parallels the language of the unconscious. Women in film thus do not function as signifiers for a signified (a real woman), as sociological critics have assumed, but signifier and signified have been elided into a sign that represents something in the male unconscious.

Two basic Freudian concepts—voyeurism and fetishism—have been used to explain what exactly woman represents and the mechanisms that come into play

for the male spectator watching a female screen image. (Or, to put it rather differently, voyeurism and fetishism are mechanisms the dominant cinema uses to construct the male spectator in accordance with the needs of his unconscious.) The first, voyeurism, is linked to the scopophilic instinct (i.e. the male pleasure in his own sexual organ transferred to pleasure in watching other people having sex). Critics argue that the cinema relies on this instinct, making the spectator essentially a voyeur. The drive that causes little boys to peek through keyholes of parental bedrooms to learn about their sexual activities (or to get sexual gratification by thinking about these activities) comes into play when the male adult watches films, sitting in a dark room. The original eye of the camera, controlling and limiting what can be seen, is reproduced by the projector aperture which lights up one frame at a time; and both processes (camera and projector) duplicate the eye at the keyhole, whose gaze is confined by the keyhole "frame." The spectator is obviously in the voyeur position when there are sex scenes on the screen, but screen images of women are sexualized no matter what the women are doing literally or what kind of plot may be involved.

According to Laura Mulvey, this eroticization of women on the screen comes about through the way the cinema is structured around three explicitly male looks or gazes: there is the look of the camera in the situation being filmed (called the pro-filmic event); while technically neutral, this look, as we've seen, is inherently voyeuristic and usually "male" in the sense that a man is generally doing the filming; there is the look of the men within the narrative, which is structured so as to make women objects of their gaze; and finally there is the look of the male spectator (discussed above) which imitates (or is necessarily in the same position as) the first two looks.

But if women were simply eroticized and objectified, matters might not be too bad, since objectification, as I have already shown, may be an inherent component of both male and female eroticism as constructed in western culture. But two further elements suggest themselves. To begin with, men do not simply look; their gaze carries with it the power of action and of possession which is lacking in the female gaze. Women receive and return a gaze, but cannot act upon it. Second, the sexualization and objectification of women is not simply for the purposes of eroticism; from a psychoanalytic point of view, it is designed to annihilate the threat that woman (as castrated and possessing a sinister genital organ) poses. In her article "The dread of women" (1932) Karen Horney goes to literature to show that "Men have never tired of fashioning expressions for the violent force by which man feels himself drawn to the woman, and side by side with his longing, the dread that through her he might die and be undone." Horney goes on to conjecture that even man's glorification of women "has its source not only in his cravings for love, but also in his desire to conceal his dread. A similar relief, however, is also sought and found in the disparagement of women that men often display ostentatiously in their attitudes." Horney then explores the basis of the dread of women not only in castration (more related to the father) but in fear of the vagina.

But psychoanalysts agree that, for whatever reason—fear of castration (Freud) or in an attempt to deny the existence of the sinister female genital (Horney), men endeavor to find the penis in women. Feminist film critics have seen this phenomenon (clinically known as fetishism) operating in the cinema; the camera (unconsciously) fetishizes the female form, rendering it phallus-like so as to mitigate woman's threat. Men, that is, turn "the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous (hence overvaluation, the cult of the female star)."

The apparently contradictory attitudes of glorification and disparagement pointed out by Horney thus turn out to be a reflection of the same ultimate need to annihilate the dread that woman inspires. In the cinema, the twin mechanisms of fetishism and of voyeurism represent two different ways of handling this dread. As Mulvey points out, fetishism "builds up the physical beauty of the object, turning it into something satisfying in itself," while voyeurism, linked to disparagement, has a sadistic side, and is involved with pleasure through control or domination and with punishing the woman (guilty for being castrated). For Claire Johnston, both mechanisms result in woman not being presented qua woman at all. Extending the Cahiers du Cinéma analysis of Morocco, Johnston argues that Von Sternberg represses "the idea of woman as a social and sexual being," thus replacing the opposition man-woman with male-non-male.

With this look at feminist film theories and at the issues around the problem of the gaze and of the female spectator that psychoanalysis illuminates, we can begin to see the larger theoretical issues the psychoanalytic methodology involves, particularly in relation to possibilities for change. It is this aspect of the new theoretical approaches that has begun to polarize the feminist film community. For example, in a round-table discussion in 1978, some women voiced their displeasure with theories that were themselves originally devised by men, and with women's preoccupation with how we have been seen/placed/positioned by the dominant male order. Julia LeSage, for instance, argued that the use of Lacanian criticism has been destructive in reifying women "in a childlike position that patriarchy has wanted to see them in"; for LeSage, the Lacanian framework establishes "a discourse which is totally male." And Ruby Rich objected to theories that rest with the apparent elimination of women from both screen and audience. She asked how we can move beyond our placing, rather than just analyzing it.

As if in response to Rich's request, some feminist film critics have begun to take up the challenge to move beyond the preoccupation with how women have been constructed in patriarchal cinema. Judith Mayne, for example, in a useful summary of issues in recent feminist film criticism, argues that the context for discussion of women's cinema needs to be "opened up" to include the film spectator: "The task of criticism," she says, "is to examine the processes that determine how films evoke responses and how spectators produce them." A little

later on, Mayne suggests that the proper place for the feminist critic may well be close to the machine that is the agency for the propulsion of images onto the screen, i.e. the projector. By forcing our gaze to dwell on the images by slowing down or stopping the projection that creates patriarchal voyeurism, we may be able to provide a “reading against the grain” that will give us information about our positioning as spectators.

If Mayne’s, LeSage’s, and Rich’s objections lead in a fruitful direction, those of Lucy Arbuthnot and Gail Seneca are problematic, but useful here for the purposes of illustration. In a paper on *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* Arbuthnot and Seneca attempt to appropriate for themselves some of the images hitherto defined as repressive. They begin by expressing their dissatisfactions not only with current feminist film theory as outlined above, but also with the new theoretical feminist films, which, they say, “focus more on denying men their cathexis with women as erotic objects than in connecting women with each other.” In addition, these films by “destroying the narrative and the possibility for viewer identification with the characters, destroy both the male viewer’s pleasure and our pleasure.” Asserting their need for identification with strong, female screen images, they argue that Hollywood films offer many examples of pleasurable identification; in a clever analysis, the relationship between Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* is offered as an example of strong women, who care for one another, providing a model we need.

However, looking at the construction of the film as a whole, rather than simply isolating certain shots, it is clear that Monroe and Russell are positioned, and position themselves, as objects for a specifically male gaze. The men’s weakness does not mitigate their narrative power, and the women are left merely with the limited control they can wield through their sexuality. The film constructs them as “to-be-looked-at,” and their manipulations end up as merely comic, since “capturing” the men involves their “being captured.” The images of Monroe show her fetishized placement, aimed at reducing her sexual threat, while Russell’s stance becomes a parody of the male position. The result is that the two women repeat, in exaggerated form, dominant gender stereotypes.

The weakness of Arbuthnot and Seneca’s analysis is that it ignores the way that all dominant images are basically male constructs. Recognizing this has led Julia Kristeva and others to say that it is impossible to know what the “feminine” might be, outside of male constructs. Kristeva says that while we must reserve the category “women” for social demands and publicity, by the word “woman” she means “that which is not represented, that which is unspoken, that which is left out of meanings and ideologies.” For similar reasons, Sandy Flitterman and Judith Barry have argued that feminist artists must avoid claiming a specific female power residing in the body of women and representing “an inherent feminine artistic essence which could find expression if allowed to be explored freely.” The impulse toward this kind of art is understandable in a culture that denies satisfaction in being a woman, but it results in Motherhood being

redefined as the seat of female creativity, while women “are proposed as the bearers of culture, albeit an alternative one.”

Flitterman and Barry argue that this form of feminist art, along with some others that they outline, is dangerous in not taking into account “the social contradictions involved in ‘femininity’.” They suggest that “A radical feminist art would include an understanding of how women are constituted through social practices in culture” and argue for “an aesthetics designed to subvert the production of ‘woman’ as commodity,” much as Claire Johnston and Laura Mulvey had earlier stated that to be feminist a cinema had to be a counter-cinema.

But the problem with this notion of a counter-cinema hinges on the issue of pleasure. Aware that a feminist counter-cinema would almost by definition deny pleasure, Mulvey argued that this denial was a necessary prerequisite for freedom but did not go into the problems involved. In introducing the notion of pleasure, Arbutnot and Seneca have located a central and little-discussed issue, namely our need for feminist films that at once construct woman as spectator without offering the repressive identifications of Hollywood films and that satisfy our craving for pleasure. They have pinpointed a paradox in which feminist film critics have been caught without realizing it, namely our fascination with Hollywood films, rather than with, say, avant-garde films, because they bring us pleasure; but we have (rightly) been wary of admitting the degree to which the pleasure comes from identification with objectification.

Our positioning as “to-be-looked-at,” as object of the (male) gaze, has come to be sexually pleasurable.

However, it will not do simply to enjoy our oppression unproblematically; to appropriate Hollywood images to ourselves, taking them out of the context of the total structure in which they appear, will not get us very far. As I suggested above, in order fully to understand how it is that women take pleasure in objectification one has to have recourse to psychoanalysis.

Christian Metz, Stephen Heath, and others have shown that the processes of cinema mimic in many ways those of the unconscious. The mechanisms Freud distinguishes in relation to dream and the unconscious have been likened to the mechanism of film. In this analysis, film narratives, like dreams, symbolize a latent, repressed content, except that now the “content” refers not to an individual unconscious but to that of patriarchy in general. If psychoanalysis is a tool that will unlock the meaning of dreams, it should also unlock that of films.

The psychoanalytic methodology is thus justified as an essential first step in the feminist project of understanding our socialization in patriarchy. My analyses of Hollywood films amply demonstrate the ways in which patriarchal myths function to position women as silent, absent, and marginal. But, once we have fully understood our placing and the way that both language and psychoanalytic

processes, inherent in our particular form of nuclear family, have constructed it, we have to think about strategies for changing discourse, since these changes would, in turn, affect the structuring of our lives in society. (I am not here excluding the possibility of working from the other end, i.e. finding gaps in patriarchal discourse through which to establish alternate practices, such as collective child-rearing, which might, in turn, begin to affect patriarchal discourse; but this approach requires constant vigilance about the effect on our thoughts and actions of dominant signifying practices.)

As we'll see in the second part of the book, some feminist filmmakers have begun the task of analyzing patriarchal discourses, including cinematic representation, with a view to finding ways to break through them. The analysis of Sigmund Freud's *Dora*, undertaken in chapter 11, shows the filmmakers' belief that the raising of questions is the first step to establishing a female discourse, or perhaps that asking questions is the only discourse available to women as a resistance to patriarchal domination. Since questions lead to more questions, a kind of movement is in fact taking place, although it is in a non-traditional mode. Sally Potter structured her film *Thriller* (also analyzed in chapter 11) around this very notion and allowed her heroine's investigation of herself as heroine to lead to some (tentative) conclusions. And Laura Mulvey has suggested that, even if one accepts the psychoanalytic positioning of women, all is not lost, since the Oedipus complex is not completed in women; she notes that "there's some way in which women aren't colonized," having been "so specifically excluded from culture and language."

From this position, psychoanalytic theory allows us to see that there is a possibility for women to change themselves (and perhaps to bring about social change) just because they have not been processed, as have men as little boys, through a clearly defined, and ultimately simple, set of psychic stages. It is this possibility that we will discuss in the book's conclusion, after looking at responses by women directors to repressive Hollywood representations.