What Cinderella and Snow White Forgot to Tell Thelma and Louise

ONCE UPON A TIME

Like the aging crones and silent princesses of fairy tales, I was trained to see myself as others see me. Fortunately, I was cross-eyed at the age of one, so I always had double vision. Sight was never natural, rather a convention that I learned with each six-week change of glasses. I saw myself seeing. I was the seer, not the seen. I also talked fast and had a big mouth. In fact, my nickname in high school during the rock-and-roll 1950s was "The Mouth." I talked back and spoke up.

When I was a young girl, I wanted to be a boy—because of everything boys were encouraged to do, particularly sports and comedy. I wore blue jeans before they were fashionable (and sold for women) and baggy shirts, sat with my legs apart, and told jokes. I climbed fences, trees, buildings, and roamed the neighborhood at night, looking for adventure. I was too restless and impatient for femininity, which was quiet, unobtrusive, dull. Girls behaved. Boys misbehaved. I did both.

Boys moved through space. Girls stayed in place. Boys never looked back. Girls waited. Sports and comedy meant noise, action, and, like "I Love Lucy" in the 1950s, rebellion. Dolls meant a panic boredom where even the air was stifling. Passivity and acquiescence were not in my nature. I wanted to be the leader, to climb the highest tree. But I never wanted the responsibility of followers. Freedom, not power, attracted me.[1]

My heroes were Babe Didrikson Zaharias, the Olympic athlete and golfer, and Amelia Earhart. They had done what they wanted, entered men's worlds of sports competition and aviation. They were heroic, had fun, and wore slacks. But at the movies during the 1950s, there were Debbie Reynolds and Doris Day, feisty if perky females. Inevitably, they were won over in each film's end. These female options vacillated. Perhaps the butch/femme dualities these women represented are styles and values that

portray the contradictions of my generation.[2] I note that masquerade, flirting, "playing hard to get," and the other ploys of romance came from fairy tales and then the movies. But so did dreams of adventure and freedom.

I knew all the big rules of romance by thirteen (I am my body; I need a guy; I sacrifice my life for my kids; and then I die). I was taught that to be without a guy is to be alone (female friends didn't count), lonely, and unattractive, a fate worse than death. I was taught that good mothers sacrifice themselves for their children, and men sacrifice themselves for their country.[3] "If you are born black or poor or a woman, it is an impossible world to live in; if you are gifted, if you have a passionate, questioning intellect, it is a vicious world that blocks every avenue" (Hewett, 89).

To the restrictions of being a girl, add the indelible paranoia that marked the cold war in the 1950s United States, the emigration of white women and "the white family" to suburbia, and the economic anxiety of upward mobility. Upward mobility in the United States was a dream, a reality, and a process of conformity. It prescribed a decorum of middle-class respectability and a set of unspoken rules. The cardinal rule was that men, not women, economically supported the family. The woman staying home with her children was a sign of *his* success and masculinity. If women had careers, they should conceal them. My mother was a dedicated nurse, but few of my parents' friends knew she worked. She always left parties at 10:30 P.M., going straight to her night shift at the hospital. Because I couldn't tell my friends, I thought her profession was something shameful. I learned much later that she loved her career.

For me, a foreboding Catholicism (which battled atheistic Communism along with sex) divided the female body into zones, many of which were off limits or top secret. Pregnancy was a fear and scandal. Sex was a sin. So was kissing for longer than eight seconds. Femininity, like the female body it shaped and the mind it curtailed, had set in—as an imposture, a problem, or a contradiction.

I was strong, but shouldn't show it (but I did); I was smart, but shouldn't use it (but I did). I was independent, but shouldn't be. The most detrimental prohibition was never overtly say what you needed or wanted. Others should know, if they love you. This guessing game rebounds; eventually, I didn't know what I wanted or needed. Over time, I relented and tried to settle for less. But rather than use femininity duplicitously, as clever girls were trained to do, I ignored it, or just endured it. Yet the illogic haunted me. Eventually, I internalized the external standards—as a contradiction of which I was uneasily aware. (Even in the mid- to late 1960s, when feminism began to transform sex from sin to liberation, from marriage to desire, from dependence on men to independence from men, the double standard endured, particularly within the economics of work.)

What I wanted to be and what I was supposed to be coexisted. My self-image and the mirror image were often at odds. I believed I was fat, with a huge nose and head, although old photographs document that I was tall, not fat, and that my head was rather small. I learned that the female body was a problem which could be cured—by makeup, fashion, dieting, and surgery. Recently, aging was added to the agenda, yet another double standard. Women can now be fifty, but they must look thirty—chronology disavowal.[4] I learned that youth is more beautiful than age, particularly for women. But I don't believe this any more than I think I am fat.

I used to think that these illusions belonged to the 1950s. From my daughter and women graduate students, I have learned that the main rules have not changed—although in each decade, some more than others, women continue to refuse to play the game.

It is precisely this misrecognition, a real alienation effect—woman divided against her inadequate self, body versus mind, mother versus daughter or son, woman versus woman—that must be overcome. After all, the body is an image *and* a sack of flesh; it is a historical, personal fiction or style as much as a reality. Certainly, the body is neither self nor identity nor value; we are much more, much greater, than our bodies. Sex and the body don't grant identity, as Michel Foucault said over a decade ago, yet we keep looking there for answers.

After college (and in retrospect), romance frightened me into marriage, to a lawyer. This forced dependence didn't suit me. Neither did prescribed roles. (Did he think I believed that women, unlike men, were born to vacuum?) Of course, nothing and no one could have met the outside standards of romance. Simply stated: Now, at last, my life would be meaningful *and* exciting, through him and his accomplishments. For me, romance doomed marriage before the wedding. Two children and six years later, I was in an unconscious trap of my own making but didn't know how to break out.

I was financially dependent, a stifling ingratitude, without a full time job, and afraid. I still didn't believe I could economically make it on my own, to say nothing of handling all the work involved with children. I couldn't speak my discontent and I couldn't endure the suffocation. Insanity seemed to be the only solution to the economics of marriage, as apparently it was for the famous suicides, the dead heroes for my generation—Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and even Virginia Woolf. In the end, the contradictions and double standards must have crushed them. Because I didn't understand that I was giving my self away, I couldn't change; I could only leave, and then barely, and with trepidation. It took me years to realize my own strength (and accept my limitations). I *could* support myself.

There is another version of Jacques Lacan's divided subject. Dorothy

Hewett, whose verve reminds me of the Australian cultural critic Meaghan Morris, perfectly describes it: "I can't remember the exact moment when I became conscious of the divided self. There is the girl who moves and talks and rages and loves and there is the writer who watches and writes it down, who even in her most passionate moments is saying, 'Remember this'" (Hewett, 90).

THROUGH THE WOODS TO GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE

But there I was in 1974, just after the Vietnam War protest, in the midst of the women's movement and sexual liberation, getting divorced, raising two children as a "single parent" on a paltry amount of money,[5] teaching eight film courses per year, and discovering Lacan's subject divided in language, with woman as lack . . . through, of all people, film feminists![6] This is comedy! The split subject of Lacan might have been news to men, but to working/single mothers? Working through his inscrutable prose, in this U.S. era before day care, I had little to learn that I hadn't already experienced as inequity and constraint. But I didn't know this right away.

In retrospect, the elegant patina of theory[7] made (white) women, and talking about (white) women, legitimate. Psychoanalytic theory, combined with semiotics and Marxism, gave feminist film theory an edge, arousing the very fear and intimidation in men that Freud's model analyzed. (Jean-Louis Commolli and Christian Metz even compared going to the movies to castration!) But Freud made sense of "the family," which then (and even now) included the subordination of women. Freud let us see the contradictions we were living. We began to bring the inequities and double standards to the surface.

However, Freud accepted and perpetuated women's status and "nature," while feminist film theorists used Freudian theory to unravel systems, including Freud's own sexism and blind spots. Like many men, Freud didn't listen to women. In his famous discovery of the Oedipus complex, the "Little Hans" case, he paid no attention to the mother, talking only with the father. No wonder psychoanalysis is mainly a boy's story. Still, we can learn from Freud without accepting his conclusions (including the reduction of everything to "infantile sexuality").

Freud and Jacques Lacan, the French theorist who interpreted Freud through linguistics, are not the same thing. The difference is more than adding linguistics. For Lacan, "woman" means "lack;" women are defined negatively in comparison to men. But Lacan also showed me how easily women can be made absent. (Never did I imagine that our presence and

our work in film in the 1970s and even the 1980s would be forgotten, without mention in the recent film textbooks. Feminist thought is everywhere in the 1990s, authorless. Our work is uncredited, as if we never existed.) The irony of women turning to Lacan for answers *and* for legitimation still can make me cringe, although the practice is not new (or over). We still "second-class" our experience and thought and even our work. What ensued was predictable: films by radical film-making mothers, starring their children and titled "The Mirror Phase," after Lacan. Women scholars, talking Lacan and sex, became titillating, then tenured.

I suspect that, despite famous exceptions, theories of femininity and masquerade—held to appearance, mystery/glamour, and the body, as they are—like conspiratorial, envious ladies-in-waiting, have kept the rest of us under power's wraps and within romance's sway, undervalued, underpaid, *even as we unraveled them.* When you think about the symbolism, hetero or homo, piled upon women's bodies in art, in theory, and in life—particularly breasts, blobs of various sizes of measured fat, flattened into pancakes during a mammogram—it's very funny. But this is not comedy. This fetish can be crippling or deadly. (Feminist film theory, however, talked Oedipus and castration. As we argued over penis or phallus, we were still talking about male subjectivity.)

During my daughter's college graduation from Brown University in June 1991, I saw Jane Fonda videotaping her daughter. I wanted a closer look at her new, implanted breasts. I wanted to ask what they meant to her. Fear of aging? Youth? Desirability? Ted Turner? Why had she done it? Would I eventually want them? (No!) Were they silicone implants? I used to want to look like Fonda, perhaps be Fonda, a courageous woman protesting the Vietnam War—although her history of bulimia gives pause, just as leaving her profession in 1990 for love and marriage makes me wonder. Yet marriage *is* the fashion trend of the 1990s, and via CNN, Ted Turner is definitely in style. (Fonda has been the bellwether of lifestyle trends for my U.S. generation.)

In 1991 my friend Fay—who had silicone injections twenty years ago during a brief stint as a Playboy Bunny—had a double radical mastectomy. The silicone had leaked into her immune system, causing it to simulate symptoms of several exotic diseases, including lupus, crippling her joints with a false rheumatoid arthritis. Her skin turned thick, scaly like a reptile's. The diseases were simulated; the pain and effects were real. (Fay was one of the first women to be diagnosed, well before silicone implants were taken off the market.) After the mastectomy, the plastic surgeon asked when she wanted to schedule reconstructive surgery with new and improved silicone implants. Fay laughed, incredulous at his callous stupidity.

Two years later, women sued the manufacturers. They denied all charges, holding up scientific evidence. Women continued to sue. Surgeons defended the products. Women won. Silicone implants were taken off the market. The companies are, in 1994, paying out millions—but money won't help Fay.

Twenty years ago, this beautiful woman had implants for men. Male desire, a foreign agent implanted in her body *as* her, was nearly lethal. Her body turned on her. The story of women sacrificing themselves to male desire of the theoretical or the marital kind is not new—and it is neither simple nor clear. Romance has been the scenario of most U.S. popular culture, the tale of most movies. Romance is the grand illusion by which most women and men live, whether or not they consciously know it.

While it may be denied in their writing, even feminist critics live the belief that their ultimate definition comes, or would come if possible, from a relationship with a man, or a woman or a baby (or a career of mastering men's theory)—and if not a relationship, then at least sex; that unto themselves, they are inadequate, "lacking," not good enough, or just not enough. In all cases, meaning comes from the outside, from sex, from another; happiness is tied to desire, to attachment. Romance asks us to make another (lover or spouse or partner) our focus, to sacrifice our selves (and our salary), to become less. This should not be confused with love. One is addicting and self-defeating, the other liberating.

Overcoming bodily and romantic constraints that figure a confusing-to-addictive lifestyle of martyred masochism called vanity, "love," or motherhood has been no small task. For me, feminism initially is an undoing, then a learning that replaces self-hatred with self-regard, worship of men's ideas and men with respect for women's thoughts and for women *and* men. The standards of regard are internal rather than external. They have nothing to do with guilt or shame or desire or the approval of others.

But back to my academic story.[8] Semiotics and linguistics were not royal roads paved with golden nuggets of knowledge about women. Like Scylla and Charybdis, they were tests of stamina, akin to being trapped between a rock and a hard place. Plucky feminists explored male subjectivity, male desire embedded in obscure words. The new language of theory was a mixed blessing: theory (Barthes, Foucault, Deleuze) broke open academia along with the text, letting women into the debates; and theory took us as objects, even as absence (Lacan). Go figure.

Yet although many women end up at the same place, our histories do not have the same chronology. We come to feminism at different times, from different places. As Meaghan Morris recently said, "In the 70s, I learned very little from British feminist film theory; I was not interested in psychoanalysis, and so my own work looked instead to Gilles Deleuze and

Michel Foucault."[9] For most U.S. and British feminists, Foucault was endorsed much later, while Deleuze is still held in abeyance or scorned.

In the 1970s United States, only the stalwart and sturdy, such as Mary Ann Doane, Kaja Silverman, and Teresa de Lauretis (who all argue with *rigorous,* Aristotelian logic), survived the prickly thorns of semiotic's terms. For many, terminology was terminal or led nowhere. As Susan Dermody puts it to 1970s and early 1980s film theory: "An unassailably authoritarian voice speaks to you from the margins, from oppression. . . . It now seems completely unpalatable." She adds, however, a respectful "yet . . . "[10] Postmodern film "theory" written by women was sometimes confused with feminism—which to me concerns women's thoughts and actions more than men's thoughts about women's inaction. (No wonder women's history repeats every twenty or thirty years. Freud's Dora keeps walking out of analysis, only to return twenty years later with the same problem. Somewhere, in an attic, is "The Portrait of Dora Gray." Of course, Freud blamed Dora for his refusal to listen. What would Oscar Wilde have said?)

I was fainthearted—I never finished Umberto Eco's thick semiotics and didn't venture very deeply into the thickets of Jacques Derrida. I noticed, however, that many of the emperors were at least seminaked. While looking outside, at great male systems, for answers, I eventually saw that even the frog prince of theory, film theory, had a brazen history of ignoring women—unless they were femmes fatales or pinups. Andre Bazin spoke of pinups, perhaps imitating Siegfried Kracauer and his analysis of female chorus lines and techniques of capitalism. Even Sergei Eisenstein, the eclectic, populist theorist of my dreams, ignored women, although he did give us the fabulous and feisty female hero of *Old and New* (USSR, 1929), Marfa (a.k.a. Martha). Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault followed suit but elegantly showed me the path through the forest.

Gradually, like Dorothy home from the exoticism of Oz or the wilds of the Prague School, and with Foucault's guidance, I realized that the answers were right in front of my eyes, in women's everyday lives, in my history. I just couldn't see them because they were covered up by Art and Theory (particularly theories of vision) or were framed as both- and contradictions, a logic that I had learned as a girl. ("Gradually" is a bit of an understatement; this took me almost twelve years to notice.) Many women, even the brilliant Claire Johnston, thought that male subjectivity would provide the answers for them, if they could only decipher the clues.

They were dead wrong. Or, as in *Thriller* (Sally Potter, U.K., 1979) and so many Hollywood films, including *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, Paramount, 1958), they, like Johnston, were just plain dead. Women had only two endings—married or dead.

HAPPILY EVER AFTER?

What did Cinderella and Snow White forget to tell us? The answer is simple. The young beauties forgot to tell us what comes *after* "The End," after the wedding to the prince. Women's stories stop after the prince—unless, of course, one is Liz Taylor and remains a princess by replacing the prince and ball gown every few years. But a sixty-year-old princess is as silly as limiting most movie women's lives to, say, thirty years. It's not the prince who is necessarily the problem but giving him so much power over our lives. What does "happily" mean for women? What does "ever after" cost women?

Thelma and Louise (Ridley Scott/Callie Khouri, 1991) questions living "happily ever after." Or to put it another way: To her great surprise, Rapunzel was not taken to a palace and a life of luxury, as "kingdom" would imply; she was dumped in the suburbs and named Louise. Rather than airy white spaces, her house is cramped, brown, cluttered. Instead of servants catering to her every pleasure, she waits on the gold-chained prince, now a salesman. She does only what he wants and, according to him, does nothing well. How did this happen? She used to have a mind and a body of her own, didn't she? She can't remember. Happily ever after, after all, has turned out to be a prison of her own making. She saw herself through his eyes and gave her life, her body, mind, and soul away.

Thank God, the sorceress Thelma, now working as a waitress at a diner, is her close friend. Thelma's life hasn't been perfect either—particularly a rape about which she won't speak and an Elvis-type lover who can barely speak. Within the first five minutes of the film, Thelma and Louise leave for a weekend at a cottage. Little did they know that lecherous wolves, and Louise's own confused desire, would dog their every move. Little did they expect that this short trip would become a journey to freedom and that they would become heroes. Or that the film would become an event, a debate of pro and con, feminist or not, and that "thelmad and louised" would become a phrase for violent action.

The film struck a social cord, and no wonder. Escaping the trap of "happily ever after" and all that "once upon a time" implies has been no small task for women. This fairy-tale scenario is the story we are taught to make of our lives. Fairy tales became expectations *and* limitations. (It's not finding the prince [or marriage or relationships] that is the problem; it's believing that the prince [or princess] is the answer to self-definition and the source of happiness. "He" or "she" or "true love" can never succeed in this impossible promise, whether straight or queer.) *Snow White* was my first encounter among thousands of versions of this fairy tale. (Released on video in 1994, this 1937 film, Disney's first animated feature, had boffo

profits, with advance orders at twenty-seven million!) This book will trace that fiction through twenty years of feminist film theory—from the mid 1970s to the mid 1990s.

FIVE AGES

My five ages of film feminism trace a twenty-year period. They are historical (from the early 1970s through the 1990s), personal (through the decades of *my* professional life), and descriptive (the taxonomy derived from what I perceive to be tactics of feminist film critics). The ages are ongoing, overlapping, and simultaneous, but for me they have also been chronological. They might be generational or, as in Shakespeare (who gave Jaques seven ages),[11] comprise stages of passage. Unlike life and like the movies, they can run in reverse—although this has not happened to me, thank God. I shudder when I imagine reading semiotic theory again!

The first three ages—intellectual feminism, irascible feminism, and experimental feminism—emphasize sexual difference. They rely on male theories of subjectivity and vision, emphasize "desire" (which I see sharing traits with obsession and addiction), and are often indebted to psychoanalysis. Intellectual and irascible feminism focus on heterosexuality—women's bodies and men's thoughts. The first is cool, impersonal. The second is angry thus no longer impersonal.[12] Both presumably speak of public, not private, knowledge.

Experimental feminism addresses other differences, other bodies—sometimes older, of various colors, increasingly lesbian—and other desires. Our experiences (life and work) begin to enter, first as theory, then as evidence or history, and finally as story. This age critically shifts the point of view to women, including women of color. The intimacy of address opens up private spaces—perhaps private because overlooked—in which women lived and worked.

The fourth age, empirical feminism, moves from sexuality to history, from desire to thought, from sexual liberation to personal and collective freedom, and includes sound along with theories of vision. The fifth age, economical feminism, emphasizes the money economy, women's work, along with bodies and sexes, the sexual economy. But it is more than this. We know that time is precious and must not be wasted. This is the age of mediation, of fearless action, of compassion. From differences we have learned the beauty of diversity and the power of unity. Thus both can cut through the superficial divides of nation, race, age, gender and the dualities of thought to focus on multiplicity *and* sameness. Public realms merge with private thoughts and behaviors, going beyond materiality to ethics.

The fragmented dyad of mind and body is restored to wholeness, a triad of mind, body, and spirit.

To be sure, the ages that overlap and structure this book are idiosyncratic. They are particular to my life and thought. Teresa de Lauretis, Mary Ann Doane, Linda Williams, Judith Mayne, Tania Modleski, Kaja Silverman, Laura Mulvey, Claire Johnston, Sally Potter, Valie Export, and the contributors to *Camera Obscura*, particularly Constance Penley, are first-generation film feminists I worked with from 1975 to 1982 in Milwaukee. Five years later came Meaghan Morris and Kathleen Woodward; and from the next generation, Patrice Petro. In the 1990s, Laleen Jayamanne and Tracey Moffatt have been influential (as have the films of Julie Dash and the writings of bell hooks and Michelle Wallace). My allusions to all of these brilliantly feminist thinkers are direct and indirect. I am profoundly grateful that such luminous, trailblazing figures have been part of my everyday life.

My terrain is not *feminism* but an eccentric figuration that I call *film feminism*. I fostered and even starred this intellectual model at several international film conferences in the late 1970s. Feminism was integral to these events (which also imported contemporary European theory) but hardly united. Debates raged over the pertinence of psychoanalysis for feminism. Julia LeSage, for example, rejected Freud, while Mary Ann Doane and then Teresa de Lauretis, following Claire Johnston, Laura Mulvey, and Juliet Mitchell in England, reclaimed psychoanalysis *for* U.S. feminism.

And within feminism at large, disciplines proceed out of step with one another. For example, art history took up film's theoretical work on "the gaze" much later, then virtually dropped the psychoanalytic framework. The same time lapse occurred with the intellectual history of Michel Foucault. In the 1990s, film scholars are turning away from theory to art history, invoking iconography. Literary criticism, in contrast, was in sync with, or a step ahead of, film, as was history and, to a lesser degree, sociology.

Economics, however, is another story, one that is just beginning for feminism.[13] I wonder why. Is money, and a field mapped by numbers, presumed to be neutral? Or too symbolic for women? Within film, economic history has been written from within both market and Marxist premises. Rarely are these biases noted, even by feminist econo-historians—to say nothing of positing a feminist economic history of cinema.

Even about film feminism, my thoughts are partial, in no sense imagined to cover this rich terrain. I no longer have the patience or stamina to finish every book. I prefer knowledge that has relevance for my present life

and some respect for women's history. Shifting registers from the personal to the academic, this book is biased and irregular. But I consider this a strength, not a weakness. Why spend years gathering knowledge if not to use it in everyday life, in the world? I have never understood why "experience," at least women's experience, didn't count as proper knowledge. From here on, however, autobiography is minimal, except for my love for movies which colors everything.

"A Fine Romance" is about an unrequited love affair between feminism and Hollywood cinema. Dorothy Fields' clever lyrics (and Jerome Kern's lovely music) portray this relationship better than I can. Sing along to her words—this book's epigraph.

> A fine romance, with no kisses;
> A fine romance, my friend this is.
> . . .
> I've never had a chance.
> This is a fine romance.

"A Fine Romance, With No Kisses": Discourse, Not Intercourse

A 1950S FILM—A 1970S PARABLE

In *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, Paramount, 1958), the inscrutable Kim Novak as Madeleine/Judy lures us and the story on a false trail—into the mysterious secret of female sexuality and identity. The film goes first to the art museum for clues and then to art historians and the bookstore for answers. Jimmy Stewart as Scotty Ferguson tracks the victim of his desire to an art museum. Kim/Madeleine poses, presumably unaware of surveillance, transfixed by a painting of a woman. A dramatic series of shots of Scotty looking and interpreting is elaborated, exaggerated by Hitchcock's point-of-view editing. This is a false trail, a setup. Madeleine is the lure who possesses knowledge, not Scotty. (Paradoxically, the film's title shots of a woman's eye and mouth told us everything.)

However, we know this only in retrospect. For now, we are *led* to believe that the secret, which is both cause and effect, question and answer, is sex, that the woman's sexual identity, her story, lies in the painting and perhaps in psychoanalysis. So off to a rare bookstore and a scholar for answers: the painted woman is Carlotta Valdez, an enigma of Spanish eroticism, Madeleine's heritage, a figure that is both mysterious and mentioned only in passing.

What is critical is that women's history and identity, and maybe scholarly answers, mean absolutely nothing to the story. The trick is to make us believe women are significant while the only thing that matters is obsessive male desire. This is the con artist's shell game or the magician's sleight of hand. In fact, Madeleine is not who she appears to be—something we learn late in the film. She can be only a masquerade, only what he wants her to be. Madeleine exists because of men. By herself, as herself, she doesn't matter. She has no identity. Along the way, a wife is murdered; even at

the inquest, nobody cares. Male obsession/desire drives the film; female sexuality is only a screen, neither cause nor effect nor explanation.[1]

When she was very young, Dorothy Hewett wrote, "Sexuality has taken the place of intellect. I resent his power over me but can't keep away. . . . While I share his obsession, these experiences hardly rate a mention in my diary. It is still full of unconsummated romance."[2]

From the early 1970s into the 1990s, from Mulvey, Modleski, and de Lauretis to Doane and Williams (and countless others), feminist film critics looked in Hollywood movies for women's desire, women's pleasure, and rarely found it. (We found male obsession but didn't recognize it.) The investigation of female subjectivity looked to Hitchcock films; Hitchcock was to feminist film theory what Edgar Allan Poe was to French deconstructionists. Feminist film theory begins with Judy/Madeleine, luminous and revolutionary work in its time but a blind alley, a brilliant dead end for the future—in spite of gay and lesbian film critics' recent analyses of Hitchcock as the site of homosexual subjectivities.[3] (Given Hitchcock's often literal attention to psychoanalysis, sexual proclivities and other Freudianisms in his films should not come as a surprise.)

Intellectual feminism continued *Vertigo*'s quest for glamour girls via the secret of sex, looking in the same pages of the *Standard Edition*, Lacan's mirror, Hitchcock films, and other 1940s Hollywood film genres, particularly film noir and melodrama. (Recently, feminists have been fascinated with glamorous, sensuous, hard-bodied women who kill without regret or sentiment, usually after great sex, in classier versions of the horror/slasher film genre. More on this trend later.) Historically, this inscription of female subjectivity, particularly in the debates over female spectatorship, was an astonishing and radical move, albeit color-blind. Nowhere that I can find in the history of film theory are women, white and of color, mentioned as subjects—extraordinary, given the power and presence of white female stars and white women in the audience and the marginality and absence of black women, on-screen and in segregated movie theaters. What now seems so apparent to any undergraduate in the 1990s had been overlooked for eighty years in the early 1970s. Whether white and present or black and absent, women were there to serve.

Thus to add female subjectivity, albeit with a white exclusivity, to the agenda, along with noticing the absence of women from so many historical accounts, was a great and brilliant move. Theories of sexual difference and vision, on the plane of the body, modeled the then-radical argument. However, the tenets of heterosexual romance linked to all this male desire and pleasure lurked offscreen yet remained unspoken for many women.

MADE IN THE FADE

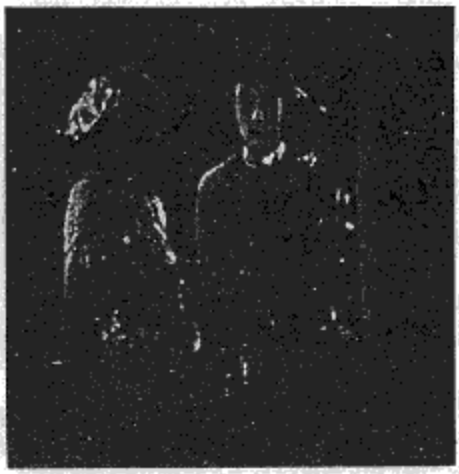
Since 1906, Hollywood has been the central agent of romance, what is known in the trades as the "love interest." In 1980, for an international film theory conference in Milwaukee, "Conditions of Presence," I labeled the technique of movie romance "Made in the Fade."[4] These conventions of the continuity style are historical, tied up with cinema's censorship codes and social prohibitions. For me, the last scene of Buster Keaton's great film *Sherlock Junior* (1924) said it all, and more.[5] Keaton, the movie projectionist, proposes marriage to the "Girl" by imitating the actions of the debonair movie hero starring in *Hearts and Pearls*—the film within the film.

The hero on-screen and Keaton in the projection booth position their respective "girls"; each then slips a ring on her finger and kisses her. During these actions, Keaton looks directly out at the movie screen (which is out at us), while "the Girl," who earlier figured out and solved the crime of the film, looks down and waits for his moves. She occupies what de Lauretis has called "the empty space between the signs, where no demand is possible."[6] After the kiss, however, the film fades to black. In the next shot, the on-screen couple has babies! Cut back to Buster, the projectionist, who scratches his head, amazed by the fade that means sex, kids, family—the "Made in the Fade" of my title. (See pages 18, 19, 20.)

Most films end with the kiss. But here, and in most of his features (and in his short *Cops* [1922]), Keaton questions not only the technical conventions of cinema but how they are tied up with narratives of romance. In several brief but powerful shots at the conclusion of his feature *College* (1927), Keaton interrogates romance, going beyond the "happily ever after," which films rarely do. After the couple's marriage, the film concludes with a brief epilogue. The couple is shown reading separate newspapers in middle age, then separate and bickering in old age. The last shot is of their gravestones. "All of this effort for that?"

The endings of Keaton features question the premises of the film itself—the tenets of romance that propel the Keaton protagonist to heroic deeds in order to win the girl in marriage.[7] And Keaton's films aptly summarize the status of women: Like the consumer courted by capitalism, woman is absolutely essential and supremely worthless. In so many ways, women are depicted as everything and nothing.

Classical cinema (from 1906 through the 1960s and into the 1970s), a fine romance indeed, is sealed by a narrative/marital contract, historically without intercourse and, for women, recourse. Since the 1980s, sex has been more real than implied, as much on-screen as off. But this was not



always the case; hence conservatives can yearn for the good old days of "good" movies. Within the historical boundaries of the classical text, cinema is an everyday machine of familialism. It is an institution that constructs objects of desire, finally conscripted into the family through film's endless creation of new, youthful couples. The representation of the erotic, promenaded female body, then the denial and containment of the dangerous eroticism by death or marriage in "The End," is both the paradox and obsession of classical film.

This film discourse of sexuality parallels Foucault's *History of Sexuality*.[8] Although Foucault's writing was central to my thought in the late 1970s and early 1980s, I was also wary. The original version of this essay

has a lengthy cautionary warning to feminists about the uncritical adoption of Foucault. I agree with Meaghan Morris, who so archly wrote that feminists who sent love letters to Foucault were in no danger of reciprocation.[8] (Then he was still alive and attending conferences; we met at the University of Southern California. I met Morris several years later; Foucault had just died.) Although he ignored women almost completely, I loved his modeling of contradiction, particularly of the logic applied to sex: "What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum* while exploiting it as *the* secret" (Foucault, 35).

In classical film, the secret is in the fade to black, protected by the closure of "The End." This is a purloined-letter logic, where the secret is hidden right in front of our eyes. We just can't see it until someone points it out; then it is obvious. Arguing against Freud's repression hypothesis (the virtual basis of early feminist film theory), Foucault defines sexuality as "the name that can be given to a historical construct . . . one relay of which is the body that produces and consumes" (Foucault, 195). The on-screen female body is produced, in the classical text, as a representation for male consumption. This is done through the narrative and through the eyes/gaze of the male protagonist.

Foucault further describes this body, from the eighteenth century on, as a class body: "One of the bourgeoisie's primary concerns was to provide itself with a body and a sexuality, the endogamy of sex and the body. . . . The bourgeoisie blood was its sex" (Foucault, 124). The family was the location of what Foucault calls sexuality and alliance, anchoring sexuality, wealth, and reproduction within the same sphere. (For historical royal families these functions had been split, something Prince Charles and Princess Di tried to bring back but failed in.) As an example, in *Cover Girl* (Columbia, 1944) the glorious body of Rita Hayworth/Rusty Parker, in gold lamé (the deployment of sexuality) is coupled in the end to Gene Kelly's middle-class body (the deployment of alliance).

This collapse of two formerly separate systems within the family, enacted in the conclusion of so many films, including *Gold Diggers of 1933* (Warner Brothers, 1933), occurs because mechanisms of power and knowledge are now centered on sex. Foucault's analysis of power is of particular interest in relation to classic cinema. He defines "power" as "a multiplicity of force relations, a process . . . a chain . . . with domination and subordination as its terminal form" (Foucault, 86). In his construct, power is tolerable only on the condition that it mask a substantial part of its operations: "Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its mechanism" (Foucault, 86). This depiction of an apparatus of sexuality matches analy-

ses of the technical and narrative mechanisms of classical films, as well as the relations between on-screen male and female protagonists

In the late 1970s, Kristin Thompson/David Bordwell and Stephen Heath's work on Hollywood continuity style overlapped, in spite of being derived from vastly different sources: Bordwell/Thompson took their lead from the *American Cinematographer*, a professional trade journal, and Heath began with continental theories of literary narrative and Lacanian psychoanalysis.[10] Continuity style referred to a set of technical and narrative principles that cut across Hollywood cinema—its genres, directors, studios, and decades.

The primary principle is that the formal properties of film time and film space are subordinated to the narrative. When we buy our movie ticket, we buy a story, not a formal, aesthetic experience. Aesthetic innovation can be a bonus, but it is not a prerequisite. And if "art" is there, as it is, for example, in the big box office films of Tim Burton, Quentin Tarentino and James Cameron, the formal elements must not overshadow the story, although they can comprise the story, for example, in science fiction or fantasy films, and even stand out as extraordinary.

No matter what the artistry and invention, film's major and profitable commodity is story—which relies on stars, usually a young heterosexual couple. Although minimal in plot and characters and very redundant, the story must have a certain duration, longer than one and not more than three hours, although we pay the same admission price no matter what the length or quality or cost. Going to the movies involves a quantity of time as much as, or more than, the quality of experience.

The continuity system is remarkably repetitive, and the film world sparsely populated—usually only the central couple matters. This destined pair is given center frame, closeups, star lighting, and most of the dialogue. It is these conventions which contribute to our seeing stars as more powerful, beautiful, and attractive.

Along with duration, repetition, and the centrality of the couple, the narrative adheres to a cause-effect logic, usually chronological, wherein every action is foreshadowed and motivated, and then repeated several times on both sound and image tracks until we get it. The repetition of elements is symmetrical, with the end mirroring the beginning. For example, the end of *Citizen Kane* returns to the beginning, panning down the gates of Xanadu. We have seen the glass ball, "rosebud," several times throughout the film (for example, in the Colorado snow scene of separation, in Susan Alexander's rooming house, on the dresser, and later in her bedroom in Xanadu), each appearance accompanied by its mournful four-note theme. Thus, when the sled, rosebud, is burned at the end, the theme crescendos, and we feel an emotional satiation. For the film audience, unlike the

reporter, Thompson, the search for the meaning of rosebud, Kane's last word, has been completed, through repetition and symmetry on both the sound and image tracks.

During the story's progression, every item is used up—there are no loose ends or unexplained actions or characters. Thus, the film *makes* connections for us, while we imagine ourselves doing the detecting. Furthermore, we usually know the ending when the film begins, yet we disavow, or suspend, our knowledge to play the narrative game.

A series of well-known techniques serve continuity's seamless purpose of repressing the formal elements of space and time: concentration on center frame, usually occupied by a human character; shooting in depth to create Quattrocentro perspective; and reframings and camera movement to keep the characters in center frame. Thus, neither the margins nor the mise-en-scene, no matter how spectacular, will dominate the action or characters. Characters and objects are given this precious space only if they serve a function in the film—either indicative of character psychology or to be used in the narrative action. Nothing within center frame is incidental to the narrative.

Another technique is graphic continuity—within each scene, between scenes, and throughout the entire film. No matter how many apartments, restaurants, book stores, we visit in *When Harry Met Sally,* the style, decor, colors, and lighting are remarkably similar. Films are highly designed, each with their own look.

Conventions of editing shots together to minimize the abrupt cuts and switches of locale, along with movements through time, have evolved. Matching action by cutting on character movement, eye line and point of view shots (cut to character looking, then to what or who they see, then back to character looking), shot-reverse shot conventions for dialogue scenes and countless other principles of editing are familiar to every movie goer. We know when screen direction is not maintained, when continuity is broken, when the 180 degree invisible line of editing is crossed and characters appear on the wrong side of the screen. Or, the 30 degree rule that prevents the perception of "jump cuts." We call these "errors." But they are merely conventions of Hollywood's continuity style.

The sound track has its own artifice which audiences take for real. Sound involves close-miking; no matter how far away a speaker moves, they talk right in our ear. Sound cuts are staggered with visual cuts, carrying sound from one scene to another, smoothing the continuity. Like the central and supporting characters, there is a hierarchy to sound. First comes the spoken voice, then sound effects, and music. Speech must always be in sync and intelligible.

What is not noticed often enough is that not only does this narrative

portray women as subordinate to men, but that the talking figures in center frame, the protagonists who move the narrative, are mainly white and the women young. The continuity style represents (and has created) a double standard of gender, race, and age, with different conventions of lighting, make-up, speech, and even action for men and women.

In this early work, Heath and Thompson/Bordwell didn't discuss sound or the function of gender, race, and age—the way these political issues determine technique. Nor did they mention that the narrative is usually a story of romance, no matter what the genre, director, studio, or year. The one-hundred years dominance of this story of the couple coupling has had cumulative significance, and, I would argue, major cultural impact. For Hollywood has created the story many little girls and women believe they must make of their lives.

Sometimes this fairy tale becomes a horror story. The Susan Smith murder trial is a perfect example. She must have believed that without a man, the wealthy boss's son, she was nothing, that without a man, nothing mattered, even her children. Dependency on men can, like any addiction, become deadly. In fact, within the syndrome of martyrdom and self pity, her children could even be blamed, then drowned. The sensational case resembled a woman's melodrama of the 1940s, turned into a tragedy of the 1990s through the use of home video recordings of her young sons.

To the male scholarly model of the continuity style, I want to add figurations of gender, race, and age. To do this, I will simply point out what is there to be seen yet paradoxically rarely noticed.

To place eroticism within the family, and consequently, to put women in their place of subordination within that family, is often "The End" of the classical film. (Whether the women of *Gold Diggers of 1933* and films of the 1940s are subordinate is open to question.) It is not insignificant that to accomplish this task of power, the apparatus must be masked.

For Foucault, a parallel tactic to concealment is accentuation or excess (particularly apparent in musicals, which foreground the cinematic apparatus). Foucault locates one of power's four major strategies as the "hysterization" of women's bodies, an apt concept for Busby Berkeley's visions. This strategy constructs the female body as "thoroughly saturated with sexuality":

> In the process of hysterization of women, "sex" was defined in three ways: as that which belongs in common to men and women; as that which belongs par excellence to men and hence lacking in women; but at the same time, as that which by itself constitutes women's body, ordering it wholly in terms of the functions of reproduction and keeping it in constant agitation. (Foucault, 153)

A history of cinema could be written as an agitation of women's bodies. The highlighted, halo-haired, feathered, furred, airbrushed-by-technicolor

concoction circulates through eighty-nine minutes of the film and is then contained/possessed in the privileged seconds of the end, usually by a middle-class male/husband. The moment of metamorphosis from sexuality to alliance, the trajectory of romance, used to be an immaculate conception, for years keeping cinema's virginal censorship code intact in the unseen and the unheard of the fade to black—the secret, or nonsecret, that is sex.

Talk about double-whammy logic! Sex "by itself constitutes women's body" and yet is "lacking in women." We are everything *and* nothing, full of sex *and* lacking sex. This is a logic of contradiction, a both-and logic of creation/cancellation. Angela Carter describes the paradox: "In the celluloid brothel of the cinema, where the merchandise may be eyed endlessly but never purchased, the tension between the beauty of women, which is admirable, and the denial of the sexuality which is the source of that beauty but is also immoral, reaches a perfect impasse."[11] What happens in the 1990s is that sexuality as source is proclaimed, not denied—quite a switch—and sometimes, as in *Basic Instinct* (Joe Eszterhas/Paul Verhoeven, 1991), not contained by "The End." But whether overt or covert, the aftereffects or fallout is the same.

Carter's historical position echoes Foucault in another sense: speaking about sex constantly while maintaining it as the secret. (Now popular culture just speaks of sex constantly!) Film's solution—fade/family—keeps the secret of sex in the dark of censorship or the light of romance. The couple's passage through the film into the fade and then "The End" (the family) literalizes Foucault's analysis: "It is through sex—in fact an imaginary point—that each individual has to pass in order to have access to his own intelligibility . . . to his body . . . to his identity" (Foucault, 22).

Foucault was not giving us advice, he was criticizing this belief. The conflation of sex and identity was a ruse. But sex still is figured as the key to identity and perhaps to politics, even radical politics. For women, sex as power/subversion is, in reality, imaginary. In *The Last Seduction* (Steve Barancik/John Dahl, 1994), Linda Fiorentino as seductress knows that sex is merely a lure, a trick; the key to power is money, not sex.

Via romance or thrill, cinema places us within the family, constructing a discourse historically without intercourse (with the exception of pornographic films). As Roland Barthes so aptly wrote: "The dramatic narrative is a game . . . nothing has been shown . . . what is shown is shown in one stroke, and at the end; it is the end which is shown."[12] The happy ending meant coupling—kiss, fade, "The End." The consequent marriage was rarely represented, let alone depicted as "happy."

Perhaps even more than the screwball comedy, the musical comedy is a form that literalizes the conventions of romance of the classical film in general. *The Dolly Sisters* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1945) and *Cover Girl* map out the collapse of sexuality and alliance in cinema. In "The End," the