Situating the Feminist Gaze and Spectatorship in Postwar Cinema
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Edited by

Marcelline Block

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For my parents
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Why is film theory so organically connected with psychoanalysis? Can this be attributed to Jacques Lacan’s lasting impact on late twentieth century culture, or to intelligent adaptations of his theories of the eye, the gaze and the screen by notable theoreticians like Laura Mulvey, Joan Copjec and Slavoj Žižek? Or is it because the subjective situations involved by psychoanalysis and the experience of watching a film in a theater are so close? When we are in the dark and watch in a rapt stupor a flow of animated images, we do more than follow a pleasant narrative or discover new vistas, we are led to indulge our deepest fantasies and reenact traumas that we would not want to be reminded of in real life. Whether this is done in the community of an anonymous crowd of spectators or in the relative solitude of a patient brought back piecemeal to past memories and hidden associations by the active silence of the psychoanalyst, soon the room gets crowded, at least at an imaginary level. All the roles of one’s life can be acted out by the most famous actors or by humdrum figures: Ava Gardner, mother, John Malkovich, father, Tipi Hedren, sister, Groucho Marx, brother, Monica Vitti, aunt, Javier Bardem, uncle, all taking on diverse parts, all to be endowed with specific legends. And just as psychoanalysis teaches us to come to terms with the “mother in us” instead of fighting with the real mother, similarly, films give us access to Gardner or Bardem in us.

Most of the authors gathered in this exciting collection would seem to agree with the first hypothesis—the impact of Lacanian reworkings of Freud is determining—and they would all state, like Molly Bloom: “Mulvey’s was the first…”1 Let us note that “Mulveys was the first” does not exactly mean “Mulvey was the first.” In Ulysses, when Molly ruminates on her past, she remembers that it was Mulvey, her first real lover back in Gibraltar, who had been the first man ever to send her a love letter. By alluding in this oblique way to Laura Mulvey’s groundbreaking 1975 essay on “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” an essay that is
being discussed by almost all the contributors of this volume, at times to contest it, at times to apply it differently, I mean that we are all aware that Mulvey had been the first to send us a letter about love as perceptible in the cinematographic dialectics of visuality linking audience to plot and characterization, or rather, to use a technical vocabulary that she would prefer, a letter about libidinal and gendered investments in classical film; the letter’s message has not been forgotten.

It was a fitting coincidence that 1975, the year when Laura Mulvey was able to successfully systematize the interaction between psychoanalytic conceptions of gender and a feminist critique of the male gaze following a trend relayed by Screen, the leading British magazine applying French structuralism, from Roland Barthes to Christian Metz, to literature, social issues and above all film analysis, was also the year when Chantal Akerman produced her first masterpiece, Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles. At the time, the film was thought shocking, less because it depicted the apparently senseless murder of a customer by an occasional prostitute than because the audience had to follow the process of boiling water or peeling potatoes in real time. Prostitution did not seem worse than doing daily chores, forgetting one’s dish in the oven or taking care of a rebellious son. The grinding repetition of daily activities highlighted how tenuous Jeanne Dielman’s control over her life was, while suggesting something like a feminist Waiting for Godot, with the difference that the final twist turned to sudden horror. Just when Mulvey was denouncing the domination of the male gaze in Hollywood films depicting women as objects of desire and subjugation, a female director was turning the tables (kitchen tables, no doubt) on the male setup of voyeurism and dominance.

I take Akerman as a good example of that generation of feminist filmmakers who did not follow in the paths of their male elders, but also refused to paint themselves in the corner of “experimental” or “avant-gardist” cinema. One could illustrate this with two films which were released almost at the same time, Akerman’s La Captive (2000), a modernized adaptation of Marcel Proust’s La Prisonnière section of In Search of Lost Time, and Raúl Ruiz’s acclaimed 1999 Time Regained. Both directors came to Proust with a reputation as formal experimenters, and both decided wisely that since they could not adapt the whole novel, they would concentrate on a limited segment. While Ruiz seemed more interested in comparing the whole world conjured up by Proust with that of the French and even international cinema, with Odette played by Catherine Deneuve, Gilberte by Emmanuelle Béart, Morel by Vincent Perez, Albertine by Chiara Mastroianni, Charlus by John Malkovich,
Akerman focuses on the issues at hand, namely the impossibility of love, the paradoxes of desire and the ambivalence of gender. Ruiz makes sense for readers who already know Proust and thus recognize instantly famous scenes, but his decision to move back and forth in time blurs anything like a narrative sequence. Finally, he had to rely on visual pyrotechnics calling up surrealist techniques to evoke the magic of Proust’s style, and one can only conclude that the visual is no match for the written word. By contrast, Akerman’s minimalism, anti-naturalism, stylized interactions, her Hitchcock-like insistence on voyeuristic exchanges and perverse innuendoes, along with her choice of a modern setting and relatively unknown actors (except for Sylvie Testud as the highly enigmatic Ariane a.k.a. Albertine), end up highlighting the very meaning of Proust’s oeuvre in so far as at its very core there lurks an obsession with deviant sexuality. Thus Akerman’s narrative thread is accessible to viewers who have never opened La Recherche. It is undeniable that Akerman has been successful in creating a stunning visual experience that leaves room for thought, thus prolonging in an original manner Proust’s own interrogations, even when they are most disturbing, while Ruiz remains decorative, awed by a book he attempts to summarize, which in the end leads one to conclude that he has not discovered the secrets of Time—the pages of the novel remain massively forbidding and time is never really “regained.”

Should one ascribe this sharp contrast in tones, styles and techniques to gender difference? I believe so, and appreciate the fact that it was Akerman’s “lesbian” approach that allowed her to universalize Proust much more than Ruiz’s polite fascination for a cultural monument of modernism. With Ruiz, Proust’s work remains a monument, nothing but a monument, with Akerman we are at times bored but we are haunted by questions about love, jealousy, dehiscence between other-sex and same-sex patterns. My attribution of a certain superiority to Akerman’s being a woman may smack of essentialism, and one might want to query any identification of Akerman’s film with a “feminine” point of view and Ruiz’s film with a “male” and totalizing gaze. However, it is my belief that these equations are indispensable fictions that we will need to elaborate in order to talk about gender in film. The best theories are those one can disagree with after having used them productively, because they begin by simplifying issues. Mulvey’s simplification was deliberate, and she could not ignore that the chain of equivalences linking Hollywood, the male gaze, voyeuristic aggression facing a female body always presented as that of an exploited victim could not be sustained seriously as a universal paradigm.
The contributors to this collection nevertheless decide to revisit the paradigm, not to prove that it was after all quite true but that it still yields new and important insights. This is due to a changed discursive field, in which the names of Lacan, Kristeva and Deleuze are now regularly quoted together (whereas they were seen as enemies one decade ago) and in which a later feminism has been reconciled with a revised Freud. No doubt, Lacan himself had to absorb a powerful and militant new wave of French feminism and he did it with remarkable brio when he presented his “formulae of sexuation” in the seventies as a way of combing his earlier stress on castration with an optional sexual divide in which both men and women could choose to be impacted differently by castration. Freud himself, when studied closely or with different lenses, resists simple dichotomization based on gender roles. Even if Freud tends to identify femininity with passivity and masculinity with activity, as soon as he works with fantasy—which is, after all, what Mulvey is doing all the time—he appears at his best, capable of understanding the complex grammar that declines sentences such as “a child is being beaten,” “my father is beating the child,” “I am being beaten by my father,” in a spectrum going from the equivalence of “beating” with “hating” and then with “loving.” Such reversals underpin his general metapsychology of fantasy, a metapsychology defined by a pervasive lability of investments and of gendered roles. Freud concludes his essay on “A Child is Being Beaten” in a very measured way: “In the last resort we can only see that both in male and female individuals masculine as well as feminine instinctual impulses are to be found, and that each can equally well undergo repression and so become unconscious.”2

Feminist film theory presented in the lucid critical polyphony gathered with unerring critical instinct by Marcelline Block will insist upon such a dynamic and mobile attitude facing the gaze. As the case of Jurassic Park clearly shows, it is the very discourse of science facing gender—when it attempts to control reproduction, to regulate the biology of gender choice, and to vanquish time by returning to archaic pre-history—that creates monsters. It would be too simple to say that these voracious dinosaurs embody our terrifying “fathers of the horde” or our always domineering and castrating mothers... Similarly, when we witness today a fascination for “slasher” films shared by male and female audiences, we may want to qualify the idea that it is produced for the exclusive enjoyment of a male gaze. It might be more productive to stress, as Angela Carter did in her groundbreaking Sadeian Woman,3 that fantasy, no matter how transgressive, monstrous or repulsive it may be, is no gender’s or sex’s property, and that perversion, especially when filmed, once it is located
firmly within the realm of fantasy, can provide subjective empowerment for all of us.

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Works Cited


Notes

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Marcelline Block
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INTRODUCTION

MARCELLINE BLOCK

Situating the Feminist Gaze and Spectatorship in Postwar Cinema examines films made in the United States, Europe and Russia. Contributors to this volume engage with and readdress classic tenets of feminist film theory. Several chapters explore its interaction with other critical perspectives such as psychoanalytic, queer, disability, postfeminist, quantum, trauma and chaos theories.

This volume is divided into four sections. The five essays in “De-Gendering the Gaze,” the first section, depart from and extend the concept of the male gaze discussed by Laura Mulvey (see below), in order to foreground gendered looking relations and theories of the gaze from various critical perspectives including the quantum gaze, female voyeurism, the poly-gaze, the queering of the gaze, and the female director’s gaze. The second section, “Theorizing Terror,” includes two essays on thriller and horror films, which are staples of feminist film critique. The two essays of the third section, “Postfeminist Interventions,” focus on the interaction between feminism and postfeminism. The final section, “Re-Inscribing the Female Subject in History,” includes essays that address the formation, development and representation of female subjecthood within the framework of the politico-historical contexts of Belgian, British, French, and Russian films.

Most of the contributors take Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975) as a starting point, while also engaging with the works of other theorists. According to Mulvey,

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure…In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness…The man controls the film fantasy and also emerges as the representative of power…: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen to neutralize the extra-diegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle…The image of woman as (passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man takes the argument a step further into the structure
of representation, adding a further layer demanded by the ideology of the patriarchal order as it is worked out in its favorite cinematic form—illusionistic narrative film...Film has depended on voyeuristic active/passive mechanisms.

As stated above, Mulvey’s discourse on looking relations, scopophilia, the male gaze, female to-be-looked-at-ness, and the fragmentation/fetishization of the female body on screen propels a feminist revision of film. Feminist film theorists have incorporated, revised, and critiqued Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure,” which P. Adams Sitney considers “the most influential text of feminist film theory.” Some critics who have modified Mulvey’s binarism—proposing different theories such as the possibility of many gazes and shifting subject positions among spectators—include Janet Bergstrom, Carol Clover, Barbara Creed, Mary Ann Doane, Cynthia Freeland, Jane Gaines, E. Ann Kaplan, Teresa de Lauretis, Tania Modleski, Constance Penley, Trinh T. Minh-ha, B. Ruby Rich, Vivian Sobchak, Jackie Stacey, and Gaylyn Studlar, among others. Yet, “Visual Pleasure” remains the urtext, “the single most reprinted essay in the field of feminist film theory.” In 1981, Mulvey revisited her “Visual Pleasure” in “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ Inspired by King Vidor’s Duel in the Sun,” in which she addressed the female spectator position as well as cinepsychoanalytic constructions of femininity.

Several contributors to Situating the Feminist Gaze and Spectatorship in Postwar Cinema propose, in turn, theories of the transgendered gaze as well as what I would like to call the Versailles gaze (modeled on the Lacanian “crowd’s gaze”) and the gaze of History, among others.

In the first chapter, Lisa DeTora writes:

Mulvey notes that Hollywood narrative films construed looking relations, or more properly, the investment of pleasure in looking relations as relying on the operation of a gendered binary, with man as ‘bearer of the look’ and woman as ‘object of the gaze.’ Today, this observation informs readings of nearly all visual media, despite the advances that Mulvey, among others, have noted in technologies that have profoundly altered what can be packed into a second of screen time. Feminist film theorists such as Barbara Creed, Cynthia Freeland and Sue Thornham have long worked to account for different gazes and subject positions in order to supplement and/or problematize the heteronormative binary of Mulvey’s theory of subject-object looking relations. (4-5)

Elizabeth Gruber, in the twelfth chapter, states that,
There are certain dangers in adhering too rigidly to the masculine-looker/feminine-object schema. An especially cogent critique of this formulation is presented by Jane Gaines, who argues: ‘the male/female opposition, so seemingly fundamental to feminism, may actually lock us into modes of analysis which will continually misunderstand the position of many women.’ (229)

Yet, Rachel Ritterbusch, in the second chapter, notes that, “critics who focus on the weaknesses of Mulvey’s arguments overlook the intent of her article, which is to call for radical change…to create the conditions for an alternative cinema…that provides an authentic position for the female subject” (35-36).

Along with confronting patriarchy of mainstream cinema and the politics of phallocentrism—which, according to Susan R. Suleiman, is the “submission to the rule of logic, syntax, linearity, homogeneity, and realist representation”—several essays in Situating the Feminist Gaze and Spectatorship in Postwar Cinema seem written in response to E. Ann Kaplan’s queries: “is the gaze necessarily male…Or would it be possible to structure things so that women own the gaze?...What does it mean to be a female spectator?...Is it possible for there to be a female voice, a female discourse?” Posed in 1983, Kaplan’s questions continue to generate responses, thus showing their relevance to today’s feminist film scholars seeking to subvert patriarchy’s enduring biases.

In 2004, Kaplan re-asserted that we are not yet “‘beyond the gaze’ (either male or imperial)...” In April 2008, at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in Manhattan, the Feminist Future Series program featured a conference entitled “Gender and Film: Resituating the Past in the Present.” The speakers—Laura Mulvey, Chantal Akerman and Trinh T. Minh-ha—took stock of the current state of feminist film theory and filmmaking, and Mulvey reasserted the continued importance of feminist film theory for cinema and media studies. Mulvey considers that the present moment metaphorically approximates the shape of a threshold, a space to maintain previous and new theories together in which the past, present and future co-exist as in a Deleuzian rhizome, cartographically rather than archeologically. It was in 1975 that Mulvey’s essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” and Akerman’s film Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles were acclaimed as innovative, making 1975 a memorable year, a year that also saw the publication of Hélène Cixous’s “Le rire de la Méduse” (“The Laugh of the Medusa”) and the release of Marguerite Duras’s film India Song: “Akerman the filmmaker came of age at the same time as the new age of feminism.” It was also in 1975 that Michel Foucault published Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison
At the time of this writing, it has been thirty-three years since “Visual Pleasure...” and Jeanne Dielman (and also Surveiller et punir). April 2008 at the MoMA is another important date for feminist film criticism as its past conflates with its promising future.

I: De-Gendering the Gaze

In “‘Life Finds a Way’: Monstrous Maternities and the Quantum Gaze in Jurassic Park and The Thirteenth Warrior,” Lisa DeTora explores the representation of the monstrous-feminine in the screen adaptations of two bestselling novels by the late Michael Crichton. Female dinosaurs newly created by a team of cinescientists—who have reassembled various DNA materials from frogs and mosquitoes to that effect—exemplify the monstrous-feminine in Jurassic Park.

Jurassic Park’s cinescientists—in the tradition of the Hollywood “mad scientist”—reproduce copies of dinosaur DNA of which they do not have the original genetic code, therefore creating copies of copies without an original. According to DeTora,

The reduction of the already overly simplistic binary of nature=good, science=bad into science=hubris=bad presents a highly troublesome moralism that Stephen Jay Gould has noted as characteristic of cinematic—but not of novelistic—portrayals of scientists and that Gallardo-Torrano sees as Promethean disaster…(9)

The cinescientists’ “hubris centers on the idea that they can control their creations” (9). According to Jean-Michel Rabaté, “it is the very discourse of science facing gender—when it attempts to control reproduction…—that creates monsters” (see the preface of Situating the Feminist Gaze and Spectatorship in Postwar Cinema, xiii).

Jurassic Park, an amusement theme park located on a fictitious island inspired by Disneyworld, soon becomes a dystopia. The dinosaurs, created only to be female, soon rebel against their breeders by swapping sexual identity with each other. In order to reproduce, some females become males. Gender switching and reproduction occur when the female dinosaurs stage a mutiny and escape the carceral gaze of the high-tech scientists in charge of breeding them.

E. Ann Kaplan’s statement that motherhood “is a place to start rethinking sexual difference”13 can be applied to the diegesis of Jurassic Park, where monstrous mothers are capable of gender mutability. Avital Ronell’s statement that “mother [is] exposed by equipment linked to
surveillance and medicine, [she] has been probed and analyzed, sectioned and scanned, measured and standardized by the pressures of the technological grid.” is also relevant to Jurassic Park, where procreation of dinosaur mothers must be controlled by scientists through electronic devices. According to DeTora, the monstrosity of dinosaur maternity has “to do with a violation of looking relations—and the inherent wresting away of the reproductive process from any primary male intervention” (19).

The behavior of Jurassic Park’s dinosaurs is reminiscent of that of humans who behave “well” in public, yet might not do so in private. DeTora states that, “the forbidden sight does not exist until it is gazed upon” (23). Unlike Jacques Lacan’s sardine can—which cannot gaze back and therefore is not threatening—Jurassic Park’s female Tyrannosaurus and Diplodocus return the gaze with threatening eyes. DeTora presumes a connection between gazing, violence and masculinity. The dichotomy between public and private spheres recalls Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon discussed by Michel Foucault in Surveiller et punir (Discipline and Punish), thus adding another dimension to the examination of science fiction and horror film. For DeTora, Jurassic Park and The Thirteenth Warrior construct maternity as monstrous by demonstrating that female reproduction deeply violates looking relations, defying definition outside the narrow confines of particular gazes...In both films, maternity remains hidden, maintaining mystery through disguise, sublimation, and transformation into animal monstrosity...The most frightening aspects of the consuming, maternal monsters that inhabit these films reside in their ability to be several things at once, to shift physical attributes and positions, until they are fixed in a gaze. (21-23)

DeTora makes use of the quantum gaze to further her contention about the connection between looking relations and monstrous maternity in Jurassic Park and The Thirteenth Warrior: “quantum theory indicates that the act of observation actually changes these physical circumstances, snapping the particle into a specific state at the moment it is trapped by a gaze” (18). The fluidity and interchangeability of sexes among the dinosaurs that were bred to be only female concurs with the argument that gender is mainly performative. According to Judith Butler in Gender Trouble (1990),

In a sense, gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of
gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed… there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results.15

Slavoj Žižek states that in Jurassic Park, the dinosaurs’ “destructive fury merely materializes the rage of the paternal superego.”16 DeTora shows that the film is about the maternal, and the dinosaurs’ refusal to allow scientists to manipulate their reproduction. Yet, within the discourse of science itself, breaches had already fractured the optimistic outlook of the park’s future, since one of the cinescientists visiting Jurassic Park, Ian Malcolm (Jeff Goldblum), a chaos theoretician, doubts the success of the operation:

[The] chaos theoretician and promiscuous father Ian Malcolm…critiques [the] genetic process not as such but as uncontainable. Malcolm rejects the reassurance that an all-female group cannot mate, because he recognizes that chaos is likely to intervene. His comment ‘life finds a way’ is echoed throughout the film as life, indeed, does find a way to escape both scientific and theme park containment, creating a monstrous maternal abject…Malcolm’s critique evokes the specter of hubris [and] the failure of science. (8)

Ultimately, Jurassic Park is about the triumph of female ingenuity—that of female dinosaurs, a female scientist and a little girl—females who “find a way” over chaos, hubris, and misogyny.

Rachel Ritterbusch’s “Shifting Gender(ed) Desire in Anne Fontaine’s Nathalie…” examines a film that at first appears to be about the relationship of two females and a male, a clichéd17 triangular romance reconfigured with a “feminist twist” (29). Catherine (Fanny Ardant), a middle-aged physician, suspecting her husband Bernard (Gérard Depardieu) of infidelity, hires a prostitute whom she renames “Nathalie” (Emmanuelle Béart) in order to tempt and test her husband. The film’s diegesis departs from a banal storyline as it becomes the site “‘of women reclaiming power’ rather than…a tale of adultery”18 (29). The two female protagonists—one mature, the other young; one financially secure, the other struggling; one in a green suit, the other in a red dress—become confidants, and their friendship leads to intimate encounters.

Although Rachel Ritterbusch is well aware of the ambiguities inherent in the perception of “‘women’s cinema’…and [that] more importantly,
there is no consensus about what constitutes a feminine practice” (27), she concludes that because Nathalie... treats questions about marriage, adultery and female sexuality, it can be classified as a “feminist film text” (28). Ritterbusch moreover writes that Anne Fontaine’s “feminist stance is evident not only in the film’s content but also...in its visual form” (34). As Ritterbusch notes, in the 1970s, early feminist film critics encouraged and influenced filmmakers to “develop ‘a new language of desire’ capable of speaking woman’s reality”19 (34).

In this respect, in “problematizing the voyeuristic mechanisms inherent in mainstream cinema” (34) by showing that a mature female physician is not only bearer of the voyeuristic gaze but is also the site of unavowed desires that become more explicit as the story unfolds, Nathalie... reverses the expectation of patriarchy, perhaps even neutralizing it, and displays—although softly rather than militantly—an openness in giving voice to female desire. All possible turmoil that could result from such important reversals of societal expectations and emotional re-balancing is glossed over in an atmosphere of social drinking, bon chic, bon genre outfits, and a color coordinated decorating scheme, as well as unintrusive background music. In Stanley Kubrick’s Eyes Wide Shut (next chapter), the male physician protagonist loses possession and control of the gaze. In Nathalie..., it is Catherine, the female physician, who is uncontestably bearer of the gaze, thus deviating from Laura Mulvey’s gaze theory. Therefore, this film provides an affirmative answer to E. Ann Kaplan’s query: “would it be possible to structure things so that women own the gaze?”20

Pondering whether art imitates film theory or whether film theory imitates art, one wonders if without the feminist film theorists of the 70s, Nathalie... would have been made. Careful to avoid the pitfall of essentializing women, Ritterbusch is in agreement with Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, who in To Desire Differently: Feminism and the French Cinema (1996), coined the term “feminist cinema” to describe the content and form of films that challenge dominant patriarchal cinema. In Flitterman-Lewis’s words,

A feminist cinema will attempt to restore the marks of cinematic enunciation so carefully elided by the concealing operation of patriarchal cinema [and] it will foreground sexual difference...focusing on the status and nature of the representation of the woman—her desire, her images, her fantasms.21

Nathalie...’s two main female characters draw on opportunities for individual women to express desire and fantasies yet unstereotyped.
M. Hunter Vaughan’s “Eyes Wide Shut: Kino-Eye Wide Open,” seems written in response to Dziga Vertov’s concept of the “kino-eye” (or the “ciné-œil”), “that which the eye doesn’t see” or “the decoding of life as it is.” According to Vertov,

The weakness of the human eye is manifest. We affirm the kino-eye, discovering within the chaos of movement the result of the kino-eye’s own movement; we affirm the kino-eye with its own dimensions of time and space, growing in strength and potential to the point of self-affirmation.

 Vaughan examines Stanley Kubrick’s unfinished controversial film, in which the male protagonist, Dr. Bill Harford (Tom Cruise), tries but fails to access a forbidden sphere of knowledge, eroticism and power, thus demonstrating the “weakness” of his eyes and his inability to discover the truth. That the title of the film refers to closed eyes tends to indicate that the gaze is absent from either the cinematic apparatus or from the film’s protagonist. Dr. Harford, an insecure character mystified by his wife’s adulterous thoughts, is also incapable of discovering the circumstances surrounding the death of a prostitute whom he had met in a nightmarish encounter.

 Vaughan claims that Eyes Wide Shut reverses Mulvey’s gender binaries. According to Gilles Deleuze,

There is as much thought in the body as there is shock and violence in the brain. There is an equal amount of feeling in both of them. The brain gives orders to the body which is just an outgrowth of it, but the body also gives orders to the brain, which is just a part of it: in both cases, these will not be the same bodily attitudes nor the same cerebral gest. Hence the specificity of the cinema of the brain, in relation to that of the cinema of bodies. If we look at Kubrick’s work, we see the degree to which it is the brain which is mis en scène. Attitudes of body achieve a maximum level of violence, but they depend on the brain. For in Kubrick, the world itself is a brain, there is identity of brain and world.

 In Eyes Wide Shut, Harford’s wife Alice (Nicole Kidman) wears glasses at the start of the film, thus indicating that she appropriates the gaze. Mary Ann Doane claims that “the female recourse for appropriating the gaze” is to wear glasses:

The woman who wears glasses constitutes one of the most intense visual clichés of the cinema. The image is a heavily marked condensation of motifs concerned with repressed sexuality, knowledge, visibility and vision, intellectuality and desire...glasses worn by a woman in the cinema
do not generally signify a deficiency in seeing but an active looking, or
even simply the fact of seeing as opposed to being seen. The intellectual
woman looks and analyzes, and in usurping the gaze she poses a threat to
an entire system of representation. It is as if the woman had forcefully
moved to the other side of the specular. The overdetermination of the
image of the woman with glasses, its status as a cliché, is a crucial aspect
of the cinematic alignment of structures of seeing and being seen with
sexual difference. The cliché, in assuming an immediacy of understanding,
acts as a mechanism for the naturalization of sexual difference.25

Recall that in Alfred Hitchcock’s *Strangers on a Train* (1951), glasses
play an important part in the plot. Barbara Morton (Patricia Hitchcock),
the “brainy little girl” who wears glasses, perceives that she reminds the
psychopath Bruno Antony (Robert Walker) of the glasses-wearing Miriam
Haines (Kasey Rogers), the woman he had already murdered. Moreover,
the murder is reflected in Miriam’s glasses, which had been knocked off
her face when Bruno attacked her, leaving her defenseless and without the
possibility of a gaze.

In one of the earliest scenes of *Eyes Wide Shut*, Alice looks directly at
the camera. Appearing to return the viewer’s gaze, Alice becomes de-
objectified. She is not the passive object of the male gaze, but rather,
becomes an active gazer herself. Akin to the female physician Catherine in
*Nathalie...* (chapter two), Alice seizes and owns the gaze. In this respect,
she also affirmatively replies to E. Ann Kaplan’s inquiry, “would it be
possible to structure things so that women own the gaze?”26

In analyzing scenes from the film featuring nude or scantily clad
women, Vaughan claims that *Eyes Wide Shut* demonstrates that female
nudity can be displayed on screen without (intentionally) provoking
scopophilia nor the arousal expected from a heterosexual male spectator.
Nudity, then, becomes mere nakedness, a sight/site more abject than
alluring.

Vaughan’s discussion of Stanley Kubrick recalls Chantal Akerman and
Sofia Coppola, whose films foreground the fragmented and/or nude
female body on screen without objectifying or fetishizing it (chapters eight
and fourteen). In Vaughan’s estimation, Kubrick’s final film “suggests
how cinema can struggle against the principal characteristics aptly
described in much of feminist film theory...Mulvey’s male gaze works on
a multitude of levels, each of which is accentuated, though frequently
subverted, by *Eyes Wide Shut*” (44-45).

Vaughan eschews the male/active female/passive binary in making a
claim for the “poly-gaze”: “the representation of sexual difference through
the institution of multi-sexual gazes...both on the level of the cinematic
apparatus as well as among the characters in the film” (49). Kubrick’s *Eyes Wide Shut* illustrates Deleuze’s claim that “the brain is no more reasonable a system than the world is a rational one.”27

When as a child Ian Scott Todd, along with his father, was watching Alfred Hitchcock films on television, little did he know that, according to Avital Ronell, “after a hard day’s work on *Psycho*, Alfred Hitchcock used to doze in front of the TV, claiming that TV, unlike film, was soporiferous.”28

In “Hitchcock’s ‘Good-Looking Blondes’: First Glimpses and Second Glances,” Todd’s nostalgic description of his early encounters with the Master of Suspense on the small screen in his living room contrasts with how Hitchcock made use of the televisual medium. Obviously, at the time of *Psycho*, Hitchcock could not yet have been acquainted with Jacques Lacan’s televised interview which, according to Shoshana Felman, “originally aired on French television in January 1973, destined to be published simultaneously as a book entitled *Télévision*…in which [Lacan] invites [the viewer] not to take “the little screen for granted.””29 Evidently, Todd did not take television for granted, as demonstrated by his childhood experience related in his essay, in which he seems to have been following Lacanian prescriptions *avant la lettre*. Deleuze’s claim that television’s “image remains so regrettably in the present unless it is enriched by the art of cinema”30 also directly impacts Todd’s discussion of watching Hitchcock’s motion pictures on television. Todd was not watching programs made for television, but rather, was engaging with masterpieces of cinema on the small screen, which became his own surrogate movie theater.

Hitchcock’s “good-looking blondes” (52) even if seen mainly on television, kept Todd and his father gaping in awe: these blondes had survived not only the transfer from the silver screen to the TV screen—from the public cinematic sphere to the private sphere of home theater—but also remained alluring in spite of drastic size reduction from their overinflated image on the big screen to the diminutive TV screen where they shrank to the proportions of Barbie dolls.

With “Hitchcock’s ‘Good-Looking Blondes’: First Glimpses and Second Glances,” Todd proposes queering the gaze in order to reposition the spectator, thus eroding Mulvey’s molar gender binaries. Drawing upon his memories of watching Hitchcock films in youthdom with a heterosexual father, Todd investigates his own spectator/subject position and subjectivity as a gay male, a feminist, and a gender studies scholar. Through his analysis of the representation of women in Hitchcock films, Todd investigates what queering the gaze might offer to feminist film
theoricticians and spectators. He proposes a theoretical model in which the personal and the political run parallel, or intersect, since he discusses queer and feminist film theories as they relate not only to images of women in Hitchcock’s films, but also to images from his private life and personal experiences in a culture that feeds on images and their manifold reproductions: photos, clichés, pictures, cartoons, graffiti and other visual traces. Todd’s father enjoyed the actresses’ looks, which he had already admired on the silver screen. Inviting his son to share in his scopic euphoria, was the father aware of—or disappointed by—Todd’s failure to respond appropriately (read: “erotically”)? Todd’s lack of expected masculine response allows him to undermine the heteronormativity enmeshed in patriarchy, while still enjoying the glamour of Hitchcock’s women in a non-objectifying way.

For Todd, queering the gaze gives a less “reductionistic model of spectatorship” (56) as well as a new way of looking at Hitchcock’s female characters that refuses a monolithic categorization, since Hitchcock’s female characters are multi-faceted rather than only good-looking and only blonde: “the process of queering the male gaze inaugurates significant possibilities for the ways in which images of women and men” (57) emerge, are produced and assimilated. According to Tania Modleski, “what both male and female spectators are likely to see in the mirror of Hitchcock’s films are images of ambiguous sexuality that threaten to destabilize the gender identity of protagonists and viewers alike.”

P. Adams Sitney considers that in *Vertigo*, the male protagonist becomes an object of the gaze, thus partially reversing Mulvey’s theory of gendered looking relations.

Todd therefore demonstrates why Hitchcock’s “films continue to function as objects of our desire” for all spectators, regardless of their sexual identities:

Following Foucault, queer theory argues that because there is no essential truth of human sexuality, it is not a matter of contesting existing sexual norms in the name of a preexistent sexual identity or of liberating repressed or silenced sexualities. Rather in the name of sexual identities yet to be created it urges an ethic of exploration that mobilizes the heterogeneity of forces present in every individual.

For Gilles Deleuze, French New Wave filmmakers “pouvaient être dite à bon droit hitchcocko-marxienne, plutôt que ‘hitchcocko-hawksienne’” (“could be said to be indeed hitchcocko-marxian rather than hitchcocko-hawksian”). In this vein, following Deleuze’s model, Ian Scott Todd would be, due to his feminist/queer outlook, “hitchcocko-foucauldian.”
Noëlle Rouxel-Cubberly, in “Family Resemblances: Engendering Claire Denis, Nicole Garcia and Agnès Jaoui’s Film Titles,” discusses three French female filmmakers. She states that film titles “are an incentive to rethink and question language through gender” (80), performing what Annette Kuhn calls “a feminist politics of intervention at the levels of language and meaning, which may be regarded as equally applicable to the ‘language’ of cinema as it is to the written and spoken word.”

For Kuhn, this concern is predicated on the notion that in a patriarchal and/or misogynistic society,

Women have no language of their own and are alienated from culturally dominant forms of expression...The issue of a non-patriarchal language immediately raises the question of the relationship between such a language and feminism. Although it is clear that the question of women and language could not be raised in the ways it has been without the impetus of feminist politics, the nature and provenance of such a language remains rather more problematic.

According to Rouxel-Cubberly, for Denis, Garcia and Jaoui’s films,

the title reflects an intention to create another order of things, to rethink the imaginary. More than discussing [topics] common to the feminine imaginary—love, family, redefinition of space and time—their titles speak against a set order of things. (79-80)

The titles of these three female directors can be taken as forms of resistance to the phallogocentric structure of patriarchal language. These titles demonstrate “how to fight the ‘unconscious structured like a language’ (formed critically at the moment of arrival of language) while still caught within the language of the patriarchy,” to cite Laura Mulvey discussing Lacan. Directors whose titling practices form an important part of their cinematic production play with the delayed effect of a postponed title upon the audience. This shifting of the traditional title display challenges the viewer’s expectations, thus allowing for a different interaction with the film text. “Raymond Queneau, referring to the phallic power of the title, talked about the ‘titre cache-sexe’ (‘G-string title’)” (77). The titling practices of these female directors are evidenced in films such as Garcia’s Un week-end sur deux (Every Other Weekend, 1990); Denis’ Beau travail (Good Work, 1999); and Jaoui’s Comme Une Image (Look At Me, 2004). These titles offer the spectator another “reading of the world: a female reading” (81) at the juncture where the title intersects with the diegesis. Within Denis’ Beau travail, an untranslatable play on the
words “belle trouvaille” (“beautiful find”) occurs, thus effectively feminizing a male protagonist (72-73).

Rouxel-Cubberly reconsiders the triangular conversation, a kind of conference call between film, title and spectator, and she interrogates why these titles attest to their authors’ féminitude and allude to a feminine cinema. Like Sharon Lubkemann Allen, Georgiana M. M. Colvile and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, who in the last section of this volume discuss the morcellation of female identity and women’s life experiences, Rouxel-Cubberly stresses the fragmentary quality of the film title as it relates to a female experience with language. The title, a semiotic fragment, should be attractive. Rouxel-Cubberly compares film titles to witticisms, brief and tightly condensed, which force the viewer to uncover what is only partially revealed.

Titles can be riddles, such as that of Denis’ 1988 film Chocolat, which takes place in Africa, “where riddles commonly invite, through the symbolic transposition of banal realities, to get to the heart of things” (71). The modus operandi of witticisms, riddles, and titles is brevity. Denis’ Chocolat “speaks of the cocoa exportation through a slave system, of Europe feeding on Africa…Chocolat’s savor lies at the crossroad of the mythical dimensions of chocolate and Africa” (72) where cocoa beans are cultivated and processed. Both African slaves and chocolate—an agricultural product of the African continent—forcibly serve a colonial system that exploited the land together with its native inhabitants (male as well as female) because of the pleasures they provided to a white, European patriarchal culture and market. In her discussion of this film title, Rouxel-Cubberly highlights the racist connotations inherent to the term “chocolat” during France’s (not so distant) colonial past:

Chocolate—a colonial food—conjures up a whole racist imagery with corresponding three-syllable chocolate brands such as Bamako or Banania, and the derogatory term ‘chocolat,’ by extension, referred, until the end of the 19th century, to an African man. (72)

Rouxel-Cubberly discusses another meaning of the word “chocolat.” In French, the colloquial expression “être chocolat” means, “‘to be had, to be cheated’” (71). This adds another dimension/savor to the film, in which a Caucasian French woman—aptly named France (Mireille Perrier)—recalls the injustices committed against as well as the sexual commodification of the African population at the hands of European imperialists in colonized Cameroon.

Coincidentally, in 2000, 12 years after Claire Denis’ Chocolat, the Swedish cineaste Lasse Hallström directed a film also entitled Chocolat
(adapted from Joanne Harris’s 1999 eponymous best-selling novel). Hallström’s *Chocolat* narrates the story of a free-spirited single mother (Juliette Binoche) in a French village circa 1950. Although Hallström’s film’s ideology diverges from that of Denis’ *Chocolat*, one wonders why two feminist films have the same title: could it be that the semiotic associations of chocolate conflates diverse female subjectivities, tying them together? In these two films, the pleasure provided by chocolate—also considered to be an aphrodisiac—appeals to characters as well as spectators. Hallström’s *Chocolat* depicts the physical, emotional and spiritual renewal of a small town, through a nomadic mother-daughter pair. These two female characters transform an entrenched patriarchal structure into a more tolerant community.

Although the two films entitled *Chocolat* have little in common in terms of aesthetics and thematics, they converge in denouncing racism. In Hallström’s version, ethnically ostracized gypsies and their leader (Johnny Depp), are prevented from entering a French village whose inhabitants also ostracized the single mother protagonist. While in Denis’ film chocolate symbolizes the oppressiveness of the racist colonial patriarchal system, in Hallström’s, chocolate represents liberation from domestic patriarchy and racism.

II: Theorizing Terror

In “Return of the Female Gothic: the Career-Woman-in-Peril Thriller,” Monica Soare demonstrates that the Female Gothic, exemplified by Ann Radcliffe’s 18th century novels which created the template for this genre, is reformulated in late 20th century cinema. Soare inaugurates the “career-woman-in-peril thriller” (CWPT), which foregrounds the continuing significance of the Female Gothic to current cinematic preoccupations: “in classic Female Gothic form, career-woman-in-peril thrillers stage an exploration of female fantasy via the heroine’s (and female spectator’s) engagement with the affect of fear” (90). Fear, in Gothic terms, is always ultimately the fear of death or extinction, which, according to Paul Wells—cited in this book’s opening chapter—“has informed horror productions since the earliest examples of Gothic literature” (7). According to Soare, the term CWPT is probably her own; it conflates elements from horror, slasher, detective, noir, and erotic thriller films. This contemporary cinematic perspective bridges the gap between the precinematic 18th century and the 21st, which is engulfed in the primordiality of pictorial representation.
The CWPT portrays its female protagonist’s relationship with a father figure, in contrast to several films discussed in this anthology—for example, those directed by Chantal Akerman, Sofia Coppola, Marguerite Duras, Anne Fontaine, Christophe Gans, Neil Marshall, Steven Spielberg, Quentin Tarantino and Agnès Varda—whose preoccupations are centered (or de-centered) around the mother figure and the mother-daughter configuration, while marginalizing the father figure. Soare problematizes the father-daughter relationship, arguing that the female protagonist of the CWPT “often inherits her career and sense of self from her father or a father figure [and] her relationship to him is mirrored in her interaction with the criminal man,” (88) who is often a serial killer. Soare explores the female protagonist’s interest in the male serial killer, whom she is investigating, fleeing and/or dating: in Jean-Michel Rabaté’s words, serial killers “allow themselves absolute mastery over the lives of others.”

Soare claims that in Jonathan Demme’s *The Silence of the Lambs*, it is Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins) who allows Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster) to access the sublime. Hannibal Lecter, in Slavoj Žižek’s words, “is a sublime figure in the strict Kantian sense…in *The Silence of the Lambs*, Lecter is truly cannibalistic, not [only] in relation to his victims but in relation to Clarice.”

Drawing upon feminist film theory—and occasionally writing against some of the predominant views on feminist horror film scholarship—Soare discusses, among other films, Richard Marquand’s *Jagged Edge* (which she considers the first CWPT), Jane Campion’s *In the Cut*, Philip Kaufman’s *Twisted* and Bernard Rose’s *Candyman*. Soare’s analysis of the female spectator’s engagement with the semiotics of fear as a means of reaching the sublime recalls Slavoj Žižek:

[The] secret of the Kantian sublime: if beauty is a symbol of morality (of the good), the sublime announces evilness *qua* ethical stance—this is the power discernible in what Kant calls the ‘dynamical sublime,’ the power that an image of terrifying unruly nature evokes by way of its very failure to represent it adequately: an ethical (principled, implacable), yet radically evil rage…

Prior to Žižek, Gilles Deleuze had mentioned the moment of the sublime, which “met with the infinite within the spirit of evil…Kant used to distinguish two kinds of Sublime, mathematical and dynamical.”

The CWPT is exciting not only because of the pleasurable dose of adrenaline that its fear-inducing sublime images send through the viewer’s system, but also because of its representation of the imagined “real world” as dangerous and “masculine…hostile and challenging” (106) for women.