Classical Hollywood film directors' female-as-object obsession and female directors' cinematic response: A deconstructionist study of six films

Sharon Jeanette Chapman

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CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD FILM DIRECTORS' FEMALE-AS-OBJECT OBSESSION AND FEMALE DIRECTORS' CINEMATIC RESPONSE: A DECONSTRUCTIONIST STUDY OF SIX FILMS

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in English Composition

by
Sharon Jeanette Chapman
September 1996
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ABSTRACT

My thesis consists of a short study of the theoretical backgrounds of feminist film study and Classic Hollywood norms and paradigms to prepare the reader for six readings--Singin' in the Rain, Rebecca and Touch of Evil from the Classic male-directed canon; and Fast Times at Ridgemont High, Desperately Seeking Susan, and Home for the Holidays directed by women. Each reading deconstructs the text, placing knowledge in the possession of women. Through exploring woman as 'subject' or the 'other', feminists uncover a number of unifying conditions in the lives of women and their experience with patriarchal hierarchy.

This thesis will also consider the active participation of female spectators in interpreting the structural and thematic paradigms which construct film. This process can be discouraging since Hollywood cinema has traditionally excluded, silenced or severely distorted the female image and voice.

I intend to reclaim Hollywood cinema for women by understanding its structures, by appropriating and formulating woman's own unique point of view and by subverting the destructive abuse created by masochistic tendencies of some feminist theories. Women in film and viewers of film may choose not to be victims of its patriarchal structure.
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INTRODUCTION

There exists an established, thirty-year old debate concerning the American film industry and its treatment of women. Although 1993 was designated as The Year of the Woman in Hollywood, few women were represented in the list of nominees for technical, production and artistic academy awards and fewer still received those honors. Certainly, women have endured in acting roles (the quality of which is subject for further controversy), but they have yet to break into the circle of directors, writers and technicians in significant numbers. These visually obvious omissions are merely the surface symptoms of what some feminists have considered a persistent credo which condones the exclusion and, more so, the suppression of women in the Hollywood industry structure and product. This practice has, through the perpetuation of myth, extended beyond the realm of entertainment and is considered an intrinsic part of a socially constructed patriarchal system which has yet to include women in its sexual hierarchy.

Since the late sixties, 'woman' and gender as academic scholarship has become a meaningful category. Through this exploration into woman as 'subject' or the 'other', feminists have uncovered a number of unifying conditions in the lives of women and their experience with a patriarchal hierarchy; however, they have also found disconcerting
differences in the way one might personally experience life within a patriarchy which are generated by the difference in race, age, occupation, religion, sexual orientation and so on. Although this is a current issue in feminist studies, it is not possible for me to address the issue at this time. Instead, I intend to focus on mainstream cinema, the system accused of excluding and victimizing woman in such a way as to beget oppression, and I intend further to examine contradictions that arise through interpretation—those repressed and unresolved issues which are potentially threatening to the patriarchy.

This thesis will consider the active participation of women as spectators in the process of making meaning. For many feminists, this activity is extremely discouraging since they view Hollywood cinema as a system of exclusion which silences their real voices and distorts their image. Since they view themselves as victims, as spectators of the product, they tend to assume the identity of masochist because they "either identify with Marilyn Monroe or with the man behind me (them) hitting the back of (their) seat with his knees." Ruby Rich explains that "this misplaced pessimism stems from their overvaluation of the production aspect of cinema, a misassumption that cinematic values are irrevocably embedded at the level of production and, once there, remain pernicious and inviolable" (Multiple 34). And later describing the approach of other critics, she says "a
woman’s experience is like that of the exile, whom Brecht once singled out as the ultimate dialectician for that daily working out of cultural oppositions within a single body” (Multiple 35).

In the first part of this study of women and film, I intend to address the two previous attitudes—1) the female spectator as masochist or 2) dialectician. I will also discuss my chosen critical tools and apply them to a number of films in the Hollywood Classical canon, all directed by men, in which women have been ‘subjugated’, some critics would claim, within the power structure of the patriarchy. I hope that this study will also reveal the difficulties which arise in the process of male and female socialization and construction, a revelation, similar to that of Tania Modleski, which would find some redeeming qualities in classical cinema for the female spectator. This study should yield a catalogue of structures which have been accused of creating the status of women in these films.

In an attempt to determine the progress made by women to alter their status, I will next interpret three recent films—*Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982), *Desperately Seeking Susan* (1987) and *Home for the Holidays* (1995)—directed by women. These interpretations are expected to reveal to what extent women, as directors, have broken free from classical paradigms to create their own structures, have turned the classical structures inside out, have
actively been engaged in a cultural dialect or have been quietly subsumed in the larger structure. My interest in these differences is not unique; other critics have been interested in how women’s films differ from those produced by men. This interest has simultaneously spilled over from other fields. Silvia Bovenschen asks, “Is There a Feminine Aesthetic?” She challenges women who tend to de-emphasize gender differences to understand first that a woman’s experience throughout history differs from a man’s, concluding that a feminine artistic production takes place by means of a complicated process involving conquering and reclaiming, appropriating and formulating, as well as forgetting and subverting” (Erens xix). I am aspiring through my interpretations to 1) understand and reclaim Hollywood cinema for women by understanding its structures in relation to men and women; 2) appropriate and formulate woman’s own unique point of view, and; 3) forget or at least subvert the destructive abuse created by masochistic tendencies of some feminist theories. I believe these three actions are necessary if we are to move forward in our pursuit to claim a language, story and place for ourselves as woman, and still come to terms with the unity of men and women as cumulative humanity.

To complete this task, it is necessary to apply knowledge of classical structures and feminist theory to the cues identified within film. I will take each film through
the process of comprehension and interpretation. According to David Bordwell, comprehension denotes understanding and interpretation; explaining. He offers this example: "One can understand the plot of a James Bond film while remaining wholly oblivious to its more abstract mythic, religious, ideological or psycho sexual significance." Paul Ricouer offers a slightly different definition of interpretation: "The work of thought which consists of deciphering the hidden meaning in the apparent meaning, in unfolding the levels of meaning implied in the literal meaning" (Bordwell, Making 2). Ultimately, I will identify such cues that, when placed within an appropriate semantic field, unfold repressed desire and suppressed anxiety in these films.

My first chapter reviews the progress made by feminist film theorists in their attempt to explain the nature and function of women in film. I believe that, as interpreter, I should identify the theoretical suppositions that influence the choices I make in selecting relevant cues, organizing them into significant patterns, and arriving at an interpretation.

The second chapter will explore Hollywood cinematic paradigms and survey what critics claim about how these paradigms create meaning.

The third chapter will explore the tools and process of interpretation. Although theory is inherently connected to the process of interpretation, since it provides the point
of view from which the interpretation is born, the structural process may involve a combination of approaches. David Bordwell’s text, Making Meaning, has provided the framework for my interpretive process. In his metacritical text, he examines the ways in which critics make meaning and maps out a procedure which can assist in arriving at meaning at four different levels—referential, inferential, symbolic and symptomatic. The fourth, symptomatic, is that realm of meaning which brings to light the repressed and suppressed in a text. I am most interested in this process of repression and suppression because it involves the female spectator as dialectician of cultural oppositions. I must also give much credit to Tania Modleski, whose background in psychoanalytic, Marxist, and semiotic theory has lead her to offer an approach that has guided my choices and interpretations.

In the fourth chapter, I will apply what some critics have discovered about certain Hollywood Classical films and, of course, my own insights to three well known Hollywood Classics. The films in this section have attracted interest because they offer exaggerated representations of women as the object of the look which, through analysis, may reveal the mechanisms that in other films would be concealed. Although I cite other films in this section, I will cover more specifically Rebecca (1939), Singin’ in the Rain (1952) and Touch of Evil (1958).
The fifth chapter is my conspicuous willingness to enter the academic argument through interpreting current films. These films, directed by women, may reveal historical theoretic influence in their construction, but this is still unclear. Finally, I will close with the hope that I have presented an interpretation with at least a hint of novelty and validity.

This is the task I have set out to accomplish in the following pages. This thesis is at once a history of feminist film criticism, an explanation of critical tools and procedure, and a series of interpretations dependent on theory and procedure. I wish to be both informed and surprised by my findings. I have made great attempts to leave little untouched and uncovered, but the enigmatic nature of film makes it impossible to know it intimately and completely. We can only come to know ourselves more intimately through our experience with film.
CHAPTER ONE
Theoretical Background: Feminist Film Theory--
Gender Differences, Marxism, Psychoanalysis
and Semiotics

It is difficult to know where to begin when trying to
establish current views of feminist film critics since the
process is ever evolving, overlapping and often
contradictory. Feminist critics have engaged in a
simultaneous and troublesome contempt for and fascination
with Hollywood classical film, possibly since the inception
of Hollywood film ninety years ago. But the controversy has
only attained academic status in the last twenty years.
Many feminist theorists claim that the films are constructed
in such a way that they suppress, subvert, demean, castrate
(behead), obliterate and silence the female figure, yet
female spectators continue to turn to these films which
conceal intriguing mysteries about the relationship and
balance between male and female, our social structure and
woman as social being. Theorists began to examine image and
sexual difference and moved on to psychoanalysis and
semiotics primarily to account for the range of differences
and to suggest ways of deconstructing oppressive
differential images.

Attention to cinema as a field for feminist criticism
gained popularity in the sixties. Discussion has evolved
extensively since then when image, through the work of Molly Haskell and other sociologists and historians, was the primary focus for explicating women's status in film, pointing out the deleterious representations of women. Images failed to correspond to how women lived in the real world. In *From Reverence to Rape*, Haskell suggests that cinema 'can' function as history, reflecting social conditions and the way women experience those conditions, stating that

women have grounds for protest, and film is a rich field for the mining of female stereotypes. At the same time, there is danger in going too far the other way, of grafting a modern sensibility onto the past so that all film history becomes grist in the mills of outraged feminism.

Her complaint stems from observing earlier active heroines who, although "brought to heel at the end," were more active than the heroines of the sixties, calling these new heroines "the most abused, neglected and dehumanized—screen heroines of all time" (*Multiple Voices* 23). She observed the preponderance of films depicting male buddies and found no reason why women could not assume such roles. Consequently, Judith Mayne said of female roles that these "distorted images appear on screen as if to assert and maintain the role of film as a powerful means of social conditioning" (*Multiple Voices* 23). In other words, images of women in film negatively contributed to the larger social
construction of women. These images were constructed as dichotomous representations of either 'good or bad, virgins or vamps (Todd 23).

Not only has film defined woman as binary image, but as John Berger has demonstrated in *Another Way of Seeing*, much of western art sees woman as image, and even property (Gender 1). Berger, a Marxist critic, equates the look with the system of property and ownership, the domain man controls and operates. In Berger's discussion of western art, he finds that 'woman', as property to be displayed, appraised and traded, is more ubiquitous than earlier supposed. These images seem unavoidable since they have been historically rooted and rerooted in western art and literature for centuries retaining, reinforcing and reempowering man as the center or patriarchal hegemony. Feminist theorists have searched for the structures and gaps in textual material which allow for an alternative to this seemingly overpowering and oppressive structure by understanding patriarchy as vulnerable.

Marxists feminists suggest that ideology is a function of representation, and "the function of film as an ideological medium would be evaluated in its forms of address to the spectator" (Multiple Voices 50). The form is the collection of cues, primarily images, in the film that correspond to the socially constructed real world. The women’s movement and feminist film critics support an agenda
which would work to demystify these negative images, turning to feminist film makers to recreate images of women which more closely match women in the real world. The structures, including the diegetic cues, would have to be recreated to truly re-present women more realistically. Unfortunately, a problem exists in infusing representations of 'real' women into a fabricated world aimed at entertaining while making a profit.

Other feminists turn to examining the finished product for gender differences. Feminist film study, from its inception, has been the study of gender, but more specifically, gender theorists began documenting and categorizing differences, marginalization, and objectification of the female figure (Bell-Mettereau xiii). Initially, the social sciences provided the term 'gender' for feminist film theory:

It is a way of referring to the exclusively social origins of the subjective identities of men and women. Gender is, in this definition, a social category imposed on a sexed body. . . . The use of gender emphasizes an entire system of relationships that include sex, but is not directly determined by sex or directly determining of sexuality (Penley xiii).

The study of gender is then a set of social effects imposed on a sexed body.

Teresa de Laurentis writes about gender and subject in an earlier text, Technologies of Gender, that they cross "languages and cultural representation; a subject engendered
in the experiencing of race and class, as well as sexual relation; a subject therefore not unified but rather multiple, and not so much divided but contradicted" (Penley xi). Using this interpretive approach, critics found that women are bound by biology and society in roles that are magnified on the screen. Eventually, work on gender differences came to an impasse since it lacked "positivity." Constance Penley suggests that work in gender difference was suspended (I suggest it was subsumed by psychoanalysis), because "a theory of sexual difference concerns itself with the construction of subjectivity that is not seen as constructive. . ." (Penley xx). Such theories do not always contribute to the reconstruction of a positive new feminine or feminist subject, but often act as damaging, confining forces. Both image and gender theory, however, have yielded to other theories which began to question the very notion of woman as image and gender difference. Instead, they began to explore the structures used to create these constructions.

Although the Marxist-representational and gender-difference approaches yielded some interesting theories by themselves, they remained less academic because psychoanalytically and semiotically oriented feminists charged that sociologists and historians did not know how to read the textuality of the text, and, therefore, these approaches are, in a sense, less scientific and less
pivotal. In the mid-seventies, Laura Mulvey presented her more academically grounded critical theory based on psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan’s notion of the ‘look’, which “insisted that the cinema be understood through structures of the look that are central to cinematic identification, here understood as an imaginary coherence of the subject” (Multiple Voices 50). Through Mulvey, theorists have explored our social structure which she says, has been constructed to identify the male as subject of discourse and the female as object. It is especially important that Mulvey derives her theory from Lacan since he:

makes the conceptual link between the process of language and the psyche, drawing on the analogous role of self and other in the production of identity to argue that ‘self’ and ‘other’ are the unconscious products of linguistic positions—I, you, they—created in language (Multiple Voices 116).

Subjectivity is a product of linguistic structures. In other words, language, meaning, and subjectivity are all dependent in different ways on difference. In Mulvey’s ground breaking essay, “Narrative and Visual Pleasure,” she explores the centrality of the ‘look’, cinema as spectacle and narrative, and psychoanalysis as a tool. She finds that cinema, especially classical Hollywood, perpetuated the gender polarities of masculine as active and feminine as passive and foregrounds the look as the dominant controlling signifier in cinema for women:
The woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified. The male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety: preoccupation with the reenactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment, or saving of the guilty object (an avenue typified by the concerns of the film noir); or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous (hence over-valuation, the cult of the female star) (Mulvey 13-14).

Mulvey employs psychoanalysis as a tool for identifying and demystifying the structure of patriarchal narrative and voyeurism. Many have seen her work as reiterating the oppression she struggles against, but Mulvey is most likely attempting, through the application of psychoanalysis, "to describe society and not to prescribe it as naturalized" (Multiple Voices 49). James Lynn offers other reasons why psychoanalysis has been embraced as a tool for dismantling the structure imposed on women through patriarchy.

The feminist perception has found powerful, if not ambiguous, theoretical support in the psychoanalytic writing of Jacques Lacan, whose omnipresence in the current debate is one of its most striking features. In Lacan's work, patriarchy is divested of all contingency and becomes coextensive with human culture. Arbitrary though it may be in point of origin, the psychic edict that prescribes the status of woman as the inferior other is, in effect nonreversible. What psychoanalysis provides, according to Lacan, is not an absolute of metaphysical definition of the 'feminine,' but a description of how such
definitions are enacted within the symbolic order. Indeed, by taking the phallic order at times as literal word, psychoanalysis exposes the fraudulence at the heart of its economy. Its 'feminine' is a phantom: nothing more than the requisite, and nothing less than the symptom of its own equally prescribed delusion of self-sufficiency. This, however, is how things are, and the way they are likely to remain. For the symbolic order inaugurated by the Oedipal drama is not comparable to a contract on which the individual subject, whether male or female, may retain an option (Todd 5).

To add further to Lynn's rationale, I suggest that because Lacan finds sexuality as produced by language, a language constructed by man, which constructs woman as not man, that she is then outside the structure and can act as Brecht suggests of the exile--as dialectician who works out the daily oppositions of society. This is advantageous for woman who, then, can engage in tenacious dialogue in an effort to question the precepts governing disparities in construction. This advantage is the beauty of constructing meaning using a feminist, psychoanalytically based approach.

Before moving on to the alliance between psychoanalysts and semioticians, it is important to explain briefly the structures Mulvey refers to in her theory and identify their sources. The narrative structure in film has been found to produce and support the patriarchal order. Roland Barthes once stated that narrative is universal:

Narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting, stained glass windows...narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural:
it is simply there like life itself (De Laurentis 103).

Peter Brooks explains, "Narrative has something to do with timeboundedness, and...plot is the internal logic of mortality" (De Laurentis 103). Although this subject will once again arise in the section concerning classical Hollywood paradigms, it is included here because it appears to be naturally linked to the 'look.' The theory of the look comes from Lacan's interpretation of the Oedipal trajectory. The main objective for the male subject in a film is to achieve masculine identity. Like the Oedipal trajectory, he does this by first identifying himself as different, then by gaining control over woman both by subjecting her to the power of the look and by demystifying her in the narrative (Modleski Women Who 52). Processes of identification and control--such things as camera angle, shot reversal, temporal continuity, the kinds of characters presented and other aspects--are sources of discussion and controversy.

Narrative is discussed in psychoanalytical terms "as the Oedipal journey," in which, as Raymond Bellour explains, "the hero must come to 'accept the symbolization of the death of the father, the displacement from the attachment to the mother to the attachment to another woman'" (Modleski, Women Who 50). De Laurentis describes the function as "the movement of a passage, a crossing, an actively experienced
transformation of the human being into—man” (Gender 91). Oversimplified from Freud, it is when the child simultaneously acquires identity, language and the unconscious through the mirror stage of identification. The child first views the mother, then himself, realizing, then, that he is different because he has something the mother does not. Through the experience of difference, he determines that because she lacks something, she is inferior and the system of identification and the process of reconfirming identity is put into motion. Susan Jeffords observes in her essay, “Narrative as Violence,” that “Patriarchy achieves this transformation through the process of dismemberment and re-membering, as the undisputed image of man can only be created at the expense of woman” (Gender 91). This journey, when it involves a man, designates woman to the status of object which, when utilized, will bring him to fulfillment regardless of the expense to the woman. She may lose her life, as in Psycho (1960), or she may lose her name, her identity and even her body as in Touch of Evil. The structuring of narrativity in cinema, most always, reifies the Oedipal journey.

Many feminist critics have found the Oedipal trajectory, the psychoanalytical theory of male maturation, problematic in that it does not account for the heroine who does not emulate man, nor does it take into account the response of the female audience engaged in watching a film,
even those films with a primarily female cast. Feminists deem it necessary to find a structure that will show how a woman becomes a woman. Psychoanalysts have explained that woman’s maturation can be accounted for through variations of the Oedipal trajectory—the Imaginary stage and the Electra Complex. The Imaginary stage posits that both boys and girls go through the same stage of development, “a time when the child’s motor skills are not fully developed and the mother’s, by contrast, seem superhuman in perfection. Further, the mother’s appearances are terrifying because they are so unpredictable. This phenomenon documented by Freud, results in an intolerable feeling of helplessness on the part of the child” (Modleski, Women Who 45). The Imaginary stage for boys is overcome because, in the mirror stage, he overcomes fear and denies his mother’s superiority by seeing his own image and asserting his differences. The woman, by contrast has trouble asserting control over her own destiny because of similarities to the mother. Instead of appropriating the look as a show of control, she allows herself to be determined by it , (Modleski, Women Who 48).

Feminists accept the Imaginary stage more readily to help explain the female journey. However, the Electra Complex also provides insight into the psychological journey of a girl becoming a woman. It originates from the Greek tragedy about matricide and a daughter’s revenge. The complex involves the daughter’s perception of the mother as
an object of rivalry, the elimination of the mother and assumption of her place (Modleski, Women Who 51). Many Hollywood classics portray the divided self as a manifestation of this complex, pitting the bad sister against the good sister as rivals for the same man. However, this theoretical assumption does not account for a woman’s desire for another woman as will be seen later in the interpretation of Rebecca and Desperately Seeking Susan. Both theories are applicable to women in film.

Psychoanalysts have had a long standing alliance with semiotics, feminism, and film. According to the semioticians, film is to be understood as a systematic network of signifiers, most often binary oppositions, organized metaphorically, like language. The semiotic approach to language and other systems of signification produce signs whose meanings are established by specific codes, as was immediately seen as relevant to film and, in particular, capable of explaining how the image of woman was constructed. Claire Johnston integrates Marxist feminist theory and semiotics well in “Women as Counter-Cinema.” She states:

The idea that art is universal and thus potentially androgynous is basically an idealist notion: art can only be defined as a discourse within a particular conjuncture--for the purpose of women’s cinema, the bourgeois, sexist ideology of male dominated capitalism. It is important to point out that the workings of ideology do not involve a process of deception/intentionality.
For Marx, ideology is a reality, it is not a lie. Clearly, if we accept that cinema involves the production of signs, the idea of non-intervention is pure mystification. The sign is always a product. What the camera in fact grasps is the "natural" world of dominant ideology. Women’s cinema cannot be captured on celluloid with the innocence of the camera: it has to be constructed, manufactured. New meanings have to be created by disrupting the fabric of the male bourgeois cinema within the text of the film (De Laurentis 4).

Simply because it must have a point of view, Johnston finds that the camera cannot be objective. That point of view is attached to the film maker, who makes decisions based on ideology. The camera, then, reveals ideology; therefore, the images of women on film are the product of ideologies of those who have constructed them.

Textual studies, coupled with semiotics, offer a different approach to the process and ultimately suggest that textual signifiers and cues are the most salient in the production of meaning. Peter Wollen refers back to Charles Sanders Pierce’s Speculative Grammar and Existential Graphs to classify the sign into icon, index or symbol. "An icon, according to Pierce, is a sign which represents its object mainly by its similarity to it, . . ." for instance, the portrait of a woman resembles her. "An index is a sign by virtue of an existential bond between itself and its object, . . ." exemplified by a weathercock, a sign of the wind which physically moves it. "The symbol corresponds to Saussure’s arbitrary sign. A symbolic sign demands neither
resemblance to its object nor any existential bond to it," for example, "You can write down the word 'star,' but that does not make you the creator of the word, nor if you erase it have you destroyed the word. The word lives in the minds of those who use it" (Wollen 123).

These signifying categories are very instructive and useful in that the cues found in film fit nicely within one of these and often cross over to another, or all three. Take for example the narrative structure of classical film. Like the structure of sentences in language, it is iconic in that it often imitates real time and commonly found cause and effect. The mise en scène is also a constructed situation which most often resembles what it represents. Within a scene eliciting the illusion of violence, montage camera angle may be considered indexical in that the dity of motion, the instability of camera angle and an overtent blurring of focus may connote the violence that it. The symbolic signifier is present throughout in knowledge one brings to the film. A simple example is readily in silent film in the illuminated head of the created by the use of back lighting. The halo constructed by the specific use of lighting a figure's head, originated from the theater. But film exaggerated the effect, using dark sets and light-skinned people to give the impression of light traveling through them. The apparent transparency of the figure,
especially pale white female figures like Lilian Gish, gave them an angelic appearance. Her angelic appearance then connotes purity and innocence, her image, including the back lighting, signifying the angel (Dyer 3).

These examples help explain why cinema is considered as language, structurally and communicatively, but they do not explain that the primary force in our spoken language or cinema, especially Hollywood cinema, is what feminists claim to be patriarchal. Semiotics goes further, arguing that words and images are signs that have meaning, not because they reflect a preexisting reality but because they function to make meaning in the linguistic or semiotic system. "The world does not provide words and images with their meaning; rather, by articulating and naming, verbal and visual languages gives meaning to the world. Thus meaning is not reflected but produced through the construction of language" (Multiple Voices 112).

Since cinema is a language, and character is considered to be a signifier of that language, one must pay attention to how character is produced by textual operations such as narration, plot, and mise en scene. Women as signifiers have also been a powerful force in feminist film criticism. They have been classified as sexual types rather than, as for male figures, career types. The cowboy, until recent changes in stereotyping codes, earned his type because of his career, independent actions and detached relationships,
not because of his sexual or physical appearance. Recently, critics have begun to uncover the sexual differences which have determined the reasons for the cowboy's social differences. His sexuality, especially his lack of commitment to monogamous heterosexual relations, has come into question. On the other hand, the femme fatale is never really what she seems to be. She is typed according to her physique and sexual behavior since she embodies the fears and anxieties related to misunderstanding sexual difference. For the patriarchy, she is forever a sexual riddle; the fatal woman. The housewife is every bit what she seems to be, from her gingham dress to the dish towel in her hand, as she remains submissively in her place within patriarchal sexual parameters. The housewife, though she may prove to be constructed with symptoms contradictory to her outward identity, is more easily identified and understood than the threatening femme.

To this point in the evolution of feminist film theories, the primary concern for critics has been either the construction of the image or woman's structural position in a limiting patriarchal system. Anne Kuhn states that "the main focus in feminist film analysis is 'the ways in which woman has been constituted as a set of meanings through processes of cinematic signification'". She goes on to say that "the fundamental project of feminist film analysis can be said to center on making the invisible
visible" (Lawrence 110). Though the visual cues has been
the primary focus in deconstructing the cinema, others look
for vocal signals. Those theorists interested in sound-film
theory may say that they are interested in making the
"silent audible" (Lawrence 111). The field of sound
production has recently become another arena in which
feminist film theorists can deconstruct the systems of sound
production in relation to narrative. Critics like Amy
Lawrence and Kaja Silverman, who trace the technical aspects
of sound production and the woman's voice, find that women
were not excluded or silenced due solely to the patriarchy's
conscious or unconscious suppression of women, but often
because of problems the equipment available to record the
male voice had in recording the higher pitches of the female
voice (Lawrence 29). Many feminist film critics believe
that this area of research will yield some important
theories unexplained by semioticians, psychoanalysts and
Marxists.

I would like to include another theoretical sect that
has emerged from the larger body over the past decade.
These theorist are concerned with the exclusion of women of
color or alternative sexual preference. For the first
fifteen years of feminist film theory, the major theories
emerged from the predominantly white, middle-class female
population. Just as feminists in general have claimed that
women experience the events and incidents of history
differently than men, women of color and other sexual preference also experience these events differently from the white population, formulating a different vision. I wish not to ignore this sect, but the scope of this thesis does not allow consideration of this important distinction.

Because feminist film critics continue to investigate these issues, they choose a process which, for them, begins to articulate the cinematic process of gender differentiation (or nondifferentiation) in a productive way. For many, because language is determined to be male, and film is determined to be a form of language, "feminists must 'grab culture by the word,' as it seizes us in its word." Cixous maintains that political thought cannot do without ...work on language. If discourse is tainted with sexism, it follows that female artists must refuse the dominant tradition—must 'destroy in order to create' (Fischer 10).

These feminists advocate that women create their own language as an aesthetic for communicating who they are.

Other feminist theorists have chosen to turn instead to the processes of implication, which suggests that instead of applying an acquired text to a literary or cinematic work, that it is possible to act as a go between, to generate implications between literature (cinema) and psychoanalysis—to explore, bring to light and articulate the various (indirect) ways in which the two domains do indeed implicate each other, each one finding itself
enlightened, informed, but also affected, displaced, by the other" (Felman 52).

A woman, according to Brecht, is the perfect dialectician.

Feminists, then, in an attempt to find their own space, dispute the dominant male system while creating their own language and system in confrontational cinema. Early feminist films attempting to confront the inner structure of dominant film were typically outside mainstream cinema and played to a select audience of women often already aware of the issues being challenged. Other feminists, the film makers I present in this thesis, remained within the traditional structure of film while attempting to change the social constructions of women in film and the structure used to create them. Although feminists as film makers and spectators have not always been satisfied with the results of these practices, they recognize the importance of articulating feminist orientations, especially structure, positionality and image, as liberating and necessary for social justice.
CHAPTER TWO
Hollywood Classical Film: Norms and Paradigms.

In this chapter I wish to present the norms that make paradigms: those structures that are the identifiable characteristics of Classical Hollywood production and product. I assume that classical film making can be described because it is produced by an aesthetic system that characterizes salient features of the individual work. The system is composed of certain characteristics and practices which are repeated in a unified body of work. Hollywood adopted this production style after the audience learned to read and accept the codes, and, consequently, the system ossified with the introduction of spoken dialogue. Those films considered classical employ two paradigms, in particular, that identify them in this larger body of work—continuity editing and cause and effect narration. Continuity editing supports the narrative, and both are driven by the character’s personal desires and, perhaps more importantly, by the audience’s anticipated desires.

Since many feminist critics have determined that it is the narrative structure and its supporting paradigms that objectify women, claiming that women are the object of man’s desire, it is imperative that the components of this structure be carefully examined. Determining what purpose female figures have in the narrative plot is inextricably
linked to the meaning derived by women and men when viewing these films. Since this meaning is constructed by viewers, a variety of feminist film theoretical approaches can generate hypotheses about how these schemes generate meaning. Therefore, those theories dealing with sexual difference, like Marxist and psychoanalytical, offer a semantic field in which to explore and discuss constructions. Likewise, critical tools rooted in history, experimentation and economics can clarify the codes offered by this apparently simple, but unquestionably multifarious, Hollywood Classical system. These critical approaches cannot be utilized unless the norms are identified and defined.

It is best first to define the basic term. 'Norms' implies that there are a set of rules controlling the choices made in the construction of a classical film. These norms should not be thought of as inflexible and rigid, having only one form. Though they allow for variation, they must be generally identified because they are the accepted structures of film making in Hollywood. This unified Hollywood body of work, fused through shared norms, then, would be considered a group style. Semiologists call group norms a paradigm, "a set of elements which can, according to rules, substitute for one another." Thinking in terms of paradigm allows film makers to make choices within the
paradigm and simultaneously retain a style unified by the paradigm (Bordwell, Classical 5).

These norms can be categorized at three different levels: 1) devices which consist of the isolated technical elements and include such things as continuity editing, centering, dissolves and lighting; 2) systems which are the set of functions and relations defined for them (recurrent elements, the devices), for example, passage of time may be handled through the employment of several different devices or the combination thereof—"a cut may do duty for a dissolve (or a swish pan or the image of a clock's moving hands)." For any fictional narrative film there are three systems at work: a system of narrative logic which depends on story events and cause and effect and the parallelism among them; a system of cinematic time; and a system of cinematic space, and; 3) the relation of these systems which for Hollywood film is constructed so all systems serve that of narrative causality (Bordwell, Classical 6).

Understanding norms was so important to the Hollywood product that the following passage was included in an early cinematography textbook:

It is important...that ambitious movie makers first learn the rules before breaking them. Learn the right way to film, learn the acceptable methods, learn how audiences become involved in the screen story.... Experiment; be bold, shoot in an unorthodox fashion! But, first, learn the correct way (Ray 26).
Hollywood cinematographers learned the rules that established the norms and their products became a unified body of work considered classical. To think of the Hollywood system's rules as a complex system of specific forces in dynamic interaction is crucial to interpreting its structures.

The rules allow for the formation of paradigms, models which can be utilized conforming to established rules. For example, the classical sequence "possesses the Aristotelian unities of duration, locale and action, and are marked at each end by some standardized punctuation (dissolve, fade, wipe)" (Bordwell, Classical 61). The paradigm creates the boundaries for choice while retaining unity with the larger body of work. The paradigm allows for choices, like shot length and type, but does not allow for numerous or drastic deviations; otherwise the work may be considered outside the norms of Classical cinema.

Two types of paradigms, formal and thematic, are found readily in Classical cinema. The formal paradigm, considered to be the invisible style, consists of those elements and devices which produce the structure of discourse mentioned in previous paragraphs, while the thematic paradigm is rooted in traditional American mythology adopted by film makers in the late twenties. Although a discussion of both is vital to understanding Hollywood Classical films, a more inclusive discussion of
the formal paradigm is necessary since it involves the complex structures which create the cinema. Understanding the concepts that make up the formal paradigm can reveal the underlying logic upon which classical film is constructed that are not obviously apparent from our personal experience of film. Acknowledging the inherent rule of the formal paradigm enables us to move on to consider how that style organizes causality, time and space (Bordwell, Classical 13).

Before considering these stylistic modes, it is important to note that, as David Thompson has stated, classical film is “intensely decision-based.” Plots, shots, angles, music, focus, lighting, framing—all are subject to choice. And in the process, “not only do things appear on the screen at the expense of others not shown, the manner in which they appear depends on a selection of one perspective that eliminates (at least temporarily) all others” (Ray 32). Feminist film theory makes this concealment of choice primary. This point of view—the appearance and selection determining what is to be shown or not shown creates the problematic.

American Cinema’s formal paradigm and complexity of choices has developed in a way to conceal the very choices that produce it. This concealment, often referred to as continuity editing, is primarily achieved through the “systematic subordination of every cinematic element to the
interest of a movie’s narrative” (Ray 32). Continuity is this invisible system to which the audience has grown accustomed, and, therefore, accepts as ‘real.’ Lumiere’s first films created a sense of fear producing shouts and screams, evidence of the audiences’ acceptance of cinema as realistic. Today, while audiences are surely more sophisticated, they still cling to this concealment system which, through its narrative, attempts to represent the ‘real’ (Ray 33). Continuity editing, then, allows the viewer to suture the pieces of imagery into a viable narrative realization.

Narration depends on causality and motivation. A manual for aspiring screen writers states that “Plot is a careful working out of the laws of cause and effect. The mere sequence of events will not make a plot. Emphasis must be placed on causality and the action and reaction of the human will” (Bordwell, Making 16). Bordwell lays out the premise of Hollywood story construction as follow: causality, consequence, psychological motivation, the drive toward overcoming obstacles and achieving goals. Character-centered--i.e., personal psychological--causality is the armature of the classical story (Bordwell, Classical 13).

Although the Hollywood Classical film is tightly constructed through cause and effect driven by the character’s needs and desires, the classics tend to leave
gaps allowing the viewer to set up simultaneous competing hypotheses. These gaps can be thought of in terms of Roland Barthes' 'hermeneutic code': a series of questions which the text's structure impels the viewer to ask. The questions can be overt or implicit. In Play Girl (1941), the viewer is uncertain whether Grace is a gold digger or the title is ironic. Although the answer remains uncertain for some time, it is eventually filled by the text. Major gaps are undesirable in classical film because they obstruct closure. This question-posing process supports the cause and effect structure since in posing questions, one seeks answers, a process similar to anticipating character of audience desire (Bordwell, Classical 39).

The primary agent of the cause and effect chain is the character who, then, must be defined with certain character traits that are clearly identifiable and consistent with one another. Hollywood cinema has borrowed the model of character from nineteenth-century novels which encouraged sharply delineated characterizations limiting it to create characters with fewer traits. Classical Hollywood attempts to blend the dense complexity of nineteenth-century novels with the more stereotypical characters of early melodramas creating characters that at once individual yet linked to a type.

Characterization, in turn, became linked to the star system, the group of actors--like Bogart, Cagney, Gable,
Rooney, Flynn, Tracy, Hepburn, Astaire and Rogers, Harlow, Dietrich, Garbo, Davis, Stewart, De Havilland, Wayne and Taylor—who dominated the screen at the time (Ray 25). Stars were often matched to characters because they were tagged with a certain style of speech or behavior that defined a major trait. Bordwell offers this example, "the nouveau riche Upshaw in Going Highbrow (1935) is associated with his craving for tomato juice and eggs, a sign of his ordinary tastes. The 'fallen woman' in Women of the World (1925) is defined by her exotic tattoo, executed at her lover's request" (Bordwell, Classical 15). Certain stars were more appropriate for portraying wealth than others, as were certain female stars more suited for the fallen woman. The character's clothing, hairstyle, and posture are cues that help determine character traits. As we will see later, these traits are very important as signifiers in feminist film criticism.

As the lead character, especially, is defined with individual traits, he or she (this lead is usually occupied by a male excepting films termed woman's film in which the lead is filled by a woman) assumes a causal role that places him in pursuit of what he desires. This sets up goal orientation which leads the character towards the thing he desires, either bringing something new to his life or reestablishing the old.
This main goal of the lead character can be traced through the main line of action in the film. In Hollywood film, invariably, either the main line of action or the second line involves heterosexual love. In Bordwell’s random sampling of 100 films, he found that 95 involved romance in either line while 85 involved romantic pursuit as the main line. These romantic lines as well as other lines of action develop to create a plot advanced along a chain of cause and effect (Bordwell, Classical 45).

Before moving to temporal and spatial issues, it is important to say something about how music contributes to plot advancement. "As George Antheil puts it, 'The characters in a film drama never know what is going to happen to them, but the music always knows'" (Bordwell, Classical 34). Like the camera, music can go anywhere and it does, often accompanying a moment-by-moment rise in action or being obviously omitted at a moment of crisis. The musical score—da, da...da, da ... da, da, da, da—for the pending appearance of the monster in Jaws is one memorable example of the intuitive and anxiety provoking power of music. Music can also reinforce point of view since it can denote place and time as well as any other film element.

After examining the importance of cause and effect to the narrational aspects of the plot, we must explore the systems which manipulate story space and time and the
contributions of each to the overall film. Space is primarily developed through *mise en scene*, "the arrangement of all the visual elements of a theatrical production." The function of *mise en scene* in film is similar to theater, but more specifically, it is the arrangement of objects in the visual space "photographed in a two-dimensional image" resembling the real thing (Giannetti 38).

The five conventions most relevant to this study of classical style are those of centering, balancing, frontality, the 180 degree axis, and depth. The norms that guide the application of these elements in Hollywood film have been derived from traditions which have dominated Western art. One of the most obvious borrowings is the element of centering (Gender 2).

Centering, one of those elements of invisible style, relies on the application of technical aspects like "lighting, focus, camera angle, framing, character blocking, set design, costuming, and camera distance" (Ray 38). The typical Hollywood shot is arranged "with a privileged zone of screen space resembling a T: the upper one-third and the central vertical third of the screen constitute the center of the shot" (Bordwell, *Classical* 51). Those objects and subjects in this privileged zone are clear signifiers of what has been determined to be important. On the other hand, those things cast into the other zones can be helpful to the critic in revealing the hierarchical structure of
elements in mise en scene which may produce repressed meaning.

Along with centering comes the concept of balancing, in which the human body or bodies along with the other objects in the mise en scene are arranged in such a way to create a semi-symmetrical shot. There are shots in which the balance is challenged, but these are aberrant, and purposely used to support the plot. For example, in Psycho, at the moment Norman kills Marianne in the shower, the camera is erratic, hand held, to purposely avoid balancing the shot, thereby enhancing the experience of terror and violence. At other times when there is an obvious spatial imbalance, the conspicuous empty space anticipates the entrance of another character onto the screen space (Bordwell, Classical 51).

Frontality is another one of those norms in Hollywood film that may offer some cues for the interpreter about character traits and behaviors. It is truly rare for a film character to face the spectator directly, and when he or she does, the relationship between passive spectator and film changes. The spectator is sometimes addressed directly which then initiates audience participation or at least audience awareness. Frontality is most commonly shown as slightly oblique, leaving the character open to the audience as much as possible without making eye contact. If the character’s back is to the camera, the character is usually considered to be unimportant at the time or to suggest that
the character is trying to conceal something, be it an object or his or her own sinister traits. These practices function as a part of narrative construction, shaping the story space and action for the spectator.

Another traditional spatial element is that of the 180 degree axis. It primarily determines the limitations of the camera, restricting its movement past an imaginary line which extends across the face of the set from left to right on the viewer's side. In Hollywood film the line exists to eliminate confusion for the viewer, placing the spectator always on the same side of the action. It also exists to help construct the most common chain of shots in Hollywood Classical Film, the series that has been dubbed the mechanism most responsible for the male gaze and female domination, the shot/reverse-shot.

The typical shot/reverse-shot series only shifts the center of interest slightly, opting for a graphically gentle cut. The film maker usually avoids jarring the viewer by not shifting the center drastically during these shots. The first shot in the series is usually mid-range, an establishing shot that shows the two elements involved in the series. Although most shot/reverse-shots occur between human figures, they can also occur between other elements, a human and, let's say, a building. The first shot in the series would include both the woman and the building, establishing the woman's point of view. If she is on the
ground, she may be looking upward, a cue that signifies her point of view. The next shot could be the camera’s point of view from the top of the building showing the woman in miniature on the street, the angle remaining true to the earlier invisible line drawn by her point of view. The third shot would have to be the woman’s point of view which is shot usually from behind her right shoulder to obey the 180 degree rule or from a reasonable distance from the other object to allow for identification with the looker. There may be more shots in the series before it is concluded, but a final shot similar to the first would appear at the end to establish the connection with the previous sequence. The first and last shots of the series act to suture the shots, identifying location and subjects or objects involved in the reverse shots.

Depth is a relatively simple concept that depends on overlaps of the articles in the mise en scene, a change in object density (objects closest to the spectator are most dense while those farthest away are often grainier or lackluster), lighting, diminished size and perspective. Although this concept is universal in Hollywood film, it is not a powerful construction in creating meaning for this thesis (Bordwell, Classical 52).

Spatial cues can generate meaning especially when coupled with temporal cues. The film’s temporal order and duration is also controlled by certain norms. The narrative
is iconic in that it resembles the natural sequential order of real time. Classical film rarely moves backward in time except for flashbacks shown from a particular character's point of view. But the time of film is not 'real' time; films are expected to show only what is determined to be important to the plot and to skip over intervals determined to be less important. For feminist critics, these omissions may cue problems with the hierarchy of importance in relation to events. Currently, some feminists have taken an historical platform to confront some of the issues of patriarchy, believing that recorded history is burdened with the actions of men, especially war, as if these are the only important occurrences throughout the passage of time on this earth. What women do has been virtually forgotten until recently in women's historical studies. Classical film, most often, focuses on the actions of men as subject matter, ignoring the actions of women, unless, of course women's actions advance the actions of men. Conscious omission of women from history can be linked to omission made in classical film; therefore, a study of the choices made to omit certain material is prospectively rich and as yet lightly touched.

In Hollywood film, the temporal omissions are often encoded with punctuation marks the spectator has learned to equate with a passage of time. Fade-ins and outs, swish pans, wipes and iris-ins and outs are some of the technical
maneuvers used throughout the history of film to cue the spectator to the passage of time. These punctuation marks allow the narration to skip unimportant parts of the storyline, generating forward movement at a clean and unencumbered pace (Bordwell, Classical 44).

Likewise, the quick cut denotes short time lapses and can be used to cut between parallel lines of action. Hollywood film is a system that depends on the cut which, when done effectively, creates the illusion of durational continuity. Both match-on-action and eyeline-matching maintains for the viewer the illusion of sequential time and temporal continuity.

Music, especially diegetic, contributes to temporal continuity by playing throughout a given scene. The spectator connects the shots more readily with the assistance of a melody. Music, much like film, depends on the passing of time for its existence. Passing time, particularly events occurring in different locations yet at the same time, can be readily linked by background music. The background music during the wedding of the Godfather’s daughter in the opening scene, is heard outside at the wedding and more faintly inside in the house, creating unity in place and time between shots. Music can also tie events together which are seemingly dissimilar and unify space in reverse cuts. If the same sounds or music are heard during a reverse cut, the viewer tends to believe that the subjects
in the shots are in the same place. Music can either be diegetic, within the non-existent, fictional space fabricated out of spatial and temporal fragments or outside, as part of the film’s structural devices, or both. (See the discussion of music used for advancing the plot, above 35.)

Other diegetic cues can also trigger time and place as in Apollo 13 when the viewer sees factual news clips of the 1969 moon landing and hears the familiar voice-over of Walter Cronkite, which leads one to assume that this is the sixties. The following shot of a man driving down the street in a late sixties Corvette provides another cue to substantiate the assumption. Each sign on its own would be less suggestive.

Although there are several other temporal norms which could be discussed, the final one for the purpose of this study is the deadline or ticking clock. The deadline is the strongest way in which a story duration cooperates with narrative causality. "In effect, the characters set up a limit to the time span necessary to the chain of cause and effect" (Bordwell, Classical 45). There are many ways to reveal the deadline. The most famous ticking clock is found in High Noon (1952), a drama depicting Gary Cooper entangled in a town squabble that climaxes at twelve noon. The music and camera work together, splicing shots of Cooper, the clock, train tracks, empty streets and character close ups for powerful suspense. Similarly, in Sam Rami’s The Quick
and the Dead (1995), the deadline is overtly imposed by the sheriff played by Gene Hackman and reinforced by several shots of the clock tower. In John Ford's Stagecoach (1939) the deadline is imposed by the completion of the journey to Lordsberg where all seven characters in the stagecoach meet their destiny. The deadline in James Bridges' The China Syndrome (1979) is avoiding the impending nuclear meltdown. The deadline, when met and the problem overcome, supports the concept of unity and closure so ardently sought in classical film.

Closure, then, is a norm dependent on many elements, but, primarily, it is reached when the temporal and spatial constructions work to support the causal thread that anticipates the spectator's desires for completed action and leads her shot by shot to that destination. Closure's greatest allies are cause and effect and continuity editing, both working to simulate what the patriarchy considers the real world. Closure is sought in Classical Hollywood films to return the action to its pre-crisis state and to maintain the status quo of the hierarchical structure embodied in the Hollywood American myth.

* * *

The other major paradigm that identifies classical film is thematic—"the adoption of the traditional American mythology. Classical film breaks from the silent era and
early sound films by shifting its source from Victorian
drama and literature to a purely American setting” (Ray 56). To ensure the industry’s profits, film makers decided to make film American, which is also why so many actors and actresses lost stardom when their foreign accents were first heard in talkies. The United States, after W.W. II, had established itself as a world power and Americans were thirsty for a reaffirmation of that new identity. Film makers turned to American authors like Bret Hart, Horatio Alger, Mark Twain, James Fenimore Cooper and Herman Melville as sources for their new myths about the American, and in doing so, the film makers, like historians and novelists, left women out of the story or included her only marginally as ‘his’ reward after the conflict had been resolved.

Classic films have derived their source from the romance form shown to be the basis of nineteenth-century American fiction. Historians recorded the events and people of history providing authentification for this mythology. The American cinema’s version of this traditional mythology rested on two factors.

First, Hollywood’s power (and need) to produce a steady flow of variations provided the myth with the repetitive elaborations that it required to become convincing. Second, the audience’s sense of American exceptionalism (in part authentic, in part itself the product of the myth) encouraged the acceptance of a mythology whose fundamental premise was optimistic. For to a large extent, American space, economic abundance, and geographic isolation and the fictions embroidered around
these things—had long been unavailable to the European imagination (Ray 52).

During the period of classical Hollywood’s development, Americans believed, and to a similar extent still do today, that they are, as individuals and as a people, exceptional. Consequently, their historical evolution has been transformed and elevated to the status of myth. This collection of myths is the source of classical film packaged in the form of the individual’s crisis with historical events.

A number of films imagine the individual’s confrontation with crisis and prove, upon closure, that Americans are as exceptional as they have been lead to believe. Although classic novels like *Wuthering Heights* (1939), an English novel, were sources for some of Hollywood’s greatest achievements, novels like *Grapes of Wrath* (1940) and *Our Daily Bread* (1934) provided the impetus for making and remaking the myth of the individual in crisis with this country’s coming into being (Ray 57). *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* provided the individual with a tale that revealed his personal power and importance when confronting the imposing machinery of a turning nation. Even the great Bible movies, like *Ben Hur* (1959) and *The Ten Commandments* (1956), though the stories were not of American sources, were more specifically, tales of Americans in the deserts of the Sudan, rather than an historical account. These films
reinforced the Christian (and to some extent Jewish) roots of the American male to further define 'his' identity and exceptionalism by centering his individual actions in crisis with an historical event.

But eventually, the clean thread provided by the myth became twisted, and movies began to appear that revealed contradictions within these established mythic forms. For example, Orson Welles wrote and directed *Citizen Kane* (1941), a film that garnered much criticism for its abashedly dark portrayal of William Randolph Hearst and his struggle between seductive capitalism and loss of oneself that drove him, one of American's prominent figures, to ruin. Although the portrait of the famed American Hearst was partially disguised in the character of Kane, the ruinous image affected Hearst who tried to censor the film and the film maker. Actually, the film proved to be a reflexive portrait of Welles himself. Because Welles revealed these conflicts within Hollywood's accepted mythic norm while demanding autonomous control of his work, he was eventually relegated to low budget films and virtually ignored by the box office, that had been trained to accept the established paradigm (Ray 57).

Contradictions within the American myth prompted film makers to develop a norm that might avert destruction of their money-making myth machine. To reconcile these
dichotomies troubling the myth, a new character form
developed, one that
magically embodied diametrically opposed traits. A sensitive violinist was also a boxer (Golden Boy, 1939); a boxer was a gentle man who cared for pigeons (On the Waterfront, 1954). A gangster became a coward because he was brave (Angels with Dirty Faces, 1938); a soldier became brave because he was a coward (Lives of A Bengal Lancer, 1935) (Ray 58).

There are countless examples of the male dealing with contradictions in his personal and national myth, but there are remarkably fewer for women. Again, this exclusion has to be traced, in part, back to the exclusion of women from history. The American myth, like American history, has made concealed choices about what is important and what is not. Women are, unfortunately, in the category marked 'not,' and, therefore, their stories are not told. This exclusion from film narratives may account for the infatuation independent feminist film makers have for the documentary form which exhibits talking heads. These films, which show women telling their story, attempt to fill in the gaps about women created by Classic Hollywood film and history. But these films are biased in that they, too, make choices about what will be included and excluded. This is why a system for reading films is so important.

To assist in the explanation of character developed to embody these mythic contradictions, Erik Erikson offers:
The functioning American, as the heir of a history of extreme contrasts and abrupt change, bases his final ego identity on some tentative combination of dynamic polarities such as migratory and sedentary, individualistic and standardized, competitive and cooperative, pious and Free-thinking, responsible and cynical, etc... To leave his choices open, the American, on the whole, lives with two sets of 'truths' (Ray 58).

The film industry frequented the opposition of individual and community most often, generating the most significant pair of competing myths: the outlaw hero and the official hero. The plot may have capitalized on the hero whose carefree behavior coupled with his avoidance of commitment to community and women (as symbols of both), make him a figure worthy of myth. He is, at once, righteous and caring and individualistic and transient. He is the American cowboy dependent on a natural set of laws to guide him, who not only inhabits the West but the entire nation. On the other hand, there is the law abiding traditionalist whose belief in collective action has committed him to society and laws of the nation. He is tied to community and women working within the structure, continually trying to maintain a patriarchal familial hierarchy (Ray 59). In the construction of both character types, women have been placed in a subordinate position to the male figure’s personal aspirations.

The movie industry’s affection for narrative driven by male characters and cause and effect that conceals choice is
a result of male thought and language. It is an attempt to construct a system by which the male can maintain control over his environment. Concealing choices in film, like constructing language that excludes women's thought, is a safe and effective way of maintaining hegemony. Choice and action have been associated with men in a familiar binary polar construction used as a tool by feminist critics: male/active and female/passive. Since man is associated with action, and action is the required force for change as well as maintaining status quo, it is reasonable to assume that man considers his story worthy of retelling and retelling.

Within these paradigms, then, are some clues to the difficulties men have telling their story when the figure of woman pervaded their territory. Although the system continually supports the oppression of women, they appear to be a recurring problem, obstinately refusing to be suppressed. As I examine three Hollywood films, I will attempt to discover the difficulties the male characters, the film and the industry had with the troubling figure of woman.
CHAPTER THREE


As mentioned before, I draw my structural platform from the work of David Bordwell in *Making Meaning*, which includes a short history of film surveying two approaches to interpretation—thematic explication and symptomatic reading. It asserts that the two share a fundamental interpretive logic and rhetoric utilizing similar inferential moves and persuasive devices. The process of making meaning out of textual cues found in film is, like other cognitive processes, a procedure involving psychological and social construction (Bordwell, *Making 3*).

The film that flashes in front of the viewer is reconstructed to make meaning through perceptual and cognitive activity. It is this activity which brings about both comprehension, the process of understanding, and, if desired and sought, interpretation—the process of explaining (Bordwell *Making 2*).

Four types of constructed meaning have been identified: referential and explicit, linked with building comprehension; and implicit and symptomatic, capable of producing interpretation. The first, referential meaning, is the construction of a story from its spatio-temporal diegesis. The spectator relies on his or her understanding
of film—shot, image, mise en scene, editing. It is not important to know the terms, but experience in unifying parts in relation to the real world is necessary. In other words, the spectator observes the putative world of the film in its parts and reconstructs it in relation to his or her own knowledge of a concrete world. For example, in The French Connection (1971), Popeye Doyle chases through the putative world of New York City cued by news stands, subways, city dwellers, concrete mazes and elevated trains. The viewer, relying on his knowledge of the real world, sutures these cues together to construct the imagined world. The concepts of causality, space and time, all iconic constructions, also contribute to this construction. The iconic nature of the film, that which most resembles the real world, enables the spectator to understand and reconstruct it. The referents in the text can be either imaginary or real, as in the case of The Wizard of Oz (1939), in which the referent of Oz is intratextual and imaginary, and Kansas is extra-textual and real (Bordwell, Making 8).

The second type of meaning is explicit, a level of abstraction above referential in that it assigns a conceptual meaning to the diegesis. These explicit meanings refer to the film’s intentionality in constructing meaning (Bordwell, Making 8). In the film Godfather II (1974),
Michael says to Kay just before she tells him of her abortion that "Things have been going on between men and women for a long time and they are never going to change." In this phrase he means that the existing patriarchal structure of male/female relations has always been in existence and will not be challenged at this time. He is the one who controls home, family and wife. We can extend this intended message beyond this isolated relationship of husband and wife onto an extreme patriarchal society such as the Mafia. Both referential and explicit meanings are what is often termed 'literal', and each advances understanding.

The next type of meaning is the implicit or symbolic, in which the film speaks indirectly to the spectator. Often, the implicit meaning of a film is referred to as the theme, problem or question (Bordwell, Making 8). In Godfather II, the scene ends with a threat to Michael’s nucleus family because Kay refuses to be part of the corrupt structure he has inherited. When Kay tells him of the abortion, the camera closes in on Michael’s face and the loss of composure signified in his trembling chin and his vexed gaze. Kay threatens his position, not only as head of this family but the head of the extended family. Her attack and the immediate rupture is symbolic of the eventual destruction of the extreme patriarchal structure. The symbolic can also reveal ironic meanings in the text.
The final kind of meaning is symptomatic which is the repressed or hidden meaning the film maker may not intend to express through the text. A version of symptomatic reading has been evident since the 1940's. Bordwell refers to a very influential criticism, *Culture, Dream, and Lauren Bacall*, that states, "Hollywood is mass unconscious—scooped up as crudely as a steam shovel scoops up the depth of a hill, and served on a helplessly empty screen" (Bordwell, Making 73). Symptomatic meaning, unlike the three previous kinds of meaning in which the spectator watching and making meaning assumes that the film maker knows what he or she is doing, expresses meaning that the film maker may be unaware of. The symptomatic meaning a viewer constructs is often taken to be the artist's personal obsession, his or her repressed desires coming to the fore, as in *Psycho*, often considered to be a “worked over version” of Hitchcock's personal fantasy (Bordwell, Making 9). Friedrich Nietzsche sets out the catechism of symptomatic interpretation in all the human sciences: ‘When we are confronted with any manifestation which someone has permitted us to see, we may ask: what is it meant to conceal? What is it meant to draw our attention from? What prejudice does it seek to raise? And again, how far does the dissimulation go? And, in what respect is the man mistaken?’ (Bordwell, Making 72).

Looking once again at *Godfather II*, the repressed meaning could be that the rift in the organization of patriarchy is not caused by external threats of gang rivalry or the law,
but is caused by the internal threat of male castration by the female (the threat to Michael’s manhood because he cannot control her). This can be read by scrutinizing camera angles and distance which set up spectator identification, that which the camera permits us to see. The scene is a traditional shot/reverse-shot series in which the camera moves in on Michael’s face to narrow our focus to his reactions. Kay’s voice-over during these close-ups adds to the potential threat. When the camera switches back to Kay, the point of view is farther away, detaching the spectator from her, making her seem small, forcing the spectator to identify with Michael’s power and anger. Although our intratextual knowledge of Michael’s violent capabilities and the close-ups of his face generate in the spectator a natural fear for Kay’s immediate safety, at the same time, the spectator’s attention is not on her. It remains primarily on Michael. The scene is analogous to an animal who trembles, being trapped in a corner until it turns and lashes out, as does Michael, who streaks across the room striking his assailant, like an animal. Symptomatically, woman is the force that ultimately identifies man and has the power to control him, and not the other way around. Michael could choose to kill her, but he would never really control her. Instead, he keeps her alive to shut the door in her face, symbolically and willfully cutting off his gaze (his gaze has lost the power
to control her), in an attempt to regain control over her and reestablish his own identity.

The making of repressed meaning is potentially very important to feminist critics especially those, like Modleski, who explore the difficulties in the patriarchy's attempts to control 'woman.' Traditional Hollywood film paradigms assume closure. At the end of the film the status quo or the traditional hierarchy will somehow be regained or retained. Feminist critics focus on anomalous features, those which draw attention to themselves, cueing that there is something more. These anomalies often point to a repressed meaning, a concept the film and its maker may not be aware that it is signifying. These repressed messages are the fodder for interpreters seeking alternative ways to read films. Bordwell offers a humorous yet very helpful example of this process. A father looks out at the lawn and says to his son, "The grass is so tall I can hardly see the cat walking through it," so "the son slopes off to mow the lawn." Imagine that the exchange is observed and analyzed by a team of discourse specialists and social scientists. One of them may determine that the statement concerns power and a request fashioned into inference. The father is commanding the son to mow the lawn, and, therefore, the inference is the intended meaning and the proper response was produced. Another scientist may "construe the remark as revealing a characteristic bourgeois concern for
appearance.” Another may go beyond the inferential or symbolic to a more symptomatic meaning by focusing on the anomaly in the scenario, the cat. She, then, might suggest that the statement constitutes a fantasy, one unwittingly symbolizing either the man’s desire to be liberated from his stifling life as father and provider; or a desire to see the feline in the brush, which is veiled, obscured and therefore subject to fetishization; “or his own castration fear (the cat has been neutered)” (Bordwell, Making 71). These interpretations are derived from several levels and sources of meaning, being rooted in different semantic fields. It is the relationship between the cue and the field that gives the interpretation relevance.

Those concerned with symptomatic interpretations of film look past the individual humanistic journey to an analytical, almost anthropological detachment that sees sexuality, politics and signification as constituting the salient domains of meaning. The theme of totality is replaced by duality, clusters created by pairing or grouping items which have a high degree of implicit contrastness. Some common symptomatic clusters explored by feminist critics are passive/active, work/love, male violence/female victimization, subject/object, presence/absence, aesthetics/politics, interior/exterior, fantasy/reality. In symptomatic criticism, order is associated with social and
sexual oppression, while disorder rises from impulses that have been sublimated (Bordwell, Making 109).

The doublet is one form which posits that cues can be aligned, essentially mapped, according to the inherent opposition. Chains of items can also be produced, especially when a film is determined to be replaying an already existent story line. "When the critic finds that Double Indemnity centers on the 'Oedipal trajectory of the hero — the problem of the knowledge of sexual difference in a patriarchal culture,' she posits a string of developmental phases (attraction to mother/fear of castration/accession to a paternal authority) as a semantic chain governing the interpretation" (Bordwell, Making 124). Later, I will discuss how Tania Modleski adapts this chain in a slightly deviated form to Hitchcock's Rebecca.

Finally, I would like to identify the schemata I intend to use in structuring the interpretations to follow; one is the source for salient cues and the other will help guide the text's structure. I will look for cues that build a concept around personhood. To understand the concept, it is best to consider personhood as a social and psychological construction. In the process of making meaning, the spectator relies on mimesis and on the premise that identifying with the person is basic to making meaning of the external world. The same applies to the internal world where characters and other objects can be projected with the
idea of personhood. The schema of the "person" includes the following Folk-psychological features:
1. A human body, presumed to be singular and unified.
2. Perceptual activity, including self-awareness.
3. Thoughts, including beliefs.
4. Feelings or emotions.
5. Traits or persisting personal qualities.
6. The capacity for self-impelled actions, such as communication, goal-formation and achievement, and so on (Bordwell, Making 152).

Depending first on personhood seems to me especially relevant when what is at stake in my interpretations is, most often, the relationship between and identity for women and men in films. Of course, it is possible to look at other textual variants in the text, like setting and lighting, but these cues take on more relevant meaning when they are correlated to personhood through personification. In other words, the most salient of cues are those that relate most to the conditions humans experience most — those that are personal. Of what importance is lighting unless it reveals something more about the nature of the person. I am assuming, like much of literary interpretation, that the most salient meanings are constructed from personhood, sometimes referred to as character cues, while other cues add to constructing the nature of the person.
As the interpreter constructs meaning, she may rely on other devices—plot, style, spectators, film maker—to which personification can be applied, giving her the freedom to move freely, searching for appropriate cues. I believe that by following this schema, I am following an already established formula for finding cues that enable me to suggest a valid interpretation.

The other schema is one that guides the interpretation by offering an orderly pursuit for presenting the interpretation. I believe it mirrors closely the process applied for finding cues. At the center of the interpretation will be the discussion of characters, through their traits and relationships. Cues from other devices in the text, primarily from the diegetic world will also bear meaning, but they will be considered primarily in relation to character. Finally, the non-diegetic devices, like camera work, music and editing may offer new ways of making meaning. Most often, since film is a combination of these devices, the interpretation will overlap in all areas, but once again, the meaning in relation to character nature is most salient (Bordwell, Making 147).

It is appropriate to mention that each of the films interpreted in the following section are subject to the interpretive processes already mentioned and, at the same time, to feminist theories—Marxist, psychoanalytic, semiotic, ‘inventive.’ My own understanding of film
properties and the real world will also guide the process of making meaning.

I am partial to exploring what Tania Modleski refers to as the difficulties inherent in patriarchal’s attempt to subdue and subsume woman. Because she believes that woman can never be completely subsumed, she offers a more optimistic view of woman as spectator of Hollywood films, a view which leaves her with more than pain and humiliation. While examining a film, she often finds anomalies that present themselves more so to the trained eye and attributes them to what has become known as the “unspeakable,” that which cannot be said. The “unspeakable” is the mark of an “hysterical text.” a text whose intended meaning has been challenged by these unspeakables and whose intended meaning may be overturned. Jeffrey Nowell-Smith uses the term in discussing family melodramas of the sixties saying “the ‘hysterical text,’ is one in which the repressed sexual content of the film, banished from the film’s narrative, returns to manifest itself in various ways in the mise en scene and through textual coherences” (Modleski, Feminism 172). Modleski uses the example of Peter Weir’s critically acclaimed Dead Poet’s Society (1989), saying that “the repressed content is related to homoeroticism and gay sexuality,” cued by the setting of an all male school in which the boys play out their bonding through venerating the dead, gray (gay) poet, Walt Whitman. She speculates that
the poet Oscar Wilde would then be taboo in Hollywood, so
the less threatening Whitman takes his place (Modleski
Feminism 148). She claims that

The film turns to Walt Whitman as a more sexually
ambiguous figure through whom to work out its
ideologically conservative projects: first, not
only to deny the homosexuality of Whitman but more
generally to evade its own relation to
homoeroticism; second, to appear, in true post-gay
rights fashion, to be endorsing rebellious anti-
authoritarian modes of behavior, but third to be
actually evoking a longing for a closeted world in
which such behavior would only serve to perpetuate
a power structure that would ceaselessly punish it
(Modleski, Feminism 180).

Modleski’s process of interpreting repressed meaning is
similar to that of Bordwell’s; however, unlike most feminist
film criticism, her theories encompass both male and female
repression as a method for getting at the truth about how
‘male’ and ‘female’ are constructed and interpreted in
culture. Her willingness to do so has demonstrated a marked
difference in her theory, a theory of interpretation that
never forgets about the power of women and their enigmatic
effect on Hollywood Classical films and current films.
As has already been discussed, Hollywood Classical films have certain distinguishing structures classified into norms and paradigms. They are devices that unite them in a common canon. Although there may be a few films trumpeting originality, most Classical Hollywood Films can be identified by examining these structures and mythologies.

I have selected three films for interpretation. The first, *Singin' in the Rain*, was overlooked by the academy but not by influential film critic Pauline Kael, who considers it possibly the finest movie musical. Gene Kelly along with Stanley Donen directed the picture. The film is a good example of a well-established narrative form which employs the most criticized cinematic structures. The constructed female figures are varied, each serving the patriarchal hierarchy in her own way.

*Rebecca*, an Academy Award winner for best picture and cinematography, is Alfred Hitchcock's first American film. Because it is adapted from the Daphne Du Maurier novel and not an original Hitchcock screenplay, the script created problems for the director who found it difficult to deal with its feminine qualities. His difficulty leads to the
female viewer's delight since it creates gaps that he is unable to close. Though Hitchcock's Rebecca tries to contain and control the mature sexual woman, it is not completely successful.

The final Hollywood Classic under scrutiny is Orson Welles' Touch of Evil, a film with its own interesting back story. Both Janet Leigh and Welles worked with injuries, Leigh with a broken arm and Welles with a sprained ankle. Leigh's arm was set at a 138 degree angle instead of the normal 90 degrees. For several scenes, in particular the rape scene, the cast had to be removed and the arm reset after shooting. Welles also had difficulties with the studio executives who tried to censor his work. To avoid censoring, he shot most of the scenes at night on the set in Venice, California. Welles was never paid for script writing or directing, but he received a healthy $155,000 for acting.

I chose this film first because it falls within the film noir genre and secondly because Welles is a master of construction. He is credited with introducing several structural devices employed in film today. Also, the border town setting provides some important insight into the American patriarchal structure and its attempt to maintain authority. The film was, however, produced at a time when several Classical structures were being altered, and, therefore must be considered as a transitional film.
Singin’ in the Rain

Singin’ in the Rain (1952) appears first in this section primarily because it is a musical and musicals have been found to construct overtly male narratives, i.e. the plot elements tend to be shallow, predictable, male centered, and the characters stereotypical. In other words, most males as central figures of musicals tend to dance and sing their way to manhood. The narrative is simplified because musicals must work to balance dance numbers and plot while retaining narrative movement and continuity.

Plot, psychology, motivation, suspense—are to such an extent conventional in the musical that they leave little room for variation: we alternate between the male focus and the female focus, working our way through a prepackaged love story whose dynamic principle remains the difference between male and female (Fischer 132).

This summary certainly describes Singin’ in the Rain, which constructs the story of a young actor, played by Gene Kelly, coming of age in Hollywood. Coming-of-age includes some typical male elements—working his way up in the world, encountering a challenge to his position, overcoming the challenge and winning the 'girl.' These are common distinctions of the male figure, while the female’s distinctions, also common in musicals, move her steadily toward the altar or at least into a monogamous relationship. Her alternatives to a heterosexual pairing are either
destruction or window dressing, a commodity for viewing pleasure.

The love interest between Seldon (Debbie Reynolds) and Lockwood (Kelly) in *Singin'*', like ninety-five percent of Classical Hollywood films, involves a heterosexual love story which produces closure. A heterosexual love story allows for distinctive polarized male/female constructions—the male as active manipulator of events and the female as passive, packaged commodity. For example, Lockwood jumps in Seldon’s car when first meeting her and pursues her thereafter.

These male/female binary polarities created by stereotypes infiltrate musicals. *Singin'* is no exception. The use of stereotypes in film is nothing new, but typing has different implications for male characters than it has for female. The term stereotype denotes that one is cast from a mold, having no individual distinguishing characteristics within the group from which the construction is cast. Historically, women in film have been thought of in terms of types—the vamp, the virgin, the femme fatale, the bombshell, the mother, the bitch. These types tend to signal sexual tendency or physical appearance. Male types tend instead to suggest a career or social position—the cowboy, the loner, the gangster, the detective (Fischer 137). The long tradition of identifying women as sexual type and men as professional type is apparent in *Singin'*.
Although women are seen acting, in the case of Lena Lamont (Jean Hagen) and Seldon, their active appearance will soon be replaced with submission and devaluation as they move steadily toward their proper place as help mates to a male figure.

Singin's inspiration is the song "Singin' in the Rain." When script writers Betty Comden and Adolf Green began work on the story, they built it around the song, simply plugging in common structural devices, particularly the male success story coupled with a love interest (Singin’ in the Rain, Anniversary Edition). It showcases the talents of Gene Kelly as Lockwood, supported by Donald O'Connor as Cosmo, Debbie Reynolds as Cathy Seldon and Jean Hagen as Lena Lamont. The historical crisis in the film is the introduction of spoken dialogue to the screen, the technical difficulties being unfamiliar to mass audiences. The individual's experience with the crisis is played out by the Lockwood character along with his buddies, who rely on American male ingenuity to solve the problems of introducing audio dialogue to film. Lockwood is able to rise in society from rags to riches, fulfilling the American male myth. Directors Kelly and Stanley Donen succeed in centering Kelly while devaluing women, making his success and sexual differences more pronounced. For me the film is a male ego wonderland where men invariably get the best of women.
The film opens with a very stylized set of a Hollywood premiere. Collectively, the cues imply that this is a fantasy world, at once familiar and strange. "Hollywood" 1952 was a well known, self-made, consciously determined domain where the lives of stars were public knowledge. But since this film chooses to embed a film within a film within a film, supposedly showcasing the process of film making for the audience, it further fantasizes the world of Hollywood. Because the diegetic world is first a fantasy, and second a musical, the audience knows very well that the film is not to be taken literally. Characters are accepted readily as stereotypes while actions assume a fantastic quality. *Singin'* is not the usual way to represent real people in real-life situations. The magic of the movie industry's technology and Hollywood itself help to define the film as fantasy.

The opening scene shows two women stars arriving at the premiere while an older woman, Dora Bailey, announces their arrival. The first to arrive is Zelda Sanders, the darling of the flapper set, another sign, along with the cars and costuming, placing the time period in the twenties. Dressed in a striking black and white gown, Zelda is accompanied by a stuffy elderly man, proclaimed by Dora to be one of the country's most eligible bachelors. The pairing of these two figures supports the practice of older well-to-do men as a suitable matches for younger, showy women. She makes a good
appearance while he makes the money. Bailey adds, “I hope it’s really love this time.” But cues suggest that this is improbable. This disparity between what is said and what is seen is used throughout the film to produce humor.

The second woman, Olga Brown wears a slinky black dress, the back designed to resemble a spider’s web. These signs are also clear; she is the vamp who catches her prey in the tangled snares of femininity. A small dark-haired man with a slightly exotic look accompanies her.

Both women have perceptibly European first names while their last name sounds more American. Such mixed names add to the stars’ mystique while anchoring each on American soil. They also suggest the transition of film from silent to sound. Early sound film audiences became acutely aware of foreignness when an actor’s accent could be heard. Stars thought to be familiar when seen became oddly strange when heard. They were apparently not American. Again, what is seen often contradicts what is heard. These two stars’ names eliminate their possible exclusion as foreign while retaining their exotic charm.

Before the main characters arrive on the screen, the scene has been overpowered by women through the voice and presence of Dora and the arrival of the two other stars. But when Lamont and Lockwood arrive, image and sound become dominated by the male star and are never thereafter relinquished. When the women make their appearance, they
are established as spectacle, an image on the screen to be
looked at, not as a force. The male figure carries the
story. When the couple arrives, Dora, who has her own voice
because her age and appearance no longer make her a
castration threat, asks the couple how they got together.
Instead of addressing the question, Lockwood tells his own
story, leaving Lena out almost completely. While Lockwood’s
voice-over tells the admirable story of a talented man in
pursuit of his acting career, a series of montages appear on
the screen as flashbacks, showing Lockwood with Cosmo
dancing his way through pool parlors, back alleys and
vaudeville before getting a lucky break in Hollywood as a
stunt man. Lockwood’s voice-over explains a very different
story than what is on the screen, contradicting his lofty
declaration of “Dignity, always dignity.” The story the
audience hears is not the story they see. The montage
shots, instead, suggest ridicule—the checkered suits,
hurled tomatoes, carnival lights, booing crowds, tiny
stages, crashing airplanes. Although Lockwood is a possible
object for ridicule, the audience frees him.

On the other hand, the spectator is less apt to forgive
Lena for any deceptions she may conceive, especially her
voice. Feminist film historians, uncovering important
information about the female voice, partially explain that
Lena may be suffering from separation of image and voice:
The story of Narcissus and Echo is a cautionary tale warning against what is conceived of as the unnatural and dangerous separation of sound and image... seeing and hearing—oppositions that are in many ways fundamental to the ways we think about film. Both Echo and Narcissus are ravished by perception. Subjected to obstacles of expression or comprehension, and ultimately die from the missed connections (Lawrence 2).

Lena suffers because her image and her voice have not connected—her image denoting a glamorous, classy woman, her voice suggesting a low class dimwit. Again, the image should prevail, but because her voice contradicts drastically with the image it supposedly supports, she becomes problematic as well as ridiculous.

On the other hand, the male figure rarely experiences ridicule at the hands of another man. In those rare occasions, he purposely generates the ridicule (comedy assumes this). If he does not knowingly generate the ridicule, he is invariably redeemed from the fall. This occurs primarily because in the Classical Hollywood film, there exists a hierarchy of image and sound, image being dominant, allowing image to carry the most weight as the dominant signifier. The image of man usually matches his voice whether it be humorous or serious. The image of woman, on the other hand, is undermined by the dissynchronization of voice and body. She has been willfully separated from her voice in an attempt to disempower and silence her.
Feminist film critics have taken up the historical images of women as a source of meaning, the difference between male/female images and even the 'gaze' of the camera. But if sound and image are mutually dependent, as Singin' dramatizes, then sound is an important aspect of female representation in film, and the female voice is of utmost importance. The female voice concerns three issues:

1) The physical ability to make a sound, which is then reproduced through cinema/sound technology, 
2) a woman's relationship to language and verbal discourse, 
3) her possession of authorial point of view, as in the author's voice (Lawrence 3).

Lena Lamont is a sign of the incongruous matching of sound and image in that her voice fractures her constructed image providing, then, a means by which she can be disempowered. For example, at the first screening of their recent film in the opening of Singin', diegetic female spectators comment on Lena's sophistication. Because Lena is never heard, her image makes a powerful impression on the diegetic female spectators watching the premiere. They wish to be like her. During a first viewing, we, as 'real' spectators, construct Lena similarly, as a star with charm, beauty and grace. However, after the screening, when Lena steps up to speak, she is interrupted several times by Lockwood. The reason for silencing Lena is unclear until later at the meeting in the director's office. The scene begins with men talking together, Lena standing on the left side of the screen,
still silent. She is to be seen and not heard. When she cuts into the conversation, the incongruity of image and voice shock the audience. We discover that she has been silenced because of her nasally, high pitched, screechy uneducated voice and discourse. Her voice is not pleasant sounding; she lacks an understanding of rhetorical discourse; and her voice imparts no authority. Her voice shatters the constructed image; she is a freak, an easy target for ridicule. Her repressed voice has been justified.

What this classic Hollywood depiction signifies for women and women’s voices in film is three-fold. First, by constructing the woman with a desirable image and an undesirable voice, she can easily be silenced and, therefore, seen and not heard. Secondly, she never achieves full power because the match of voice and image is not made. The story of Echo and Narcissus warns against missing the connection between sound and image, voice and being, for a threat of destruction exists. And thirdly, voice signifies for woman her true identity; appearances can be deceiving. The effects of silencing woman’s voice are diverse.

Essentially, voice infers two areas of meaning: the actual sounds made by the speakers vocal chords formed into discernible patterns that help to distinguish one person from another; and sounds considered in regard to character, quality, tone or expression. In composition, the writer’s
voice denotes authority, and grammatically, it suggests the speaker's active or passive position. Further, 'to voice' is to express oneself, while voice in music is the tonal quality. Voice, then, is reflexive of one's character and quality. It denotes power and active position. A woman without a voice is unidentifiable as different from any other. If she were to exert her own voice, there would be repercussions in classical film as there are in Singin'.

Later in the diegesis, Lena threatens Hollywood patriarchal control using legal channels when she demands of the director that Cathy remain her voice. She may make the threat legitimately, but she is disempowered furtively by the three men who divulge her secret. The three men wait until she begins to lip-synch on stage in front of a live audience, Seldon behind the curtain singing. During the performance, the men pick the right moment, strut in a line over to the ropes, and cooperatively, alternate taking turns tugging on the ropes to open the curtain, revealing the deception. Although these three men contrive the deception in the first place, they take the liberty to divulge the deception, Lena paying the price for it. She pays because in many ways her legal threat is equivalent to a sexual threat. In both cases, the threat involves castration, one of sexual power and one of social power, each often intertwined in the other. Lamont's volatile threat is extinguished when the curtain opens to reveal her
prevarication. As spectators, we already know of her lie and anticipate the reaction of ridicule, an anticipation being fully satisfied.

The film is carefully crafted to include another female figure, Cathy Seldon, the girl with the wholesome looks and voice, with whom the spectator is expected to identify. The narrative sets her up to contradict and compete with Lena Lamont. Lena not only threatens the patriarchy, she threatens the patriarchy's acceptable female figure when she schemes to covet Seldon's voice. Seldon's voice is separated from her image similar to Lamont, therefore, though Seldon appears to be accepted, she is also used by the patriarchy.

Seldon's character, as patriarchy's acceptable female figure, abides by patriarchy's rules. While performing as part of a group of showgirls at the party, the camera works to center her so the audience can trace her as the object of Lockwood's desire, even though she looks amazingly like the other girls in the group who are all dressed alike in pale pink frilly outfits. The number is synchronized so the group works as a unit, mouths move at the same time, feet tap the floor in unison. Seldon signifies women who remain in line to serve the male spectator; even the lyrics of the musical number proclaim, "All I do is dream of you the whole night through!" Although she has a streak of independence
in her, that is quickly extinguished when she is aligned with Lockwood and thereafter becomes his helper.

Historically, Seldon would have been the appropriate role model for middle-class women pursuing marriage and commitment to family in the twenties. Lamont, on the other hand, may signify the women’s rights movement of the early twenties, which was strongly opposed by male professionals who did not want women gaining control in corporate or medical fields (Evans 187). But although the film’s narrative was set in the late twenties, the film was produced in 1952, constructing ideologies about woman’s place in the early fifties as well. At that time, most women had moved back into the home from their wartime jobs, not always willingly, and had taken up the duties of household and family once again. Middle-class women of the fifties had become consumers of a very prosperous nation now industrially the most powerful in the world. Debbie Reynolds as signifier is less mature and sexually provocative than her predecessors Bette Davis, Katherine Hepburn, Marlene Dietrich, Joan Crawford and others who signified the strengths of Depression and WWII women. The fifties’ Reynolds and Doris Day represented baby-doll-like characters prone to laughing and giggling. In Singin’, Reynolds does not look at the camera directly nor does she return the gaze as many femme fatales did in the thirties; instead, she averts her look as a sign of submission. Her
clothing, modestly designed pale colors of blue or pink, supports her washed down feminine image. She embodies what is currently known as the 'feminine mystique,' an ideology which defined woman almost exclusively in terms of wife and mother, and functioned to shape women's roles which disrupt their power (Evans 246).

The other women in the film (excepting the Cyd Charisse character and Lena Lamont) also remain in their proper place, becoming the backdrop for a more centered male figure. Costuming, as in the montage numbers of Lockwood working his way from vaudeville to the Zigfield follies, distinguishes him clearly from the women dressed in frilly outfits. Other montage sequences show a man as the central figure while smiling, frilly, painted women dance around him. Even the women's facial features, as in the earlier Reynolds' jumping out of a cake number, have a certain similarity which tends to merge them further, like the matching flowers of wallpaper. They flank men on the right and on the left speaking and singing in unison, a sign of sameness. The men speak singularly, signifying their independent voices.

Cyd Charisse presents another distinct female figure. She is the ultimate fetish. She appears in the middle of a dance number about the young hoofer, Lockwood's intratextual character, who comes to Hollywood to become a star. He is boy-like and naive when he first arrives, declaring at the
top of his lungs, "Gotta dance." So he does until he is taken in by a male agent who, after removing the character's glasses and hat to make him appear older, flings him into a room where he dances with a crowd of people. As he moves further into the room and closer to the camera, a curvaceous, female leg appears as an obstruction in his path. The shot places Lockwood, his face in full view, behind the leg which is held out rigidly. Lockwood's hat, a sign of his immaturity, hangs poised on the foot. Lockwood stares at the leg, tracing it with his eyes from the foot to body, the camera matching his gaze. Here the spectator encounters the split between active/male, as subject and voyeur, and passive/female, as object and spectacle. The young hoofer confronts the female as in the Oedipal child's traumatic perception of sexual difference, the woman bearing the 'lack' and therefore, reaffirming his difference and creating his own subjectivity. Mulvey posits that woman is a reminder of the threat of castration, and man, then, has two choices: to investigate her which would devalue, punish or save her; or turn her into a fetish that becomes reassuring rather than threatening (Mulvey 13-14).

The woman's lack, according to Mulvey, suggests castration anxiety, so when the foot rises making the leg perpendicular to the ground, it resembles an erection, the cue converting the sexual difference and fear of castration into something more familiar by reconstructing her into a
sexual object. Her long stemmed cigarette holder, her spiked high heels, her tight, garish, green dress, her short, dark bobbed hair—in conjunction, compose an object reflecting the male penis. The woman has been turned into a fetish that reflects maleness, rather than its threatening opposite. The woman stands up and dances around him, not as a woman but as a reflecting signifier of his own maleness.

The next scene drifts even deeper into a dream-like state. The two figures, one the young hoofer in a dark suit and the woman, not Charisse, in a white flowing gown trailing a thirty-foot white scarf, suggest sexual intercourse. Many observers have equated the act of dancing with the act of sex, and in this scene the two figures, in becoming isolated from the rest, signal a fantasy of sexual desire and fulfillment. The two dance; the scarf floats suggestively in the air before wrapping the two together at the climax.

The scene that follows the dance is constructed to resemble a nightclub. The young hoofer, now dressed in black tie and tails, is a more sophisticated version of his earlier self. The room is filled with men and women dressed similarly. As the camera pans the room, it stops at the Charisse character who is also more polished. He fixes his gaze on her once again as she descends the stairs toward him. The two dance briefly until the woman’s male companion dangles a diamond bracelet in front of her face. She is
lured from the young man back to her original partner. The act of defining difference is in play again—female/consumer and male/producer as well as woman/commodity and male as consumer of woman. The bracelet signifies the females desire for material things, which is merely a male projection of female, and the woman becomes one of the objects a male desires.

The four previous scenes are linked together sharing the Oedipal trajectory of the young man, through song and dance, becoming subject by identifying himself as different, fetishizing the women to destroy the castration threat, becoming sexually active and being released from the fetish to be his own man. He declares at the beginning that he's "Gotta Dance;" he's got to become a sexually mature male. The narrative involves the male story of maturation, including but subordinating the female figure as an object necessary to complete his process.

Many of the dance scenes, and especially the dance numbers involving the young hoofer, stand out as anomalies in the text. They can be attributed to an "unspeakable," found in an "hysterical" text. The repressed sexual content of this film, which has been banished from the film’s narrative, is the possible homoerotic and gay sexuality of the Cosmo character (played by Donald O’Connor) and the Lockwood character. The two have been seen dancing together through most of the picture. When the Seldon character
dances with the pair, she is placed between them acting as a natural diversion from homosexual implications. The Cyd Charisse scene also supports the homoerotic tendencies found in the text, suggesting that the self-love signified by male fetishization of the female body to reflect his own body (the woman as penis) is more powerful and desirable than heterosexual love. Heterosexual pairing wins out in the end to protect the patriarchal structure.

This musical has offered three exaggerated representations of women: the marrying kind, opposed by the patriarchal threat and the pure fetish. Abundant sexual differences arise in all aspects of the film—narrative, mise en scene, camera work and mythical adherence. The male figure becomes the central driving force of the narrative who rises to the top, while the female figure remains primarily spectacle. The attempt to conceal in this film is strangely perverted, since its reflexivity pretends to open the process to inspection; however, the constructions become even more concealed by pretending that this is all make believe. And finally, the elements just mentioned, along with the film's link to male homoerotic tendencies in the characters of Lockwood and Cosmo, make it a film that provides a good foundation upon which to build the two following film interpretations.
Rebecca

Alfred Hitchcock's films have been central to much of feminist film criticism. Readings of his films have caused him to be called either a flagrant misogynist or a film maker sensitive to women's plight. These contradictory views make it difficult to understand how both can be describing the same director. Mulvey's formulation of "Visual Pleasure" owes much to her analysis of Hitchcock films that show women made into passive objects of male voyeurism. His long career in films seems to have produced films that become progressively more violent, climaxing with Frenzy (1972), a film that according to Donald Spoto presents food as a visual metaphor for the devouring abuses of man to woman. Spoto condemns Hitchcock's rape/murder as the obsessions of a dirty old man (Modleski, Women Who 102).

A short list of Hitchcock films finds women often at the center of the problem, not on the periphery, as in many other classic films. Her identity crisis is part of the action, as in Marnie, Blackmail, Vertigo, Rear Window and Rebecca. It is true she is often investigated by the central male figure, but as in other texts, she is decidedly not absent. Her presence is very much felt as a moving force in Rebecca, often the force that drives the male
figure through his actions. For Hitchcock, women seem to possess an enigmatic power that he has not been able to understand or control. The sexually mature woman presents a threat to the patriarchal family and is most often punished of killed in his films to eliminate her threat. Nevertheless, because she remains center to the tension and conflict of much of Hitchcock’s work, she is an obsessive problem for him, one who will not go away, and who refuses to be controlled.

Mary Anne Doane, drawing from the work of Christian Metz, suggests that the female spectator’s problem when viewing Hitchcock films lies in the failure of woman to separate herself successfully and completely from the maternal body. Because she lacks a penis she has no way of distinguishing difference and, therefore, lacks the lack necessary for identifying semiotic fields (Modleski Women Who 7). More simply, because she is unable to define herself as different, she cannot assume the status of subject which is necessary to become the identifier of differences in a signifying semantic field. This is a very pessimistic view that has been opposed by many feminist critics, including Helene Cixous, Linda Williams and Tania Modleski. Doane posits that ‘woman’s closeness to the (maternal) body means that she ‘overidentifies with the image,’ which, in turn, lashes her so closely to the maternal body, there exists an “abolition of a distance, in
short, an inability to fetishize’" (Modleski, Women Who 8). Adequate distance is required to attain subjectivity because it enables one to fetishize. The notion of adequacy implies that there is an optimum viewing distance for the viewing audience and specifically for the male gaze. Because the woman is never distanced, she is unable to fetishize. However pessimistic this view may seem, the young woman (Joan Fontaine) in Rebecca has difficulty separating herself from two powerful women, Mrs. Danvers (Judith Anderson) and the haunting off-screen presence of Rebecca; therefore, she finds it difficult to subjectify herself.

Modleski raises some important questions concerning Doane’s Hitchcockian theory:

I want to suggest that woman’s bisexual nature, rooted in preoedipality, and her consequent alleged tendency to overidentify with other women and other texts, is less a problem for women, as Doane would have it, than it is for patriarchy. And this is not so only for the reason suggested by Gertrude Koch (that female bisexuality would make women into competitors for the “male preserve”), but far more fundamentally because it reminds man of his own bisexuality (and thus his resemblance to Norman Bates), a bisexuality that threatens to subvert his “proper” identity, which depends on his ability to distance woman and make her his proper-ty (Modleski, Women Who 8).

Instead of accepting a masochistic approach for viewing film, Modleski offers the opportunity to act as dialectician working outside the text to unravel patriarchal structures embedded in its creation. She assumes that a basic fear arises in the patriarchy when challenged by deconstruction.
As critics deconstruct film, repressed desires, the anomalies of an hysterical text for example, are exposed causing cracks in the male supremacy myth of virility and power.

Modleski’s alternative approach is especially important for the female viewer of Rebecca, for it gives the female spectator the opportunity to examine a Hitchcock work that caused him distress because of its alleged feminine qualities. Hitchcock claimed that the original text lacks humor and credited this lack to its feminine source (Modleski, Women Who 43). Because he worked with a woman’s vision rather than his own, it detached authorial ownership and, especially in this case, gender ownership. Although Hitchcock attempted to make the text his own by presenting his own image of woman, he was unable to attain complete ownership. His inability to solely own the text signifies, once again, the inability the male’s inability to own the female.

I believe, as does Modleski, that Rebecca exemplifies the female maturation process as being different from the male Oedipal story. During the first two-thirds of the film, the young Mrs. de Winter desires to be like the mother, a sexually mature woman. She desires this because she believes Max’s passion is for a woman with the sophistication and experience of his former wife. But she does not know the truth about Rebecca. To become a mature
woman, she must undergo a chain of psychological experiences. The first is the pre-Oedipal stage of attachment to the mother. The second is an identification with the mother, an understanding of sameness. Because, prior to finding Rebecca's boat, she cannot separate herself from the mother, she tips into the image of the woman and eventually into the "all powerful look of the father" by substituting the image of the mother with her own body as a specular image (Modleski, Women Who 48). The semantic chaining suggests attraction to mother/identification with mother/substitution of mother's image/object of the look. This transformation occurs for as she tries to assume the missing specular image of Rebecca, reaching completion when she learns of Rebecca.

On the other hand, Max persistently avoids revealing information about Rebecca to hinder the young woman's progress toward womanhood. Instead, he prefers her to remain in the pre-Oedipal stage, a stage for woman that is less threatening for men.

The film begins with the camera meandering its way through a mist-filled forest along a path, overgrown with tangled vines, to the scorched skeleton of Manderley, the palatial manor once occupied by the De Winters. The young Mrs. de Winter's voice sorrowfully foreshadows the mysterious past events that drove her to discard her childish views of woman and forced her toward womanhood.
The narration traces the love relationship of Max de Winter, whose full name is George Fontesque Maximillian de Winter III (Laurence Olivier), and the young woman whose proper name is never heard, but is often called ‘Good Girl’ or ‘silly thing’. In most heterosexual romances, the topic of 95 percent of Classical films, the story, in simple terms, tells of boy meeting girl. This oversimplified summary places the male figure in the active position. However, in Rebecca, girl meets boy and the viewer’s interest remains with her three-quarters through the film until it is diverted to Max, being properly relinquished to the male. Relinquishing centrality is crucial. By doing so, the heroine becomes nonthreatening, becoming the proper wife. Since the haunting sexual power of the first Mrs. De Winter can never be fully distinguished, it is a reminder that she was and remains a threat, and eventually, every female becomes that same threatening force.

Hitchcock’s attempt to transform Mrs. de Winter into wife instead of a fully mature woman suggests that he, like Max, must find a way to keep woman contained. One way to contain her would be to suppress her in the pre-Oedipal stage, like a child. Max attempts to do so with Mrs. de Winter by valuing her plainness and childish devotion. Since the narrative traces her transformation from child to wife, it is best to explore narrational structure.
After the opening shots of Manderley, the voice-over fades as does the image of her past. The camera cuts to the moment the couple first meets, thrusting the viewer back in time. Max stands at the edge of a cliff, his eyes fixed on an off screen presence, presumably somewhere out in the vastness of the sea. This fixation is the first cue to the powerfully illusive ghost that haunts him. Interestingly, the standard shot/reverse-shot works in reverse. The initial shot of the series either shows both of the parties or to use the language of Mulvey's male gaze theory, the first shot reveals the object of the look from the looker's point of view. The reverse shot, then, shows the absent one, the possessor of the object in the first shot. However in this series, the inferred object is the absent one. This reverse structure causes anticipation and desire for the absent one to be made visible and, therefore, to become the object of the look (Modleski, Women Who 51). Essentially, this is what the heroine attempts throughout the film by remolding herself to be like the desired absent one, and therefore transforming herself into the visible object of his gaze.

Under the tutelage of Mrs. Van Hopper, the young woman learns that men are not interested in an overbearing, commanding sort of woman. Because Max rejects Van Hopper, the woman looks elsewhere for a suitable mother image. She
finds it in the unseen image of Rebecca, a woman she believes Max is still in love with.

Before De Winter learns the truth about Rebecca, the heroine, desiring to transform herself into the object of his desire, emulates the mother, in this case, signified by both Mrs. Danvers (Judith Anderson) and the absent Rebecca. Psychoanalysts treat this desire for another woman as a problem. This desire for the mother is unlike the Electra Complex which "Freud himself was forced to reject . . . and to admit the young girl’s early desire for the mother" (Modleski, Women Who 51).

This desire originates in the pre-Oedipal stage which is the same for both boys and girls. Before the mirror stage, the mother is the object of the child’s desire. This desire for the mother does not fade as the patriarchy may wish, but continues throughout a woman’s life. If this is so, the young woman’s desire for the mother in Rebecca leads to some odd and troubling problems for the patriarchal establishment.

Signs of lesbian desire originate with Mrs. Danvers whose trance-like obsession with Rebecca permeates the text. Danvers taunts the male figures who have been bewitched by Rebecca saying, "She used to sit on her bed and rock with laughter at the lot of you." Rebecca’s refusal to become sexually singular as the wife of Max suggests her plurality. Max despised her plurality because it meant that she was
able to be his wife, the mistress of the manor and a libertine on the side. This plurality also assumes the attraction of woman for woman, the lesbianism man finds offensively threatening to his masculinity.

Danvers suggests the lesbian traits of the plural woman most clearly in the film. At once, she is attracted to and disgusted by the young woman who tries to take Rebecca's place. Perhaps this is because the young woman is an attractive woman, but she is much too singular in her sexuality to be admired as was Rebecca. During the first meeting with Manderley's staff, de Winter drops her gloves. Both de Winter and Danvers bend over to retrieve them, almost colliding. Camera work freezes the moment. The frame, crowded with the two faces almost nose to nose, reveals much about the women's relationship. First, they face off as rivals, Danvers, the mother figure, perceiving de Winter as a threat to her dead lover's power. Second, she also perceives her as a sexual woman, and therefore, a possible object of her desire. On the other hand, de Winter views Danvers as another sign of her own insignificance since she represents the sexual mother. However, Danvers continually reminds Mrs. de Winter that she could never be like Rebecca. In the dead woman's bedroom, Danvers pulls the lacy nightgown from under an embroidered pillow and dangles it in front of her, saying, "Have you ever seen anything so delicate," a signifier of Rebecca's desired
sexuality. The camera works to capture Danver’s lascivious desire for the absent woman while linking it to the lacy nightgown. The camera also capture her fingers caressingly petting the silky fabric of the pillow she embroidered for the dead woman. The mysterious sexuality of these two women appears powerful; therefore, de Winter identifies with the woman desiring only to be them.

Several elements impede Mrs. de Winter’s maturation process. The most important is Max’s unwillingness to share the mystery of Rebecca, therefore, causing her great distress about her own identity as woman. Throughout the film, he patronizes her saying, “Eat your breakfast like a good girl,” “Stop biting your nail,” and “You can’t be too careful with children,” when he suggests a coat for their walk. Max prefers to think of her as a child and cherishes this over her womanliness. She peruses a magazine admiring the women and their masquerade, and selects a gown from the magazine to become like them. When she wears it and a new hair style to dinner, Max is not pleased. He prefers her childish clumsiness over the sexually mature woman because it poses less threat to him. The scene after he tells her about Rebecca, she is visually changed, wearing more sophisticated clothing and hairstyle. She has lost her clumsy childish ways. He regrets this loss saying, “that funny young look I loved. It won’t ever come back. I killed that when I told you about Rebecca. It’s gone....
in a few hours you’ve grown so much older.” A paradox exists for man, then, because, simultaneously, he desires the sexual woman and fears her. Every woman becomes the sexual mother at some time, and therefore, man has something to fear from every woman. This is why Max prefers her as a child.

Mrs. Danvers also impedes her maturation. Initially, de Winter posed, at once, a threat and presented possibilities of sexual desire to Danvers. As the diegesis progresses, Danvers perceives her as undeserving of desire since she has none of the qualities of Rebecca who was an accomplished equestrian, boater and dancer. Rebecca seems overly apologetic when she admits she can draw a little. Danvers deems her undeserving enough to entice her to leap from the window after she has been rejected by Max at the masquerade party.

The carefully crafted mise en scene of the manor’s interior also poses problems for de Winter. The manor is oversized with expansive rooms and lengthy hallways. In isolated shots of de Winter, the door handles have been altered, being placed several inches higher than the average handle. These alterations exaggerate the manor’s size and accentuate De Winter insignificance. She feels lost in this world of unfamiliar customs, spaces and people.

At the beach house, viewer anticipation again appears while Max tells de Winter about Rebecca. In this scene,
mise en scene remains unbalanced, anticipating the appearance of Rebecca who never materializes. Instead of using a flashback, Hitchcock chooses to exaggerate her absence by tracking the space she would have occupied while Max retells the details of her death in voice-over. The effect is unsettling. The viewers desire to see the woman is never satisfied, leaving her powerfully puzzling mystery unsolved. Though she is dead, and presumably unable to threaten, her presence is felt throughout the film. Never seeing Rebecca prevents the viewer from objectifying her; therefore, she can never be controlled.

During the trial, the young woman feigns fainting to save her husband from an attack on his manhood. The magistrate investigates his manhood when he questions Max about Rebecca. The young woman's fainting spell signifies her partial identification with Max, who appropriates the look. From this moment on, the young woman steps aside and Max becomes the center of the narrative. He gains his position and she is relegated to her proper place. Now at the center, he investigates Rebecca's behavior on the night of her death in an attempt to regain his male power. Though they find she was not pregnant as believed, she held the power to anticipate Max that night and controlled him by provoking him to strike her, resulting in her death.

Manderley's blaze suggests an attempt to destroy the power of the sexually mature woman, but the anomalous
expression on Danver's face suggests otherwise. She stands in the midst of the flames and stares out at the onlookers defying them all. Her expression resists any attempt to be destroyed, perhaps knowing that she too has left a powerfully haunting imprint on the young Mrs. de Winter as Rebecca did with her. The plurality of the sexual woman can never be truly extinguished.

The story, then, is Hitchcock's personal transformation of Du Maurier's Rebecca into a text in which woman can be brought under male control. The irony lies in his difficulty in trying to control a force he may not understand and certainly can never control.

**Touch of Evil**

Orson Welles' Touch of Evil (1958) combines a well defined authorial position on American culture and ideals with exceptional cinematic techniques Welles personally introduced to the industry and perfected. During the seventeen years between Citizen Kane's release (1941), a film acclaimed by many to be Hollywood's finest product, and Touch of Evil, his last American film, Welles experienced rejection by the industry and personal financial difficulties while perfecting his unique cinematic form. Martin Scorsese considers Welles, who was virtually ousted
from the film industry after releasing *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), "responsible for inspiring more people to be film directors than anyone else in the history of cinema" (*Cinemania*, Welles).

Welles' magnificent flame burned too quickly, too ravenously, too powerfully for an industry that sanctioned limits and norms. However, the technical advancements he introduced became standard devices in Hollywood film form after *Kane* until today. A brief discussion of these technical devices is appropriate, since they are responsible for some of the unique visual and thematic constructions found in *Touch of Evil*. Welles has been credited with six devices common to Hollywood film: 1.) developing composition in depth (allowing all distance planes to remain in focus); 2.) developing a complex *mise en scene* in which the frame overflows with visual cues; 3.) employing low angle shots; 4.) utilizing long takes; 5.) adopting a fluid moving camera that expand off screen space; and 6.) relying on a creative use of sound as a transitional device (*Cinemania*, *Touch*). Each of these techniques plays a major role in constructing *Touch of Evil's* varied meanings.

The film characterizes the film noir genre popular in Classical Hollywood in the thirties and forties with its dark and gloomy exploration of crime, corruption and betrayal. Film noir lighting usually produces deep shadows
while camera angularity shifts either high or low to accentuate the dark side of human character. Both heroes and villains signify the disillusioning, cynical, yet, sobering affects of W.W. I. Mystery permeates the genre’s characters, setting, and story line creating suspicion concerning relationships, human actions and morals. These mystery-provoking elements create many gaps for symptomatic readings of such a film. Feminist film critics examine the dynamics of characters as well as technical elements within this genre to construct and eventually deconstruct its hierarchical structure of power and suppression.

*Touch of Evil’s* diegetic space reconstructs the juncture of two small towns situated on the United States/Mexico border. The primary story line concerns the investigation into the bombing of a powerful American boss and his lady friend. The second line, more convoluted, dark and important than the primary, suggests Captain Quinlan’s (played by Orson Welles) fear of the ‘other’ usurping his position and power. Welles claimed that the film was about betrayal rather than decadence (Thomson 117). Perhaps Welles felt personally betrayed by an industry and a country he worked hard to please. *Touch of Evil*, then, could be considered his reconstruction of betrayal through the character of Quinlan, the overweight, slovenly gruesome detective credited for unjustly maintaining justice in a corrupt world. The setting also suggests that American
decadence is an issue in the film, since the camera focuses on the physical setting's decay as well as the corruption of law and morality. But while both lead toward valid themes, the most cogent thematic thread in the film lies elsewhere and begs discussion. The thread sutures a theme that suggests, instead, an unsettling threat to American male hegemony. Mexican characters represent a threat to Quinlan, symbolic of the American national community.

The idea of nationalism as an imagined community is primary to a discussion of the American male hegemony threatened, supposedly, by Mexican nationalism and cultural beliefs. The Mexican characters, Mike Vargas, Uncle Joe Grandi, the nephews and gang members, suggest the characteristics of the 'other.' The other, in this sense, is that which allows the subject, Captain Quinlan, an American, to determine and justify his own identity. The 'other,' which allows him to do so, is considered to be different and, therefore, foreign and unknowable. Mexico, then, consists of an imagined community in which those within the structure signify a common cultural belief that threatens Americans, who likewise belong to their own imagined community. Regardless of any inequality or exploitation that may prevail within either nation, nationalism is conceived of as a deep, horizontal comradeship. "Ultimately, it is this fraternity that makes it possible over the past two centuries for so many millions
of people not so much to kill as willingly die for such limited imagined communities" (Appurdurai 17). 'Fraternity' suggests a bonding of men, not women, in the creation of imagined communities having arbitrary and often elastic physical boundaries.

Touch problematizes the imagined clash of imagined mythical communities. Since each community holds sacred their own beliefs concerning human actions and moral consequences, when the two meet, each threatens the other. In this case, Quinlan and Menzies form a political American doublet--Quinlan as power/expedient justice and Menzies as loyalty/duty. Vargas and Grandi represent the primary doublets for Mexico's imagined community--Vargas as nation/law and Grandi as family/power. Each would be considered as active rather than passive, excepting Menzies who remains passive until duty and loyalty for county outweigh his duty and loyalty for Quinlan. These pairs become important to a discussion of the political power structure and its controlling forces.

The task of cultural and political reproduction affects the most intimate arenas, even family and male/female relations, which become politicized and exposed. The politicization of the family, community and nation is often the emotional fuel for more explicitly violent politics of identity. . . .Women, in particular, bear the brunt of this sort of friction, for they become pawns in the heritage
politics of the household (and community), and are often subject to the abuse and violence of men who are themselves torn about the relationships between heritage and opportunity in shifting spatial and political forms” (Appurdurai 18).

This political violence permeates the entire film as characters jockey for power in an effort to maintain their established rank in the hierarchy. Women, on the other hand, either become pawns in the game as does Susan Vargas (Janet Leigh), or they move outside politics becoming observers as does Tanya (Marlene Dietrich). To fully understand the implications of community politicization, several scenes will be examined for camera work, lighting, mise en scene, character action, dialogue and music. One of the most stunning scenes in the film is the opening shot, a single crane shot lasting over three minutes. The shot begins with a ticking clock tied to dynamite in the hands of a dark unidentified figure who runs through the shadows to place it in the trunk of an automobile. A male and female approach the car and get in. The camera cranes up over the buildings tracking the car as it rolls onto the city streets. The camera’s fluid movement anticipates what will be revealed in off-screen space, a technique that heightens suspense. As the camera follows the car, it picks up the Vargas couple, a dark skinned tall man and his visually American blonde wife, strolling the sidewalks. Two policemen control traffic on the Mexican side as the couple
and automobile move steadily past the Mexican border patrol to the American border check. Here, the couples converge at the station where an officer, foretelling the impending political struggle, asks the Vargas couple if they are American. Susan is the first to speak, "Yes, I'm an American." The officers asks, "Where were you born, Miss?" She replies, "Mrs.," and looks to Mike affectionately. Her identity is both American and wife. After she provides the officer with the information he requested, Philadelphia, Mike speaks up adding that the name is Vargas, and the focus shifts to him, a Mexican official in charge of a major narcotics investigation. When asked what he is doing, he replies, "I'm in search of a chocolate soda for my wife." The officer acts surprised saying, "Your Wife?" and Susan adds, "Yeah officer, you're not too dumb." The officers know the man in the car, Mr. Linniker, a local big shot. The officer asks the woman in the car with him if she is American. She complains about the ticking noise in her head, and although she is the only one aware of the impending doom, her high-pitched, uneducated whining, drunkenly garbled voice diminishes her authority, causing the officer to dismiss her and the question of her identity.

The car rolls through the border check while the Varguses move to the sidewalk where they begin to kiss. The car bomb explodes, breaking the long continuous opening shot. The
bombing shot also seems to break the 180 degree rule forcing Vargas to run directly into the camera space.

This opening shot signifies the crossing of many borders and limits: first, the actual crossing of the border between Mexico and the United States; second, the crossing of cultural limits in the marriage of Mike and Susan Vargas; and third, the crossing of the 180 degree filming rule. The signs at the very beginning of the film suggest that boundaries and limitations are in question. In a political struggle for dominance, the boundaries can be crossed at any time. The line between right and wrong is crossed constantly during the film in an attempt to retain political power and maintain community.

The following scene of the burning automobile introduces the Quinlan character, whose appearance shocks the viewer. Welles as Quinlan has gained a great deal of weight, almost forcing him to roll out of his car. Make-up, especially a plastic nose and heavy, drooping bags under his eyes, adds years and wear to his aging figure. His speech is arrogant and gravelly. He is America—fat, corrupt and decaying—in the flesh. The camera shoots him from an exaggerated low angle, a common practice in film noir; however, in Touch, the effect is very different. In traditional film noir, employing the low angle denotes a sense of power. The figure looms up, seemingly to overpower the viewer. In Touch, the use of low angle, especially on
Welles, is unflattering, accentuating the heaviness and decay of his ghastly figure. His presence from this angle ironically denotes, instead, a man rapidly losing his grip on power and position, yet trying desperately to maintain it. Vargas is also shot in exaggerated low angle, identifying him as the threat to Quinlan and the U.S.

A parallel sequence involves Susan Vargas who attempts to return to the hotel. But she is dissuaded by Poncho, one of the Grandi boys. While the conflict between Quinlan and Vargas progresses at the bombing site, another conflict builds, entangling Susan as the victim of a plot to debunk and punish Vargas for imprisoning one of his own kind, the head of the Grandi family. Susan is caught in the political struggle between the communities of Vargas, who signifies Mexican law and order and the Grandis, who signify corruption and crime. She is a pawn in this politicized war. Her character, as mentioned before, exerts herself as self-assured and strong willed during the meeting between Uncle Joe and herself. She gets in his face yelling, “Yeah, yeah, yeah!” Grandi interprets her as a personal threat to his authority and as pawn in the political struggle. He, then, cements her in place as the chosen victim.

There are other possible reasons she is selected as the victim in this story, not only by Grandi but also by Quinlan. She has chosen a Mexican husband, a threat to the American male. Quinlan says of her the first time he sees
her, "She don't look Mexican either." During colonization, the dominant culture attempted to assimilate the sub-culture by miscegenation. "... [I]t would be very desirable that the Indians be extinguished, by miscegenation with the whites, ..." The practice of miscegenation was simple—impregnate with white, 'civilized' semen, and one could acquire private property like everyone else. But it was the male who crossed over and mated with women of another race or nationality, not the other way around. Later Europeans preferred to maintain purity in race (Anderson 14). In Touch, it is the white woman who chooses, instead, to cross borders, and therefore, she will be impregnated with the uncivilized semen of an Hispanic male. She not only marries a member of another community willfully, the implications are that she prefers him sexually and may eventually give birth to a child of mixed nationality. Her choice may be offensive and threatening to Quinlan, whose own wife was murdered by a 'half-breed.' Likewise, U.S. males may decode the action of this woman as threatening to their dominance and control.

The scene involving Susan at the motel also signifies the political power struggle as well as symptoms of repressed sexual desire. Dennis Weaver plays an odd, quirky night clerk whose evening shift has had a deleterious effect on his already repressed sexuality. As an anomaly, he signifies the fear of sexuality and the sexual act, in
particular. While Susan inspects her room, he lurks outside, seen through the uncovered windows. His actions depict the voyeur, whose desire is satiated from a distance, through the view of an open window. He first pops his head through the open window, a more comfortable entrance into the room for him than the door. His fear of sheets is actually humorous, a sign consolidating his fear of the sexual act. His fear of women is severely exaggerated, a sign that he can never control and understand them. Frightened of getting too close to Susan and anything sexual, he refuses to help Susan put the sheets on the bed.

Simultaneously, the investigation into the bombing continues at Manolos Sanchez' apartment, the boy friend of Marsha Linniker; they are also a mixed nationality couple. The scene is filmed in a single shot, the camera moving magnificently throughout the apartment during the investigation and search. A white lawyer represents Miss Linniker and eventually removes her from the apartment taking her back into the fold. While in the apartment, cues supporting the political identity struggle continue to pile up. Vargas speaks to Manolos in Spanish, and Quinlan warns him that he will extend him obligatory courtesy but that is all. Moments later, Manolos again speaks Spanish to Vargas irritating Quinlan who says, "I don't speak Mexican. In English Vargas." Language is a way of uniting as well as separating, and since Quinlan is monoglot, he fears being
left out and losing his position of power. This scene achieves closure when Menzies finds the dynamite in a box in the bathroom, the empty box Vargas had knocked off its shelf moments earlier. The direction is clear. Vargas will pursue his quest exposing Quinlan, while Quinlan pursues his goal—maintaining his status and power.

The sequence in which Susan lounges alone on the bed waiting anxiously for the gang members to enter the room is puzzling. She knows she is in danger but does not act. In contrast with an earlier scene in the motel where she becomes agitated and aggressively hurls a light bulb across the alley into the room where a man is watching her, in this scene, she becomes uncharacteristically passive, thereby creating a number of questions. The anomaly could be considered bad writing, but I don’t think so. This scene takes place during the day, while the other takes place at night. This motel is isolated from the city and likewise from other people. Also Susan’s importance to Vargas has diminished, since he chooses to pursue the bombing mystery rather than her sexual mystery. After all, this is supposed to be their honeymoon. In many ways, her strength lies in identity with her husband, who is not with her and has postponed his arrival several times. She waits, irritated and frustrated. The frilly teddy signifies, perhaps, her sexual frustration, so she waits to be satisfied. The whisper through the wall, “You know what they want to do?”
parallels the street scene when she first meets Pancho and
the old man says, "He says you don't understand what he
wants." She replies, "I understand very well what he
wants... Tell him I'm a married woman." Her husband is
far away from this isolated hotel.

When the gang enters the room, Susan lays on the bed,
tense and silent. The gang surrounds Susan, the camera
working to create suspense by shooting alternately from her
P.O.V and the individual gang members. Because the viewer
sees her from many different angles, she knows Susan is the
gang's possession. Even though the dialogue never mentions
a rape, the cues suggest that a rape takes place, if not
physically then metaphorically. Mercedes Mckenzie's
portrayal of the cross-dressing, hard-core gang leader
suggests the hysterical text. She dresses as a male. Her
hair is short, dark and slicked down with grease. Even
though she is not involved physically, she tells Pancho she
wants to watch. Pancho orders the gang to hold Susan's
legs, a sign that this will be a rape, not a drug party.
Susan will be punished for her blatant disrespect for the
Hispanic male and fulfills her role in disempowering her
husband.

In contrast to the Susan Vargas character, Marlene
Dietrich as Tanya, the madam across the border, represents
the femme fatale in this film. The femme fatale, one who
threatens to ruin man, is also a common film noir character.
She is most often subject of the male gaze in an attempt to demystify her sexual powers. In Touch, Tanya appears three times, each revealing more about her own and Quinlan's character. Their first meeting in the film takes place when the Americans cross the border to interrogate the prostitutes at the bar. After finding little there except scantily clad women the D.A. seems to admire, dusty empty streets littered with trash lead Quinlan to Tanya's place. Quinlan seems to know where he is going, cueing the viewer that Tanya's place is not unfamiliar to him. Inside, he leans against the wall looking into the corridor and through an empty doorway. The imbalanced mise en scène anticipates someone's appearance which is soon satisfied as Dietrich, smoking a cigar, moves into the door and film frame. Her clothing appears neither American nor especially Mexican, but more gypsy-like. She signifies a border crosser, both sexually and nationally, not fully identifying with either side. The shot/reverse-shot takes over, the camera first shooting Tanya from behind Quinlan's right shoulder. The second shot in the series, a close-up of the aging Quinlan, captures him lustfully looking at her. At the beginning of the series, he seems confident and sexually aroused. As the series continues, Quinlan's ego deflates dramatically, reaching a low when he says, "When this case is over I ought to come around and sample some of your chili." Dietrich replies, "You better be careful. It may be too hot for
you." Although the gaze is constructed as a male investigation of the female, this series fails in achieving that goal. Instead, Dietrich's own powerfully unattached gaze and candid dialogue control Quinlan, deflating him enough to make him leave her place with a hefty sigh.

The second meeting takes place once again at her place. Because she is within her own domain, she achieves control. However, this time Quinlan seeks consolation and encouragement at a time when he feels most vulnerable. He asks about his future. She curtly replies, "It's all used up." Her unique position as border-crosser allows her to remain unattached to the power and political struggles occurring in these small towns. She remains the perfect dialectician, able to comment on such cultural oppositions.

Dietrich's final appearance is most intriguing. As cultural dialectician, she cuts to the core of the problem. In this scene, Quinlan, shot by his best friend Menzies, floats in a pool of water. Menzies, shot by Quinlan, lays lifeless on the bridge above. Vargas returns to his distraught wife. The power structure crumbles, its pieces scattered, collapsed or destroyed. Schwartz, the assistant D.A. who helped Vargas expose Quinlan and who is, at that moment, overwhelmed by the pervading sense of emptiness, asks Tanya about loving Quinlan. She says "No. The cop loved him." This anomalous statement implies not only a loving friendship between the two men but also suggests
homoeroticism. Menzies' obsessive devotion and affection for Quinlan signifies his role as feminine. This feminized role, then, positions him as Quinlan's submissive companion while at the same time jeopardizing him as victim of familial politicization. He suffers the fate of a woman, who in the same circumstances, would suffer for her betrayal of family. Quinlan kills Menzies as punishment for challenging his authorial position in their family. The text's symptomatic cues suggest that the greatest threat to male hegemony is man himself. Quinlan's decay and eventual destruction may be caused by his own destructive self-love, a love that cannot be quelled by any woman or man (Menzies).

Tanya, as one outside the struggle, remains the least affected. When Schwartz asks her, "Is that all you have to say about him?" she replies, "He was some kind of a man. What does it matter what you say about people?" Some critics believe this to be the most ridiculous line in the film while others claim it to be brilliantly succinct. For me, Dietrich's character is suggesting that male-generated language limits. It defines. It labels and categorizes and, therefore, it supports differences. Differences create envy, strife and ruin. Her comment, "some kind of man," refuses to define, to distinguish difference. Her undefined "some kind of man," becomes even less defined, less gender biased with her final word, "people." Tanya signifies the border-crosser who eventually removes borders, in this case,
by delimiting language. Tanya’s comments suggest the means to exhaust the ruinous nature of man-kind.
CHAPTER FIVE

Hollywood Female Directors and Their Films: Three Interpretations—Fast Times at Ridgemont High, Desperately Seeking Susan and Home for the Holidays

Few women have entered the arena of Hollywood directors and remained in prominence for any length of time. In the Classical period, Dorothy Arzner and Ida Lupino, who collectively made over fifteen films, were pioneers whom some critics praise while others slight. Within the past twenty years, more women have been accepted in Hollywood and have made films that have not only entertained and been commercially successful, but have questioned strict traditions of Hollywood film. The challenges they make, unfortunately, have been less severe than their independent counterparts like Yvonne Rainier, Chantal Ackerman, Laura Mulvey, Peter Wollen, Nelly Kaplan, Jacques Rivette and others, but I believe the women who enter the Hollywood system have made more impact on mass popular culture than their independent sisters (and brothers).

A list of prominent women directors is in order before proceeding with those directors whose work I have selected to decode. Martha Coolidge has been on the scene since Not a Pretty Picture (1976), and continued with Joy of Sex and Valley Girl (1983), Real Genius (1985) and is slated to

I have selected three films theoretically linked to the time period they were produced which become apparent in these films’ issues and structures. Amy Heckerling’s Fast Times at Ridgemont Times (1982) was released at a time when feminist film theory was beginning to take hold in the United States. Certain academics had already waved their flags proclaiming the atrocities inflicted on women in film, but theory had not trickled into film schools that focused on Hollywood film production until just before this time. Fast Times itself was a financial success, suggesting that
it was widely viewed, reaching a number of spectators, both male and female. It is still a favorite in college dorms.

When *Desperately Seeking Susan* (1987) was released, the psychoanalysts had made great headway in film studies and the connection between the Oedipal trajectory and film narration had been made and challenged. Susan Seidelman, also a graduate of film school, worked to deconstruct the male-dominated narrative by constructing woman through myth and fantasy. *Desperately* showcases pop culture’s symbol of the self-constructed woman in Madonna. The film works the idea of socially constructed image of woman and masquerade into the into its diegesis nicely.

Jody Foster is the only director in my selection who was not a film school graduate. She attended Yale University. She worked her way up from child star to major film star into the rank of director. *Home for the Holidays* (1995), her third feature film, is a woman’s story written by a woman from a woman’s point of view. It has none of the “tough-woman” qualities that male directors look for in films for the nineties. The main character Claudia does not carry a gun, chew tobacco, have a limited vocabulary or defined muscles. Her story is anti-causal and the outcome is open to interpretation. This film incorporates some important structural and thematic shifts that are the result of post-modernist feminism.
In these films I am looking to answer an age-old question “What do women want?” I ask this because it can only be answered by women. It seems that men in films are ever in pursuit of what they want, their stories driven by their desire of perhaps power, sex, money, honor or even immortality. During Hollywood’s Classical Period, although films can be read to include women and the female spectator, the female figure is most often an object used by a man to attain his desired goal, and, in the process, is brought under his control usually through marriage. If, on the other hand, she is troublesome and threatening beyond containment, she is killed off. These are usually her options—to be married or end up dead. Only recently have women begun to ask the question, (on very rare occasions) “What do women want?” There must be other choices than what most male directors have offered. Hopefully, these interpretations will give clues to answer this question. At the same time, I believe that these interpretations will reveal how female processes are different from those employed by men by examining the structure adopted by these women to show what they want.

Fast Times at Ridgemont High

Amy Heckerling was one of the first to break into the mainstream in the early 70’s after completing N.Y.U. Film

Although some feminists have condemned her work in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* film and other films, claiming she utilizes "the same kind of leering-at-female-bodies sequences as male commercial directors," (Koenig 62) I believe she has challenged some traditional classic structures and, in doing so, has provided alternatives to the previously supposed experiences of female spectators. She fabricates humorous incidents throughout the narrative in such a way that the film seems outwardly male: men glance, gaze and even gawk at the female figures in the film, but these voyeurs often become the butt of the joke. Helene Cixous acknowledges the subversive power of humor and celebrates the potential of feminist texts "to blow up the law" and "to break up the 'truth' with laughter" (*Multiple Voices* 39). *Fast Times* employs humor to deflate the patriarchal order and reinvent the story to include women.
The narrative story in *Fast Times* is a string of incidents which often seem unrelated and certainly less causally motivated. Heckerling is also able to capture, in a single shot, the purity of metaphor and significance. Through careful examination of the narrative pattern and camera work, Heckerling has broken some of Hollywood's most cardinal rules, being consciously aware that her audience is both male and female while being ever conscientious of the female spectator's delight in the male 'mastery' farce.

*Fast Times* focuses on teens in the early '80's whose parents are never visible and seemingly never involved in their lives. Adults, with the exception of a few teachers, are absent, I believe, for a reason. Since the text explores sexual behavior, it is more acceptable to exhibit the fumbling experiments of youth than to expose the fumbling inept habits of grown adults, especially male. A three second ejaculation is not a proud accomplishment for a grown male and would then pose a castration threat to the character as well as an adult male spectator. Teens experiment with sex and relationships candidly without seeking closure and, therefore, leave the incidents open for ambiguous interpretations. Woman is able to have the last laugh, as Cixous suggests, when using humor as a tool "to break up the law"--the male law and myth of superiority and virility.
The primary characters are Stacy (Jennifer Jason Leigh), Bradley (Judge Reinhold), Spicolli (Sean Penn), Linda (Phoebe Cates), Ratt (Brian Backer), and Mike (Robert Romanus). In the opening shots, the *mise en scène* is infused with cues which place the narrative in pop culture's teenage domain. The mall is the designated habitat of young people—rows of Levi-covered buns in front of video games at the arcade, children and teens linger outside the movie theater and short-skirted young women bustle around a pizza parlor. The music in the background, "We Got the Beat," could be diegetic, fitting in nicely with the mall atmosphere signifying actual time, or it could be extra diegetic, or both. Either way, it signifies that our youth are somehow mysteriously in tune with the rhythms of the time.

The narrative, as mentioned above, is composed of a string of incidents resembling the pattern established by George Lucas' *American Graffiti* (1973) whose narrative achieves closure at the end of the night with the characters taking off to new destinations. However, in *Fast Times*, the incidents revolve primarily around Stacy, whose desires replace the narrative's Classic Hollywood need for closure and dynamic principle of the male figure's desire for power or conquest. Instead, Stacy desires to know what it is that women want, what 'woman' means. She does not desire an object or a social position; she simply wants to know what
it is to be a woman. She experiments with the belief that she will construct knowledge through her experiences. At one point in the story, Linda tells Stacy, "Just keep doing it (sex); it’ll get better." It is through this ‘just do it’ process that her desire drives the narrative. But because she is female, some interesting narrative structural changes occur. This is so because of Heckerling’s influence and because the subject of the narrative is female rather than male. The second storyline involves Spicolli, who stays outside the main line but still supports its thematic thread of sexual experimentation and identification.

After the opening shots of the mall, Ridgemont High becomes the setting where one of the principal sexual differences is pointed out. Linda asks Stacy if she’s ever done it, and follows with “It’s no big thing; it’s just sex.” For women in this film, sex is simply part of what humans do, and it is apparently learned. The women wonder and question about the process and the result of such behavior, treating sex as a mysterious unknown. Such candid discussion articulated by women brings to the fore that which was previously unspeakable—female sexual desire. Women did not talk about sex or act like sexual beings in Classical films without facing the consequences for their independent actions. Sexually provocative women, as discussed before, were subdued through marriage or killed off. Not so in Fast Times. In the cafeteria, the two girls
sit at a table and playfully experiment with carrots so Stacy can learn what it might be like to ‘give a blow job.’ Her mentor Linda, who acts as a surrogate mother for the absent mother, is an older, more experienced girl who has learned in the same way. Stacy desires to be like the mother and emulates her actions. The entire experiment is observed by a group of boys at another table who, at the completion of the experiment, applaud their performance. Although the girls are embarrassed, they laugh it off as if they are already aware of the boy’s behavior as voyeurs and familiar with their position as objects of their gaze. There is no punishment; there is no shame. The scene signifies that women have fewer sexual pretenses, and, therefore, they may have less to lose, less to be ridiculed for.

For the young men in the film, sex is more of an obsession, a game of status or power, a ritual and a myth which is talked about, displayed and desired. Signifiers of the obsession are everywhere in the diegesis—the boy who kisses the picture in his locker of two girls’ derrieres, the two boys who trail Linda as she passes by, Bradley staring out at the girl on the sidewalk saying, “Ooh, look who’s grown up,” the pictures of naked women plastered all over Spicoli’s walls and Spicoli flanked on two sides by beautifully voluptuous women in his personal daydream.
As in the scene depicting the mother as mentor, men too have their mentors who clue them in on the game and how it is played. The mentor is Mike who shares his secrets about masculinity and how to control women with Ratt while the two hang-out outside the movie theater. Mike describes his five-step system, each step leading causally to the next. But, he, unlike Linda, is exposed as a fraud; one who talks big but delivers little, as will be seen below.

The scene that exposes Mike contains conspicuously fewer shot/reverse-shot structures than Classical films, as does the entire film, but when they appear, they serve to draw our attention to how the shots manipulate point of view and therefore audience identification. The camera does not identify with the young men in this movie. Most shots in Fast Times are objective, acting as an outside observer of these behaviors. In this way, Heckerling has avoided fetishizing the female character; instead, women are looked at by male figures who, in the process of looking, are in turn looked at by the audience. This structural shift away from the typical shot/reverse-shot paradigm frees the audience to choose a point of view. The camera in remaining objective has not decided upon a singular point of view, forcing the spectator into making a decision. The spectator can identify either with the male voyeur by shifting into his gaze or remain objective and, consequently, become privy to the joke.
Heckerling's free choice, point-of-view technique leads to a number of other problems which must ultimately be solved by the spectator. First, the camera's point of view along with a contrived cause-and-effect structure, as well as other mechanical devices like continuity editing, create the seamlessness of Hollywood Classical film. However, in *Fast Times*, the scenes, although sequential, do not employ these standards, often leaving the scene open and unresolved. The tension between conflicting lines of action is not always concluded. More specifically, the narrative, in its paradigmatic form, in classical film seeks closure and unified wholeness. But this is not always the case in either *Fast Time's* individual scenes or at the end of the film. For example, in the bedroom scene when Stacy and Ratt are sitting on the bed looking at a photo album, Ratt is at first uncomfortable that Stacy has changed into her robe. He fears the expectations she may have of him. However, although Stacy is sexually more experienced than Ratt, she is as inexperienced in male/female friendship as he. The shot of the couple's feet, each pair turned in and fidgeting on the carpet is metaphorically successful. The contradiction develops between the opposition of an erotic sexual and friendship-based encounter. Stacy flips through the pages of a photo album, their faces perceptibly close, their cheeks almost brushing. The closeness seems comfortable until, simultaneously, they become aware of
their proximity and the mood changes. The moment’s awkwardness shows the couple’s sexual callowness. Their faces, at ease while looking at the album, at this moment jockey ineptly to avoid colliding during the kiss. This scene contrasts the Mike and Stacy scene in which friendship is never the question. However, when Ratt and Stacy lie back on the bed, male/female relationships overpower the moment forcing each, especially Ratt, to question what this shift from comfortable to uncomfortable means. Ratt, finding his new role disquieting, opts to make excuses for a hasty departure. At the end of the scene, the question remains, “Can there be such a thing as male/female friendship, or is sex the appropriate conclusion?” Ratt stands outside the house wearing a puzzled look. Likewise, Stacy is perplexed, assuming that sex is what man wants. Initially, she searches for her identity by trying to uncover what man wants, much like young Mrs. De Winter in Rebecca, who tries to transform herself into a duplicate of the woman she believes man desires. In both films, the heroine pursues ‘his’ desire as a means to her own identity until she begins to ask the question, “What does woman want?” Both questions in Fast Times remain unresolved throughout the story, the text offering only glimpses of the answers.

I mentioned earlier that men are often the butt of the joke in this film. In many classical films, women are set
up as the source of ridicule and laughter. Lena Lamont is the butt of the jokes in *Singin' in the Rain* each time she opens her mouth. Her voice, laced with imperfections ranging from strong nasal qualities to poor diction, coupled with uneducated speech patterns mark her as an easy target for ridicule. She is thoroughly subjugated because she is a threat to the patriarchal power of Hollywood; however, the spectator remembers her as a threat to another woman’s career and therefore forgives the patriarchy for retaliating against her, because they save another woman in the process. Lena stands alone on stage the target of laughter and ridicule.

Several scenes in *Fast Times* set up the male figure as the butt of the joke and specify woman not as the manipulator of the joke but merely as the observer of the joke he himself sets up. Heckerling is aware of the sexual dichotomy, man as possessor of gaze/woman as object of gaze. Working within this established code, Heckerling problematizes the action and the intended result. This shot/reverse-shot series involves the swimming pool scene. The scene begins with Stacey, Ratt and Mike in the pool while Linda relaxes on the diving board. Bradley arrives wearing his fish-restaurant uniform and glances at Linda. After Bradley enters the house, Heckerling employs an atypical classical fetishization code using a shot/reverse-shot series. The camera identifies with Bradley’s point of
view shooting his face peeping through the bathroom window he has opened slightly. A shot of Linda identifies the object of the gaze. An over-the-shoulder, through the opened bathroom window, shot shows Linda once again. Bradley is obviously supposed to be concealing his voyeuristic activity. Linda stands and adjusts the back of her suit. Extra diegetic fantasy-like music signals a change from the diegesis' putative reality to Bradley's personal daydream, and the next shot is of Linda pulling herself up from the pool. A reverse shot shows Bradley closing the window. Linda is unquestionably fetishized when, in his day-dream, she comes out of the water, addresses him adoringly and takes off her top. He wears a suit, the symbol of the successful man, and the couple kiss. Shots of Bradley masturbating in the bathroom alternate with the dream shots. Suddenly the music is gone and Linda dives into the pool. The elimination of the extra-diegetic music signals a shift back to the diegetic story. The shot remains on Linda as she climbs from the pool and asks Stacy for Q-tips. A moment of suspense is created, since we know that she must go inside to the bathroom to get them. The camera shifts to the interior action showing Bradley still self-absorbed, then cuts to Stacey outside the door, ready to open it. Another cut to the interior captures the reaction of both characters at the moment of exposure. The scene is constructed to give the audience a good laugh, but
different reasons generate. Men laugh because identification with Bradley causes uncomfortable embarrassment. Exposure is a castration threat. Women laugh at the men’s embarrassment. This scene generates meaning by distorting the traditional classic structure of the shot/reverse-shot gaze including the imaginary possession fantasy, while debunking this patriarchal structure in the process.

Another castration threat appears during and after Stacey and Mike have sex in the dressing room. Heckerling has been accused of exposing too many female bodies, but the manner in which women’s bodies are shot in comparison to the way in which male bodies are shot reveals some relevant meaning. In the dressing room, Stacey appears to be calm and composed when she reveals her body. Mike stands like a little boy caught with his pants down. But there are three more salient shots which carry prodigious meaning. The first is the 1 1/2 second shot of Mike’s quivering leg as he ejaculates upon penetration. We see only the leg briefly, nothing more, but the image becomes an important signifier. The shot evokes for men a fear of castration, a fear that premature ejaculation is a sign of a masculine ‘lack.’ Woman is not the signifier of castration—the reminder of the ‘lack’ through the absence of penis. The castration threat comes from the male’s own inability to live up to the patriarchal myth of male superiority. Although the shot can
evoke laughter for men, I believe this laughter arises out of the uncomfortable nervous confrontation with contradictions in the male superiority myth. For women, it also evokes laughter, but their laughter is generated by personal knowledge. Here, we see that woman is undoubtedly superior to man. When Mike says, "I think I came. Did you feel it?" and Stacey replies, "I think so." the audience's supposition is confirmed. A close-up shows Mike rolling his eyes, a sure sign he is aware of his failure. While Mike frantically tries to flee the scene, Stacey is shown laying on the couch naked, the camera at eye level, shooting from under Mike's arm. Had the shot identified with his P.O.V., the angle would show dominance. Instead, the eye-line shot retains identity with Stacey, who is composed but bewildered by her recent experience. The castration threat is carried out completely when Linda writes messages about his "little prick" all over town. We, and not Linda, are privileged to the truth of her accusation which increases our humorous response.

Heckerling exploits man once more as the butt of the joke in the scene involving Bradley on a fish delivery. While in his car dressed in a pirate suit from the fish restaurant, a beautiful woman drives up next to him. This sort of fetish gaze scenario is very common in Hollywood classic film. Once again, Heckerling employs the shot/reverse-shot series, this time, exploiting the
inappropriateness of the gaze because of the male's appearance. The camera identifies with Bradley, showing the woman in her car. He occupies a somewhat privileged position, since he looks into her open car at her entire body. The reverse shot does not fully identify with the woman though, since the camera shows only a close-up of Bradley's face, breaking the depth cue required for her identification. Bradley makes provocative facial gestures, but the hat contradicts his seductive look. The combination of the uniform and the his facial gestures create another moment for laughter. The camera reverses once more and we see the woman laughing, eliciting laughter from the spectator as well. The final reverse shot captures Bradley's humiliation. The attack is no longer embarrassment; it has become humiliation because the exposure in this scene is less private and more public. Heckerling has made another attack on the American male myth and, in doing so, assures that woman has the last laugh.

At the end of the film, it seems obvious that women prefer men who are less pretentious and more honest about sex as a natural part of the relationship between men and women. Stacey chooses the naive Ratt, who is interested in understanding the tantalizing mystery of male/female sexuality and not the conquest. Linda, after receiving the Dear-Jane message from her boyfriend, finds herself only temporarily interrupted from her pursuit of a meaningful
relationship with a man. She regains her composure quickly, exclaiming that it is his loss; she can get anyone she wishes.

I use the term ‘end’ to denote that the running time for the film has been terminated. Certainly there are obvious cues that this film’s diegetic story has come to a close, like the girls pulling down the door and an exterior shot of the mall, but there has been no real closure. There remain several unanswered questions. Relationships are unstable. In other words, the mystery (in this case of sexual relationships between women and men) has not been solved, and the male figure has not won his woman. Instead, the inter-titles suggest that Ratt and Stacy are still pursuing a romantic relationship and Linda has moved on to college and other men. The shot of Ratt across the mall waving boyishly to Stacy is telling in itself. The preferred male figure is the one who does not engage in the traditional voyeuristic male gaze. Instead, he is the boy who works his way through a male/female relationship without the pretense or the show. He is a new man willing to admit that he is still a boy when it comes to women and while the experience may be frightening, it is not threatening enough to turn woman into something she is not.

One of the most enigmatic shots in the entire picture comes at the film’s conclusion, when the young women in the pizza parlor are lined up along the overhead door to pull it
down, their backs and, prominently, their butts, facing the camera. This shot echoes the opening shot of the back sides of blue denim jeans, one that made no distinctions between male/female. Perhaps the final shot is a signal that it is O.K. to be female and to be different, or maybe not. The shot could be Heckerling's way of saying, "Kiss my ass."

The question remains, "What does woman want?" Maybe she wants to be accepted for her difference and to be respected for it.

Desperately Seeking Susan

Susan Seidelman has also been relatively successful with Making Mr. Right (1987), Cookie (1989), She-Devil (1989), and Confessions of an Urban Girl (1992), but it is Desperately Seeking Susan (1987) is still considered her most critically acclaimed film. At the time Susan was released, feminists had already examined a number of women's issues in relation to film which, then, could be further explored, restructured or recast in film writing and production. What makes this film an interesting subject for discussion is its apparent light-heartedness, a quality often missing in avant-guard, independent feminist films. Although often dismissed as childish fantasy, the film has
subtly displaced many traditional structures while maintaining a highly motivated cause and effect narration.

After attending both N.Y.U. Film School and the American Film Institute and before working on *Susan*, Seidelman completed a low budget, $80,000, independent film titled *Smithereens*, a study of a punk rock groupie, that was the first American film to be accepted at the Cannes Film Festival. With this success, she was given a five million dollar budget to direct Leona Barish’s *Susan*, a fairy tale-like fantasy of mistaken identities, dressing-up or dressing-down, kooky city characters, and melodramatic adventure which Barish sees “as less about people moving out of middle class suburbia and more about ‘imagination and how it could save anyone’” (Koenig 67). Seidelman supported this premise saying, “You don’t want it so unreal it’s like a total cartoon, but you don’t want it so realistic that it loses the imaginary fable-like quality (Koenig 64).

Taking into consideration these comments, I suggest that because Seidelman understands fable’s power to influence deep-rooted cultural values, popular culture’s flexibility, and the spectator’s willingness to participate, she presents feminist issues in the less threatening genre of fantastic realism, taking the opportunity to present some important issues without garishly pointing fingers. The binary polarity of fantasy/reality then becomes the semantic field in which to explore this element of the film. The world
Roberta enters of magicians, ventriloquists and comedians resembles vaudeville and reminds us that the magic show scenes in the film lean more toward fantasy. Historically, spectators have associated presentational modes of such proletarian forms as vaudeville and the circus with fantasy and make believe (Ray 35). We come to understand that Susan is less about distinguishing the real differences between male/female and much more about parading those differences fantastically in an attempt to expose and transcend them. The vehicle for exposing differences is the sweet, goodly--but soon to be worldly--housewife, Roberta played by Roseanna Arquette. Madonna, on the other hand, who virtually begged to be cast in the role of Susan, plays a street-wise carefree woman and turns out to be the film’s most problematic signifier.

In Desperately Seeking Susan two women partially fulfill the plot previously employed in Mark Twain’s The Prince and the Pauper and other fiction in which two characters change roles. The story depends on a magical suspension of disbelief to work, since the exchange could be easily rejected as the product of childish imagination which is often the case in this kind of story line. But here, as in Twain’s story, the thematic issues overpower the contrived structure. The story deals with issues of identity, implying that the true nature of woman is enmeshed in her plurality. Other issues concerning voyeurism and
possession are also questioned through the use of camera and camera identity. These alterations enable the film to partially answer the question, "What does 'woman' want?" and also attempts to answer what 'man' does not want.

The narrative is primarily driven by cause and effect generated by the main character’s desires. The main character, Roberta, a middle-class housewife, wishes to experience a little impassioned romance while Susan, a worldly, unattached woman, wishes only to continue on her journey, wherever it may take her, until Roberta interferes.

As the film opens, Roberta is rooted in suburbia New Jersey where she plays middle-class housewife and hostess. At the same time she dreams of other people’s romantic desires when reading the personal ads. She decides to find Susan, who has been connected with a murder and the theft of Nefertitti’s earrings, and Jim, her newspaper ad-writing lover. At Susan and Jim’s meeting, Roberta observes covertly, through a coin-slot viewer and on the street from a distance, the couple caressing until Jim leaves in a van to tour with his band. To this point, Roberta has been engaged in a voyeuristic game which has partially fulfilled her desires for a more romantic life. She watches the pair with interest, a reflexive activity depicting the film spectator’s pleasure in watching. At the moment the couple splits, Roberta’s desire is altered, now being gratified completely by Susan, not the dynamics of the couple. It is
obvious that Susan, as the object of her desire is, at once, the mother as well as something more intangible, the one she seeks to emulate. Roberta stays close behind as Susan strolls down the street unaware of Roberta's presence. When Susan enters a shop, Roberta follows. In the shop, for a moment, their eyes meet; an acknowledgment of the game. Susan trades her jacket for a pair of shoes and leaves before Roberta can catch up with her. Roberta purchases the jacket and returns home.

In her kitchen, Roberta meets with husband Gary who is not pleased she has forgotten her errands and has purchased a 'used' jacket (previously Susan's). He has plans for the night which do not include Roberta. Alone, Roberta removes the coat and tosses it on the chair, which causes a locker key to fall from the pocket. She places an ad in the paper to meet Susan and return the key, but at the planned meeting, Susan is hauled off to jail for underpaying the cabby, and Roberta, now clumsily dressed to emulate Susan, runs into the thief in pursuit of the earrings he has stolen. While Roberta tries to escape the villain, the hero Dez, a friend of Jim's who has been asked to watch out for Susan, comes riding up on his trusty scooter. Roberta breaks free, stumbling backwards, bumps her head on a light pole and drops to the ground while her purse rolls over the edge of the boardwalk into the ocean. When she comes to, she has amnesia and is assumed to be Susan.
The remainder of the story involves a number of complications which arise from Roberta's disappearance, Susan's missing luggage (containing cues to her identity), the villain's attempt to reclaim his stolen property, and Roberta's struggle to fit into her newly acquired identity.

Roberta, as Susan, becomes involved with Dez, gets a job at the Magic Club, and eventually regains her memory when she is knocked down by the thief still in pursuit of the earrings. The police, mistakenly, pick her up for prostitution, and while in jail, she calls her husband for help but hears a woman's voice, Susan's, at the other end of the line. We assume that Dez bails her out, but this is not shown. The next scene shows her sitting on a bench across from a homeless person, not quite knowing where she belongs.

She borrows the paper draped over the sleeping man's head and finds an ad submitted by Susan, who is desperately seeking "the Stranger" (the signifiers concerning her identity are numerous). The story lines converge at the Magic club while Roberta, as part of the act, is sawed in half (another signifier of her ambiguous identity). All interested parties converge at this moment and the mysteries of the earrings and Roberta's identity are unraveled.

Although Roberta leaves Gary to be with Dez, it is unclear, but likely, that this is not her final destination. The same applies to the coupling of Susan and Jim. The final shot gives a clearer picture of what has happened. A shot
from a newspaper, the source of the women's initial contact, shows the two holding their hands high in the air victoriously as finders of the stolen earrings. The headline above the picture reads, "What a Pair." In what way are the two women paired?

The signifiers are obvious at first, as in the film's opening moments when we know we are in the women's privileged inner world where painting and primping prepare them for the masquerade they participate in and maintain. The credits run over a scene in the beauty shop where our attention is drawn to the process of costuming and make-up: nail painting, hair cutting, facials, hair teasing (an appropriate tag). Initially, we see the trappings of the middle-class female and understand all too well that she goes through this process to flaunt her womanliness, to make the sexual distinctions more obvious. What is important to understand is why a woman would want to do so. Joan Riviere suggests:

Womanliness, therefore, could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisal if she was found to possess it—much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods. The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the 'Masquerade.' My suggestion is not, however, that there is any difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same (Doane 25).

In Susan, masks are donned overtly; the process accentuated,
making us alert to the masquerade to which Roberta has acquiesced as housewife, at least temporarily. Through Roberta’s journey, we see her exchange the mask for an array of disguises which represent the plurality of femininity. The heroine does this, perhaps, because “masquerade is not as recoupable as transvestitism precisely because it constitutes an acknowledgment that it is femininity itself which is constructed as mask— as the decorative layer which conceals a non-identity” (Doane 66). By assuming multiple identities, she comes closer to revealing the true identity of ‘woman’. Roberta cannot decide how to have her hair styled, so, as we see at the party later, she not only wears her hair like her domineering sister-in-law but also wears a look-alike pastel dress. She is trapped in this humdrum spiritless world which promotes and expects masquerade. Roberta, still wearing her mask, contemplates another life when she stares dreamily out across the bridge to the lights of the city. She signifies not only the desires of so many middle-class housewives, but the desire to be delightfully surprised that there is something more for women than the masquerade they perform daily for men and each other.

The bridge spanning the river signifies not only an expected passage, but it represents also the desire of the audience to see what is at the other end. This desire is satisfied with the next scene showing Susan getting off a bus. Her clothes act as signifiers of the mystery
surrounding this woman, a woman who is at once desirable and threatening, one who moves from city to city and from relationship to relationship. Susan's clothing is a mix of male and female articles which contrast sharply with Roberta's pale blue dress and pastel heels. We know we are confronted with a different sort of woman. Her hat shadows her face and, in this scene, she is never shot in full view, thus adding to her mystique. Although we have already seen her in the hotel room taking pictures (signifiers of the creation and power of image), and packing her bags, she remains a mystery. Cues like the Nefertiti earrings and the strange man in the corridor, enhance suspense in the bus scene and later scenes.

The bus scene cuts directly to the bus station's bathroom interior, which contrasts sharply with the beauty parlor scene. Women in this female inner world understand the masquerade and exploit it differently. In the bathroom, Susan washes her body, dries her armpits with the hand blower, changes her clothes; but she never attends to her hair and make-up in the same manner as the women in the beauty shop. Instead she constructs herself in such a way that she is uniquely sexual and individual. Because Susan has the ability to construct herself as she pleases, it is important that Madonna has been cast in this role.

Madonna is a self-fabricated image who has the power to change, like a chameleon, at any moment; a star who is at
once sexy but sexless. Much later in the film, Susan pulls herself from the pool wearing a bra connoting breasts and boxers connoting the penis—hinting at androgyny. In the next scene, she wears only women’s underwear, garter and all. These scenes support the idea that women are not unisexed, but have the ability to cross-dress which only increases eroticism. Men, on the other hand, who cross-dress are subject to ridicule and marginalization.

During Madonna’s career, she has been acutely aware of mass consumerism and has created a product desired by both male and female. Her star quality is an obvious sign of the blurring of sexual differences. Her androgynous construction further contributes to the diegesis when Roberta follows the couple along the boardwalk, and Roberta is ostensibly infatuated with Susan, having little interest in Jim. Critics have previously discussed this phenomenon in relation to stars like Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo.

Kenneth Tynan has said of Dietrich that “she lives in a sexual no-man’s land—and in no woman’s either.” She has “sex, but no positive (that is, determinative) gender. Her masculinity appeals to women, and her sexuality to men” (Garber 16). Like Dietrich, Madonna’s reputation is built on this cross-gender representation, whose very presence has itself become the “sign of the provocative destabilization of gender that is the very signature of the erotic” (Garber 16). Dietrich often wore male clothing and stared back at
the camera with a cold unattached gaze often signifying her awareness of the audience’s desire and male expectations, but she did not acquiesce to these demands. Madonna in her bra and boxers—breasts and penis, or her trousers and rhinestone shoes is less meretricious than genuinely attractive to both sexes. This androgynous state seems to be what Roberta seeks. In this one way, Susan and Roberta are a pair, one seeking to be like the other.

The search uncovers other blurred male/female boundaries which this film continuously challenges. The middle-class white male, represented by husband Gary, is very much out of place in an arena that challenges gender differences. At the nightclub, the elevator doors open and an array of costumed characters file out. Gary is at the back, alone and more than uncomfortably out of place in his beige suit, loafers and suburban middle-class appearance. His ignorance to difference is emphasized when Susan approaches him and asks, “Are you Gary Glass?” (an appropriate name for a character who is truly transparent) and he replies, “How’d you know?”

The question of lesbianism and 'otherness' (a term referring to other than male or female in this discussion), arises several times throughout the text. The first hint of lesbianism appears in Roberta’s fascination with Susan. The second occurs when Susan pinches her friend’s butt outside the Magic Club and they walk down the street arm and arm.
But the most significant suggestion of lesbianism and, more so, otherness, surfaces in the nightclub where Susan meets up with Gary. Gary is already out of place in a club populated with so many alien-others, but at the moment he turns from the bar, he encounters a transvestite, a man dressed in women’s clothing who flirts with him. Soon after, he sees a strangely alienated being, the bald, nearly asexual human, who comes face to face with him. To increase the ‘otherness’ phobia Gary is experiencing, the camera work in the shots of Susan and Gary dancing is carefully crafted. As the couple dances, Susan moves freely on the floor, not maintaining the ‘couple’ relationship. Gary understands his identity as male when coupled with a female, so in his attempt to stay connected with Susan, he continually turns around in search of her. The camera, then, assumes Gary’s point of view. Instead of finding Susan, the camera finds the transvestite, the asexual being, and finally Susan in several alternating shots. These shots clearly blur the differences between gender and sexual difference. The camera work creates the illusion that Gary, surrounded by beings alien to himself, cannot escape them. The differences between sexes are minimal in this nightclub, a fear that Gary tries not to face.

The anomalous figure of the ventriloquist suggests something even more subversive, more repressed than Gary’s phobia of ‘otherness.’ Although the ventriloquist fits well
into the magic club mise en scene, the relationship between master and male child-like puppet is in question. Because the ventriloquist appears in three short shots during the film and our attention is drawn to them, we must ask as Nietzsche suggests with such anomalies, "What is it meant to conceal?" Since the film thoroughly explores sexuality and roles, it is not absurd to suggest that the ventriloquist's presence suggests male repressed homoerotic content. The first shot shows the ventriloquist back stage stuffing his puppet into a suitcase, a keeping-it-in-the-closet signifier. The second shot shows the ventriloquist on stage, his hand in the puppet's back, the two performing for the audience. The third shot is, again, back stage, the ventriloquist holding the puppet on his lap and wearing a surprised look on his face. Because the ventriloquist is never seen with anyone other than the puppet, the mise en scene suggests the repressed taboo behavior of the male pedophile. If so, the text becomes the 'hysterical' text, a text whose symptoms lead to the unspeakable.

The actions of the male figure are often exposed and challenged. One of the scenes most disliked by feminist critics is that of Dez peering through the aquarium at Roberta as she dresses. But camera work and mise en scene collaborate to alter the standard 'male gaze' while offering an alternative response. In Dez's apartment the first
morning, Roberta rises to change her clothes. As she dresses, Dez watches her through an aquarium. We do not identify with Dez’s gaze; instead, the camera is placed far enough behind him to give us the sense that we are watching him look at her. The shot includes his right side, the bowl and Roberta’s naked body on the other side who seems almost mermaid-like (another image of fantasy) through the aquarium. The reverse shot shows Dez’s face framed by the aquarium and the swimming fish. Voyeuristic behavior is not ridiculed here, as it is in Fast Times, nor is it an act of possessing the female. The mise en scene suggests especially that man watches woman to understand her mystery. The audience, likewise, is fascinated by the mystery of woman and wants to know her secrets. Dez has already said, “You’re not at all what I expected.” The scene suggests further that man does not know what to expect from woman, when Roberta appears from around the aquarium wearing Susan’s sequined gown. She has begun the transformation, the act of creating herself.

The scene in the Magic Club is also a very important signifier. When Roberta, still anonymous, first begins to perform for the audience, she is clumsy, not able to perform even as well as her inept predecessor. After she regains her memory, a memory which offers an identity more ambiguous than ever, she has new confidence and knowledge. She appears on stage like a real performer, and Larry, Gary’s
friend, remarks about how good she is. Gary is fearful of what she has done and is doing, a possible threat to his male identity. The final magic trick symbolically represents the split she has experienced in character and the symbolic torture she must go through in order to become whole. She steps into the magician's box to be cut in two. She has already experienced each separate half by being Roberta and assuming the identity of Susan. This split can be explained by the theory of the divided self in The Literature of the Second Self, where we find

the typical polarity that exists between the two personae: oppositeness is the main link that unites them, for it is the complementary oppositeness of the two halves of the being whom they comprise, a being sometimes suggesting the total human personality (Fischer 173).

Woman is a dual being (for Seidelman she may be plural), that has been portrayed as the divided self in films like A Stolen Life (1946) with Bette Davis who plays twin sisters, one evil and one good, and The Cobra Woman (1944), again two sisters, one an exotic temptress, the other an innocent girl (Fischer 181). Most female divided-self films emphasize the competitiveness of these women for a man. The good twin always gets the man, a scheme that supports the submissive woman as the socially accepted woman. Male films employing the divided self are less apt to thematize a competitive nature; instead, they emphasize the solidarity and virtue of men who might be rivals (Fischer 179).
The divided self in Susan is obviously Roberta-Susan, one representing innocence, the other sexuality; one representing naiveté, the other knowledge. Roberta’s evolution from half to whole involves assuming the other half before joining together into one. Roberta first encounters the divided self when she sees Susan and desires her, Susan representing an absence in Roberta that longs to be filled. When Roberta assumes the role of Susan, she partially experiences her missing half. The cutting-a-woman-in-half magic trick is a perfect symbol for the divided self. When Gary and Dez open the box so Roberta can step out, she has truly become whole. While the two men argue, she is silenced, their shouts too loud for her to be heard. When she gets their attention by shouting, she takes control of the situation and assumes the more powerful personality of the whole self.

Susan also shows signs of the divided self while making herself comfortable in Gary’s home. She even states that she could get used to a place like that. However, the transformation occurs more readily in the character of Roberta who has, at the end, become a woman unfamiliar to Gary and to herself. The changes prompted by her divided-self experience force her into making a choice between the old and the new.

After the magic trick, in the dressing room, Gary touches the many costumes signifying the plurality of women.
While in the dressing room, Roberta wishes to know what Gary wants to determine if what he wants has anything to do with what she wants. Gary, oblivious to her, is concerned only with his own fear; he must discover whether Roberta is lesbian, a symbolic representation of castration. She rejects the man who is unwilling (perhaps unable) to acknowledge her desires and new identity.

Gender differences and blurring are not the only issues explored in the film. The patriarchy of Hollywood classical film is also attacked. First, Roberta watches Hitchcock’s Rebecca, alone in the middle of the night. Her isolation at such a time signifies her impending change and dissatisfaction with the status quo. Rebecca is an appropriate selection for the scene since Roberta’s experience will wipe away “that young lost look I (Gary) loved. It won’t ever come back.” Roberta is also much like the young Mrs. de Winter at the beginning—clumsy, shy and inexperienced. However, both heroines emerge from their experience as confident and capable women.

The clip from Rebecca emphasizes how Susan problematizes the binary polarities good woman/bad woman, virginal/sexual and innocence/knowledge. In a majority of classical films, woman is identified in one of the polarities, often stereotyped so she fits into the male narrative structure. Through this sort of identification, the male character and the male spectator know how she is to
be handled based on already established thematic paradigms. In *Rebecca*, the good/innocent/virginal new Mrs. de Winter wishes to be like the bad/knowledgeable/sexual Rebecca, the dead Mrs. de Winter, because this is what the new Mrs. de Winter believes her husband desires. The narrative leads the young de Winter to find the answer to what man wants. The story of *Rebecca* tells us that Mr. de Winter wants her to be submissive to him, to support his ego, to satisfy his desires, not her own. He does not want a woman to challenge his patriarchal position or masculinity. The erotic desire of each protagonist is primarily directed toward the mysterious sexual woman they desire to emulate. Roberta’s desire for knowledge of the sexual woman is similar to Rebecca’s, just as Gary’s response resembles that of Max. The patriarchy avoids and the precludes female challenges if possible.

Two other Hollywood films appear in the diegesis at the movie theater where Dez works. Both are affected by the intrusion of a female. The first is interrupted when Jim calls to ask Dez to check up on Susan. The second, a film about a male army trying to stop the invasion of aliens, may be signifying the feminist movement and classical film in general. This film is interrupted when the Dez and Roberta’s bodies press on the reel, eventually burning the frame. Perhaps this symbolizes the challenge to classic film and patriarchy by feminist film makers.
Finally, in Susan, traditional polarities are blurred; neither Roberta nor Susan fit easily into male generated categories. This blurring of polarities further develops the plurality of woman; her essence is never easily categorized or contained because of its complexity and elusiveness. Both Susan and Roberta pursue their own desires, whether they be heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual; it is unclear. What is clear is that the fantastic quality of the narrative allows for women to explore the question, “What does woman want?” The story is not about wanting out of middle-class America, as quoted from Barish earlier; it is more about women wanting to get out of the female masquerade to explore imaginatively their plurality and sexuality. For the middle-class, white male, it is fairly clear what he wants,—he does not want to be confused or challenged or threatened. He wants only to maintain the hegemony that classical films have tried so desperately to maintain. As for the other men in the story, the answer remains unresolved.

Home for the Holidays

Home for the Holidays comes at a time when the women’s movement has slowed to a crawl, and the war feminists waged on male dominated Hollywood has been scaled down to a scuffle. Foster’s film portrays women after the experience
of the women's movement, after the fight for financial, political and social independence has made its mark on both men and women, leaving them wondering how many positive results have come from the movement concerning differences and similarities between the sexes. Some women claim that not enough has been done to advance the status of women while others declare that too much damage has already been done to American culture. Any war has its casualties, and if feminist activists don't think they've been waging a war, they're dead wrong. In the aftermath, at a time when strategists reformulate their position, film critics like Tania Modleski are concerned that women's presence in film has in some ways suffered further damage. She is either being altered to emulate men as in The Quick and the Dead (1995), relegated to old roles as in Mighty Aphrodite (1995) and Leaving Las Vegas (1995), or simply invisible as in Three Men and a Baby (1990). Male directors who try to be sensitive to the desires of women are often mistaken in their attempts to correct past characterizations. They either create women in their own image or continue to project woman as a construction of male desire. Women in most male produced films are still subject to the 'either-or' scenario--either they marry or they die. Most often they die. The only other alternative for woman is to emulate men becoming gun-slinging, hard-core characters. I
will admit there are a few rare exceptions, and these
directors should be commended for their attempts to create
women who are multifaceted, fully developed characters.

But assigning commendations is not my task here.
Foster's *Home for the Holidays* was released eight years
after *Desperately Seeking Susan* and thirteen years after
*Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. It is decidedly different
from the other two films in that it deconstructs Hollywood's
classical norms of continuity editing in an attempt to
expose the construction of the film, overtly segmenting the
film into parts. Attending to the continuity editing
process responsible for concealment and narrative reality
along with Foster's attempt to establish a female myth
places the film squarely in the nineties. Several elements
have made this bold attempt possible and somewhat
successful. First, being around the film industry since the
age of three has provided Foster a very long inside look at
the industry's evolving history and major structural
devices, each adhering to traditional patterns. From the
position of insider and respected actor, she has had the
freedom to attempt to alter the cause and effect structure
so powerfully ingrained in the industry and its spectators.
However, I believe that since *Home*'s structure is more
incident based rather than cause and effect driven, many
spectators, especially men, have dismissed the film
believing it to be unstructured and lacking action. It’s just a women’s film. This is exactly the point. This film has an inherently female quality about it, resulting possibly from Foster’s proclaimed feminism. In some ways, it echoes the narrative qualities of some of Woody Allen’s films, a director who focuses on problematizing society’s moral structure.

Second, although there are no talking heads, the film somewhat resembles the documentary structure. It is divided into chunks of time labeled by extra-diegetic titles—Mom and Dad, Company, More Company, Now What and the Point. Each chunk contains a slice of life similar to that of Chekhov’s slice of life, but these chunks are derived from a distinctively female point of view. The documentary has been favored by independent feminist film makers as an alternative to the Hollywood ‘male’ narrative because it provides the film maker with a form to tell ‘her’ story cinematically, using a structure that is not gender biased. The documentary structure has also been employed to fill in history’s gaping holes concerning women and women’s lives. However, some say that feature film produced in Hollywood is constructed for the purpose of entertainment and ultimately, for capital gain, and therefore, documentary has no place in Hollywood. Foster has altered the documentary structure to fit the industry’s purpose while maintaining a distinctively
female style. Home has been constructed with biases that, like classical film, conceal choice and structure.

Third, Home for the Holidays differs considerably because it is a map of "What happens after feminist independence?" Hunter's character, Claudia, is a post-feminist woman maintaining a single-parent household and a professional job. At the beginning of the film, she is thoroughly engrossed in removing the old layers of varnish in the process of reconditioning a classical Renaissance painting. She tells her boss that she loves what she is doing; nothing else matters. As a post-feminist, she has attained her sexual, social and economic independence; she's come a long way. Nothing else should matter, or should it? Perhaps the stripping away of layers symbolizes what can be found underneath it all, what might be at the core worth salvaging. She comes to know what really matters in the incidents to follow.

Fourth, because the feminist movement has been identified with a number of social issues from gay rights to clean air to freedom of speech, the sub-themes of the film are multifarious. Endangered species activists can cheer when the prom queen is put down for wearing a fur coat; self-help advocates identify with the idea of carrying too much baggage. Gay rights activists sneer at Joanne's homophobia; mothers applaud the daughter's intelligent, independent actions. Feminists have a lot to cheer about,
but the film shows that after the long, hard-fought battle of feminism, there might be something missing, something being covered over, layer upon layer.

Fifth, a major portion of the film takes place in the home, traditionally considered to be the woman's space, and concerns family issues. Hollywood classical films are often concerned with maintaining roles within the family. For example, Hitchcock's films have been carefully criticized to show his obsessiveness with women who stray from their designated roles within the family. Even a symptomatic reading cannot deny the punishment independent women have endured at the hands of Hitchcock characters. Home does not paint a nostalgic romantic picture of family life in America, nor does it paint a picture of the dismembered family; it paints instead a fairly believable picture of the dynamics of the nineties family structure. It is obvious in Home's family that the patriarchy is not in control, and family members, while being fairly normal for the nineties, are dysfunctional. Since the family has been liberated from patriarchal control, women do not suffer by the hands of men; instead, their actions and decisions are valued; their voices are heard.

At the film's beginning, Claudia dreads returning to the family home and her semi-traditional parents. While on the plane to her parent's home, she calls her brother. The conversation begins normally with a courteous greeting but
rapidly breaks down into a crying session. She spills her most intimate concerns into the phone only to be recorded by an answering machine. In the car on the way to her parent’s home, the crowded mise en scene shows the mother intruding into Claudia’s space directly behind her head, her tiny face overpowered by the bulky coat, and the smoke of her mother’s cigarette encircling her head. Claudia is being smothered in this confining environment. A shot of a mid-thirty-year-old man slumped down in another car caught in the same traffic jam confirms the modern dread of dealing with family. No one seems quite sure what to make of it anymore. Even the father’s prayer at the table before their Thanksgiving meal reveals sorrow and remorse for what has been lost. He wants to know why, with all these changes and with all this progress, people can’t be happy; why families can’t be families. He doesn’t seem to be alluding specifically to the patriarchal family, just a group of people unified through a common bond. When Claudia leaves to return to her city apartment, she has shed the extra baggage talked about earlier in the story. Her parents, though not perfect, are accepted as a meaningful part of her being; they love each other and her.

Sixth, although the shot/reverse-shot, a characteristic structure of Hollywood films, is employed many times throughout the film, I detect little, if any, use similar to the process Mulvey describes in her theory of the male gaze.
Instead, the series is most often used in this film as a deviation of the mirror stage of psychoanalytical theory. Most shot/reverse-shots in this film involve the mother Adele and Claudia, the father Henry and Claudia, and Fish (Claudia's romantic interest) and Claudia. I do not see these shots as structures that position one of the participants as the subject and the other as the object. In Home, these series have very little to do with fetishization; they act as a process of identity, not as a means of determining difference as in the mirror stage, but an identity connoting sameness. For example, when Claudia descends the stairs to the basement to find her father, Foster employs a shot/reverse-shot series. The father is sitting alone watching old family movies. The movies here are reflexive of the evolution of the diegetic material in Home itself. They chronicle change. When Claudia sits to talk with him, camera angles never identify with either character as the possessor of the gaze.

Instead, the camera works to show the moment of identification. In this scene the moment comes when Henry explains his most cherished moment. The camera slowly moves in on his face until it shows the gloriousness of that moment, long ago on the airfield, in the very lines of his face and the faint quivering of his facial muscles. He explains to Claudia that she was fearless, a truth he experienced at that single moment long ago that bonded him
to her for life. The camera work is constructed to suggest Claudia’s symbolic identification with her father through her father, as well as with the spectator.

The story Henry tells brings out another major difference between this film and classical films as well as with previous feature films directed by women. One of the chunks in the film is titled “The Point.” Before the film ends, Claudia asks Fish, “What’s the point?” and he replies “Nothing,” meaning perhaps that there is not always a reason for an action. Women just are and they should deal with that. The carefully constructed chains of cause and effect have no place here. There are only the many incidents we experience in life which can provide us with that one (hopefully more) moment when life seems glorious.

And finally, of all the issues alluded to in this film, the most poignant thematic issue involves the polarities of tradition/progress, independence/dependency, isolation/family, patriarchy/egalitarianism, heterosexual love/freedom, exposure/rejection and risk/safety. These binary pairs suggest semantic fields of the nineties woman caught between a long history of trying to gain independence and denying her desire for romantic love and marriage. Claudia, the temporarily out of work independent, self-reliant, post-feminist has everything going for her except the love of a man. She has the means to make a comfortable living. She has an open mind and a keen understanding of
human behavior. But, she still wants the love of a man. The cues supporting this hypothesis are numerous. What makes this an important film, one that is truly feminist, is that it is not afraid to show the contradictions in the myths about modern women. It punches holes in the myths embedded in feminism, family, Americanism and masculinity. For example, the superwoman of post-feminism who can do everything, sometimes falls short—Claudia loses her job. The secure independent woman does not need a man—Claudia desires Fish. Families are perfect—the Brewers don’t even like each other. Families are bad—the Brewers provide love and meaning to Claudia’s life. Hollywood classical film devised male characters like Rocky the boxer with a tender heart who would take on the contradictions of the American male myth. Claudia takes on the myths about woman, liberated woman, about the nineties, and she doesn’t do it by conquering or destroying or suppressing. She is at once the plural female who is still in the process of asking herself, “What do I want?” Vogue has labeled this new trend in feminism as the “postsensitive, neo-feminist nineties” (Mellencamp 45). Two films, both released in 1994, the remake of Little Women once again showing that a woman can have a career and a marriage, and Safe Passages starring Susan Sarandon, mother of five children, showing that women’s lives are heroic, perhaps without the risk of death, but nevertheless, heroic. Safe Passages ends with the
husband's hysterics being caused by an allergy discovered by Sarandon—*A Wonderful Life* for the nineties, but this time, really for women. Family is no longer viewed in feminist circles as the threat to independence and career. Instead it is something desired, though often difficult, and something which adds meaning to women's lives. The Australian-made *Piano* is another example of the new attitude toward personal desire and female sexuality, showing a woman whose obsessions in life are plural—her music, her child and her love for a man.

The nineties should see women rejecting the now archaic view of women as spectators experiencing film masochistically. Instead, pleasure can be derived intellectually, as the "intellectual labor of thinking," found in a shift in feminist theory, suggesting that the spectator may interpret the film makers' textual cues at many levels and from many points of view. This leaves women in a better position to be active interpreters of the text, and not to become its victims. We return once again to woman as the ultimate dialectician acting to test an idea's validity in its world and hers.
CONCLUSION

My thesis consists of a short study of the theoretical backgrounds of feminist film study and Classic Hollywood films to prepare the reader for a series of readings that attempts to deconstruct the texts, placing knowledge in the possession of women. It has been my task and the task of other feminist film critics to free women from the possessive male text, and at the same time to suggest approaches leading to her own aesthetic expression. These readings reflect the assumption that women’s responses to film are complex and contradictory (my own readings are similar yet dissimilar to other critics) and require an understanding of woman as, at once, inside and outside the patriarchal order. Often, her place in the order makes it difficult to assume authorial voice necessary for aesthetic freedom, but, at the same time, her position outside the order enables her to comment on its dynamics while working toward her own subjectivity inside and outside its bounds.

Using a feminist film approach enables the female spectator to assume a positive position when viewing Classical Hollywood film as the interpreter of textual cues rather than victim of narrative structure. The director’s influence on the text has been found to be undeniable since she or he makes concealed choices as to what will be shown and how it will be shown.
In Classical Hollywood films, *Singin' in the Rain*, *Rebecca* and *Touch of Evil*, the patriarchy, in an attempt to control woman, cinematically constructs distorted mirrors, reflecting her as an incapable, guilty or troublesome creature often requiring control. All three films achieve closure when the female’s desire is tamed before the end of the film while the patriarchy regains or maintains its authority. In *Singin’*, the Gene Kelly character occupies the central position at closure while women assume their supposed rightful positions on the margins. Young Mrs. de Winter in *Rebecca* never secures her own name while other character’s names become powerful signifiers of their positions. At closure, she, like her name, is absorbed by the patriarchy. Although *Touch of Evil* silences and subjugates the Janet Leigh character by savagely punishing her aggressive behavior, the Marlene Dietrich character remains unscathed by the power struggle. She signifies the narcissistic woman who is able, simultaneously, to charm and instill fear, inflicting considerable damage to the male ego. She remains unharmed only because she refuses to become entangled in the Classical Hollywood male/female relationship. She is relegated, then, to the outside. In each case, textual constructions, primarily the male narrative and the norms of continuity editing (Hollywood’s
willing subordination of style to story), produce these negative readings for women.

On the other hand, I have found the three Hollywood classics to be entertaining and enlightening, providing insight into the workings of the power structure they so aptly imitate. These films, upon closure, with the exception of Touch, ensure that patriarchy is maintained. But in the cinematic structure that aims to maintain the patriarchy, small fissures erupt revealing the weaknesses and fears that will eventually demystify both. These alternative readings save Hollywood film for the female spectator while saving her from being its victim. I believe by seeking to prevent absorption by male authority and male texts, the female spectator can continue to find pleasure in Hollywood Classical films.

For women film makers, these fissures offer opportunities to study the system's vulnerabilities. The film makers I present in this thesis remain within the traditional Hollywood framework while attempting to change the negative social constructions of women and the ingrained thematic and technical paradigms used to create them. Although spectators have not always been satisfied with the results of these practices, many recognize the importance of articulating feminist orientations, especially structure, positionality and image, as liberating and necessary for social justice.
These readings of female director’s films show they possess intimate knowledge of classic structures. They understand the structures that tend to objectify women. They often pervert and subvert these structures while positioning a female figure as subject, not as possessor of the gaze, but as possessor of her own choice. These film makers introduce thematic and technical structures that construct female subjects as viable members of this aesthetic and cultural community.

Heckerling’s contributions lie in her immediate understanding of the shot/reverse-shot series, the primary technical structure that attempts to control women by objectifying her. The structure is altered considerably, making the male a ridiculous object of his own structure. Seidelman works to reconstruct the narrative in such a way that she places the heroine in a position that allows her to investigate another woman, her own sexuality and her own choices. Foster alters the narrative itself, placing incidents and issues above traditional cause and effect norms.

I believe that women film makers will continue to search for ways to liberate women from traditionally oppressive structures. Although their numbers remain meager, these film maker’s aggregate shoves may move the onerous Hollywood assemblage toward accepting women as subjects.
WORKS CONSULTED


Rebecca. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. With Laurence Olivier and Joan Fontaine, David O. Selznick Studios, 1939.


