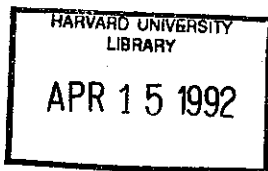


THE DIFFICULTY
OF DIFFERENCE

PSYCHOANALYSIS
SEXUAL DIFFERENCE
& FILM THEORY

D. N. RODOWICK

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For R. B. and L. M.

Was du ererbt von deinen Vätern [und Müttern] hast,
Erwirb es, um es zu besitzen.

—Goethe, *Faust*, I, 1

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Chapter 1

The Difficulty of Difference

Binary Machines

In *Dialogues*, a book cowritten with Gilles Deleuze, Claire Parnet comments on the function of “the binary machine.”¹ In these interesting pages she resumes an argument begun by Deleuze concerning the relation of philosophy to the State. Every college educator knows well the official version of this story, defined according to the theory of progress that was the nineteenth century’s contribution to Enlightenment philosophy. As philosophy becomes more specialized and departmentalized, its role is to contribute in a “detached” way to the refinement of procedures of thought. Increasingly, the “image” of thought invoked, along with criteria for its perfectibility, is associated with procedures of “language” but of a special sort: that defined by linguistics and related logico-mathematical protocols.

Deleuze’s position and his ongoing practice of reading philosophy is motivated by a different emphasis. Philosophy is confronted as an “image of thought” that in its historical manifestations all too perfectly prevents people from thinking. And not only because “thought” is left to specialists, but also because the definitions of thought produced by specialists accord perfectly with the State’s image of power and its juridical definitions of identity. As critics and educators, the language we use to describe “identity”—as a difference from or conforming to an image of gender, class, or race—is intricately tied to the mechanics of power.

What Parnet calls the binary machine perfectly describes this technology of thought and the notions of identity it fabricates. Its components are easily elucidated: divide into two mutually exclusive terms or categories and thus produce two perfectly self-identical “ideas” that brook no contradiction or invasion from the outside. Hegel’s dialectic is the utopia of this technology, dividing and reconciling into ever higher unities and hierarchies until spirit and subject became one in an image of universal rationality. Nowadays binary thought—which has reproduced itself in the discourses of law, economy, medicine, science, and politics no less than epistemology and aesthetics—is content with cellular division and horizontal replication. According to Parnet,

Dualisms no longer relate to unities, but to successive choices: are you white or black, man or woman, rich or poor, etc.? Do you take the left half or the right

half? There is always a binary machine which governs the distribution of roles and which means that all the answers must go through preformed questions, since the questions are already worked out on the basis of the answer assumed to be probable according to the dominant meanings. Thus a grille is constituted such that everything which does not pass through the grille cannot be materially understood

[The] binary machine is an important component of apparatuses of power. So many dichotomies will be established that there will be enough for everyone to be pinned to the wall, sunk in a hole. Even the divergences of deviancy will be measured according to the degree of binary choice; you are neither white nor black, Arab then? Or half-breed? You are neither man nor woman, transvestite then? (D 19–21)

The binary machine always pretends to totality and universality. And to a certain extent, Parnet sees the working of language by the binary machine to have been imminently successful. In this context, one could ask if the picture of language developed in structural linguistics differs so much from the image of thought in the Hegelian dialectic.² The smallest possible unities—phonemic—are integrated into ever higher levels of unity—morphemic, syntactic, syntagmatic, narratological—that are simultaneously equivalent to “higher” levels of thought. And when grafted on to structural anthropology, these branching divisions and hierarchies become equivalent to the “meaningful” organization of human collectivities. This is one way of understanding the feminist critique of Lévi-Strauss, for example, where the binary division and hierarchy of the sexes informs the intelligibility of language, labor, and social life. But Parnet’s point is that granting linguistics’ recognition and exacting description of the dualities that work language and society is to leave untouched its own language—its patterns of logic, rhetoric, and argumentation—which, tautologically, only produce the legibility and intelligibility of that which is already structured by binary division. A similar tautological situation is no less evident in the ways that contemporary film theory has appropriated the logic of structural semiology and psychoanalysis for the formal analysis of films and the spectatorial relations they imply.

If language and linguistics so perfectly replicate one another, the latter reproducing the “thought” of language as the limit of what language can render “thinkable,” what alternatives can be imagined? Parnet and Deleuze warn that it is futile to propose a thought “outside” of language. (How many theories of avant-garde literature and art have been wrecked on this utopian island?) Nor can it be said that language deforms identities, concepts, or realities that can be returned to their proper states. “We must pass through [*passer par*] dualisms,” writes Parnet, “because they are in language, it’s not a question of getting rid of them, but we must fight against language, invent stammering . . . to trace a vocal or written line which will make language flow between these dualisms, and which will define a minority use of language” (D

34). Rather, it is a matter of reconsidering what “language” is or could be, of understanding what it leaves aside, and of remembering that totality is a pretension that displaces recognition of the multiplicities it covers over. It is a question above all of reading differently.

The question of reading can now be rephrased: how to understand otherwise these schemata of language and thought? How can one recover the “individuations without ‘subject’ ” that fall between the terms of binary division and are de-territorialized by the law of the excluded middle? How can one apprehend the minority languages and the multiple collectivities that are displaced and overcome by the universalizing unity of binary thought? For Parnet, the Achilles’ heel of this logic is the term that not only constitutes the middle, but also guarantees the contiguity and multiplication of binary modules:

And even if there are only two terms, there is an AND between the two, which is neither the one nor the other, nor the one which becomes the other, but which constitutes the multiplicity. This is why it is always possible to undo dualisms from the inside, by tracing the line of flight which passes between the two terms or the two sets, the narrow stream which belongs neither to the one nor to the other, but draws both into a non-parallel evolution, into a heterochronous becoming. At least this does not belong to the dialectic. (D 34–35)

I have left to one side the principal targets of Parnet and Deleuze’s criticisms: structural linguistics, psychoanalysis, and more profoundly, the alliance between them represented by the work of Jacques Lacan. There is much to be said for this critique of psychoanalysis which is more complex and compelling in the *Anti-Oedipus* than it is in the pages of *Dialogues*. The questions that interest me, however, are on one hand how contemporary film theory has read and incorporated psychoanalysis, and on the other, to what degree the logic of psychoanalysis, above all the work of Freud, is inflected by the binary machine? In *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, I argued that the most substantial accomplishment of contemporary film theory was its formulation of new practices of reading that profoundly transformed our notions of filmic and literary texts.³ But blocked by a formal conception of text, spectator, and the relation between them, Anglo-American film theory has been unable to comprehend historically or theoretically the implications of these reading practices. Despite the gains they have enabled, neither semiology, psychoanalysis, nor feminist theory have entirely eluded the logic of the binary machine in their theoretical language and in their formal conceptualization of film text and film spectators.

The consequences of this situation must be addressed. What I question now is the way that Freud has been mobilized in film theory to address questions of textual analysis, on one hand, and sexual difference in specta-

torship on the other. Do Freud's writings implicitly propose a model of reading that might erode the version of language and power formulated by the binary machine? Does the work of Freud enable a different way of understanding sexual difference? Rather than following the "law" of unity and identity, is Freud among the first to understand the possibilities of "individuations without 'subject'" and a minority language of sexuality? Is there in Freud a theory of reading that renders legible otherwise deterritorialized languages, identities, and meanings?

Pleasure and its Discontents

"In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female." This phrase from Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" is undoubtedly and deservedly one of the most well known in contemporary film theory.⁴ I begin with Mulvey's essay not because I disagree with what it "says," but to open up tensions in Mulvey's own reading of Freud, and, more importantly, in how Mulvey's work has been read and appropriated. Without doubt, it is and will remain one of the most important essays in contemporary film theory. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" has indeed been successful in its original, polemical objective: to place questions of sexual difference at the center of the debate concerning film theory's appeal to psychoanalysis. But what was offered as a polemic and a stepping stone to further analysis has instead too often been treated as axiomatic. What is at stake is how film theory has read Freud in order to understand the construction of "femininity" by audiovisual media and to reconceptualize the value of psychoanalysis for a theory of narration and spectatorship.

Mulvey's early argument, which is still the subject of an ongoing debate in her own work, remains the best and most brilliant exposition of the reading of Freud produced by Anglo-American film theory in the seventies.⁵ Mulvey's project and the many essays inspired by it are organized around the question of identification. The first task of this project is to target and examine the codes and mechanisms through which the classical cinema has traditionally exploited sexual difference as a function of its narrative and representational forms. The second task is to ascertain the affects these mechanisms might inspire in the spectatorial experience of sexed individuals as well as their role within the more general ideological machinery of patriarchal culture. The analysis of narrative forms, and the forms of spectatorship implied by them, are thus intimately related. Similarly, the analysis and criticism of patriarchal ideology by film theory has had a historic impact on these questions.

One of the most striking aspects of Mulvey's argument is the association of a fundamental negativity with the figuration of femininity characteristic

of the classic, Hollywood cinema. The great strength of Mulvey's analysis is that it is not a simple condemnation of how women are represented on the screen. Instead she identifies a powerful contradiction in the heart of the structure of image and narrative in Hollywood films. In order to begin to define these issues more precisely I have isolated a rather long citation from Mulvey's essay. My motive is neither to completely sustain nor subvert Mulvey's argument, but rather to illuminate a series of assumptions and a system of oppositions that organize her discussion of sexual difference and mechanisms of visual pleasure in film. In a section entitled "Woman as Image, Man as Bearer of the Look," Mulvey makes the following argument:

But in psychoanalytic terms, the female figure poses a deeper problem. She also connotes something that the look continually circles around but disavows: her lack of a penis, implying a threat of castration and hence unpleasure. Ultimately, the meaning of woman is sexual difference, the absence of the penis as visually ascertainable, the material evidence on which is based the castration complex essential for the organisation of entrance to the symbolic order and the law of the father. Thus 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 re-enactment 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). This second avenue, fetishistic scopophilia, builds up the physical beauty of the object transforming it into something satisfying in itself. The first avenue, voyeurism, on the contrary, has associations with sadism: pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration), asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness. This sadistic side fits in well with narrative. Sadism demands a story, depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory and defeat, all occurring in linear time with a beginning and an end. Fetishistic scopophilia, on the other hand, can exist outside linear time as the erotic instinct is focused on the look alone. (VP 13-14)

Unlike Raymond Bellour, whose work has many affinities with Mulvey's, Mulvey is less concerned with problems of textual analysis than with the definition of structures of identification and the mechanisms of pleasure or unpleasure that accompany them. I am now using the term identification in its strictly psychoanalytic sense: "Psychological process whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides. It is by means of a series of identifications that the personality is constituted and specified."⁶

Mulvey herself does not develop the argument in precisely these terms. Her argument does presume, however, a potentially transformative relation between the object (the narrative film and the mechanisms of visual pleasure characterizing it) and the spectatorial subject such that the libidinal economy of the latter is organized and sustained by the signifying economy of the former. In fact all theories of the subject invoked by psychoanalytic film criticism cast signifying processes in film as the "other" with the power to transform or sustain categories of subjectivity.

For Mulvey these subject/object relations are a product of the point of view mechanisms of Hollywood cinema. This idea is emphasized by the division of gender and labor in the title of this section: "Woman as Image, Man as Bearer of the Look." In the interlacing of diegetic looks between the characters, the look of the camera, and that of the spectator, an economy is preserved where set subject-positions are continually reconfirmed and reproduced by avoiding avenues of identification leading to unpleasure and by seeking out avenues leading to pleasure. That the analysis of sexual difference reveals an imbalance in the social system represented in films is of course important. But of greater significance is the suggestion that visual and narrative forms produce pleasure, that this pleasure is produced for someone, and that this production sustains an imaginary situation where real relations of social imbalance are maintained for a given culture. According to Mulvey, the forms of point of view institutionalized by the cinema as mechanisms of pleasure have defined themselves historically in the same manner as the ego forms itself in relation to the objective world: that which promotes pleasure is introjected and that which promotes unpleasure is systematically rejected.⁷ The various forms defining cinematic imaging and point of view at a given historical moment are objectively produced and sustained only to the extent that they maintain a pleasurable relation with the subject at whom they are aimed—the cinema consumer. If these mechanisms perform their social and ideological function efficiently, the production of pleasure will sustain and reinforce the place of the subject in a given structure of representation. An imaginary place is created for this subject in and by the film text that he or she may choose to inhabit. As in Marx's suggestive epigram from the *Grundrisse*, "production not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object."

In sum, processes of identification in the cinema and the various forms of looking that organize their functioning in film narratives regulate an economy of exchange where the production of pleasure guarantees the place of the subject both in and for the text. What constitutes this place and the imaginary from which it is derived, as well as how it is placed and for whom, are the central questions and the greatest difficulties of Mulvey's essay.

The terms and the logic evoked by Mulvey in the long citation above should now be sorted out. Mulvey is primarily concerned with the organiza-

tion of looking by, for, and in the text of the narrative film. Again, the concept of identification is understood as the linch-pin on which the relations between subject and object turn. Identification also organizes, or attempts to organize, the vision and the libidinal aims of the spectatorial subject. Drawing on terms from Freud's "Instincts and their Vicissitudes" (1915c), Mulvey undertakes a classification of the forms of visual pleasure characteristic of the narrative cinema.⁸ Her primary distinction is:

active:	male
passive:	female

At first glance this polarization of terms seems faithful to Freud's own schema. Later I will examine whether or not Freud's arguments concerning sexual difference are not somewhat more complex.

Nevertheless, Mulvey's discussion of forms of "pleasure in looking" crystallizes around this schema. To maintain this polarization of terms, she establishes two crucial sets of distinctions. The first involves the following pairing of terms in section II C, where Mulvey describes fundamental structures of identification in the strictly psychoanalytic sense:

sexual instincts	ego-libido
scopophilia	narcissism
[separation of subject and object]	[identity of subject with object]

Mulvey is careful to differentiate the first pair, sexual instincts/ego-libido, while maintaining the intimate link between them. The nature of this linking of opposites is clarified by examining Freud's distinction between ego-libido and object-libido. Although he was not strictly consistent, Freud often used the terms "libido" and "sexual instincts" interchangeably. However, in the distinction between object- and ego-libido he refers primarily to the direction in which the libido is channeled; that is, whether it is being directed toward an exterior object or being reinvested in the ego itself. Obviously the concept of ego-libido is indissolubly linked to narcissism which Mulvey correctly points out in her description of the mirror stage and its apparent similarities with cinematic perception. Mulvey understands the economy of the ego-libido as attached fundamentally to the phenomenon of primary narcissism characterizing Lacan's scenario for the mirror stage. In this scenario the formation of the ego, the potential "I" of the speaking subject, is understood as a splitting—first in a division between the sexual instincts and the ego-instincts through the organization of narcissistic libido, and second in the formation of an image to which this libido is attached. The formation of this image constitutes an economic relationship with the ego that is *imaginary* in the full sense that Lacan gives to the term. The joy of recognition that the

child receives through identifying itself in this exterior image is located in a fundamental misperception where the distance between subject and object is simultaneously formed and canceled. The terms for perceiving, knowing, and desiring are thus constituted and verified by the setting in place of this imaginary other who both is and is not the child. The ego is formed through a simultaneous externalization and internalization of an object constituted by a visual and imaginary structure that governs the child's perception of self.

A first caution is in order here. This scenario of the formative moments of the ego is not yet a scenario of sexual difference. And Mulvey, with great care, has not yet introduced the distinction between active:male/passive:female. To be sure, in both Freudian and Lacanian accounts this scenario establishes the "first" sexual relations: those attached to the imago of the mother and to the autoeroticism associated with narcissism. In addition, this period of development sets the stage for the complicated and fragile set of sexual identifications that are carried through in the formation of the castration and Oedipus complexes. But in this preoedipal phase of psychological development there is no evidence that masculinity or femininity will follow predetermined routes. In fact, Freud himself is adamant that gender difference is a product of a retroactive "understanding" of Oedipal relations during puberty. For Freud, up until this point any child's relation to sexual difference is fundamentally undetermined, unformed, and unsure; after puberty sexual identifications remain fragile. Moreover, the anxiety produced by the residue of preoedipal relations characterizes all questions of identity that plague the subject for the rest of its psychological life.⁹ The complex of Oedipal identifications is only the first attempt to address questions of sexual identity whose indecisiveness is never fully resolved.

Unquestionably, the problem of the persistence of this anxiety is central to Mulvey's argument. For the structures of desire and pleasurable looking perpetuated by the Hollywood cinema demonstrate for Mulvey both the insistent patriarchal bias of cinematic representations and the potential for eroding that bias:

During its history, the cinema seems to have evolved a particular illusion of reality in which this contradiction between libido and ego has found a beautifully complementary phantasy world. In *reality* the phantasy world of the screen is subject to the law which produces it. Sexual instincts and identification processes have a meaning within the symbolic order which articulates desire. Desire, born with language, allows the possibility of transcending the instinctual and the imaginary, but its point of reference continually returns to the traumatic moment of its birth: the castration complex. Hence the look, pleasurable in form, can be threatening in content, and it is woman as representation/image that crystallizes this paradox. (VP 11)

For Mulvey, the imaging of the woman's body evokes a fundamental negativity that always places the pleasure and security of cinematic looking at risk. The fundamental mechanisms of pleasurable looking are meant to displace the castration anxiety suggested to the male spectator by the representation of the woman's body, and the male spectator obsessively requires this representation to alleviate his anxiety. Yet each repetition simultaneously renews a possibility of threat: the potential negation of Hollywood codes of looking and the security of the male ego they support.

This leads to a second point that Mulvey is careful to emphasize: the drives may only be apprehended through their investment in representations. Or, as Mulvey puts it, they "are formative structures, mechanisms not meaning. In themselves they have no signification, they have to be attached to an idealisation" (VP 10). Indeed in the citation above Mulvey characterizes the formation of the ego as a kind of "phantasmization" of the subject. Certainly, almost all of Freud's discussions of instinctual vicissitudes rely on the analysis of representations or phantasy scenarios. This is the fundamental link between the "instinctual" theory and Freud's analytic method concerning manifestations of phantasy life, including dreams, parapraxes, jokes, and the scattered comments on painting and literature. And any concrete discussion of the construction and dissemination of subject-positions must presuppose that there are historically and socially determined mechanisms, both formal and technological, that organize the desire of the subject and account for the structuring of that desire. But it is not Freud, but rather Lacan's account of the relation between the imaginary and the symbolic that Mulvey follows.

The implications of this choice must be addressed at the risk of oversimplifying Lacan's thought. Lacan's account of the processes of identification and subject formation are often more deterministic than Freud's. Each stage of the formation of the ego, from the mirror stage to the dissolution of the castration and Oedipus complexes, is driven by a process of dialectical incorporation. As Miriam Hansen points out, "... in Lacanian models of spectatorship scopis desire is conceptually inseparable from voyeurism, fetishism and, thus, the regime of castration. Not that these are unrelated or free of determinism in Freud. The Freudian speculation, however, does not posit earlier stages of psychic development as always already negated by later ones, in a Hegelian sense of *'Aufhebung'* which Lacan assimilated to psychoanalysis."¹⁰ Alternatively, as I hope to demonstrate in greater depth in Chapters Three and Four, Freud understands the relation between the drives and their representatives as causally and temporally more complex, fragile, and historically mobile. In sum, terms that Freud develops on the basis of shifting "polarities" [*Polarität*] are simultaneously divided and linked through the mechanism of Lacan's dialectic. Moreover, Mulvey has specific reasons for preferring Lacan's scenario of negation even if she thereby

fixes Freud's polarities in a system of binary division: to preserve an image of the female body as a site of negativity that can erode rather than sustain the security of the male look.

Returning to Mulvey's argument, some of the assumptions characterizing the long citation above can now be reconsidered. The best place to begin is with the following pairs of oppositions:

male	female
active	passive
scopophilia	narcissism

I have already suggested two cautions in my discussion of primary narcissism. First, the strict distinction between what is "male" and what is "female" in processes of identification is undoubtedly the trickiest problem in reading Freud and should be approached with great caution. And where film theory wishes to sustain the analogy between Lacan's mirror stage and the "primary identification" organized by the cinematographic apparatus, additional care is called for. There is no doubt that sexual difference plays an important role in Lacan's account, both explicitly and symptomatically. But the *a priori* alignment of scopophilia and narcissism with active and passive aims on one hand, and maleness and femaleness on the other, is not clear. None of Freud's texts on sexual difference suggests an unequivocal distinctiveness between maleness and femaleness in this relation as I will make more clear in a moment. Second, if primary narcissism formulates an identification whose visual structure supports pleasure in looking, this structure implicitly contains both active and passive components. It is maintained not only in the *act* of the look, but also in the *return* of the look from the imaginary other who verifies the apparent corporeal and psychical integrity of the "I" of the subject. Pleasure in looking contains both passive *and* active forms. Mulvey implies as much in the passage cited above, especially in the reference to "fetishistic scopophilia" which in her schema would have both "active" scopophilic and "passive" fetishistic components.

Similarly, for Mulvey the avoidance of castration anxiety (unpleasure), is made possible by two distinctive types of looking:

active	passive
voyeurism	fetishistic scopophilia
sadism	?

There is an implicit blind spot here. For example, Mulvey defines fetishism as an overvaluation of the object, a point Freud would support. But he would also add that this phenomenon is one of the fundamental sources of authority defined as passive submission to the object: in sum, *masochism*.¹¹ Why is the relation of masochism to "fetishistic scopophilia" elided in Mulvey's essay?

Her emphasis considers the structure of the look not only in terms of the pleasure it allows, but also in how it organizes relations of power and control in and through narrative form. This claim, as powerful as it is provocative, deserves greater theoretical elaboration. Within Mulvey's thesis, though, the structure of the look is based on two givens: it is fundamentally a source of control or mastery and as a product of patriarchal society it is fundamentally masculine. The concept of masochism is deferred by the political nature of her argument. She wishes, justly I believe, neither to underestimate the extensiveness of a "masculinization" of point of view in the cinema, nor does she want to equate femaleness with masochism.

No one will have missed the reference to Freud in naming this section "pleasure and its discontents." But the nature of that "discontent" has yet to be explicitly addressed. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* [*Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930a)] Freud himself uses the word *Unbehagen*, more aptly translated as discomfort, uneasiness, or restlessness. The idea of pleasure [*Lust*], then, is inseparable from this uneasiness [*Unlust*] as Mulvey herself implies in her discussion of castration anxiety. Nonetheless, Mulvey's account, and in fact most contemporary film theory follows her in this, is relatively unwelcoming to Freud's own complex remarks in the case histories on the restlessness of identification and the contradictoriness of desire that traverses and problematizes any strict binary distinction between "maleness"/"femaleness" and activity/passivity.¹² My own view is that the most productive area for a turn to Freud in film theory is to derive a theory of signification from the Freudian theory of phantasy. This theory would first have to account for permutations in the signification of the look in relation to the variations and shiftings of the subject and object of enunciation as transactions in sexual difference. Secondly, I would caution that although this theory could describe *possibilities* of cinematic identification, its claims for the positions adopted by any spectator would be purely speculative. Mulvey has undoubtedly helped to lay the groundwork for such a theory but her own considerations are deficient on several points. For example, Mulvey discusses the male star as an object of the look but denies him the function of an erotic object for either the female or male spectator.¹³ Because Mulvey considers the look to be essentially active in its aims, identification with the male protagonist is only considered from a point of view that associates it with a sense of omnipotence and of assuming control in the narrative. She makes no distinction between identification and object-choice where active sexual aims may be directed towards the male figure nor does she consider the signification of authority in the male figure from the point of view of an economy of masochism. On the other hand, her discussion of the female figure is restricted only to its function as a male object-choice. In this manner, the place of maleness is discussed as both the subject and the object of the gaze (though only in a restricted fashion) and femaleness is

discussed only as an object structuring the male look according to its active (voyeuristic) and passive (fetishistic) forms. In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" the vicissitudes of identification—whether in its pleasurable or anxious forms, or whether it involves taking the other as an object (scopophilia) or identifying with attributes of a more perfect other (narcissism)—is reserved for the male alone, despite the suggestion of distinctive male and female forms. Where is the place of the female subject in this scenario?

In order to unravel this problem, or at least clarify its contours, here again is Mulvey's schema as I have reconsidered it:

male	female
active	passive
object-libido	ego-libido
scopophilia [object-choice]	narcissism identification]
voyeurism	fetishistic scopophilia
sadism	[masochism]
masculine unconscious	?

In this context Mulvey must be questioned, as she herself questions Freud, as to whether or not "anatomy is destiny." In her schema psychological subjects and the libidinal economies that characterize them are typed according to a bodily definition of sexual difference. In other words, when describing the organization and the economy of the scopic drive, the sets of oppositions defining psychological characteristics are implicitly derived from biological difference. However, it would be too easy and undoubtedly unfair to Mulvey's sensitive and powerful reading of Freud to write off her argument as promoting a biological essentialism. Rather her argument is searching to define the specificity of the female body as the locus of a repressed yet articulate being. Recognition of this body and the representations proper to it, would thus enable both the recognition of a subjectivity so far elided under patriarchy and the overthrow of the discursive and social practices that censor this subjectivity.¹⁴ In short, Mulvey discovers in the patriarchal construction of an image of the female body the materials for negation and critique that allow new possibilities of subjectivity and desire.

Freud's own texts, from the *Studies on Hysteria* (1895d) to *The New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1933a), are marked by a certain ambivalence in this respect to which the comment about anatomy and destiny will always bear witness. Similarly, Freud's anthropological and phylogenetic arguments, with their suggestion of a primitive memory of sexual difference and the universality of a patriarchal social life, must be regarded with a high degree of suspicion.¹⁵ Alternatively, Freud's lifelong

reflection on femininity and female sexuality led him to profoundly question the idea of a biological or instinctual determination of sexual difference. This is indeed where the theory of "instincts" and the theory of the drives diverge. Especially in the case histories, questions of sexual difference, femininity and masculinity, and homosexualities, are understood as highly complex yet not the least determined by inherent biological factors. This is after all the same Freud who was hooted by the Vienna society of physicians in 1886 for suggesting the possibility of "male" hysteria.

Freud was always uncomfortable with the concept of biological determinism in speaking about sexual difference and cautioned against it in several essays. For example, in a footnote to *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud writes:

We are accustomed to say that every human being displays both male and female instinctual impulses, needs and attributes; but though anatomy, it is true, can point out the characteristic of maleness and femaleness, psychology cannot. For psychology the contrast between the sexes fades away into one between activity and passivity [that is, in describing the organization of the drives], in which we far too readily identify activity with maleness and passivity with femaleness, a view which is by no means universally confirmed. . . . However this may be, if we assume that it is a fact that each individual seeks to satisfy both male and female wishes in his sexual life, we are prepared for the possibility that those [two sets of] demands are not fulfilled by the same object, and that they interfere with each other unless they can be kept apart and each impulse guided into a particular channel that is suited to it.¹⁶

Above and beyond the inherent complexities of his arguments, the contradictory responses to Freud's views on sexual difference are explained by the variety of the situations referred to in his use of the terms *Männlichkeit* and *Weiblichkeit*. Freud understood at least three different senses of the distinction between "maleness" and "femaleness"—biological, psychological and cultural—and accepted that their interrelation was by no means univocal or unproblematic. Moreover, these three senses are only profitably understood by identifying how they are inscribed in the material representations that serve patriarchal ideology as its raw materials.

There is a passage in "Instincts and their Vicissitudes" that illuminates Mulvey's reading of Freud in this respect. Towards the end of the essay, Freud asserts that the fundamental polarities of mental life are subject (ego)-object (external world), pleasure-unpleasure, and active-passive. When describing the interaction between these polarities—which precisely define the economy of identification—Freud warns that relations of activity and passivity must not be confounded with the relation of the subject (ego) and the object (external world). For the psychical life of the ego is always

characterized by a complex of active and passive relations motivated by its reception of and reaction to perceptual information. Moreover, the drives are inherently always active in their aims. To the extent that psychological significations are attached to the meaning of masculinity and femininity in relation to activity and passivity, they do not define mutually exclusive sets of oppositions and are always the product of a historical and social variability. Similarly, there could never be a unilateral response between object and subject when identification takes place.

The rigor of Mulvey's binary schema for describing the relation of the drives to the representation of sexual difference therefore belies the complexity of Freud's thought. The density of contradiction in which the *significations* of feminine and masculine are circulated in our culture is thereby confused in Mulvey's analysis with the related but nevertheless separate problem of *identification* in Freud. Similarly, Mulvey's schema collapses when any one of the three senses of sexual distinction in Freud are systematically applied. Why would this be so? The contradictions of Mulvey's argument derive from an implied ontological definition of feminine identity and the feminine body as the requirement for her theory of political modernism. If the possibility of a "female unconscious" is a question mark in her essay, it is because the potential for a feminine subjectivity and desire will only be defined by a feminist counter-cinema that will arise through the negation of Hollywood codes of looking and visual pleasure. In her essay, that possibility rests in the very representations of the female body formulated in Hollywood cinema as an uncanny, "alien presence" that must be contained or mastered.

The clearest way of understanding this aspect of Mulvey's essay is to examine her division of film form into narrative and spectacle. The former is aligned with the vicissitude of sadism and the latter with fetishism as exemplified in the films of Alfred Hitchcock and Joseph von Sternberg. Following the counter-cinema argument, if Hollywood narrative relies on conventions of linearity, continuity, and depth illusion no less than pleasurable looking, then for Mulvey the imaging of the female body "tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation. This alien presence then has to be integrated into cohesion with the narrative" (VP 11). The conventions of Hollywood cinema are understood as an agonistic relation between coherence and contradiction, movement and stasis, containment and erosion. The imaging of the female body always threatens to disrupt the linearity, continuity, and cohesion of the narrative. Mulvey refers to it as a momentary "no-man's land" outside of the temporal and spatial coherence of the narrative. Similarly, the effort to eroticize and fetishize the female star by fragmenting her body in close-up "destroys the Renaissance space, the illusion of depth demanded by the narrative, it gives flatness, the quality of a cut-out or icon rather than verisimilitude to the screen" (VP 12).

The organization of looking around the female body thus preserves an anti-realist space and the potential for a narrative, political modernism. Moreover, Sternberg and Hitchcock are not "symptoms" in this respect; instead they are models, straining the envelope of narrative coherence and pointing the way to a possible counter-cinema. Through an overvaluation of the image, Sternberg's films stress pictorial rather than narrative values. He deemphasizes depth illusion, stresses the flatness of the screen, stages non-linear plots, and, most importantly, refuses to mediate the look through the agency of the male protagonist: "for him the pictorial space enclosed by the frame is paramount rather than narrative or identification processes" (VP 14). Alternatively, the interest of Hitchcock for Mulvey is that he foregrounds erotic looking, making it central to the plot. He portrays the processes of identification associated with the look in a way that reveals their perverse origins. In Hitchcock's films, "erotic involvement with the look is disorientating; the spectator's fascination is turned against him as the narrative carries him through and entwines him with the processes that he is himself exercising" (VP 16). In sum, for Mulvey the look of the camera and of the spectator are subordinated in Hollywood cinema to the narrative organization of point of view and its requirements of unity, coherence, linearity, depth illusion, and diegetic verisimilitude. On one hand, "the look of the audience is denied as an intrinsic force," but on the other, "the female image as a castration threat constantly endangers the unity of the diegesis and bursts through the world of illusion as an intrusive, static, one-dimensional fetish" (VP 18). Thus the binary schema of Mulvey's analysis really begins with the structured oppositions of the counter-cinema argument, mapping them back onto Freud to build a theory of identification and distancing that will "free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics, passionate detachment" (VP 18).¹⁷ The entire essay is organized according to the question of the specificity of the female body-image, rather than the specificity of the female look or feminine identification. In turn, questions of signification and identification in film are structured by a system of binary division and exclusion devolving from that body.

In Freudian theory, however, the relation of the body to the drives is not governed by such a straightforward binary logic. Instead, Freud draws a complex picture of the relations that attach the aims of the drives to systems of representation. In "Instincts and their Vicissitudes," for example, Freud suggests a classification of drive-components that defines their aims and objects according to both active and passive forms. Here masculinity and femininity are defined solely as psychological and cultural distinctions. In addition, the distribution of terms in Freud's instinctual theory is neither static nor immutable. It relies, in fact, on a mobility where given terms exchange places and functions within the structure of their division. Thus

the fundamental vicissitudes for Freud are the reversal of a component into its opposite and the turning around of a drive upon the subject's own self. The examples he gives are especially apposite to Mulvey's analysis. The paired opposites Freud uses to explain the reversal of a form into its opposite are *voyeurism* (desire in looking)/*exhibitionism* (desire in being looked at); for the turning around of a form upon the subject's own self Freud uses the pair *sadism* (desire in controlling or hurting an other)/*masochism* (desire to be controlled or hurt). Thus Mulvey draws upon Freud's schema only to substitute fetishism for exhibitionism, and to exclude masochism. And where her schema is marked by a logic of binary opposition, Freud characterizes the mutability of his pairs as "ambivalence."

Once again the forms that channel the drives are understood to be active and passive by turns rather than being fixed immutably in their oppositions. Paradoxically, despite the power and the suggestiveness of her argument, Mulvey's thesis ultimately falters by imagining the female subject through the binary logic of the counter-cinema argument. And if the female subject becomes somewhat unimaginable in this context, it is not only because of difficulties in Freudian thought. In Mulvey's analysis the spectating subject is forcibly the male subject. When Mulvey defines the look according to its objective and subjective, as well as active and passive, relations, it is a look made for the male subject. Consequently, the only place for the female subject in her scenario is as an object defined in the receiving end of the glance or as the unrealized possibility of a counter-cinema. Her pairing of voyeurism and fetishism is also interesting in this respect because it is inconsistent with Freud's own schema.¹⁸ Unlike exhibitionism, fetishism is not precisely a passive form of looking. Rather, it is better characterized by another vicissitude—repression. In this manner, a contradictory belief is set up within the ego in which the evidence of castration is elided. The ego is split into two epistemological scenes—one where the woman is phallic and undifferentiated and the other where she is understood to be without a penis.¹⁹ The playing down of masochism is also interesting in Mulvey's essay. However, rather than being a misreading, this is better understood as a point necessitated by her political position. She hesitates—and not without justification—to characterize the position of the female subject as masochistic. This would define woman's place in representation solely as an object of aggression. Moreover, if she were to delimit a place for the female subject in this schema her logic would require that woman's relationship to representation, and to desire organized in representation, would of necessity be defined as masochistic economy.

But the question still remains: where is woman's place? Mulvey speaks of a male unconscious but a female unconscious takes place in her analysis only as an absence, a negativity defining castration and the not-masculine, or as a yet unrealized possibility. If the code of the look may be understood as a

figure conjoining identification, desire, and the "phantasmization" of narrative as many theorists have suggested, what is the place and the function of the female subject with respect to this structure? How does this structure condition the possibility and even the knowledge of her desire through the politics of inclusion and exclusion so characteristic of the power relations of the classic, narrative text?