

2011

## 'THE DOWNWARD PATH': THE SEDUCTION OF THE SPECTATOR IN AMERICAN SILENT FILM HISTORIOGRAPHY

Cristian M. Melchiorre

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/digitizedtheses>

---

### Recommended Citation

Melchiorre, Cristian M., "THE DOWNWARD PATH': THE SEDUCTION OF THE SPECTATOR IN AMERICAN SILENT FILM HISTORIOGRAPHY" (2011). *Digitized Theses*. 3518.  
<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/digitizedtheses/3518>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Digitized Special Collections at Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Digitized Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact [wlsadmin@uwo.ca](mailto:wlsadmin@uwo.ca).

**'THE DOWNWARD PATH':  
THE SEDUCTION OF THE SPECTATOR  
IN  
AMERICAN SILENT FILM HISTORIOGRAPHY**

(Spine title: 'The Downward Path')

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

**Cristian M. Melchiorre**

2  
Graduate Program  
in  
Theory and Criticism

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada  
September 2011

© Cristian M. Melchiorre 2011

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO  
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

**CERTIFICATE OF EXAMINATION**

Supervisor

Dr. Christopher Keep

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Tilottama Rajan

Examiners

Dr. Joel Faflak

Dr. Janelle S. Blankenship

Dr. Tobias Nagl

Dr. Paul Moore

The thesis by

**Cristian M. Melchiorre**

entitled:

**'The Downward Path': The Seduction of the Spectator  
in American Silent Film Historiography**

is accepted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Date

Chair of the Thesis Examination Board

## Abstract

In an attempt to approach the persistent gravity of the classical Hollywood film spectator as an indicator of its hegemonic populism, the dissertation conceives of the historiography of the silent era as a melodramatic seduction plot. Seeking to rise to the methodological challenge posed by early cinema, Freud's seduction theory (as it has been elaborated by Jean Laplanche) is proposed as an alternative psychoanalytic model of cultural incorporation, to provide the frame to consider the constitution of the film populism of classical Hollywood spectatorship as a series of decisive historical encounters with the alterity of film's monstrative address. In an exploration of the bodies of work of film scholars including Linda Williams, Tom Gunning, Ben Brewster, Miriam Hansen and Mary Ann Doane, this project posits a dialectical itinerary to reimagine the transition from attractions to (narrative) seduction, and to rethink the way that the monstration of cinema (and its cultural hypostases) comes to invade the intimacy of the spectatorial interior. It reconsiders the decisive conflicts of American silent film's infancy against the screen of analyses of early American Mutoscope and Biograph Company peepshows and the silent films of Cecil B. DeMille, Rudolph Valentino, and Louise Brooks.

## Keywords

Film Spectatorship; Film Historiography; Film Theory; Silent Film; Early Cinema; Melodrama; Cinema of Attractions; Film Monstration; Transitional Cinema; Psychoanalysis; Seduction Theory; Jean Laplanche; Judith Butler; Film Bodies; Sex Appeal; *Traffic in Souls* (1913); *The Downward Path* (1900); *The Picture the*

*Photographer Took* (1904); *The Ten Commandments* (1923); *Cobra* (1925); *Pandora's Box* (1929); Cecil B. DeMille; Rudolph Valentino; Louise Brooks; Tom Gunning; Miriam Hansen; Linda Williams; Ben Brewster; Mary Ann Doane; Christian Metz.

## Acknowledgements

While this dissertation will take as its main theme the *acknowledgment* of alterity in the theory of the film spectator, I would like to begin by acknowledging particular others in my life who have fundamentally marked the path of this research, and so who deserved to be named. But I should begin with the acknowledgment of one who will, it seems, forever be nameless. In the first week of January 2010, long after the trope of *invasion* came to have a central place in my research, and in what was supposed to be the final year of my doctorate, the door of my home was broken open while my partner and I were out, and we were robbed. Sadly, among the belongings taken were my laptop computer and my backup drive, which housed the entirety of my dissertation writing and much of my digitized research materials. I would like to thank my dissertation supervisor Dr. Christopher Keep, my second advisor Dr. Tilottama Rajan, and the director of the Theory Centre, Dr. Veronica Schild for supporting the completion of this project in the aftermath of this substantial setback.

I would also like to acknowledge the help of Christel Schmidt at the Library of Congress who helped me obtain copies of my research materials from the Paper Print Collection (*The Downward Path, The Picture the Photographer Took, Behind the Screen, One Way to Take a Girl's Picture, and As Seen on the Curtain*). I would also like to thank Nancy Kaufman at the George Eastman House who helped me work through their collection of promotional stills of Cecil B. DeMille productions. Unfortunately, as all this material had been scanned and digitized, it was lost in the theft, and did not make it (directly) into the dissertation that follows.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Nicholas Balaisis, Dr. Gregory Brophy, Shana MacDonald, Dana Broadbent, Justin Keith, Mitch Smolkin, Sylwia Szymanska, Nathan and Lynda Gotlieb, Dr. Richard B. Simpson, Dr. Richard Dellamora and my family for all their love and support.

Most of all I want to thank the true love of my life, and my future wife, Lisa Adele Gotlieb. She has invaded me most deeply, and without that inspiration this dissertation would not have come to fruition. This dissertation is dedicated to her.

## Table of Contents

	Page
Certificate of Examination	ii
Abstract & Keywords	iii
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Figures	viii
<b>Introduction. The Hypostatic Charge: Spectatorship after the Challenge of Film Historiography</b>	1
The Classical Spectator: Our Long-Suffering Whipping Boy	1
The Look that Leaves a Residue: Walter Benjamin, Film Aura and the 'Modernity Thesis'	9
Seduction and the Hypostasis of the Film Spectator	16
The Seduction Plot of the Film Spectator	23
<b>Chapter One. Planted Kisses: Seduction and the Infancy of Spectatorship</b>	33
The Film Body of Linda Williams	35
The Seduction Plot of the Film Spectator: <i>The Kiss</i> as Primal Scene	41
"This Silence Might be Meant for You": <i>The Infans</i> of Film Melodrama	58
<b>Chapter Two. The Youth the Moving Picture Took: The Scandal of Early Cinema</b>	64
The Attraction of Tom Gunning	67
A Child is Being Watched: Münsterberg and the Perils of Early Film Spectatorship	84
The Seduction Plot of the Film Spectator: The Transitional 'Latency' of the Attraction	94
The Wayward Gaze: The Monstrator-Seducer of the Feature Film in <i>Traffic in Souls</i>	100
<b>Chapter Three. From Attraction(s) to Seduction: The Melodramatic Compromise of Hollywood Fantasia</b>	108
The Melodramatic Anachronism: Revisiting the Conservatism of the Theatrical Inheritance	111
The Seduction Plot of the Film Spectator: The Attraction as the Repressed of Classical Narrative Cinema	118
From the Situation to "A Scene at the 'Movies'": The Emergence of Hollywood Fantasia	123
The Inside Out: DeMille's Hollywood Fantasia	135

<b>Chapter Four. The Populism of <i>IT</i>: Film Stars and the Birth of Sex Appeal</b>	150
Hansen's 'Blue Flower': Stars and Hollywood Hegemony	152
The Seduction Plot of the Film Spectator: <i>Photogenie</i> as Hypostatic Elaboration	161
'Confusion of Tongues': Rudolph Valentino and the Translational Scene	167
<b>Chapter Five. Melodramatizing Visual Pleasure: The "New Woman" of the Gaze</b>	187
<i>Back In Suicide Hall</i> : The Legacy of Film Seduction	187
The New Woman of the Plastic Age: Spectatorship Theory and the Melodramatic Mode	189
Lulu in Danger: The Seduction Plot of the Film Spectator	203
<b>Conclusion. Screen Memories?: The Afterlife of Seduction and the Intimacies of Hollywood Fantasia</b>	222
Too Early! Too Late!: Early Freud Reads Early Cinema...After Freud, After Cinema	222
That Downward Path: Plotting Seduction	225
The Penetralia of the Cinema: Hollywood Fantasia and the Intimacy of Film Populism	231
<b>Bibliography</b>	233
<b>Vita</b>	249



## List of Figures

<b>Fig. I.01</b>	<i>Son of the Sheik</i> , 1926, Feature Productions.	3
<b>Fig. I.02</b>	<i>The Cheeky Book Agent</i> , 1900, American Mutoscope and Biograph Co..	24
<b>Fig. I.03</b>	<i>She Ran Away with the City Man</i> , 1900, American Mutoscope and Biograph Co..	25
<b>Fig. I.04</b>	<i>Girl Who Went Astray</i> , 1900, American Mutoscope and Biography Co..	27
<b>Fig. I.05</b>	<i>The New Soubrette</i> , 1900, American Mutoscope and Biography Co..	28
<b>Fig. I.06</b>	<i>In Suicide Hall</i> , 1900, American Mutoscope and Biography Co..	30
<b>Fig. 1.01</b>	<i>The Kiss</i> , 1896, The Edison Company.	45
<b>Fig. 1.02</b>	<i>The Kiss</i> , 1896, The Edison Company.	46
<b>Fig. 2.01</b>	<i>As Seen on the Curtain</i> , 1904 American Mutoscope and Biography Co..	73
<b>Fig. 2.02</b>	<i>As Seen on the Curtain</i> , 1904 American Mutoscope and Biography Co..	73
<b>Fig. 2.03</b>	<i>Behind the Screen</i> , 1904, American Mutoscope and Biography Co..	74
<b>Fig. 2.04</b>	<i>Behind the Screen</i> , 1904, American Mutoscope and Biography Co..	75
<b>Fig. 2.05</b>	<i>Picture the Photographer Took</i> , 1904, American Mutoscope and Biography Co..	78
<b>Fig. 2.06</b>	<i>Picture the Photographer Took</i> , 1904, American Mutoscope and Biography Co..	79
<b>Fig. 2.07</b>	<i>One Way of Taking a Girl's Picture</i> , 1904, American Mutoscope and Biography Co..	80

<b>Fig. 2.08</b>	<i>One Way of Taking a Girl's Picture</i> , 1904, American Mutoscope and Biograph Co..	81
<b>Fig. 2.09</b>	<i>Traffic in Souls</i> , 1913, Universal Pictures.	103
<b>Fig. 2.10</b>	<i>Traffic in Souls</i> , 1913, Universal Pictures.	104
<b>Fig. 3.01</b>	<i>Male and Female</i> , 1919, Famous Players-Lasky.	130
<b>Fig. 3.02</b>	<i>Male and Female</i> , 1919, Famous Players-Lasky.	130
<b>Fig. 3.03</b>	<i>Male and Female</i> , 1919, Famous Players-Lasky.	131
<b>Fig. 3.04</b>	<i>Male and Female</i> , 1919, Famous Players-Lasky.	132
<b>Fig. 3.05</b>	<i>The Whispering Chorus</i> , 1918, Jesse Lasky.	141
<b>Fig. 3.06</b>	<i>The Whispering Chorus</i> , 1918, Jesse Lasky.	141
<b>Fig. 3.07</b>	<i>The Ten Commandments</i> , 1923, Famous Players-Lasky.	146
<b>Fig. 4.01</b>	<i>Blood and Sand</i> , 1922, Paramount Pictures.	169
<b>Fig. 4.02</b>	<i>Cobra</i> , 1925, Paramount Pictures.	170
<b>Fig. 4.03</b>	<i>The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse</i> , 1921, Metro Pictures Corporation.	173
<b>Fig. 4.04</b>	<i>The Young Rajah</i> , 1922, Paramount Pictures.	175
<b>Fig. 4.05</b>	<i>Blood and Sand</i> , 1922, Paramount Pictures.	176
<b>Fig. 4.06</b>	<i>The Sheik</i> , 1921, Paramount Pictures.	177
<b>Fig. 4.07</b>	<i>Cobra</i> , 1925, Paramount Pictures.	179
<b>Fig. 4.08</b>	<i>Cobra</i> , 1925, Paramount Pictures.	179
<b>Fig. 4.09</b>	<i>Cobra</i> , 1925, Paramount Pictures.	181
<b>Fig. 4.10</b>	<i>Cobra</i> , 1925, Paramount Pictures.	181

<b>Fig. 4.11</b>	<i>Cobra</i> , 1925, Paramount Pictures.	183
<b>Fig. 4.12</b>	<i>Cobra</i> , 1925, Paramount Pictures.	183
<b>Fig. 5.01</b>	<i>It</i> , 1927, Paramount Pictures.	195
<b>Fig. 5.02</b>	<i>It</i> , 1927, Paramount Pictures.	196
<b>Fig. 5.03</b>	<i>Prix de Beauté</i> , 1930, SOFAR Films.	199
<b>Fig. 5.04</b>	<i>Prix de Beauté</i> , 1930, SOFAR Films.	200
<b>Fig. 5.05</b>	<i>Beggars of Life</i> , 1928, Paramount Pictures.	209
<b>Fig. 5.06</b>	<i>Beggars of Life</i> , 1928, Paramount Pictures.	209
<b>Fig. 5.07</b>	<i>Beggars of Life</i> , 1928, Paramount Pictures.	211
<b>Fig. 5.08</b>	<i>Beggars of Life</i> , 1928, Paramount Pictures.	211
<b>Fig. 5.09</b>	<i>Pandora's Box</i> , 1929, Nero-Film.	214
<b>Fig. 5.10</b>	<i>Pandora's Box</i> , 1929, Nero-Film.	215
<b>Fig. 5.11</b>	<i>Pandora's Box</i> , 1929, Nero-Film.	215
<b>Fig. 5.12</b>	<i>Pandora's Box</i> , 1929, Nero-Film.	216
<b>Fig. 5.13</b>	<i>Diary of a Lost Girl</i> , 1929, G.W. Pabst.	218
<b>Fig. 5.14</b>	<i>Diary of a Lost Girl</i> , 1929, G.W. Pabst.	218
<b>Fig. 5.15</b>	<i>Diary of a Lost Girl</i> , 1929, G.W. Pabst.	219
<b>Fig. 5.16</b>	<i>Diary of a Lost Girl</i> , 1929, G.W. Pabst.	219

**Introduction**  
**The Hypostatic Charge:**  
**Spectatorship after the Challenge of Film Historiography**

The Classical Spectator: Our Long-Suffering Whipping Boy

In one of the most unforgettable images of the silent age, Rudolph Valentino is hanging from the bars of his jail cell, strung up by his wrists, having been beaten (Figure I.01). For film scholars, this scene is also significant as one of those presented by the late Miriam Hansen in the last section of her influential book on the American silent era, *Babel & Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*. In it she argues that the spectacle of suffering and sacrifice of the ethnically and sexually ambiguous body of Valentino functioned like a monstrative supplement to the universalist, Babelian project of Hollywood film: the exception that both proved, and questioned, the rule. The sadomasochism of this scene, she argued, expressed the complexities of feminine spectatorial cross-identification with respect to the star and hero: “[t]he deepest, most effective layer of the Valentino persona is that of the whipping boy” (*Babel* 287). As an exemplary work of the turn to early cinema in film studies in the 1980s (her first essay on Valentino was published in 1986), Hansen works through the silent era to test and to critique the dominant theories of film history and spectatorship which privileged classical Hollywood film.<sup>1</sup> I open with this scene because it brings together a number of themes of the research that will follow, including the critical encounter between spectatorship theory and film historiography. It also introduces the ‘emblematic mode’, which will be important to us: first, because of the silent era’s melodramatic tendency to condense its

---

<sup>1</sup> Hansen, Miriam. “Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship.” *Cinema Journal*. 25.4 (Summer 1986): 6-32. Print.

scenes into gestural *tableaux*, and *dramatis personae*; and second, the scene's treatment by Hansen reflects a *theoretico-critical* rhetorical operation in film studies, in which theoretical debates (and culture wars) become waged as fights over the meaning of particular moments, scenes, figures, and bodies in the history of cinema. Finally, I would suggest that the suffering Valentino seems an apt (if hyperbolic) emblem for the fate (or perhaps, the afterlife) of the theory of the classical Hollywood spectator. Beyond the platonic reference to a tethered viewer that the scene screens (so important for Baudry), like Valentino the theory of the classical spectator had a relatively short, though influential career; and like Valentino, the classical spectator, lived in infamy and died before its time, only to be ritually revived as an ever-present sacrificial monument to the progress of the film studies past its first era: the theory of the classical film spectator, a whipping boy?

Citing words which Hansen used to describe Valentino, we might say: "[t]o use a cliché, he became a floating signifier for temporarily antagonistic discourses" (*Babel* 267). Tom Gunning uses a similar figure while critiquing the history of classical film: "[w]hile all this [critique of the classical mode] may seem like beating a dead horse... I want to emphasize the key role narrative played in the linear conception of cinema's history" ("Whole" 189). Is there anything left to consider in this beaten (if beautiful) old horse? And does Gunning's phrase reflect some deeper (if disavowed) intimacy between film historiography and its beaten foe? In beginning this path back down the road of the classical spectator, I will place the debate within film studies over the status of the spectator within its melodramatic context, going back to the first years of moving pictures. I will contend that what made the concept of the spectator so *seductive* for film

theory in its heyday (that it provided film theorists a forum to work out broad cultural theories and themes) is an index of the fact that, going back to the first thirty years of the moving pictures, the spectator of American film was itself the site of a seduction. The fact spectatorship theory emerged as a cultural psychoanalysis is not simply a kind of wrong path in the development of film studies: beyond the manifold positions that developed in the terms of the psychoanalytically informed debates, the paradigm itself reflected the fact that as a cultural movement the cinema had, from its beginnings, invaded the spectatorial interior.



**Figure I.01** The Classical Spectator: A Whipping Boy? (*Son of Sheik*, 1926, Feature Productions)

In the last twenty-five years, spectatorship theory of the 70s and 80s, which helped establish film studies as a discipline, has found itself apparently unseated from this foundational position. Psychoanalysis had been usefully commandeered by film

scholars (like Baudry, Metz, Mulvey, Heath, etc.) as a libidinal supplement to fill the semiotic gap in the film system (in its precarious status, as Metz discovered, as a “language without a system”), and, given this, to account for the depth and gravity of film as a popular form of art and entertainment (Metz *Film* 65).<sup>2</sup> However, in doing so, these scholars implicitly introduced its model of the spectator as a theory of sexuality in modern culture. Here, metapsychology was taken as a prescriptive anthropology, and projected *tout court* onto the scene of film spectatorship. For a generation of scholars then, the monolithic spectator and its discontents became *the* disciplinary touchstone (and subsequently, the sacrificial ‘wicker man’) of film studies.

Critics have provocatively leveled the charge that the spectator posited by this theory is an unspecified, abstraction separated from any historical specificity. Indeed, this has been one of the loudest accusations against psychoanalysis in film theory; that is to say, as an epistemology, it is itself a kind of narcissistic conceptual structure that has the

---

<sup>2</sup> We can distinguish between three different theoretical strategies within the history of spectatorship theory that sought to deal with the Lacanian “fact” of the lack in the cinematic Symbolic (that the big Other of film language does not exist): theorists of the filmic Imaginary, Symbolic and the Real. Figures like Baudry and Metz (in his work of the mid-70s) focused on Imaginary or “perverse” regressions that the cinematic apparatus presupposes and provokes. This structured Imaginary identification offers the spectator the possibility of the ideal perspective of the passive voyeur. Secondly, understood from the perspective of the Symbolic (with Oudart, Heath and Silverman), the illusion of the cinema is not created by a nostalgic return to an enveloping plenitude, but by placing the subject in a relation of Symbolic suspense (i.e., by amplifying the aphanis of the subject): by identifying with the gaze of the camera the subject is superimposing its lack onto the lack in the Symbolic as Big Other. Finally, Copjec, McGowan and Žižek have emphasized the cinema’s potential for encountering the trauma of the Lacanian Real. They point out that Lacan’s theory of the gaze, as outlined in *Seminar 11*, does not emphasize the illusion of scopic mastery, nor the gaze of a Big (Br)Other who would see all, but rather presents the gaze as an encounter with anxiety: a smudge of the impossible-Real within the visual field, a surplus *jouissance* which stands for the unsymbolizable maternal Thing. The problem of the internal limit of film is understood on the model of the Real, as an impossible object-cause of the closure of the system.

effect of incessantly reflecting upon itself, to the total abandonment of the cinematic “object” in its specificity. As Gunning has suggested, with the rejection of the “biological schema of infancy and maturity” to understand the development of film history, film historiographers effectively rejected the “simple narrative of a cryptobiological teleology” that stood as the unacknowledged foundation of classical Hollywood spectatorship theory (“Whole” 189). Submitting these theories to cases of historical variation, the reexamination of early cinema, “denaturalis[es]...[the] experience [of the cinema]”, and displaces the hegemonic fiction of what Noël Burch has called narrative film’s “Institutional Mode of Representation [IMR]” (Burch 2).

Since the period of this reassessment began in the mid-1980s, then, spectatorship theory “seems to have become obsolete” (Hansen “Early” 135). Looked at as historical panorama, this historiographic critique asserts that the so-called “gaze theory” presents a retrospective, *hegemonic* view of spectatorship which assumes both a privileged, deracialized, nongendered subject position, and the implicit historical installation of the conventions of narrative cinema: that is, that the infancy of early cinema gave way to the maturity of classical Hollywood. Ironically, given its emphasis on the foundational nature of the infantile years, psychoanalytic film theory (we might say in summation) forgot that the film apparatus has itself gone through constitutional crises in its historical development, and that an ahistorical theory of spectatorship presumes a (mature) film form with its own language.

For scholars still invested in the category of the spectator (as Linda Williams wrote in 1995 in her introduction to *Viewing Positions*) the lesson that has come to light has been that “any theory of spectatorship must now be historically specific, grounded in



the specific spectatorial practices, the specific narratives, and the specific attractions... [of its] viewers" ("Introduction" 18). Now a work of cultural and historical *specification* to give expression to the manifold 'viewing positions', this revised category of the spectator seems less prone to abstraction and speculative reflection. Submitted to the stories of its own development, then, the notion of a univocal, universal spectator that rises above the tumult of historico-cultural contingency, loses its form. The turn toward history, it would seem, implies a turn away from theory, an emptying of the concept of classical film spectatorship *per se*, and the historical singularity of the classical Hollywood cinema that inspired the institution of film studies as a discipline of its own, in the first place. And yet, the erasure or particularization of the category of the film spectator misses the fact that this category was a consistent popular preoccupation within American culture (both in criticism and the films themselves) from its very beginning. Today, given this critical reappraisal and the continued withering of the conditions of cinema-going, we might legitimately ask, *whither the film spectator?*

In the Autumn 2004 issue of the journal *Signs*, a number of the most influential feminist film critics gathered around a series of questions (posed by the editors) addressing the legacy and future possibilities of the feminist orientation for film studies. While a number of prominent critics distanced themselves from, or revised their previous positions, Mary Ann Doane stood out by insisting on the continued militancy of a feminist film theory, as such:

The current tendency to divide and subdivide subjectivities  
in an effort to avoid overgeneralization or totalization  
of the concept of 'woman' rests on the premise that this

impact (of film on society or society on film) is potentially infinitely complex, but nevertheless there, as the substrate of feminist endeavour. The logical outcome of such a process of division, which is ultimately based on the premises of empiricism, is pure particularity, pure idiolect. This approach... risks an aphasia of theory in which nothing can be said. ("Aesthetics" 1231)

While this passage clearly targets precisely the kind of empiricist research that questions the legitimacy of feminist theory, Doane here seems to be addressing herself more specifically to the enterprise of theorizing spectatorship. The tendency to understand "the concept of 'woman'" as a vacant signifier whose identity would be ceaselessly contested and redefined, denies the concrete fact of the preoccupation with gender in the West. Against what we might label with Doane a 'particularist empiricism' she argues (in the earlier "Masquerade Reconsidered: Further Thoughts on the Female Spectator") that "what has to be acknowledged is that there are, in fact, constraints on reading, constraints on spectatorship. Social constraints, sexual constraints, historical constraints. If there were no constraints, there would be no problem, no need for feminist criticism" (*Femmes* 41). Reading these statements together, Doane's defense of the feminist project in film studies is, I would argue, instructive in its emphasis on spectatorship as a cultural legacy of stubborn, enduring constraints. While I would agree, then, that the dialectical return within film studies to its historical "object" announced by film historiography no doubt had to take place so that the ongoing legitimacy of film studies as a discipline might be maintained and deepened, in its *institutionalization* the historical turn has veered,

however, into a descriptive, historicist empiricism. In its most careless forms, historicist empiricism equates the theoretical with the violent imposition of *a priori* transcendentals onto its historical *data*. And yet, as Doane highlights, how might we read the popularity of film, indeed its *populism*, without resorting to some transcendently-informed statement? And if we are to take the nature of this *hegemony* seriously (with the work of Ernesto Laclau in mind) how are we to approach the universalizing tendencies of the cinema itself?<sup>3</sup> In short, at its extreme, historicist empiricism leaves us without any possibility of tackling the question of *how the cinema became 'universal'?* How does it constitute its diverse audience? Even if now, it might be agreed upon that film is not a universal language strictly speaking, how did American silent film come to have this aura?

While the luminaries of the historical school no doubt articulate something fundamentally important about the missed encounter between film theory and film history, the movement towards historicist empiricism threatens to ignore what is at *stake* in its object. I would agree with the historical school that psychoanalytic spectatorship theory has failed to *work through* the history of the spectator *as a cinematic institution*; however, what has not been examined sufficiently is the meaning of cinematic universalism and its entanglement, from its beginnings, with the discourse of sexuality.<sup>4</sup> What is it that allows the spectator to be open to the movement of universalization, and why has this populism been associated with sexuality?

---

<sup>3</sup> Laclau, Ernesto. *On Populist Reason*. New York, NY: Verso, 2007. Print.

<sup>4</sup> As an example of a historically oriented scholar who has attempted to take up this question of populism, we will look at Hansen's notion of "vernacular modernism" in the fourth chapter.

Historiographers (notably Tom Gunning) have cited this “utopian promise” of spectatorship in its first era as one of the inspirations for the revisions of early cinema of the last thirty years.<sup>5</sup> In this vein, therefore, if spectatorship is to be a meaningful theoretical concept for film studies, it cannot be thought of as an empty hegemonic form. Rather than think of spectatorship in terms of the accusation that it is an idealized, pseudo-Cartesian monolith (to be worshipped or flogged), I take it as the flashpoint of a form of populism that was emerging in the teens and twenties, centred on the cinema. It is necessary to find a way of taking seriously the category of a spectatorial universal; we could say, particularly necessary. While, as Doane has suggested, the historical turn seems in danger of a kind of aphasia, we actually find in the major works of film historiography, I argue, a relatively consistent theoretical model of spectatorship to counter the psychoanalytic schemes that had gone before. In the section that follows, I suggest that while film historiography does pose a (crypto)theory of its own spectator, it does not account sufficiently for how this model connects to, or revises how we think of the “classical” spectator.

The Look that Leaves a Residue:  
Walter Benjamin, Film Aura and the ‘Modernity Thesis’

Within the broader Western theoretical tradition, the accusation against spectatorship theory is a version of the old charge of *hypostasis*, i.e., the fallacious substantialization (e.g. the classical spectator) of some negative or accidental condition (e.g. the

---

<sup>5</sup> See his references to the “forgotten future” of the cinema in “Attractions: How They Came into the World” and “The Whole Town’s Gawking: Early Cinema and the Visual Experience of Modernity”.

conventions of “classical” Hollywood).<sup>6</sup> However, at the crucial moments in the historiography of the American silent era, ranging through a number of its foundational works, we find a group of scholars hypostasizing a body *immediately* subject to the conditions of modernity, without cultural mediation or psychic representation.

Historiography itself, I will argue, has an implicit theory of spectatorship, which should be read *as theory* in its response to the spectatorship theory of the 1970s and 80s. Film historiographers like Gunning, Hansen, Singer and Williams engaged with theories of modernity, biopolitics and cultural inscription as a way of combating the ahistoricism of psychoanalytic film theory. Among these historiographers, the work of Walter Benjamin has been crucially influential.<sup>7</sup>

In his famous analogy in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, Benjamin highlights the way cinema “penetrates” the body deeply like a surgeon making an incision in an operation (*Illuminations* 233). In this essay and in “Some Motifs in Baudelaire”, he suggests that cinema, as a cultural form of modernization, breaks down (through the insistent repetition of shock) the contemplative distance that produces an art form’s aura. Cinema’s mode of spectatorship is, thus, discontinuous with that of the contemplative reception within the tradition of Western painting; for Benjamin, the “unconscious optics” of film evokes a tactile, “haptic” mode

---

<sup>6</sup> The charge of hypostasis, the positive substantialization of some negative / accidental condition, haunts the history of metaphysics. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century there is the exemplary case of the German critic Hamann, who accused his colleague Kant of abstracting the *a priori* forms of subjectivity from all historical and linguistic context. What the Kantian *a priori* hypostatized, and therefore excluded, was the “heraldry” of language, which Hamann speaks of in theological terms. Thus, what Kant tries to locate as the “inside” property of the subject, is (for Hamann) visited upon the subject as a spiritual/cultural inheritance. This critique of hypostasis will become important for us going forward.

<sup>7</sup> With the exception here of Williams, whose work is more influenced by Foucault.

of reception. In this sense, film has been part of the movement whereby modernity has affected and modified the human sensorium. Within the historiography of early cinema, Benjamin's thesis on the anti-auratic nature of the film has been taken and consolidated by a group of scholars in what has come to be known as the *modernity thesis*.

Also influenced by Benjamin's work and by French poststructuralism, thinkers (like Crary and Kittler) have developed the theme of film as cultural inscription, placing emphasis not on the content of films, but on the manner in which the film form penetrates and informs the terms of discourse of the moment. Crary has argued that unlike the "centred, ideal, disembodied" visual perspective of art history, the photographic technologies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (including film) presupposed the "carnal density" of vision brought on by the changing conditions of modernity: a spectatorial body not bound up with a "metaphysic of interiority" ("Modernizing" 6, 34, 26).<sup>8</sup> For Crary, the techniques of observation imply a "technology of individuals" in the sense in which Foucault speaks of the *biopolitical* as a form of subjection directly penetrating and investing the spectatorial body (a notion we will explore in our first chapter, as it has been taken up in the work of Linda Williams). In a similar vein, Kittler argues that as a "psychotechnology" cinema "implements its psychic mechanisms itself" rather than reflecting a pre-existing psychic reality (*Gramophone* 159). In the following chapters, we will explore how a number of important works of American film historiography are influenced by Benjamin and the inscription theory that followed his work. As I detail in the discussions to follow, in the Benjaminian theories posed in the historiographic work

---

<sup>8</sup> In her editor's introduction to *Viewing Positions*, Williams affirms Crary's "corporeality of vision" but wonders what its implications might be for gender (7, 20 n.11). See also, Crary's *Techniques of the Observer*.

of Gunning, Singer and Hansen (among others), emphasis is placed on the capacity of film to mark its spectators with its modernity.

What remains dissonant in this anti-auratic perspective, or perhaps we should say, what remains an undeveloped paradox of the silent era for this school of thought, I will argue, is the extent to which the Hollywood mode works within, and develops in terms of psychologization and individualization. As Christine Gledhill has argued of the melodramatic mode, when Hollywood is “[f]aced with the decentred self” it “answers with excessive personalisation, excessive expression” (“Signs” 218). Benjamin famously argues in the canonical version of “The Work of Art” that what passes for aura in the cinema is in fact only a simulation:

[f]ilm responds to the shrivelling of the aura by artificially building up the “personality” outside the studio. The cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves that magic of the personality which has long been no more than the putrid image of its own commodity character (“Work” 261).

While this statement betrays Benjamin’s alignment of the Hollywood star culture with commodity fetishism, it does not reflect the place that he gives to the concept of aura in his thinking. While many film scholars have taken up his anti-auratic pronouncements enthusiastically, few have registered Benjamin’s “ambivalence” to the concept of aura, and the crucial position that the concept occupies for him in his dialectic of experience (Hansen “Blue” 187). The work of Miriam Hansen reflects this ambivalence in an illuminating way. As I explore further in chapter four, her concept of vernacular

modernism is steeped in the Benjaminian anti-auratic view of cinema, but one of the themes of her earlier work is Benjamin's complex relation to aura, and (in *Babel and Babylon*) the crucial role of aura in the history of narrative film spectatorship.

In her early essay "Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: 'The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology'", Hansen follows Benjamin's apparent rejection of aura and his thesis that cinema would be part of the cultural movement of its dissolution but seeks to draw out his deeper ambivalence to the auratic. To make the argument for a more developed and complex relation to aura in Benjamin's work, Hansen makes use of a number of statements from other texts in Benjamin's corpus. In "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire". Benjamin states that "to perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return" (*Illuminations* 188). In this essay, aura is associated with "a look that leaves a residue", and is related to the psychic returns of a Proustian *memoire involontaire*; its disintegration comes about as a result of the tendency in modern life towards the experience of sensorial shock. Benjamin calls upon the late-Freudian doctrine of protective anxiety (which is at great odds with Freud's earlier theory of anxiety as the byproduct of trauma and repression), to understand the fascination of modern shock. She reminds readers that Benjamin defends himself against Adorno's claim that aura is reducible to commodity fetishism as a store of "reified human labor" by asserting that aura was not primarily a result of human work and creation but of some other common attribute (Hansen "Blue" 212). What is in the auratic object (if it is not in labour), for it to be target of human investment, and to thereby sidestep the force of Adorno's charge? For Benjamin, auratic experience is fundamentally connected to the primitive mimetic faculty, which allows humanity to perceive similarities and make



analogies (and which paves the way, for Benjamin, to language as such); and this dialectic of experience in which aura is a product is modeled on the primal intersubjective relation: “experience of the aura thus rests on the transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relationship to the inanimate” (188). Benjamin’s concept of aura is, thus, the place-holder of a traumatic incorporation of alterity; or, perhaps more precisely, we could say that aura is itself a hypostatic projection which indexes some prior traumatic incorporation of alterity. According to Hansen, Benjamin will abandon this position in “The Work of Art” under Adorno’s pressure, “split[ting]...off the element of similarity from his concept of mimesis...attach[ing]...it, as “sense of sameness,” to the masses; he further positivizes it by placing it in diametrical opposition to the aura” (Hansen “Blue” 202). But for Hansen, the auratic residue of the mimetic faculty gets repositioned in Benjamin’s conceptual apparatus, returning under the banner of the optical unconscious.

For Benjamin, the thinker of aura, the act of spectatorship leaves a residue: it has a traumatic aspect the legacy of which is aura. Surprisingly, despite its emphasis on the way that film impresses itself on its spectators, what gets left out of the dominant anti-auratic reception model of Benjamin by film historiography (with the important, if complicated, exception of Hansen, as we will see) is precisely this traumatic legacy of spectatorial subjection, its ‘psychic life’ as Butler has put it. The psychic life of subjectivation implies a breaking down and metabolization which gets “inside” the subject, but which also refers to a long process of oblique returns and repetitions, as the subject reengages with the traumatic over time.<sup>9</sup> For film historiographers to emphasize

---

<sup>9</sup> Butler points out, in her theory of the psychic life of power, that what Foucault called

Benjamin's anti-auratic tendencies without giving fair space to its subsequent 'hyper-auratic' tendencies (like the cult of the star) simply remains an inadequate account of silent era spectatorship. Looking forward, I will suggest the ways that film historiography excludes this spectatorial dialectic of incorporation.

My *modus operandi* for this research is to read these "theorists" with and against themselves; I suggest we take film historiography's own hypostases together as itself a theory of the development of classical spectatorship, and one which must contribute to understanding the theory of the Hollywood spectator. I will argue in the following chapters, that the positing of a spectatorial body directly exposed to the modernity of the film apparatus is a melodramatic repetition of a seduction subplot in the films and criticism going back to the very first years of the moving pictures. As we will see in the chapters that follow, in the press and the popular criticism of the first three decades, the vulnerability of the spectator to the dangers of film was expressed, largely, via the concern over passionate, impressionable spectators being improperly touched by the cinema: the child, the woman, and the immigrant. Like this early discourse of impressionability, the modernity theorists hypostasis of a spectatorial body posits a *realist* event (the encounter with the modernity of film) which impacts upon the spectator: a body which is the object of novel stimulations and disciplinary practices. In other words, the hypostatized 'body' of the spectator is the subject of a traumatic encounter with the 'foreign body' of the film form itself.

---

"'reverse' discourse" simply means that via the passionate attachment to subjection (its political incorporation) "the law turns against itself and spawns versions of itself which oppose and proliferate its animating purposes" (*Psychic Life* 100).

### Seduction and the Hypostasis of the Film Spectator

Taking Gunning's critique of the 'infancy narrative' as a theoretical rebuttal of psychoanalytic theory of classical spectatorship (and not simply a rejection of the legitimacy of the activity of theorizing the spectator) and elaborate upon it, what psychoanalytic film theory lost sight of in the scotoma of retrospection is the enduring legacy of trauma for Freudian theory. In other words, as a cultural theory and ideological schema of sexuality, film theory denied the foundational centrality of trauma in its theory of the spectator, in that it gave no role to cinema other than as a screen, support and (sometimes) dictator of desire: it sutures the subject of sexuality and the cinema, and thereby replays the metaphysical notion that the subject is that which persists and transcends the 'external' or 'accidental' conditions of its appearance. Turning Gunning's formulation around slightly, I suggest that spectatorship theory did not respect its *own* psychoanalytic infancy narrative; in disregarding the discontinuities and repressions of film history, this theory cut itself off from thinking the spectator's unspeakable (*infans*) cinematic inheritance.

If the charge against psychoanalytic film theory revolves around the perceived tendency to hypostatically abstract an unspecified, universal spectator out of its historical particularity, then the 'social' result of this thesis, which is foisted against the apparatus theories, is that film theory misrecognized the influence of cinema, imparting to conditions of spectatorship what was in fact the conditions of a very specific ideology: "[c]lassical cinema establishes itself as a ventriloquist of ideology" (Dayan 191). Psychoanalytic film theory (e.g., Mulvey, Heath, Oudart, Dayan, etc.) risks "reproduc[ing]...a phallic economy on the level of critique" (Hansen *Babel* 277).

In the face of this charge (with the claim that it is narcissistically cut off from its referent and that it reproduced the hegemonic logic it attempts to describe), I would ask the question: how does one, at once, question the necessity of a historical narrative, while at the same time, respect its power and influence? Specifically though, how might we question the dominant theory of cinema as a technology of the sexual subjectivation, without rejecting the terms of this problem? To take up the positivity of the past archaeologically is to, as Ernesto Laclau has said, “reactivate the moment of decision that underlies any *sedimented* set of social relations” (Laclau *Emancipation(s)* 78). In the context of the histories of film and sexuality, there can be no more sedimented site than psychoanalysis. Much to their credit, this is the radical theoretical stake of the critique of the historiographers. The work of this school at its most incisive has sought to expose the cinematic language to its own initial silence, to its own infancy, and to its own foreclosed possibilities. And yet, as a result of this critique, these scholars have largely rejected the correlation between film spectatorship and sexuality. But if historiography is a spectatorship theory as I suggest then the question that it implicitly poses to psychoanalytic spectatorship theories is: how cinema, in its modernity, does not just reflect the sexuality of the spectator, but come to intervene in it? From the darkened rooms of the working-class nickelodeon to the mass hysteria of the Valentino funeral, anxieties about the exposure of the spectator to the influences of the screen (of the cinema as Monstrator-Seducer, an intrusive external agent that would penetrate the subject’s interior) is a consistent theme in the discourse and films of the silent era. I will argue in the pages that follow that the emergence of psychoanalysis as the paradigm of the first wave of film theory needs to be seen as the culmination of this melodramatic

discourse (and domestication of it, insofar as it gives no role substantial role to cinema) which developed from the very early years of the motion pictures in sexualized terms. With our extrapolation of a historiographic spectatorship theory in mind, I maintain that the relation between film history and spectatorship theory should be a dialectically re-founded (i.e., that we must work towards incorporating historical research into a revised theory of the film spectator), and that this enterprise benefits from a psychoanalytic theory of enculturation and traumatic incorporation.

In Freud's theory of seduction of the mid 1890s (the birth years of the motion picture), he proposed that the child's first traumatic sexual exposure (to the adult world) is at the foundation of all neurotic phenomena. While Freud would officially abandon this position in 1897 (for reasons we shall review in our first chapter), the French psychoanalytic theorist Jean Laplanche has demonstrated the 'repressed' persistence of its problematic of the exogeneity of sexuality in the Freudian corpus, and has reformulated psychoanalytic theory on the basis of a 'general theory' of seduction, in which the invasive, traumatic messages of the adult world become the kernel of the repressed around which the entire psychic edifice is developed and structured. Here, psychoanalysis itself provides a model for theorizing the development of the spectatorial institution as a dialectical relation with its founding traumas and foreclosures.

For the early Freud, as for Laplanche, the dialectic of psychic elaboration is fundamentally marked by the unilateral form of these first 'accidental' exposures, which come to haunt the subject as, what I will call a traumatic *proto-content*. Just as the very form of the psyche is generated out of the repression of contingent 'contents', the form of the film spectator (as a process of subjectivation) retains the contingent marks of its birth.

While the seduction theory is focused on the psycho-genesis of the individual, Butler has shown that the notion of a 'psychic life' is not accidental to forms of subjectivation, or rather, that forms of subjectivation are essentially predicated on the substantialization of these accidentals.<sup>10</sup> In her theory of hegemony, Butler has developed themes similar to those posed by Laplanche's seduction theory, in a critical response to Žižek's Lacanian formalism: an "empty and formal structure is established precisely through the not fully successful sublimation of content as form" (*Contingency* 144). For Butler, formal structures and formalisms are always haunted by, and passionately attached to this primal *proto-content*. That is, a residual content which formalism bears like a birthmark: "formalisms are generated by a process of abstraction that is never fully free from the remainder of the content it refuses" (*Contingency* 145). Butler is influenced here by models of psychoanalysis (i.e., Laplanche) that respect the realism of the foreclosed, as dialectically *preserved*.<sup>11</sup> If psychoanalysis has been rejected in film studies primarily because of the apparent imperialism of its logic (that behind every historical specificity is the empty form of the logic of the phallus), I propose to enlist Freud's early seduction theory as a model from within psychoanalysis which hunts out the abandoned and excluded contents on the basis of which there can be the appearance of an apparently

---

<sup>10</sup> Catherine Malabou's reading of Hegel as a thinker of "plasticity", in *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, develops the Hegelian paradox of the "becoming essential of the accident" (71). Seduction describes the process whereby *the accident is substantialized* as a psychological process and the interior is generated from *out of* the external. This is also the major point of divergence between Laplanche and Lacan: for Laplanche, the *accidentality* of the emergent substance clings to it in an effective way, it is a constitutive foreclosure that amounts to more than just the return of the Real as symbolic excess or detritus.

<sup>11</sup> For the Lacanian model, the foreclosed is, by definition, a kind of *non-sense*; for Laplanche and Butler, however, like the primal 'event' of seduction it has a realist insistency, even as the repressed. See Lacan's myth of the Lamella in *Seminar XI*.

“empty” form. For Laplanche, as for Butler, the hypostasis of the subject is always preceded by, and instigated by some prior incorporation of alterity.<sup>12</sup>

In her book *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler discusses the primacy of the other in the life of the subject, in her attempt to understand the operations involved in making subjects recognizable in language. Referring to Laplanche (and Levinas), she asserts that one can do the work of the self only on the basis of first being undone by the other: “an account of oneself is always given to another, whether conjured or existing, this other establishes the scene of address as a more primary ethical relation than a reflexive effort to give an account” (21). In other words, she offers an attempt to rethink the dialectic of subjectivity on the basis of this irreducible asymmetry in the relation with alterity. Within Butler’s corpus, this paradoxically hypostatic conservation of alterity is not restricted to psychoanalysis or metaphysics; her position on the primacy of the other also informs her theoretical engagements with hegemony and cultural theory. With her emphasis on the scene of address (as the primacy of the other) which precedes the hypostasis of the subject, Butler’s work, I suggest, points us toward a model of

---

<sup>12</sup> In the early philosophical work of Levinas (in *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other*) the hypostatic gesture is the name given to the subject’s founding as an “apparition of a substantive”; hypostasis is “the event by which the act expressed by a verb became a being designated by a substantive” (*Existence* 83). The subject finds itself as a being (it grasps itself) by turning away from the terrifying anonymity of what Levinas calls the impersonal existence of the *il y a* (or “there is”). Levinas’ sees in the hypostatic gesture the metaphysical positing of the subject, *per se*. Hypostasis becomes the founding exclusion of this alterity that clears the place for the subject’s emergence. For Laplanche, as we have already seen, the psyche is similarly the result of an asymmetrical encounter with the (adult) other from both the side of the ego and from the side of the unconscious: the ego is only possible as a result of the “introjection” of external models, and the danger that the ego defends against (the unconscious) is the result of the ‘foreclusion’ of the other’s obscurity. Like Laplanche’s repressed address of the Other, Levinas locates alterity as the prime mover of the subject.

spectatorship as a hegemonic populism generated out of the serial encounter with the traumatic aspect of the spectatorial address.

In her contributions to the triologue *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* she suggests that all universalist, hegemonic categories (far from being empty) are haunted by the spectral trace of their founding particulars, and that “no universal is freed from its contamination by the particular contexts from which it emerges and in which it travels” (*Contingency* 40). Butler here is in discussion with the theoretical work of Laclau, whose theory of hegemony explores the generation of political identities out of the diverse social field. In Laclau’s theory of hegemony, populisms form by introducing universalist categories at once available to social inclusion (and so ontologically undetermined by particular content), and yet contaminated and marked by particular historical realities (the “ontic” contingent incidentals). For Laclau, “[a] popular demand is one that embodies the absent fullness of the community through a potentially endless chain of equivalences” (*Populist* 225). Populist movements thus gather under discursive banners that he calls “empty signifiers” of an absent (promised) totality (*Emancipation(s)* 42).

For Butler, the unspeakable legacy of these ‘incidental’ particulars are given a kind of primacy that they do not have for Laclau. Butler ‘restages’ the concept of hegemony in terms of “cultural translation” (*Contingency* 20). She suggests that Laclau’s theory of hegemonic signifiers as “persuasive synecdoche” of society might simply be one form of universalization amongst others, and that the selection of an empty signifier is underwritten by the production of new excluded social contingencies: “[t]here is no way to predict what will happen in such instances when the universal is wielded precisely by those who signify its contamination...” (40-1). For Laclau, the populist “empty



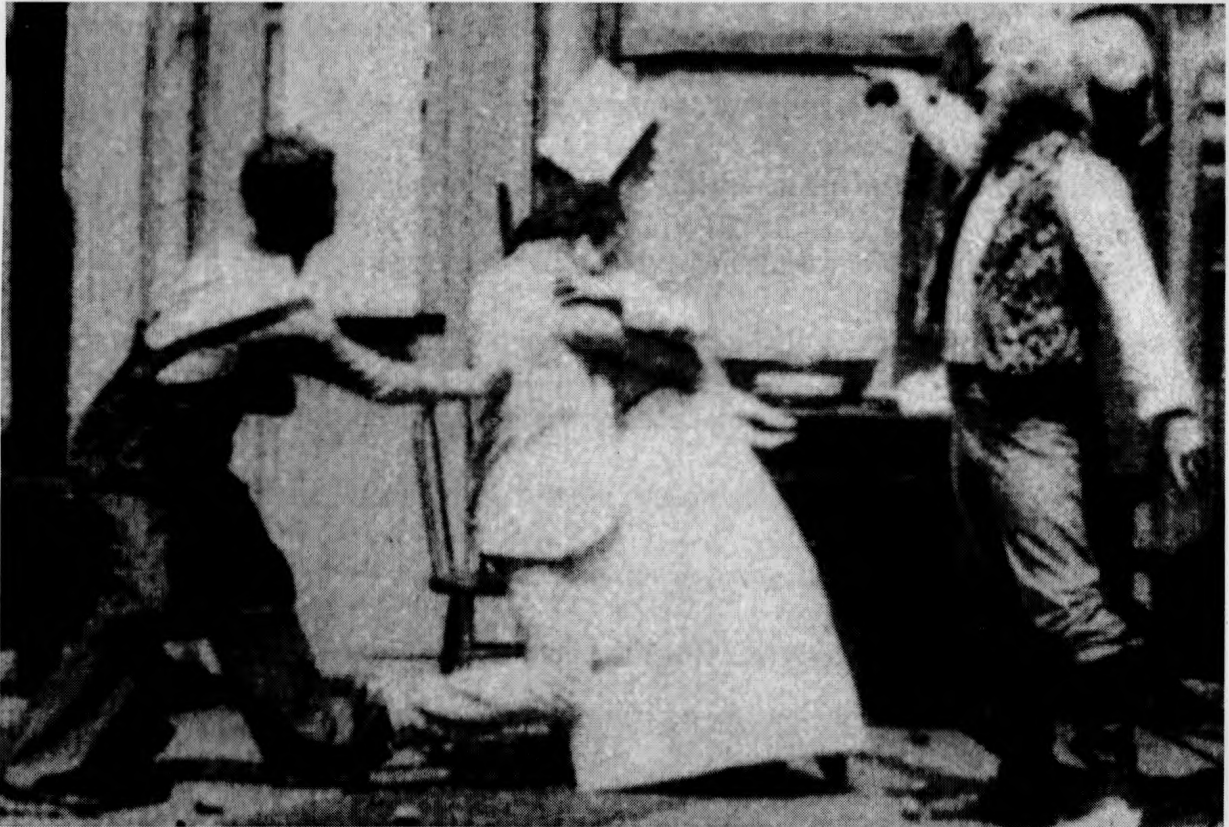
signifier” is a provisional imaginary whole of the social body, a universalist category that is only ever a hypostatic appropriation of a particularity; but for Butler there is no absolute threshold dividing a social-universal from a social-particular in the historical articulation of these new social ‘signifiers’. On the way to becoming universal, a hegemonic signifier is taken up, and challenged by the “‘impossible’ figures” which inhabit its margins, so that for Butler hegemony is always responsible to, and dialectically “challenged” by an unspeakable which it inadvertently produces (*Contingency* 149). In other words, the institution of spectatorship as hegemonic signifier is underwritten by an unacknowledged process of translation. Following Butler, I take this “unspeakably social” register to which she refers (and which corresponds to the enigmatic alterity of the adult message) as the cultural material to-be-translated, as that aspect of a culture to which a hypostasis is called upon to translate and make legible. The classical spectator, as a hegemonic form, should be understood as just such a hypostasis, called upon to make the traumatic alterity of the motion picture address culturally legible.

Considering Butler’s critique of Laclauian hegemony in the context of the corpus of American silent film, the hypostatic constitution of a spectatorship as a *people* is allegorically ‘attributed’ to, and tested out by (and on) unspeakable figures of alterity. In the chapters that follow three such spectatorial *others* will emerge into view in our discussions of the silent era and its historiography: the child (in chapter two), the immigrant (in chapter 4) and the woman (in chapters 2 and 5). In its first thirty-five years, these figures populate the seduction melodrama of American film spectatorship, and they have (for this reason) become important conceptual *personae* for the historiography of early cinema.

### The Seduction Plot of the Film Spectator

The seductive aura which we associate with the classical Hollywood cinema, and which spectatorship theory took as central to its operation, developed in the silent era (and was given the name by French critics of *photogenie*) as a result of the seduction of the spectator; in his general theory of seduction, Laplanche has identified an itinerary of traumatic incorporation with its own distinct moments. Each chapter of this dissertation will take as its focus one of these moments in the seduction plot of the spectator, corresponding it to an important historical juncture in the development of American motion pictures, while reading it through the emblematic figures which film historiography proposes.

As a way of introducing this tripartite itinerary of the dissertation, I would like to consider an early American serial that allegorizes the seduction plot of the spectator. The 1900 Biograph five-part serial, *The Downward Path* tells the story of a young woman from the country who is seduced into a life of exploitative urban sex work, only to commit suicide, just before the police and her family can rescue her. With each part lasting approximately thirty seconds, the film serial consists of five frontally viewed settings in which a scenario is played out in a highly condensed way, making emblematic use of gesture and pictorial staging to get its dramatic situation across.



**Figure I.02** The First Encounter of the Moving Picture (*The Cheeky Book Agent*, 1900, American Mutoscope and Biograph Co.)

The first part of *The Downward Path*, entitled “The Cheeky Book Agent” takes as its setting a poor country home. A humble family’s intimacy is intruded upon by the entrance of an urban dandy, who swoops the daughter up onto his lap, caressing her. It ends (Figure I.02) with the father and brother angrily demanding his leave. The scene recounts the first encounter between the young woman and her seducer from the city. In Freud’s theory of seduction, this first event, due to its unprecedented trauma, often goes apparently unregistered, until in a second moment it comes to find its traumatic significance. Like the ‘book agent’ who seems to barge into the family home uninvited, the seduction scene stages an invasion of the intimate interior by a foreign figure. In chapter one, “Planted Kisses: Seduction and the Infancy of Spectatorship”, we take up the famous Edison company one-reeler, *The Kiss*, as an allegory and prototype of just such an unprecedented event. As an allegory of the first era of motion pictures as intimate

intrusion, the strange reaction of the first audiences of the kiss on the screen, echo the young girl's passive surprise at the strange man's aggressive advances.

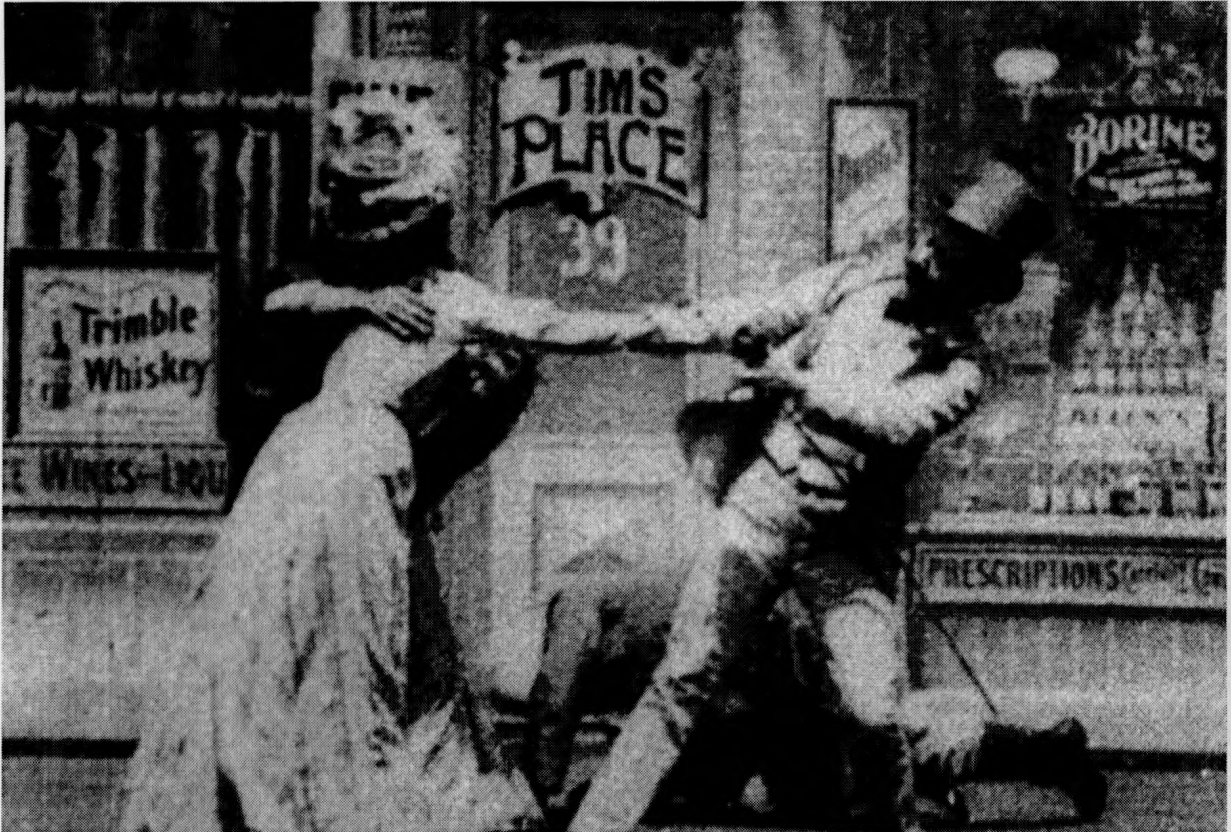
Framed by a discussion of the work of Linda Williams on the history of cinematic sexuality, I will read her theory of the film body against her more recent work on melodrama, and suggest how the seduction theory can help to think through *The Kiss* as a kind of primal scene for the spectator, a first encounter, *après coup*, with the proto-content (what I call the *infans*) of the motion picture. I take Butler's emphasis on the "unspeakably social" in her theory of hegemony as a way of developing Williams' notion of the melodrama as the fundamental mode of American *moving* pictures.



**Figure I.03** The Implantation of the Cinema of Attractions (*She Ran Away with the City Man*, 1900, American Mutoscope and Biograph Co.)

In the serial's second part, "She Ran Away with the City Man", the scene is set outside the country home. The dandy is standing on a ladder up to the top window beckoning the young daughter, who pops her head out and climbs down, dressed and

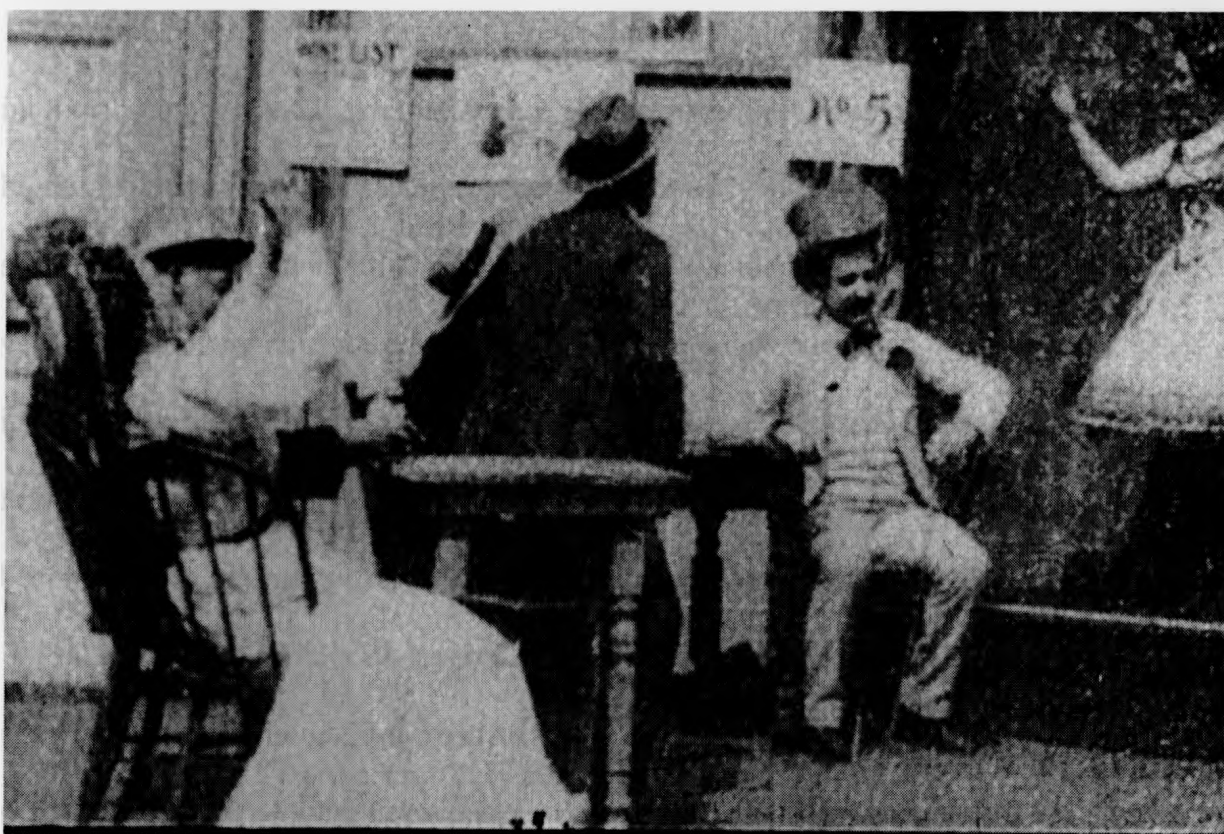
packed to go. As the two make their escape, the rest of the family emerges from the house, guns in hand (see Figure I.03). With her departure from the home, the scene suggests that the seducer has 'gotten inside' the girl in some way, whether through persuasion or coercion. For the seduction plot of the spectator this scene corresponds to the second blow of the two-stage theory of trauma: what Laplanche calls the psychic implant, and its latency. In contrast to Foucault, Laplanche's implant is not a discursive mark on the biopolitical body of invasive "strategies of power", but the *afterwardly* proto-content leftover after the attempt to translate into discourse, the alien address of culture (*Foucault Live* 159). In our second chapter, "The Youth the Motion Picture Took: The Scandal of Early Cinema," I will discuss the traumatic implantation inherent in the monstration of the cinema of attractions (1895-1907) and the scandal this form caused in the first era of the moving pictures. Of particular interest, given the introduction of the modernity thesis, I will focus on the primacy given to shock over address in the theory of the attraction in the historiography of Gunning. To bring out this tension, we will discuss a number of peeping-tom mutoscopes from 1904, before a discussion of the white slave trade scandal of the early 1910s and the banning of the attraction in the transitional era (1907-1914). In this context, I discuss the anxiety over film as a Monstrator-Seducer in the early American narrative feature *Traffic in Souls* and in the theoretical writings of Hugo Münsterberg.



**Figure I.04** Narrative Repression as Melodramatic Compromise (*Girl Who Went Astray*, 1900, American Mutoscope and Biograph Co.)

In *Girl Who Went Astray*, set on a busy city street, we find our female protagonist working as a prostitute when she comes across the same ‘book agent’ who demands money from her. As they struggle over the money, her parents appear, recognizing and embracing her. The man, her pimp, tears her away from them and escapes with her again. Beaten down by the pimp, the parents appeal to a passing policeman, who shrugs it off. As the still of the scene displays (Figure I.04), what is at stake in this episode is a struggle: caught between the seducer and her parents the ‘fallen’ girl is literally pulled in two opposing directions. In our third chapter “From Attractions to Seduction: The Melodramatic Compromise of Hollywood Fantasia”, I suggest that we think of the birth of the American narrative cinema (around 1915) as originating from out of a dialectical struggle and subsequent compromise. Reading texts by Ben Singer, Lea Jacobs and Ben Brewster on American film’s theatrical inheritance, I suggest that the conservatism of the

melodramatic mode that ushers in the narrative era indexes a repression of the attraction in the Laplanchean sense: as a melodramatic translation and spectatorial internalization of film monstration. Then, looking at two exemplary Cecil B. DeMille films from the early narrative era (*The Whispering Chorus* and the first version of *The Ten Commandments*); in the context of a discussion of these films, I introduce the concept of *fantasia* to characterize the compromise (as both exploitation and moralization of the attraction) characteristic of classical Hollywood.



**Figure I.05** The Cultural Elaboration of Film Seduction (*The New Soubrette*, 1900, American Mutoscope and Biograph Co.)

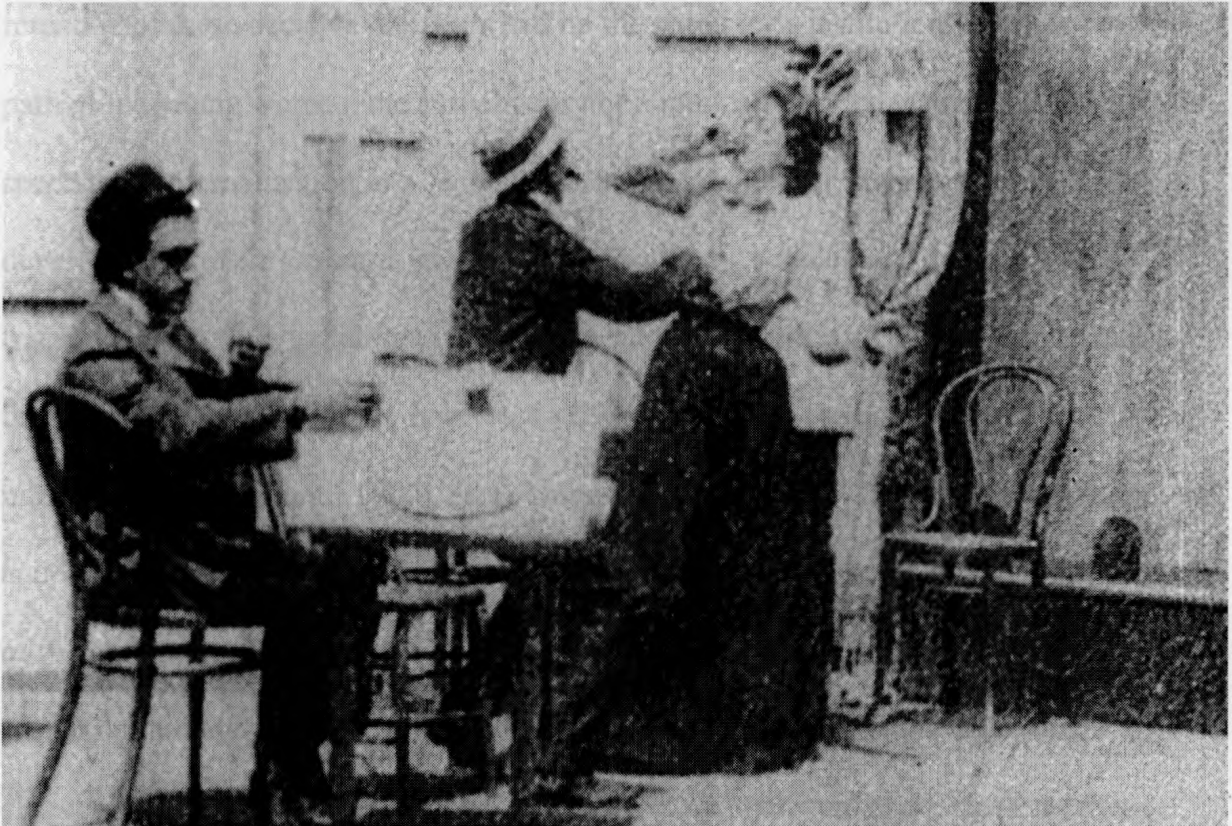
In the fourth part, “The New Soubrette”, the scene changes to the inside of a saloon, the young woman is now dancing for a crowd of drinking men (Figure I.05). The pimp pulls her off the stage, hands her a drink and props her onto a table, where she continues her dance for the crowd. A reflexive turn in seduction has taken place: from being lured by the white slaver, to the literal struggle of trying to ‘hook’ customers on the

street, the young woman is now performing that seduction as a dance in front of an audience, suggesting a general fluency in its pragmatic gestures. The scene also seems to depict the woman as enjoying *herself* as a spectacle. For the seduction plot of the spectator, this corresponds to the moment of elaboration (sublimation). Having been internalized and domesticated, the monstration of Hollywood fantasia becomes hypostatized as a attribute of the spectator and the spectacle: the sex appeal of the star. I argue that the elaborative moment characterizes the first golden age of Hollywood in the 1920s, and that it also corresponds to the melodramatic labour of expression from psychic interiority to hegemonic externalization. In a further discussion of Hansen's work, I will highlight what I propose as a tension between her early auratic work on Valentino and star appeal and her later anti-auratic hypostasis of the manufactured sensorium of vernacular modernism. Here I will take up the theme of translation in Valentino's films in relation to his sex appeal (as personal *photogenicie*) as hegemonic hypostasis of the *infans*. In the cultural elaboration of cinematic seduction of the 1920s, screen intimacy becomes a key hegemonic signifier for American film spectatorship.

In the film serial's final part, called "In Suicide Hall", the setting of the saloon is exactly the same (though less crowded), with our protagonist (now in regular dress) sitting having a drink with her seducer, when he starts yelling at her, and storms out the door. Miserable, she pulls out a vial from her pocket, drinks it and collapses (Figure 6). The scene ends as her parents and a police officer enter the saloon, to find her dead on the floor. The seducer (and the agent of her monstration) ominously surveys this scene at the door, in the background. Here, the poison ingestion of 'The Downward Path' figures the



girl's internalization of vice. The serial proposes that her death is caused by the fact that she came to take on and enjoy her 'fallen' life. In our fifth and final chapter,



**Figure I.06** Symptom (Return) (*In Suicide Hall*, 1900, American Mutoscope and Biograph Co.)

“Melodramatizing Visual Pleasure: The ‘New Woman’ of the Gaze”, we look at the figure of toxic internalization as a way of reconsidering the important legacy of early feminist spectatorship theory. In discussions of the theoretical work (both early and recent) of Laura Mulvey and Mary Ann Doane, I suggest that one of the enduring discoveries of feminist film theory is its framing of film spectatorship as a sexualized invasion or expropriation of the personal. To illustrate this, I will explore the motif of seduction in Louise Brooks’ dramatic film roles (both American and European) in the final years of the silent era. In these late silent films, in different ways, this seduction is associated with the Monstrator of the cinema itself, as an allegory of spectatorship.

In this introduction, I have proposed working back down the path of this spectator to draw out the founding crises that underlie its development, and the effect the inevitable retention of these decisive moments had on the spectator's institution. Like the downward path of the young woman, the early history of American film tells the dialectical story of spectator's internalization of a seductive address. I argue that in the historical developments of film form in its first thirty-five years, a dialectical dynamic can be traced between the film address and the hypostasis of a spectator. From the traumatic, unassuming *encounter* of the first years (the late 1890s) to the novelty spectacles of the nickelodeon era (up until 1907), early cinema's presentational direct address presupposes, and visits upon its spectator, an alterity with something to show: as the enduring content of this new form, this foreign visitation leaves a trace, an *implant*. In the era of its transition to story-telling (1908-13) before the consolidation of what will become the classical Hollywood narrative mode (as of 1915), the monstrative address is at first banned; and this prohibition corresponds to an increasing focus on telling the stories of the interior, and of finding ways to display the personal. With the melodramatic turn to the *internal*, as spectatorial *repression* or dialectical conservation, the monstrative display of film reappears transformed from visceral attraction to the enigmatic appeal of narrative seduction. In the popular golden age of the 1920s, this internalization of the film monstration is *elaborated* culturally with the emergence of sex appeal as cinematic hypostasis of personality. Finally, as a return of the spectatorial repressed which would eventually lead to the stricter enforcement of the Hays code in the early 1930s, the violence of the cinematic invasion returns in the final years of the silent era as the new attraction of the voice begins its intrusion.

To conclude our opening remarks, then, it is time to reassess the legacy of the classical film spectator. As the curtain falls on the era of American cinema, and at this juncture in film studies as its object seems to be transforming into something only partially recognizable, it becomes urgent to take stock of the singular object that was.<sup>13</sup> Rather than seeing the theoretical avant-garde of film scholarship as a wasted, missed step, I take its fixation on the spectatorial sexuality as melodramatic repetition of the cinematic seduction plot. I have returned psychoanalysis to its radical exogenous origins to argue that to understand the singularity of Hollywood spectatorship is to take seriously the depth and gravity of film's cultural intervention. As I will argue, while cinema is a seducing agent which gets inside the spectator, if we regard it in the context of the development of the American melodramatic mode, it may also be seen as central in the development of a new form of populist intimacy, in its display and circulation of new unspeakable views. Framed melodramatically, the visual pleasures of the cinema are more than just consumerist evasions, they are the intimate secrets of their culture, the sharing of which is called *film spectatorship*.

---

<sup>13</sup> Given my interest in returning to and preserving the singularity of the American cinematic address and the spectatorial populism that grew up around it, this work runs against the tendency towards drawing *intermedial* connections between silent cinema and other cultural phenomena of the historical era. For example, where a work like Grieveson's *Policing Cinema* explores how the thematic of governmentality places the phenomena of early film culture 'beyond the screen' in its larger cultural context, I have returned to the historicity of spectatorship theory to develop the way the aesthetics of the cinema grew to affect and mark the culture outside its walls (e.g., the cultural categories of sexuality). While an empirical focus on cultural context (including intermedial ones) can broaden our perspective, it can also neutralize the singularities and events that help shape the categories through which an empirical 'fact' is framed. In questioning the dominance of empiricism in current film studies, I seek to trace out one of the terms of cinema's singular eventfulness, on the model which psychoanalysis has given us for such traumatic interventions: seduction.

# 1

## Planted Kisses: Seduction and the Infancy of Spectatorship

[T]he filmic is that which cannot be described, the representation that cannot be represented...". (Barthes, "The Third Meaning" 64)

From its very beginnings, the spectator of American film has been the subject of a grand melodrama, complete with virtuous heroes and heroines, exploitative villains, deceptive seductresses, lost causes and suspenseful cliffhangers. Throughout its history critics have considered the spectator the site of an uncertain exposure. Indeed, many of the most important films of the silent age told this story. What effect would film-going have on its spectators? What dangers might lurk in its screening rooms? How might it deform the minds and bodies of the weak and vulnerable? In a sense, this kind of moral outrage about cinema has never abated.<sup>14</sup> This discourse culminated with the sweeping rise and fall of psychoanalytic theory in film studies. For the disciplinary study of the cinema, in its first decade and a half, the foundational principles were imported from psychoanalysis: the film spectator is subject to unconscious sexuality, and the cinema's success reflects its potent exploitation of this subjection. The psychoanalytic engagement of film (going back to Otto Rank's *The Double*) accounted for this exposure by positing spectatorship as a cultural working-through of a sexuality already inherent in human beings.<sup>15</sup> Despite the manifold variety of psychoanalytic *hermeneutic* perspectives (Freudian, Kleinian, and various Lacanian, etc.) which have grown out of this principle, this pre-supposed correlation between the spectator and the subject of sexuality has been

---

<sup>14</sup> A very recent example of this is the concern over the effects of 3D optical technology on the vision, and particularly the developing eyes of children.

<sup>15</sup> Rank, Otto. *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*. Trans. Harry Tucker Jr. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1971. Print.

foundational for film theory as a whole, perhaps going so far as to call psychoanalysis *epistemic* for the consumption and study of film. As I have discussed in the introduction, when film historiographers of the 1980s and 1990s argued that the psychoanalysis of the spectatorship de-historicizes its object by not accounting for earlier forms of film production and reception, the legitimacy of psychoanalysis was displaced. Recently some film scholars have returned to remark on the cultural association between cinema and sexuality.

In an interesting revisiting of her own groundbreaking work on the “male gaze” of classical Hollywood cinema, Mulvey remarks: “A denunciation of Hollywood for sexism has to give way to the wider question: Why it was that images and discourse of sexuality had such particular significance for Hollywood cinema?” (“Thoughts” 230). The enduring truth of the psychoanalytic legacy of film studies remains in embodying this chiasmus between film and sexuality, and posing the exposure to cinema as a quintessentially sexual matter. This study focuses on the paradox whereby the libidinal, interior life of the subject (his/her sexuality) appears via the relay of a new populist technology (the cinema). Modern sexuality as we know it today is marked by this primal encounter, indeed, it may be that how we conceive of sexuality today is fundamentally cinematic.

This opening chapter, I examine the key texts and movements in the corpus of the film historian and theorist, Linda Williams; her work from 1980s onwards has been centrally concerned with cinematic sexuality, and no scholar has gone further in plotting its history. The development of her ideas on film spectatorship over the last thirty years, I will suggest, reflect a spectatorial dialectic between the traumatic alterity of the ‘foreign

body' of the cinematic address (what I call, the *infans*) and the mimetic response of the film body. This tension is read against accounts (including Williams' own) of the Edison company one-reeler, *The Kiss*, in order to frame the terms of a primal cinematic seduction scene.

### The Film Body of Linda Williams

From her 1981 essay "Film Body: An Implantation of Perversions" through to her recent study of the history of film sexuality *Screening Sex*, Williams' work has emphasized the cinema's participation in the incitement and investment of a particular form of eroticized viewing.<sup>16</sup> Williams has been influenced in this work by the terms that Michel Foucault set out in *The Will to Knowledge*. According to her account (which dovetails with much of feminist analysis) the privileged object of sexual attention in the history of the American cinema is the excessive body of Woman: "[w]ith the invention of cinema... fetishism and voyeurism gained new importance and normality through their link to the positivist quest for the truth of visible phenomena... Cinema implanted these perversions more firmly, normalizing them in technological and social "ways of seeing"" (*Hard Core* 46). In Foucault's introduction to his multi-volume *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, he famously argues that the "implantation of perversions" around particular sites in modernity is an "instrument-effect" of the biopolitical order of the moment: "it is through the isolation, intensification, and consolidation of peripheral sexualities that the relations of power to sex and pleasure branched out and multiplied, measured the body,

---

<sup>16</sup> In "Film Body: An Implantation of Perversions", Williams develops her Foucauldian themes in relation the early cinematic and proto-cinematic texts (including the work of Muybridge).

and penetrated modes of conduct” (*History* 48). In texts from the 1980s on early and proto-cinema and hardcore pornography, Williams (citing Foucault) argues that cinema in part grows out of this biopolitical exigency. From the outset, Williams argues the cinema was a site of an investment and organization of a spectatorial body: “the cinema became...one more discourse of sexuality, one more form of the “implantation of perversions” extending power over the body” (“Film Body” 532). In an explicitly Foucauldian vein, this “film body” produced by the cinema is understood fundamentally as the locus of cultural investment and discipline. Voyeurism, and the fetishistic “blindness” that it implies here, becomes a call to discourse, an invitation to narrativize its excesses, and ultimately, to make these bodies articulate themselves. Let us consider for a moment the nature of the implantation posited here. In Foucault’s theory, this implanted body is affected directly by the machinations of the discursive regime; putting it very starkly in an interview, Foucault states “[w]hat I am trying to do is to show how power relations can get through to the very depths of bodies, materially, without having been relayed by the representations of subjects. If power affects the body, it is not because it was first internalized...” (Foucault Live 209).<sup>17</sup> The substance of Foucault’s position, that political investments are affected without the relay of interiority, suggests that Williams’ film body is forced to incorporate the perversity that the apparatus foists upon it. Oriented toward a theory of film as a technology of subjection, Foucault’s notion links up with a stream within film theory, which in the introduction, was grouped under the banner of “inscription theory”.<sup>18</sup> While this stream of Williams’ thinking does

---

<sup>17</sup> See also De Lauretis, Theresa. “The Stubborn Drive.” *Critical Inquiry*. 24.4 (Summer 1998): 851-877. Print.

<sup>18</sup> See Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*; Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*;

seem to align her with inscription theory's 'post-traumatic' conception of subjectivation, her theoretical position has shifted (though in an uneven, complicated way) in subsequent years towards more psychoanalytic, dialectical theory of the film spectator. My contention is that, within the corpus of Linda Williams, the shift is centered on the prominence that she increasingly gives to the melodramatic mode.

In the early 1990s, capitalizing on her groundbreaking discoveries in genres other than pornography (horror and melodrama) and straying from the Foucauldian model, Williams began to focus more on how the cinema's perverse implantation is internalized and worked-through by the spectator within the American genre film.<sup>19</sup> In the influential essay "Film Bodies", Williams posits not one, but three different generic forms of spectatorial corporeal involvement. Williams' "film bodies" are created as a result of the new stimulations of the cinema, and varying forms of relations to this stimulation have been allegorized by the cinema itself, in what she has called the "body genres". In the visceral film genres of horror, pornography and melodrama, the spectator is presented with three different "structures of fantasy" with respect to the stimulation of the cinema; Williams aligns these three fantasmatic "solutions" with Freud's three primal fantasies outlined in Laplanche and Pontalis' influential essay, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality".<sup>20</sup> In her "anatomy" of film bodies, the origins of cinematic sexuality are fantasmatically solved as: 1) a scenario of sadomasochistic castration in *horror*; 2) a scenario of sadistic seduction in *pornography*; 3) a scenario of masochistic return to the

---

Cohen, *Ideology and Inscription*.

<sup>19</sup> See Williams, "When the Woman Looks"; "Something Else Besides a Mother: Stella Dallas and the Maternal Melodrama".

<sup>20</sup> In this essay, the authors list three primal fantasies: "fantasies of origins", "fantasies of seduction" and "fantasies of castration" (Laplanche and Pontalis 19).



(maternal) origins in *melodrama*. Where, in "Film Bodies", melodrama is proposed as one genre corresponding to the primal fantasy of origin (the primal scene fantasy), Williams also suggests in passing that melodrama as a cultural mode may be thought of as a way characterizing all three of the body genres, in that it can "encompass a broad range of films marked by "lapses" in realism, by "excesses" of spectacle and displays of primal, even infantile emotions" ("Film Bodies" 3). How might we think of this double, privileged status for melodrama (as both an example of the body genres and *the* mode of excess which underpins them all), and does it give the primal scene fantasy a prominence as well (given that this is melodrama's fantasmatic scenario)? Indeed, since the late 1990s, Williams has expanded this notion of the primacy of the melodramatic for American film arguing that melodrama should be considered "the fundamental mode of popular American moving pictures... that seeks dramatic revelation of moral and emotional truths through a dialectic of pathos and action" ("Melodrama Revised" 42).<sup>21</sup> This privileged status given to melodrama (as both genus and species), reflects not only a development in Williams' work toward psychoanalysis, but its also replays a limitation in the reception of Jean Laplanche's work in film studies.

Laplanche and Pontalis' essay "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality" has had a large impact on spectatorship theory, with film theorists like Elizabeth Cowie, D.W. Rodowick and Williams (among others) mobilizing its more flexible, plastic concept of fantasy as a psychoanalytic alternative to the Lacanian-Althusserian model of cinematic address as ideological interpellation.<sup>22</sup> And yet, as Laplanche himself has noted, this

---

<sup>21</sup> See also "The American Melodramatic Mode" in *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson*.

<sup>22</sup> See Cowie's "Fantasia"; D.N. Rodowick's *The Difficulty of Difference*.

reception reflects a fundamental misreading of “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality” and its context in his work as a whole (*Seduction, Translation* 84). If we look at the primal scene in Laplanche’s account of fantasy, we notice that it is also given prominence as the structuring of fantasy *as such*. In “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality” Laplanche and Pontalis argue that Freud’s move to the notion of the phylogenetic fantasies comes as a result of the abandonment of the seduction theory, which posited the exogenous origins of fantasy: in the theory of seduction,

sexuality literally breaks in from the outside, intruding forcibly into the world of childhood, presumed to be innocent, where it is encysted as a simple happening without provoking any defense reaction—not in itself a pathogenic event... in the second stage [with the onset of puberty]... there is a sense of unpleasure, and the origin of this unpleasure is traced to the recollection of the first event, an external event which has become an inner event, an inner ‘foreign body’, which now breaks out from within the subject. (Laplanche and Pontalis 10)

Against the speculative realism of this theory, Freud’s “primal fantasies” attempt to reposition the genesis of sexuality as *endogenous*, the result of a phylogenetic inheritance: “in this false synthesis by which the past of the human species is preserved in hereditarily transmitted patterns, he [Freud] is vainly trying to overcome the opposition between event and constitution” (18). What the Freudian doctrine of the *primal fantasies* rehearses is an attempt to reconcile the ‘external’ contingent conditions under which the structure of fantasy come into being and the subject’s structuring of that contingency. The notion of the primal scene remains an internal index of the traumatic contingency

(the proto-content of the fantasy's form) at the heart of the child's psychic structure, originating in the adult world.

From the perspective that Laplanche has developed over the last forty-five years on the basis of this earlier work, the insistence of the internal foreign body (the unconscious) indexes the primal subjection to a seducing other. Seduction is not primarily a fantasy (though of course, it can be) but the primal cause of all fantasy: "seduction is not to be placed on the same level as other primal fantasies; it is not a fantasy, but a communication situation" (*Seduction, Translation* 10). Seduction, as the afterwardly encounter with the (adult) other's appeal, gets sublated by the work of psychic derivation in the form of the primal scene, which then gets embodied as content, and elaborated from different 'viewing' positions. For Laplanche, the "primal" fantasies mark these different positions in which the subject attempts to solve the problem of this invasion, rather than being the ancient inheritance of patriarchal culture (as Freud had argued). A primal scene, then, might be more profitably understood as the index of a fundamentally contingent element in the structure of fantasy itself, in that it repeats the unalterable "*mise-en-scene* of desire" as an attempt to contain what is truly unbound in the subject, i.e., the internal foreign body as the psychic memorial of the traumatic alterity of the other.

The double status of melodrama in Williams' account of the 'moving pictures' of American film, points to the seduction problematic of the traumatic proto-content in Williams' film body(s) in that, like seduction, it is figured as both general structure and particular genre; it suggests an alternative to her theory of Foucauldian spectatorial involvement. Reading this more recent work on melodrama with and against her earlier

work, which seeks to see in melodrama not an abhorrent excess of the tradition but its “fundamental mode”, I suggest that Williams’ move beyond the rhetoric of perversion, lack, and excess (which after all lose their precise meaning when they become the paradoxical norm), requires us to rethink the perverse implantation of the film body. As a mode then, melodrama might be thought of the aesthetic encounter with an unbound, primary communication (that is, seduction); it is a serial repetition of the problems of, and solutions, to the alterity that the primal fantasies provide, but fundamentally it is a mode which involves itself with, and dramatizes the other’s address as an invasive foreign body. Next, in developing this alternative theory of the spectatorial trauma as seductive encounter, I bring in the relation to what Williams has called the “cinema’s first sex act”: the Edison company’s *The Kiss* (“Of Kisses” 291).

#### The Seduction Plot of the Film Spectator: *The Kiss* as Primal Scene

If the spectator is, in some sense, constituted by an anterior encounter with the foreign body of the cinematic address, then the inscription model of perverse implantation is insufficient, in that the latter does not account for the dialectic process of the former’s internalization. I would suggest that what we call today the spectator is the name given to this metabolization of the cinematic address. In taking up the psychoanalytic theory of seduction in relation to film, after the apparent critical demise of this paradigm, I have proposed going back to that moment of Freud’s thinking which coincided with the commercial appearance of the motion pictures in 1895 and 1896.

The first years of motion pictures were also the years in which Freud advocated for what he called a seduction theory of the neuroses, which we previously mentioned in

our discussion of Laplanche. Between 1895 and 1897, working as a physician specializing in the treatment of neurotics, Freud's thinking was marked by the interest in a "realist" discovery. His method of the psychoanalytic 'talking cure' doubled and repeated (in a therapeutic context) the asymmetrical relation to the other characteristic of the childhood stories he was hearing from his ailing patients. In virtually all of his cases of the time, as he would report in his essays "Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defense" (1896) and "The Aetiology of Hysteria" (1896), his patients recalled having been sexually seduced as a young child by an older person. At this point in his thinking, the premise of the seduction seems remarkably plain: "at the bottom of every case of hysteria there are *one or more cases of premature sexual experience*", and "[i]n all of my cases of obsessional neurosis... I have found a substratum of hysterical symptoms which could be traced back to a scene of sexual passivity" (Freud *Standard* 168-9). In the case of the hysteric, the repressed trauma that leads to the defensive hysterical symptom is a compensatory response to the unconscious memory of this seduction, and in the case of the obsessive the defense is a response to an *active* enjoyment (afterwards) of this passive, invasive encounter. But as Laplanche has pointed out, there is a complex implicit theory of the temporality of trauma in Freud which pertains to this afterwardly, deferred action; the trauma of "the past already has something deposited in it that demands to be deciphered... there is something that goes in the direction of the past to the future, from the other to the individual in question, that is in the direction from the adult to the baby" (Laplanche *Essays* 265). Trauma, in the theory of seduction, thus implies at least two moments: a first moment of encounter which often *seems* to go unregistered, and a second later moment in which the trauma is repeated and reactivated in some way,

solidifying its fixation. By September 1897, as the creation myth of psychoanalysis goes, Freud abandoned the seduction theory for a number of reasons.<sup>23</sup> In his general theory of seduction, Laplanche has taken the discoveries that Freud made in these early years, generalizing and building on them so as to re-ground psychoanalysis on the “primacy of the ... other”: that is to say, the ultimately exogenous character of human sexuality (*Essays* 83). Extrapolating on his close readings of early Freud, Laplanche has outlined an itinerary of seduction, which we previously introduced. Beginning with the traumatic encounters with the adult world in infancy, something coming from the other is then taken on (the implantation of the enigmatic message), followed by a period of latency in which these “enigmatic messages” of the adult unconscious sexuality are internalized, repressed and metabolized, only to repeat itself (as sublimation and/or symptom) in some novel way. According to Laplanche, the seduction theory constitutes a radical moment in the Freudian corpus, which is not overcome, but continually revisited. As a theory of enculturation characterized by a dialectic of traumatic incorporation, it provides an alternative to the ahistorical, hypostatic theories of the film spectator, and it also provides a different way of conceiving of the accretions left by history.

For American audiences, the seduction of the film spectator began with a kiss *sent into the future*. The long, circuitous path down which sexuality would come to be experienced, in the West, via the cinema (and as cinematic) began with a famous kiss

---

<sup>23</sup> Four reasons in particular: 1) That, at the time, none of his patients had been completely ‘cured’; 2) as he realized that hysterical phenomena were more common than he had first considered, it then followed that the incidence of perverse adult seduction would be almost ubiquitous; 3) that he could not be sure that the seduction memories were not in fact unconscious fantasies, where the object of the fantasy was the older person; and finally, (4) that in extreme cases of delirium, these seduction memories are wholly absent (Masson “Complete” 264-5).

between stage actors May Irwin and John C. Rice. As the cinematic institution for public projection began to supplant the 'private' peepshow-style machines like the Kinetoscope and the Mutoscope, one of the first and most popular American films projected was *The Kiss*. But, when Thomas Alva Edison's company shot this short film on Tuesday, April 21<sup>st</sup> of 1896, on the occasion of the premiere of his new system for projecting moving pictures (the Vitascope), this kiss was already well-known to his audiences. It depicted a small comedic scene from a popular play of that year called *The Widow Jones*, in which a widow is kissed by one of her suitors. And while the film itself was not screened at the first public demonstrations of the Vitascope, the largest-circulation New York newspaper of the time, Pulitzer's *The New York World* ran a prominent story on the making of the film a couple of days after the Vitascope's debut, proclaiming: "[w]hen a young woman insists on sending her betrothed kisses by mail, she may simply tear one by one yard of them from a kinetoscope strip, and the recipient will know what he gets" (Qtd. in Musser "The May Irwin Kiss" 101). *The Kiss*, as it were, was on its way. Though the film was not initially produced for projection on screen, "cinema's first sex act" was one of the first projected American films to come to public prominence. From the beginning then, the kiss in the cinema was not just something *given*, nor something taken, but something sent and received. But, does the recipient (as the review suggests) know what (s)he gets? There is something in this scene which prevents it from being self-evident; in other words, we should not take *The Kiss* as *given*. Returning to the first screenings of *The Kiss* as a kind of primal scene of cinematic sexuality, our discussion opens with the evocation of this film so as to locate a kind of fault line in our notions of sexuality and spectacle.



**Figure 1.01** (*The Kiss*, 1896, The Edison Company)

In her most recent book *Screening Sex* (2008), and perhaps the most ambitious project in film studies to locate cinema in the context of a history of sexuality, Williams has noticed in passing that *The Kiss*, as “cinema’s first sex act”, was “[m]ost likely... nothing overtly sexy to audiences at the time” (Williams “Of Kisses” 291, 293).<sup>24</sup> Citing Musser’s archival research, she notes that the reported reaction of the first audiences to this film was ebullient laughter. Williams offers Musser’s quotation of a Boston newspaper of the time, “[o]f the 10 pictures included in yesterday’s programmes, it would be difficult to say which will leave the most lasting impression, but there is no shadow of doubt as to which created the most laughter... [the] kissing scene... was reproduced on the screen,

<sup>24</sup> Here I quote Williams’ first published version of the essay on *The Kiss*.





Figure 1.02 (*The Kiss*, 1896, The Edison Company)

and the very evident delight of the actor and the undisguised pleasure of the actress were absolutely ‘too funny’ for anything” (Musser “The May Irwin Kiss” 103). So, though reviews of the time do speak of the film as being amusing, there is no mention of the *sexual* nature of the spectacle. Now, how could it be that the first sexual act ever depicted was not really understood, or experienced, *itself* as a *sexual* spectacle?

There could be at least two conceivable responses to this question: first, one could say, as Musser does, that *The Kiss* must be understood as both part of a comedic context and as a satirical repetition of another theatrical kiss. In fact, the kiss as an American public *spectacle in itself*, Musser reports, first made its debut on a Manhattan stage at the same time as *The Widow Jones*, in dramatic version of *Carmen* starring Olga Nethersole (99). In this play, the female protagonist’s lurid encounters are exploited as the

privileged spectacle of the show. Thus when, only months after the opening of *Carmen*, *The Kiss* made its debut and was looped repeatedly (as was common practice for these short one-reelers), the film's repetition replayed the earlier work in a comedic vein: the kiss as *burlesque*.

A second explanation, following Williams, is that this laughter surrounding the scene is a result of the shock of the kiss being magnified on the screen, becoming spectacle for the first time. The kiss, as she understands it, can be characterized in terms of Gunning's notion of the *cinema of attractions*, i.e., as a film which displays not only the novelty of captured act *without* the support of narrative framing devices, but which also foregrounds the novelty of the spectacle of the cinema itself. Hansen will say of the film : "[t]he point of such a film [referring to *The Kiss*] is precisely the 'impossible' placement of the viewer: the thrill of witnessing an intimate act from such close proximity which in 'real life' would preclude that very intimacy, and which on stage would disrupt the illusion of reality" (*Babel* 35). While Hansen's suggestion seems like a plausible articulation of *The Kiss*' attraction, the diversity of reactions to the film suggest that its point-- the direction of its pointing-- was not entirely clear to its audience. Williams accounts for this diversity by disarticulating the film kiss from its sexual *telos* in American culture: "[k]isses, when stylized and elaborated by the Hollywood narrative cinema, would eventually become synecdoches for the whole sex act. Here, however, a kiss is an unnarrativized attraction amounting to a revelation of the physical act to one critic and a disgusting monstrosity to another" (Williams "Of Kisses" 294-295). For Williams then, what makes this film an example of an attraction is that the sex act is not contextualized in any way: it offers itself as a kind of pure presence to be the object of

enjoyment or outrage of its spectators. If it is shocking, then it can only be domesticated in the form of this most basic of games: repetition. And yet, viewed afterwards as a “first” for the cinema, it is curious that this scene is not afforded a traumatic valence by Williams.

These first spectatorial impressions, reflecting the unprecedented nature of the spectacle, nevertheless act as a troubling reminder of the discontinuity of early film spectatorship; just as historiographers have identified evidence from early cinema that runs counter to our ideas about classical cinema, the reaction to the kiss functions like a lacuna for synchronic psychoanalytic spectatorship theories. Going forward, I would like to take this sense of historical estrangement as the index of a discursive fault-line. This scene remains illegible because something crucial has yet to be installed (i.e., the conventions of classical spectatorship); I would go further to suggest that this scene does not read as a *sexual* scene because the very notion of the “sexy” has not fully emerged as a possible horizon of readability.

While I would not disagree with Williams’ assessment then, one question to pose is: if this film is, at once, a sexual event and not a sexual spectacle (a specular reflection) at the time of its release, how do we account for this disjunction, while at the same time respecting what, within it, *will become sexual*? Our question directs us towards the *nachträglich* (as *après coup*, afterwordly) nature of the traumatic address of the film, which Laplanche elaborated after his reading of early Freud. What is it, after all, in *The Kiss*, that is sent? What is planted by this film (and the genre of attraction films like it)? What is it that addresses itself to spectators? No doubt, this film and many more after it, challenge their viewers to consider what it means that such an act is publically displayed.

What does it mean that (s)he watches it, and repeatedly? And of course, what does it mean that it provokes and seems to contain such enthusiasm? What does the image seek? At stake here in these questions is the idea that this film's reception is a kind of traumatic primal scene, and as a *prototype* it screens a fundamental, insistent fixation for film spectatorship. As we shall see, Williams' notion that this is a scene of shock is consistent with her Foucauldian accounts of the history of film sexuality as "perverse implantation", and yet quite at odds, I will argue, with her recent work on Hollywood as melodramatic mode. Williams' suggestion that the scene is simply shocking does not hone in on this event as a traumatic *first sexual act*.

What, then, does *The Kiss* send? How does it address the spectator? W.J.T. Mitchell has formulated a similar question for the field of visual studies in his essay *What do Pictures Want?* He uses this question heuristically to investigate the status of images as "things that have been marked with all the stigmata of personhood and animation", as a kind of dependent, "subaltern" entity which needs its viewer to survive (Mitchell 30). This means that for Mitchell, the images' address is fundamentally predicated on its *want*: as both desire and lack. Part of the image's power to provoke comes from this ambiguity: "[t]he picture as subaltern makes an appeal or issues a demand whose precise effect and power emerges in an intersubjective encounter compounded of signs of positive desire and traces of lack or impotence" (39). Now in thinking about *The Kiss* as a cinematic spectacle, is it *just* to say that it lacks? Certainly, it displays the act as something meaningful, but to say that it lacks would ignore the fact that the image presents itself, and that part of the novelty of its attraction is that the moving image is *present* to its viewers in a new way.

Positing lack in *The Kiss*, I would argue, is a way of dealing with what remains untranslatable in the image's presentation. Translation may at first seem out of place in this discussion; after all, we are talking about images, and images without speech at that. To speak of the untranslatability of the image interrupts one of the foundational myths of the cinema: that it is a form of "visual Esperanto", that it has the potential, via the transparency of its images, to bring together a spectatorship out of the different peoples of the world. And yet, in taking up the 'contents' of early cinematic images from the perspective of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we must not lose sight of the fact that we are dealing with film as an emergent idiom, but one which already signifies or appeals to its audience. Unlike the psychoanalytic emphasis on the lack in the film system (as lack in the Big Other), Mitchell's essay puts a *paradoxical* emphasis on the image's lack; it lacks because it has a kind of positivity that other signs do not have. While treating images as pseudo-life forms has a kind of heuristic power, what seems to me persuasive is his notion that images have the ability to address, as if as an other. In the spectacle of *The Kiss*, and beyond any content it delivers, there is something in the form of address that retains its traumatic content.

One of the guiding premises of this study is that it is only by giving a positive status to the *infancy* of early cinema, as a form of enculturation with a kind of 'proto-content' (an address that remains pregnant with silence), that we can approach the meaning of its silence.<sup>25</sup> In thinking about what is sought in *The Kiss*, what is *unsayable*

---

<sup>25</sup> For a different approach to the notion of "the Infans" which takes as its reference the work of Serge Leclaire and Maurice Blanchot, see Fynsk, Christopher. *Infant Figures: The Death of the Infans and Other Scene of Origin*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000. Print. And for a work of film history which mobilizes "the infans" of Leclaire/ Blanchot, see Lebeau, Vicky. *Childhood and Cinema*. London: Reaktion.

in it, it is important to distinguish between lack as an analytical principle and infancy as a primal category. To say that something lacks is, of course, to speak in terms of a discursive set, implying a paradoxical closure. Film theory of the 1970s called upon psychoanalysis to fill out its apparent gap, it calls upon film as an example to establish its logic in the face of its own lack. That the cinema begins in silence (that it does not have sound but also, and more fundamentally, that it begins without its own language), means that it carries with it, in the unique form of its indexicality (the indication of a “here” as Metz says), a singular relation to what it cannot translate. I think that it is more useful to think of the early cinematic address in terms of translation.<sup>26</sup> What is the ‘here’ of the untranslatable *infans*, what is the character of this *presence*? Cinema’s infancy, its privileged relation to the unspeakable is a habitual theme within film theory and before further exploring a return to psychoanalytic understanding of infancy and its legacy for the spectator, let us consider two key cases in film theory.

Famously, André Bazin saw in the primal relation to presence that characterized the cinema, the possibility of an authentically existential art, an art which in its very photographic ontology was a monument to the ambiguity of being. And though he does not refer to Peirce’s theory of the index directly, film theorists since Peter Wollen have read Bazin (and not without convincing evidence) in terms of indexicality: to take the exemplary definition of Nichols, “An indexical sign bears a physical relation to what it refers to: a fingerprint replicates exactly the patterns of whorls on the fleshy tips of the

---

Books, 2008. Print.

<sup>26</sup> The necessity and impossibility of translation for motion pictures goes all the way back to the wish for film to be universal language. Going back to D.W. Griffith’s project to make of cinema a “new American hieroglyphic”, this dream resonated around the world with the concept of a film as “visual Esperanto”, a language of images which would overcome the problems of Babel.

fingers; the asymmetrical shape of a wind-swept tree reveals the strength and direction of the prevailing wind” (Nichols *Introduction* 125). For Bazin, the photographic image has this indexical quality of being tied to its referent ‘existentially’; he, thereby, brings out the melancholic structure of film realism(s). For Bazin, famously, film is the most recent of the “plastic arts”, the essential feature of which is to “embalm[...] the dead” (*What v.1* 9). Taking as his founding trope the death cults of the ancient Egyptians, Bazin calls the melancholic structure of art its “mummy complex”. For Bazin’s phenomenology-inspired position, the light-trace on the film stock is a monument to the presence of reality: “a black-and-white photograph is not an image of reality broken down... but rather a true imprint of reality, a kind of luminous mold... There is ontological identity between the object and its photographic image” (*What v.2* 98).<sup>27</sup> This is the dominant reception of Bazin’s theory of cinema as an indexical art. And yet there is another sense in which film is indexical for Bazin that comes closer to what we are aiming at with the notion of the *infans*, and which bears on the scene of *The Kiss*. In an essay called “Cinema and Exploration”, Bazin states in passing regarding an exploration documentary: “[i]t is not so much the photograph of the whale that interests us as the photograph of the danger” (*What v.1* 161). In other words, the urgency characteristic of the indexical sign is not primarily in what is objectively displayed, as its address-value: as that intentionality present, but obscured just under the surface. What film critics miss in both Peirce and Bazin’s theories of the cinematic index, is that what is at stake is not perfect resemblance

---

<sup>27</sup> But it is important to immediately add that if Bazin requires that the film image preserve the image in its “wholeness”, it is not in the naive dream of perfect representation, but so that the image more faithfully preserves the ontological “ambiguity” of reality itself. Bazin’s advocacy of Italian neo-realism allegorized his ‘respect’ for the power of this indexicality.

(which is, of course, strictly speaking iconic), but an urgency in relation to its referent: “A rap on the door is an index. Anything which focuses the attention is an index. Anything which startles us is an index, in so far as it marks the junction between two portions of experience. Thus a tremendous thunderbolt indicates that something considerable happened, though we may not know precisely what the event was” (Peirce 108-09). The ‘here’ of the index is *seductive* in the first instance, in its treatment of an immediate signifier as an urgent message, as an address. This alternative way of thinking about the indexicality of cinema places emphasis not on the certainty of the referent (which is, in fact, always uncertain and imperceptible outside of its signal), but on the urgency of its address.

In its mutism, Giorgio Agamben has argued, that cinema “leads images back into the realm of gesture”; as an art of gesture, cinema (at once) invests everything with significance without, however, having this significance being resolved into an ultimate sense: “it is a kind of mediation that is pure and devoid of any end that is effectively communicated to people” (*Infancy* 156, 153, 155). In this essay on the cinema called “Notes on Gesture”, Agamben suggests that the experience of language *as medium* is the fundamental meaning of gesture: “[g]esture is the display of mediation, the making visible of a means as such” (155). And further, Agamben argues that the “essential ‘mutism’ of cinema (which has nothing to do with either the presence or absence of a soundtrack)... [should be associated with] an exposition of the human being’s being-in-language: pure gesturality” (156). It is this urgent *mutism*, which characterizes the silence of silent cinema. In his *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*, Agamben has described human infancy as the “encounter [with]... the pure exteriority of



language”; it is not language in its lack, but language reduced to its zero ground. Infancy, here, refers to the minimal difference represented by the place of the subject, which translates synchronic language into the diachronic act of speech. It is not simply a developmental state all humans have overcome, but the very engine of this development. To regard the cinema in its infancy does not return us, *a la Bazin*, to a relation to the lost object of the referent, but to a primal experience of the unspeakable in language. He calls infancy an “experience of language as such, in its pure self-reference” (*Infancy* 6). He associates infancy not with an ontological demarcation of the noumenal referent, but with the signifying system’s limit-point.

Film gets its power precisely by surveying the borders of its own signifying limit, thereby preserving those limits within it. The *infans* of the image is not simply silent, it is a monument to the entrance wounds of language and culture. Here, the framing limits of what is culturally readable at a given moment are made into an *involving* spectacle. The cinematic spectacle, like that of *The Kiss*, before its language, before its voice, constituted an *address*, as *infans*. I would argue following Bazin and Agamben that a message stripped of its content does not lack: it addresses. In showing more than it can tell, the cinematic address presents the spectator with an uncertain, urgent message.<sup>28</sup> For Agamben, this form of address is epochal for modern political hegemony.

In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, quoting a letter of Gershom Scholem to Walter Benjamin on the law and revelation, Agamben highlights Scholem’s notion of the “Nothing of revelation” as (in Scholem’s words) “a stage in which

---

<sup>28</sup> A theorist who has read the work of Laplanche and Agamben’s Scholemic address together is Eric L. Santner in his *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig*.

revelation does not signify, yet still affirms itself by the fact that it is in force. Where the wealth of significance is gone and what appears, reduced, so to speak, to the zero point of its own content still does not disappear” (Qtd. in 50-51). What I would like to take from this movement in Agamben’s thought, the shift from infancy as a phenomenology of the transcendental to infancy as an analytic of modern hegemony, is an attention to the socio-historical dimension. In the address “in force without significance” the undecidable, untranslatable limits of a culture are made present as a mute, urgent *here*, the locus of a call to culture. Reading these moments in Agamben together (the Scholemic address and the problematic of infancy), I would suggest that we think about the *infans* as a positive leftover of this hegemonic address, as a deposit in the message which requires translation, narration and resolution. Heuristically, we can say that the reception scene of *The Kiss* is “in force without significance”; as a primal scene it screens that which will become central to the cinematic form: the *infans* as seductive address of the spectator.

At this point I think that the problematic of infancy can be translated (and can translate) the terms of the dialectic of Freudian psychoanalysis, for (as we demonstrated in our discussion of Williams) it is the centrality of this traumatic address that Laplanche has emphasized. Reframing Agamben’s theory of infancy through a Laplanchean optic, the *infans* represents the fact that apparent lack is, in cultural practice, never void. In Laplanche’s thought, the address of the other is associated with precisely this aspect of signification: “[t]he category of the message, or of the signifier in so far as it ‘signifies to’, is ‘addressed to’, is absolutely different from that of the Symbolic: the message can be verbal or non-verbal, more or less structured...” (*Essays* 91-92). In other words, Laplanche points out here an aspect of signification that carries this urgency, a libidinal

indexicality referring to the sense of the other's presence. The efficacy of the Laplanchean unconscious does not stem from the alienation of desire in language, but in the fact language has a traumatic residue that it can never fully overcome.<sup>29</sup> Contrary to Lacanianism, the unconscious is, for the subject, the real mnemonic film of language. For Laplanche, the primal address is the realist index of the other's ex-citement, as it comes to mark itself in the psychic life of the individual.

Recently, in the final instalment of his *The Pervert's Guide to the Cinema* (and for the first time in his work), Žižek addressed himself to the specific role of the cinematic. Evoking the Lacanian Real, Žižek highlights "a certain autonomy of cinematic form... form is not here simply to express, articulate content. It has a message of its own." (*Pervert's v3*). For Žižek, the *message* of this "cinematic materialism" is of a "proto-reality":

beneath the level of meaning— spiritual meaning, but also simple narrative meaning— we get a more elementary level of forms themselves communicating with each other... it is this that provides the proper density of the cinematic experience. (*Pervert's v3*)

In his statement that "cinematic form... has a message of its own", I think Žižek has come closest of all psychoanalytic film theorists to naming the problem of what I call the "proto-content" of the form of cinematic address. Following Laplanche, with our

---

<sup>29</sup> Where within the primacy of the signifier, the unconscious amounts to the circulation of an a-signifying element (the letter) separated from its contingent 'causes' by the process of Symbolic substitution, for Laplanche the Thing-like quality of the 'designified' enigmatic signifier does not cut it off from its indexical relation to the referent (even if that 'referent' has been internalized). Lyotard has made a similar argument about the realism of the Freudian unconscious in his essay "The dream-work does not think", when he suggests that the "force" of the figural, as the exposition of language to its outside, violates the closure of the Symbolic (*Lyotard Reader* 51).

discussions of Bazin and Agamben in mind, I would suggest that we read this proto-content in line with the enigmatic indexicality of the other's excitement (rather than as another allegory of the Lacanian Real) to perhaps get a more precise understanding of how the index functions specifically for the film spectator. The address of the "autonomy of cinematic form," as Žižek calls it, returns us to the task of deciphering the obscure enthusiasm of the cultural address, in all of its alienness.

In this light, the scene of *The Kiss, as a scene of seduction*, exposes us to the fact of the cinema's infancy; the film form, even more than other semiotic modes, has a uniquely direct relation to its origins as a quasi-language.<sup>30</sup> It is not simply that early cinema forms a kind of babbling childhood for the classical conventions to follow, but that something of this unspeakable birth lives on in motion picture spectatorship even today. For it is this very presentation of the unspeakable unique to film spectatorship (as something in the address and as something to be addressed) that constitutes film's infancy. In the chapters that follow I examine how this *infans* gets expressed as a cinematic inheritance.

Regarding *The Kiss*, the jovial spectatorial 'bodies' in question have yet to fully incorporate the cinematic spectacle as sexualized. In order to approach the afterwordly deposit left by *The Kiss*, I propose that we look upon its spectatorial scene from the

---

<sup>30</sup> Metz found that while film can be approached from a semiotic perspective, it was not itself, in fact, a language system (*langue*). Unlike verbal language, which relies on a code of rules which are not in themselves meaningful (a paradigm), film language must generate its own codes from out of what is actualized in it (its syntagms), which admittedly include other languages which *are* systematic (the sound film includes verbal discourse, graphic language). As a "language without a system", the cinema always preserves within itself a certain art, or activity of *poesis* (*Film* 65). Metz rightly emphasizes the indexical aspect of film semiotics, as an internal limit to its linguisticity: "[i]t [film] carries with it a kind of *here*" (67).

perspective of seduction, as thinking of the “film body” (of the other) in its most untranslatable gestures as a herald of the traumatic legacy of the spectator: as a foreign body against which the form of spectatorship is developed as a solution. Viewed from the perspective of seduction in this expanded sense, the unprecedented address of this scene instigates the forms of cinematic involvement to follow: a kiss *planted* for the future.

### “This Silence Might be Meant for You”: The *Infans* of Film Melodrama

If we, as spectators, are *seduced* by the cinema it must be in this traumatic sense of the seduction theory, in which the spectator repeatedly encounters the *infans*. In Freud’s seduction theory, read as a theory of cultural incorporation, we have a model for thinking of the way the spectator is derived dialectically from the attempts to metabolize the novel troubles presented by the moving picture. I will argue, going forward, that by understanding the dialectic of this incorporation of the *infans* of early cinema we can reapproach the theory of classical Hollywood spectatorship, and thematize the rhetoric that accompanies its development out of the early cinema. The story of Hollywood film is the story of the internalization of this spectacular visual address, and as we conclude, let us come back to Williams’ understanding of melodrama to explore how this metabolization becomes the focus of Hollywood’s melodramatic mode.

Williams’s theory of the “film body” (as hypostasis) functions to translate and paradoxically domesticate the alterity of the cinematic ‘foreign body’. Previously, we demonstrated that in her early work Williams follows a Foucauldian biopolitical model in positing a film body directly affected by the apparatus without remainder or

metabolization. Subsequently, with her turn to the primacy of melodrama in her understanding of American “moving pictures” she has placed these film bodies within generic, fantasmatic frames of cultural reception. I argue, however, that the privileging of this body remains ultimately abstracted from its traumatic infancy. The hypostatic rhetorical gesture persists in her work, I would argue, in her essay “Film Bodies” in the centrality of mimicry for film reception: “the body of the spectator is caught up in an almost involuntary mimicry of the emotion or sensation of the body on the screen” (4).<sup>31</sup> The creaky hinge here between the Foucauldian body and psychoanalytic fantasy swings on this axis of the ecstatic spectacle of affect. Williams’ point about this is that, framed by “primal fantasies”, moving pictures elicit this mimicry as the basic way of addressing the cultural problems associated with these genres: “pornographic films... tend to present sex as a problem, to which the performance of more, different, or better sex is posed as the solution” (9). The implication is that these sites of cultural enthusiasm remain, ultimately, traumatically unsymbolizable; without the ability to understand these emotions, the spectator’s last resort is a basic form of mimicry. In the architecture of her film corpus, this ultimate illegibility of the ecstatic body *holds the place* of the *infans* for Williams, as being “in force beyond signification”, and I would argue it is the ‘zero point’ which necessitates her turn to the notion of melodramatic “dialectic of pathos and action”, in which the enigmatic call of the spectacle of passive emotional excess or

---

<sup>31</sup> In a workshop entitled “Affect as Rhetorical Strategy” at the 2011 annual SCMS conference in New Orleans, Williams again affirmed her position that affective mimicry is central not only to the body genres but to the American melodramatic “moving picture”, in general. See also her recent Foucault-inspired essay, “Discipline and Fun: Psycho and Postmodern Cinema.”

suffering is met with the response of a decisive action to attempt to situate moral virtue (*Playing* 30).

Within the criticism of melodrama, Williams' work follows from the pioneering scholarship of Peter Brooks who understands melodrama as the *mode of excess*. For melodrama, the *so-called* discursive "failure" of excess is the locus of the drama itself. Having originated as an aesthetic movement with the French Revolution's liquidation of the royal authority, and the subsequent ban in France on oral language in dramatic performance, melodrama seeks to articulate a shared moral sense, precisely in those modern cultures where the traditional symbolic moorings of the community have been challenged or overturned. Thus, melodrama only occurs where the symbolic network of a culture has faltered, and where there is a gap, or tear in the *moral fabric*. In light of our discussion of early film and the *infans*, we will explore the ways that the 'language' of narrative cinema comes partly as a melodramatic response, both aesthetically and culturally, to the scandal posed by film's new possibilities of display and dissemination.

Unlike Williams, Brooks has attempted to give melodrama's excessive referent a conceptual articulation; for him, what is obscured by the gap in social discourse has, nonetheless, a kind of *reality*. As Brooks puts it, melodrama presents "the postulation of a signified in excess of the possibilities of the signifier, which in turn produces an excessive signifier" (Brooks 199). Brooks suggests that the ultimate signified melodrama probes is what he calls the "moral occult"; this denotes, for him, "not a metaphysical system... [but] rather the repository of the fragmentary and desacralized remnants of sacred myth"; a "domain of spiritual forces and imperatives that is not clearly visible within reality, but which... demands to be uncovered, registered, articulated" (Brooks 20-

1). Despite being profoundly influenced by Brooks' account, Williams stops short of positing the referent of melodrama in a moral occult: "I prefer to use the other term Brooks deploys to define melodrama—'moral legibility,' instead of the more religious, and vaguely Gothic 'moral occult'" (*Playing* 315 n.17). For Williams, despite (and, I would argue, because of) the illegible body of the other, moral legibility becomes the ultimate task of the American melodramatic mode. And yet, Williams does not offer another conception for what makes something radically illegible in society; in her early theory this is embodied by the fact that the primacy of unspeakable other seems to be subsumed and incorporated by the mimicry of the film body. The hypostasis of the film body mimics the incorporative movement of the seduction theory, by taking in and repressing the foreign body.

I want to re-frame some of the foundational premises of Williams' 'moral legibility' argument about the melodrama of 'moving' pictures in the light of the seduction theory and Butler's directives regarding the "unspeakably social". For Butler, the importance of the unspeakable is particularly evident in the 'impossible' figures of marginalized contingencies within society that find themselves left unreadable and unrecognized by hegemonic forms: "it is important to remember... that interpellation does not always operate through the name: this silence might be for you" (*Contingency* 157). Butler's silent interpellation is structured like the Scholemic address in force beyond signification. If we are to take seriously seduction as a culturalist theory of sexuality (where the *infans* is a traumatic remainder of the process of enculturation) I would suggest that we understand Brooks' notion of the *moral occult*, not as a "symbolic" remnant of a by-gone age, but as indexing the circulation of these exciting,



invasive addresses in culture: 'unspeakably social' *sites of illegible enthusiasm*.<sup>32</sup> To revise Brooks' formulation then, the occulted signified of melodrama is this cultural *address as infans*: "this silence might be meant for you" (*Contingency* 157). Going forward, I will be arguing that the singular form of film monstration-- as a paradoxical unilateral direct address detached from the sphere of social pragmatics and performance-- gave it a privileged position in the development of the melodramatic mode in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

While the appeal of the cinema has been forcefully associated with sexuality since its inception, when we look at how sexuality was represented and 'theorized' by the cinema itself in its first decade, we are faced with the problem of the historicity of the concept of the sexual. In exploiting the novelty of sexuality on the screen, film did more than simply reflect back to early spectators their desires and fantasies; film, in fact, intervened in the process by which sexuality was popularized as a cultural category. While I agree with Williams that film implants something in its spectator, I contest the Foucauldian paradigm of her initial argument. Calling on the work of Laplanche, Bazin, and Agamben, the term *infans* can denote the residual 'proto-content' implicit in silent cinema's spectatorial address. I would suggest that we take the legend of the reception *The Kiss* as an allegory of the first moment in our seduction plot: a first traumatic message which, though sent, seems not to have arrived: as Laplanche has said of the

---

<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, despite having grown up in a family in the film business (as owners of a cinema in Cleveland) Butler's sole work on cinema is an essay on Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* (1959), entitled "Lana's "Imitation": Melodramatic Repetition and the Gender Performative."

cultural, “an address to an other who is out of reach, to others ‘scattered in the future’”  
*(Essays 224)*.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Laplanche describes the cultural address as re-activating seduction: “cultural production is situated from the first beyond all pragmatics [of communication]... What can be isolated here as characteristic of the cultural is an address to an other who is out of reach... this relation [to the enigma of the other] is essential, a renewal of the traumatic, stimulating aspect of the childhood enigma” (*Essays 224*).

## 2

**The Youth the Moving Picture Took:  
The Scandal of Early Cinema**

Since the beginning of film's public exhibition, anxieties circulated about the criminal threats associated with the setting of film-going, the obscenity of film content, and the psychological dangers of film form. With *The Downward Path*, we saw that already in 1900, films reflected this fear about an imminently emerging, Post-Victorian sexual economy, in which upwardly mobile young women were exposed to a "wider range of evening pleasures" (Maltby 218). Historians have argued that the emergence of new working classes (i.e., 'independent' women, immigrants, etc.) along with mass forms of entertainment, generated these anxieties about illicit forms of criminal, sexual, and infectious traffic.<sup>34</sup> However, I would like to take these anxieties about the cinema seriously, as indexing the specificity of its intervention, of its particular exigency. Film-going reflected this new culture of amusement and distraction, but while it remained as one entertainment in a variety program, it did not single itself out as a singular danger. This did not happen until the advent of the nickelodeon, as a place solely for the viewing of moving pictures. What, as we shall see in the following chapter, characterized the aesthetic of the first era of film was its visceral visual display. As Gunning has argued, where the form of narrative film that has become dominant is primarily interested in filmic narration and the suspense of temporal development, the cinema of the pre-1908 era (if indeed it can be called cinema) is characterized by visual display, shock and with

---

<sup>34</sup> For an overview see Bowser, Eileen. "The Recruiting Station of Vice." *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990. Print. History of the American Cinema 2.

what he calls temporal “irruption” (“Now” 45). At the centre of cinema’s own melodramatic discourse, the visceral appeal of the attraction (in Gunning’s sense) provides us an alternative to thinking about early aesthetics as voyeuristic perversion, but it is also a model that seems to resist being captured and translated into the terms of historical teleology. Previously, I introduced the term *hypostasis* to describe the ‘working’ theories, and the work that theory may do, despite the tendency in recent critical studies to move beyond theory. Bracketing their gaps, errors and fabulating qualities, these theories respond to some urgent *exigency*. Similarly, this urgency is also reflected in the melodramatic figures of spectatorship that arose in the second decade of the cinema, as motion pictures became the object of public reflection.

In this chapter, I will read the history of the aesthetic institution of the film spectator in relation to its constitutive ‘foreclusion’ of the early, novelty form of motion picture aesthetics that has been given the name “the cinema of attractions”. While very important work has been done to draw out the historical/ cultural conditions in which these profound changes took place, there is more to say about the ‘internal logic’ of this aesthetic shift, and the cultural ramifications that followed from it. The aesthetic relation already implies a theoretical and libidinal work in relation to its object. What theoretical ‘work’ was the spectator of motion pictures undergoing within the evolving address of the cinema? If we look at the efforts to theorize the shift from the cinema of attractions through the transitional period to the classical narrative cinema of the 1920s (be they critics of the time or scholars of the present), I would suggest that we find a dialectical logic working itself out in the institution of film spectatorship. In describing this as a developmental movement, and in tracing out continuities and transitions, I no doubt open

this argument to the charge that film historians of the last thirty years have levelled against film theory; i.e., as noted in the introduction, that film studies had traditionally presupposed a theory of film history ‘written by the victor’: written as a teleology of conventional (Hollywood) narrative cinema. Alternatively, I would like to sketch out a dialectical trajectory in which emphasis is placed on the how founding exclusions of the cinema come to indelibly mark its development. In other words, I want to focus on the *retentive* (or conservative) moment of the dialectical model. In this chapter, I will introduce the concept of the attraction of early cinema, and the conditions of its prohibition in the years of the transitional period, to set the table in subsequent chapters to ask the question: how is the legacy of the attraction preserved and *shut into* the form of dominant Hollywood cinema, as it developed into the 1920s. I see the visceral appeal of the “attraction” as this foreclosed and dialectically preserved alterity of the cinema that developed out of this historical dynamic. The history of cinema as a cultural institution is the history of the fundamental compromise with the alterity of the filmic attraction. It is in this context that I will read the Freudian theory of seduction and the seduction narratives of American melodramatic film with/ against Münsterberg’s pioneering theory to think through this historical dialectic of the film spectator.

I will make this argument in the context of a heuristic discussion of three stages of American film production from the three periods of American film historiography: the cinema of attractions (1896-1907) the transitional period (i.e., 1908-1913), and the classical narrative period (from 1915 on), all of which in their different ways take up the scene of seduction as their privileged theme.<sup>35</sup> Our agenda for this chapter will be the first

---

<sup>35</sup> While there is much debate about the precise of years of these three eras of silent film,

two of these periods, from the early 1900s to the mid 1910s. To begin with, I will turn to a number of similar mutoscope reels from 1904 which are characteristic of the cinema of attractions; among films like *One Way of Taking a Girl's Picture* and *The Picture the Photographer Took*, the voyeuristic scene centres on the sexual aura of the female subjects as their organizing principle. From there I will proceed to the transitional narrative feature *Traffic in Souls* (1913); in this film, as has been noted, narrative address is constructed by harnessing the basic techniques of editing, so that the orientation of the film is forged on the basis of the display of intercutting, or we might say, the meaningful *traffic* between shots. In other words, the form of the narrative itself becomes the site of spectatorial appeal. Within film historiography, the shift from the cinema of attractions to narrative filmmaking coincides with a shift from *direct* address of the spectator to the *indirect* address organized by the fictional world of the diegesis. As we will see, this shift corresponds to a changing moral stance in film culture. Our framing questions will be: how does this ban function, and what is its implication for the spectatorial address?

### The Attraction of Tom Gunning

Tom Gunning has built an important body of work by looking at the “errors” of linear film history, of “[r]ejecting biological schema of infancy and maturity” in favour of examining “those aspects... utopian, uncanny, or fantastic—that tend to remain repressed or were curtailed, and that constitute the forgotten future of our recent past” (“Whole” 197).<sup>36</sup> At the vanguard of the generation of film scholars who turned back to early cinema, he noticed a type of cinema before 1907 that was striking in its aesthetic

---

their descriptive use is now generally agreed upon.

<sup>36</sup> Gunning here echoes Benjamin’s use of the notion of a “forgotten future”.

autonomy, in the precise difference that it posed. In the mid 1980s, Gunning began to use the term “the cinema of attractions” to refer to this particular set of characteristics he was seeing in the archival material of the pre-narrative era. This emblem came, according to Gunning, from two primary inspirations: the carnival idiom of the 1890s, and the aesthetic theory of Sergei Eisenstein. For Eisenstein the attraction was the basic “unit of impression” of the theatre, it was a quanta of “sensual or psychological impact” provoked by the spectacle (Gunning “Cinema” 384). In Gunning’s hands, it became a model for understanding the uniquely visual, visceral impact of the early cinema:

this return to Eisenstein held great significance for me. I felt at that time (and still do) a need to rediscover the Utopian promise the cinema offered, as it had been described by theorists and filmmakers in the 1920s... In contrast to the ideological critique of the cinematic apparatus that had dominated Film Theory post-1968, these earlier avant-garde thinkers and practitioners saw revolutionary possibilities (both political and aesthetic) in the novel ways cinema took hold of its spectator... The concept of the attraction captured the potential energy of cinema’s address to the spectator. (32)

The attention to the visual display of novelty views in these early films had to be understood from the standpoint of visceral appeal, or these films would have to be rejected as the (non-narrative) trash of (narrative) film history. In 1985-6 Gunning published two articles which described the distinct visuality of the cinema of attractions: a paper co-written with André Gaudreault called, simply, the “Early Cinema as a Challenge to Film History”, and the now canonical “The Cinema of Attraction(s): Early

Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde". In the former, this early period is referred to as "the system of monstrative attractions", and in the latter, "the cinema of attractions" (Gaudreault "Early Cinema" 373, Gunning "Cinema" 382). While I will return shortly to Gaudreault's influence on this concept (and the meaning of the "monstrative"), in Gunning's first version of the argument with Gaudreault, *display* is given first billing. And this emphasis carries through to the second essay when, quoting the French avant-garde film critic Fernand Léger, Gunning suggests that early cinema's radical potential came in "making images seen", of making new things the object of visual display, and of making things new through this novel form of visibility (381). The hope of the avant-garde was the reality of the attraction, in that it gave a mundane view new and wondrous animation. This novel visibility was something markedly distinct from "fiction", and it did not serve a diegetic purpose, of establishing a world for the film.

For the cinema of attractions the moment of display is the centre of the action of the film, its punctual climax. The shock of this moment of "temporal irruption" is the object of a visual game of (as Gunning often says) "now you see it, now you don't", in which the image displayed is made to appear and disappear (44). Gunning often evokes as the *Ur*-scene of the cinema of attractions, films which play on the moment of visual presence as a scene of confrontation as visual assault: "the onrushing locomotive that seems to threaten the audience is early cinema's most enduring example" ("Now" 44).<sup>37</sup> For this reason, Gunning has increasingly tried to align the *cinema of attractions* with the techniques and experiences of modernity:

---

<sup>37</sup> See especially Gunning's "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator."



[t]he cinema of attractions develops out of a visual culture obsessed with creating and circulating a series of visual experiences to stimulate consumption. These attractions, however, do not simply arouse desire for commodities, but paradoxically begin to serve as ends in themselves, doses of scopic pleasure tailored to the nervous pace of modern urban reality. (“Whole” 194)

As both a “reflection” and “method” of modernity, the attraction reproduces (aesthetically) the fragmented, disorienting life of the modern city (194). In this way, not unlike Williams, Gunning has tried to bring out the ambivalence of the cinema of attractions; it is both a form of modernity and a response to it, both a form of stimulating play and a form of normalizing discipline.<sup>38</sup> With this emphasis on the aesthetics of shock and astonishment, the attractions mode functions like a visual *fort/da* game, which allows spectators to attempt to negotiate, master and ultimately enjoy the startling sensations of film display, assimilating this unprecedented (and, hence, potentially traumatic) new form of aesthetic experience. Referring repeatedly to Benjamin’s work on the shock aesthetic of film in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” and in “Some Motifs in Baudelaire”, Gunning understands the attraction as a kind of haptic exercise of sensation that helps inoculate the modern subject from the modern world’s tumult and disorder. Again, the emphasis here is on the visceral effect of the visual spectacle, and on the kind of bodily impression that it leaves rather than any narrative or moral sense it might have. Gunning’s reading of Benjamin is decidedly anti-auratic, in that he emphasizes the way that cinema breaks down the life-world into new

---

<sup>38</sup> On this point see Ben Singer, “Making Sense of the Modernity Thesis”, in *Melodrama and Modernity*, and our discussion of Singer in our next chapter.

units of sensation, including the bodies of others. In another of Gunning's key cases, Porter's *The Gay Shoe Clerk* (1903), a shoe seller gets 'fresh' with one of his female customers, and this is cinematically reflected in a cut to (or insert of) an extreme close-up of her bare ankle, in a quasi-point of view shot. While Gunning acknowledges the narrative elements of this film, which include the lewd behaviour of the clerk being punished, the emphasis remains on the act of display.<sup>39</sup> In the erotic peepshow attraction, the body of the woman is more often than not broken down into new units, and these new part-objects, de-contextualized and dismembered, become the fixing-point of a new erotic sensation. In these moments, Gunning expresses interest in the *attractions* as a model of thinking modern visual curiosity, as a (quoting Augustine) "lust of the eyes" fascinated not with the noumenal thing in the world, but on the sensuous pleasure of the visual phenomena ("Aesthetic" 124). In this turn of his thought, Gunning sees the thrill of attractions replacing narrative meaning and 'common' sense; i.e, attractions as a decomposition of social meaning by the materiality of consciousness, and its lust for repetition. And yet, while this anti-auratic tendency is a consistent one within Gunning's work, I would suggest that it is constantly being countered by the centrality of the "direct address" for the cinema of attractions.

Many of blue peepshow reels of the time exploited the moment of erotic address as a burlesque trick in which the spectator's expectations (carefully set-up by the promise of the film) were both titillated and frustrated by a punctual moment of concealment-as-revelation. The favoured motifs of these peepshows was the "screen" surface which

---

<sup>39</sup> Gunning, Tom. "1902-1903: Movies, Stories, Attractions." *American Cinema, 1890-1909: Themes and Variations*. Ed. André Gaudreault. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009.

functioned, like the film apparatus itself, as both a frame for the spectatorial gaze and as obstacle to that gaze. In American Mutoscope's "As Seen on the Curtain" (1904), a woman peers out the window of her dressing room as if to check for peeping toms, then the same framing is seen in the dark, as a backlit silhouette of the woman is seen in the (rather elaborate) process of dressing behind the window curtain (Figure 2.01-2). The short reel centres on the visual tease of the erotic shadow-play in which it is not only the erotic body of the woman on display, but also of the taboo on a perverse type of looking, on precisely the 'eye-lust' that Gunning associates with the cinema of attractions, which is being simultaneously celebrated and enforced. Similarly, in another American Mutoscope reel from 1904 "Behind the Screen", we "watch" as a young woman gets undressed behind the dressing screen, only to find that when the screen falls over, her nudity is still obscured by the bathtub she is by this time sitting in (Figure 2.03-4). Again the screen is used to assert the *minimal distance* implicit in the act of erotic viewing, a distance from the bodies of the other which, Williams says, is "constitutive" of the film spectator's relationship to the erotic image (*Screening* 17).<sup>40</sup> In both of these films, then, the revelatory moment of sexual presence is a (paradoxically) playful encounter with the inherent 'absence' of that presence on the screen, it is a game of distances and proximities. And yet the sense of a minimal distance of the screen also reproduces the voyeuristic position the spectator is invited to take in these films. Gunning, however, has repeatedly argued that the cinema of attractions, even in these peepshow reels, is characterized by exhibitionism, and not by voyeurism.

---

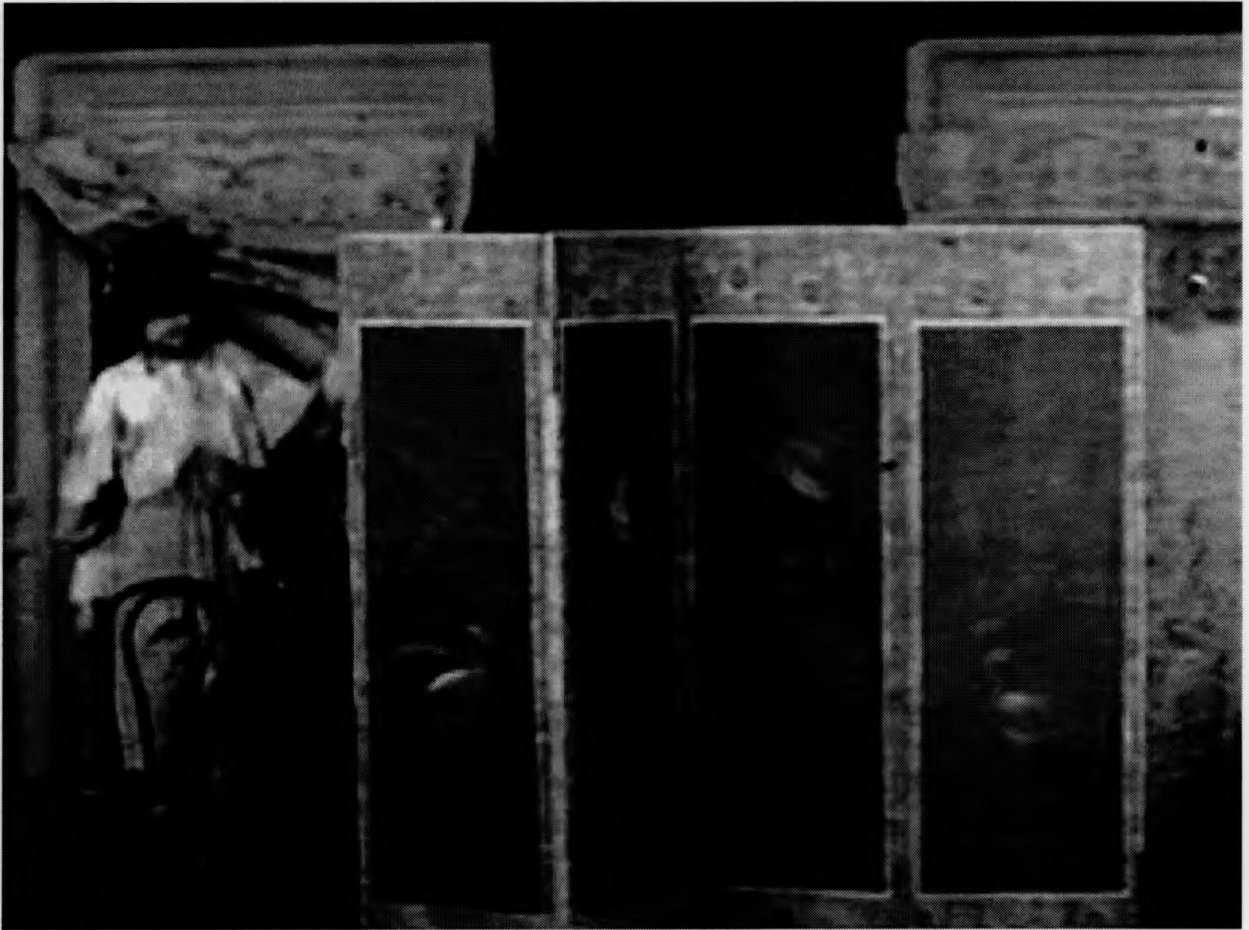
<sup>40</sup> With *Screening Sex*, Williams returns to the Foucauldian problematic of sexuality that we find *Hard Core*, and thus again moving away from her melodramatic work.



**Figure 2.01** (*As Seen on the Curtain*, 1904, American Mutoscope and Biograph Co.)



**Figure 2.02** (*As Seen on the Curtain*, 1904, American Mutoscope and Biograph Co.)



**Figure 2.03** (*Behind the Screen*, 1904, American Mutoscope and Biograph Co.)

The pre-1906 cinema often revelled, and built into itself, the encounter between the world of the film and the world of the spectator by having the image hail the spectator directly: “[a]ttractions’ fundamental hold on the spectator depends on arousing and satisfying visual curiosity through a direct and acknowledged act of display, rather than following a narrative enigma within a diegetic site into which the spectator peers invisibly” (“Now” 44). Though Gunning repeatedly asserts a distance between his work and psychoanalysis, he nevertheless mobilizes it at this crucial juncture in his argument, when he is trying to distinguish the cinema of attractions from narrative cinema. If (as Christian Metz famously argued) classical narrative film might plausibly be called “voyeurist”, Gunning suggests that the “direct address” of the cinema of attractions might



**Figure 2.04** (*Behind the Screen*, 1904, American Mutoscope and Biograph Co.)

be thought of as “exhibitionist” in its drive to be seen.<sup>41</sup> And this is nowhere more clear than in the erotic ‘peepshow’, in which the direct address was associated with the person of the strip-teaser. Thus whether the woman (as gaze-object) is addressing the viewer or not, the view is not objective; it is freighted with limitations and obstacles which figure it as a subjective point-of-view shot. Here again, we might suggest that direct address is not just a result of a literal call, but also of the presentational nature of the attraction. So while the peepshow remains exemplary of key-hole voyeurism, Gunning suggests that the way that the cinema of attractions exhibits its address(er) for the viewer disrupts the private pleasures of the voyeur:

---

<sup>41</sup> “The film is not exhibitionist. I watch it, but it doesn’t watch me watching it” (*Imaginary* 94).

[w]hile these films involve voyeurism, the spectator they address is still far from the voyeur spectator of classical narrative film... The classical spectator is constructed within a fantasy of a powerful invisible gaze able to insinuate itself into the most private dramas. In contrast, the "peeping tom" series forces private dramas into the public space of corridors, and the invoked space of the place of the exhibition itself. ("What I Saw" 38)

Paying homage to Mulvey's influential "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in "The Cinema of Attractions", Gunning sees the fetishized image of Woman as functioning as a kind of attraction, in that it similarly disrupts diegetic absorption.

Now, if we take seriously the rhetorical gestures of Gunning's work, this rare reference to psychoanalytic theory may be seen, I would argue, as an index of the dialectical conflict informing Gunning's position. If Mulvey's spectacular Woman represents an aestheticization of sexual alterity, then we might argue that the attraction similarly represents for Gunning an aesthetic alterity in the history of film, which disrupts the teleological dominance of narrative classicism. And yet, Mulvey's argument regarding the "to-be-looked-at-ness" of Woman suggests an alterity in excess of its pleasurable spectacle, which must be resolved by the male gaze:

Women displayed as sexual object is the leit-motif of erotic spectacle... The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation. The alien presence then has to be integrated into cohesion with the narrative ("Visual Pleasure" 750).

As Mulvey goes on to argue, the "alien presence" is ultimately that of the lack (castration) represented by Woman as Image, for the male viewer. However, in the light of the psychoanalytic discussion of seduction in the previous chapter, I suggest that we view this "alien presence" of Woman in line with Laplanche's *signifier-to*, i.e., not primarily as a symbol of lack, but as an index of the unspeakable appeal to which the spectator is called upon to respond. For Gunning, as I already suggested, the attraction does not point beyond itself, but instead decomposes the world's images and representations into thrills and sensations, thereby attempting to domesticate their alterity. But yet, if we look at the genres of attraction films (e.g., the strip peepshows, the gag film, and phantom rides), it is hard to deny that the intense views on display there are associated with objects of social and cultural trouble, investment and responsibility. Again, I would suggest Gunning's mobilization of a psychoanalytic concept at this juncture reflects a problem for his theory of the attraction: how can Gunning accept the category of alterity in his theory, without that alterity being relatively structured, and thus the locus of narrative orientation? With this in mind, Mulvey's position poses a question for the cinema of attractions, and a question for Gunning's model of the direct address: does the "to-be-looked-at-ness" of the attraction not presume an alien presence, does it not induce its own aura? For the erotic peepshow, this is a particularly pertinent question for those films which utilize the direct address in the guise of, what Noël Burch has called, "the emblematic shot" (Burch 196). In these films, the emblematic shot was usually of a smiling female looking back at the spectator. Like the attraction, this shot is the "repository" of the exhibitionist "point" of the film (Burch 196).





**Figure 2.05** (*Picture the Photographer Took*, 1904, American Mutoscope and Biograph Co.)

Looking again at the Mutoscope catalogue of 1904, we find two films with almost exactly the same set-up, which leave the viewer with just such emblematic endings.

Where, in other erotic attraction films we are witness to a burlesque scenario which *screens* female nudity, in “One Way of Taking a Girl’s Picture” (American Mutoscope & Biograph 1904) and “Picture the Photographer Took” (American Mutoscope & Biograph 1904) these “portrait” films depict the process of “taking” or capturing sexual presence in photography: we witness two different models having their partially nude photos taken by a male photographer and his female assistant. In a first, long shot of the whole studio, the photographer sets up, as the assistant helps the model undress and pose. After the picture has been taken and is developed (which miraculously only takes the amount of time for



**Figure 2.06** (*Picture the Photographer Took*, 1904, American Mutoscope and Biograph Co.)

the photographer to go offscreen and return with the plate), the film cuts to a second shot: an insert of the picture the photographer took. In both cases, too, the model is shown in tight closeup, framed to display the face, hair and the bared neck and shoulders. In “One Way of Taking a Girl’s Picture” the model is shot from behind with her wistful look focused offscreen right (Figure 2.07-8). In “Picture the Photographer Took”, the model faces the camera looking at us with a smile (Figure 2.05-6). Now, while I have suggested that these films display emblematic conclusions, I would also like to suggest that they allegorize what will become “emblematic” for the cinema of attractions going forward. In both these films the spectator gets to see the “fetish object” being constructed before *his* eyes, the insert being the product of this set-up scenario. And yet, what is captured is



**Figure 2.07** (*One Way of Taking a Girl's Picture*, 1904, American Mutoscope and Biograph Co.)

not simply the exhibition of a view, what is frozen in the whole process is a pose, an erotic gesture. The emblematic “picture” has a “point”, and it is this presentational pointing of the attraction, which Gunning’s anti-auratic position deemphasizes. The emblematic shot, sums up the relationship between direct address and visual display: the revelation of the cinema of attractions is that images can be *targeted*, that in the cinema images are sent and received, i.e., they have an *address-value*. This would be another way to think about the famous emblematic moment of Porter’s *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), in which the film’s primitive narrative is concluded by a direct address in close-up of the villain firing his six-shooter right at the spectator. If, as Gunning suggests, the



**Figure 2.08** (*One Way of Taking a Girl's Picture*, 1904, American Mutoscope and Biograph Co.)

content of the cinema of attractions comes out of an attempt to 'work through' the novelty of its form, I would argue that here is an example of the way that the alterity implied by the form comes to be a kind of unresolved 'proto-content', which in the last chapter we gave the name *infans*. Even as the cinema finds ways to represent fictional worlds, it must present views to its spectators, and this presentationalism will remain central for cinema up until the present.

Film historian Charles Musser responded to Gunning's reading of film history by pointing out that early cinema found its own ways to tell stories, emphasizing for instance, the role of the exhibitor.<sup>42</sup> In the viewing context of the variety show, and

<sup>42</sup> See Musser's "Rethinking Early Cinema: Cinema of Attractions and Narrativity."

narrated by the film exhibitor/ showman, attraction films were always and continuously being stitched into stories, including the story of their own exhibition. Where for Gunning the alterity of the attraction is diffused into a kind sublime enjoyment, for Musser this alterity is embodied by the narrator/ exhibitor. While in some ways the dialogue that arose between Gunning and Musser remains a bit of a missed encounter between their two positions, I wonder if there is not something that emerges from it: that is, that even before film's "narrator system" establishes itself, early cinema implies an alterity, a party to whom this the address of the film is ascribed (be it performer, exhibitor or director).

To better understand what is at stake in the "aura" of the emblematic in the cinema of attractions, I would like to return now to Gunning and Gaudreault's 'dropped' term, "the system of monstrative attractions". A comprise between two thinkers, the term also incorporates Gaudreault's work. Gaudreault has distinguished between two elements of film narrativity: narration and *monstration*, which is his term for cinema's strictly *presentational* capacity. The monstration of the attraction is associated with the "momentary" nature of the cinematic present, as it is captured as a piece by the camera, whereas narration introduces difference into the time of the film. Through editing, film narrative progresses, and meaning is constructed by combining views into a whole. The whole becomes an effect of seriality. Gaudreault suggests understanding cinema as a dynamic relation between these two polarities, so that when monstration is dominant we are still dealing with a very basic narrative frame, and when narration is dominant we have a monstrative element which remains: this is "the essential contradiction of the cinema as a system, the ineluctable contradiction that weighs on the cinematograph"

(Gaudreault "Primitive" 96-7). Within the logic of narrative, the attraction appears as gratuitous excess (the song in a musical, the special effects sequence, the exploitative display of nudity) associated with the sensuality of spectatorial reception, but within the attraction film, I would suggest that *the emblematic* represents the dialectical torsion-point between narration and monstration, in which the singularity of the punctual shot tries to condense into itself a summation of the whole. Rather than being a *representation* through different views of actions which make up the whole, the attraction is a *presentation* of the whole. The "monstrative" aspect of the attraction, extrapolating on Gaudreault's concepts, uses the punctual visuality to point to its subjects, and the emblematic in the cinema of attractions indexes the degree to which this pointing goes beyond itself. As Gaudreault has noted in his book *From Plato to Lumière: Narration and Monstration in Literature and Cinema*, the act of monstration implies a locus of alterity which is distinct from that of the Narrator, who addresses the spectator and presents a message: what he calls the Monstrator. Following Gaudreault, monstration gets utilized but not overcome by narrativity as film conventions develop. Perhaps we could say that the attraction realizes, *après coup*, its address-value in the context of the narrative cinema. However, the inclusion of monstration in narration, I would argue, projects a more structured, hypostatized figure of a Monstrator, on the model of the narrator. This figure of a Monstrator will be very important going forward in the transition to narrative cinema, as the perceived locus of meaning beyond that of the narrative instance. Like the inspired text of the Scholemic address, the Monstrator (particularly as it survives in the narrative era) is figured as either an unknowable master

or as a dangerous seducer. As we will see in our final section, the fundamental ambiguity of the Monstrator is reflected in the doubled structure of *Traffic in Souls*.

Recalling the emblematic shot of Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* in which the villain fires in direct address at the audience as a representative of the Law, I would like to ask who or what is the target of our two "portrait films"? In both of these films, the emblematic shot cinematically presents not an action (the burlesque gag or the overt strip), but a gesture of address as captured passion. Here, the form of these emblematic shots implies a content of its own: an erotic presence as indexed in the look of the other. As address in force beyond signification, the aura fabricated by the emblematic tendencies of the cinema of attractions would produce mass anxiety regarding its ramifications: to what end does the attraction point? Does it simply end in entertainment or in some more lasting, damaging impression?

#### A Child is Being Watched: Münsterberg and the Perils of Early Film Spectatorship

"Every little movement has a meaning of its own, every thought and feeling by some posture can be shown..." (Popular song from the play "Madame Sherry" by Karl Hoschna and Otto Harbach, 1910, qtd. in *The Jewish Americans*)

"More young women and girls are lead astray in moving pictures theatres than in any other way" (Qtd. in Keil and Singer *1910s* 32)

Efforts at reform and 'uplift' of the film industry began to emerge in earnest only as film came to occupy its own space. Taken out of the *relatively* respectable setting of the public fairground or the vaudeville theatre, and into the thousands of little, one-room store-front theatres which were emerging in urban America by 1905, film came to have its own home. This home, the *nickelodeon*, forged film-going as a cheap form of entertainment for working class audiences, and it also gave the scene of motion picture

spectatorship a new lurid atmosphere. As part of a "mixed program" on a vaudeville stage or fairground, the fascinations of the moving image seemed a novelty, but with the nickelodeon, spectators could spend all day watching moving pictures. The wild success of these film-only theatres led to a public sensation in the media, and the nickelodeon became the site of a culture war between upper-middle class and working class, mass interests.

These "darkened rooms", as they were repeatedly called, were figured as spaces existing outside public visibility and legal oversight, and so by 1910, it was possible to say of them, as a women's suffrage leader famously did, that they were "recruiting stations of vice" (Qtd. in Stamp 47). This concern culminated in the sporadic closure of nickelodeons all over the U.S. in 1908-09, including the mayor of New York's City's closure on Christmas eve of 1908 of all film theatres in Manhattan, the nation's centre of production and consumption at the time.

As the puritanist reform story went, the "darkened rooms" of the cinema were the perfect setting in which to expose the innocent to criminality. But chief among the concerns expressed in these days was around sexual 'seduction' and white slavery. In an article of the time, the child safety crusader Vincent Pissaro suggested that the "darkness of the auditorium during exhibitions, with its opportunities for 'puppy love' affairs" was a perfect setting for sexual seduction of the youth (Qtd. in Gunning *D.W. Griffith* 152). Yet, there was also intense debate about the appropriateness of the *content* of the cinema, and not just its unseemly setting. As the film industry began increasingly to address these concerns with a new regime of self-regulation (the National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures) by the end of the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the reign of the



nickelodeon waned, and film-going became increasingly acceptable to the middle-class (Bowser 49, Maltby 219).

By the 1910s, what had made the cinema of attractions both novel and popular in the culture of the nickelodeons (its relative ability to *detach* both the spectacle's object and subject-- the spectator-- from their everyday circuits) had become the focus of moral oversight. In the wake of the regulation of producers and theatres, studies by government and lobby groups found that it was not simply as a form of *adult* distraction that moving pictures were being consumed: immigrants, children and young women were going to the movies regularly, if not habitually.<sup>43</sup> Increasingly, the concerns around spectatorship went beyond the physical danger, exposure to crime, kidnapping and seduction. As cinema began to institutionalize its modes of production, regulation and narrative form, fears crystallized around the psychological effect of spectatorship. What once had been a fear of social conduct and behaviour became increasingly a matter of the interior. And this internalizing movement was being reproduced in the form of films. In 1909, the budding director D.W. Griffith began (with his *The Drunkard's Reformation*) to display and develop the interiority of his characters through editing. From being a "direct" spectacle of showing of the cinema of attractions (1895-1907), narrative films of the 'transitional' period (1908-1914) developed into a form of visual story-telling, by converting segments of film (shots as they were to be known later) into semantic units. Editing became a way of establishing and developing the world of the diegesis, its action and its temporal unfolding. Multiple characters and narrative threads expanded the scope of what films might display. This implied not only an increasing standardization of

---

<sup>43</sup> See Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema*, and Scott Simmon, "Movies, Reform and New Women."

narrative convention, but also an internalization of the spectator in the form of film. As an aesthetic of astonishment, the direct address was abandoned in the transitional era (notwithstanding exceptions fantastic “visions” and lingering emblematic shots) in favour of an indirect address which closed the space of the diegesis from that of the spectator. The spectator was thus ‘enveloped’ into the form of indirect address, and films came increasingly to focus on the interiority of its characters. Indeed, according to Gunning, *The Drunkard’s Reformation* stands as the first American film that takes as the object of its drama the psychological development of its protagonist, as it follows an alcoholic’s descent and redemption (*D.W Griffith* 169). This transition from attraction to narrative, from the first, implied a moral reflection on the impact of spectacle and the act of viewing. The transitional period has long been noted by historians as the beginning of the moralization of the cinema, and for its intense interest in “showing thoughts”, and critics like Kuhn and Grieveson have highlighted the biopolitical ramifications of this internalization of institutional censorship and surveillance (Keil *Early* 69).<sup>44</sup> A new visibility was developing around children, young women, and immigrants, inside and outside of the cinema. This in-turning of the motion picture not only connotes a biopolitical mobilization (of a network of knowledge/power) it also ambivalently connotes the fear of what this internalized gaze would mean for immature, innocent spectators. Ought the cinema to take as its object issues of a lurid nature? Would this help inform, and thereby liberate, the ignorant? Or, alternatively, would presenting these subjects on screen deform the spectator? The fact that these issues are hyperbolically sexualized speaks to fact that at some level there was a sense that the cinema may be

---

<sup>44</sup> See Annette Kuhn *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality, 1909-1925* and Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema*.

invading and penetrating the spectator's interior. At stake in this debate, is a theory of sexual development: where does sexuality originate, and how might cinema be implicated in this process?

In the introduction I identified three distinct types in the theatre of public discourse of the time, melodramatized as three 'new' spectatorial groups. These three different types, I would suggest, correspond to the three distinct melodramatic figures of *passionate* spectatorship I would like to highlight going forward: the *seducer-villain*, the *fallen woman* and the *child-youth in peril*. Though these figures are constantly being combined and confused, I would suggest we heuristically distinguish them as representing three founding scenarios of seduction that resonate with Freud's seduction theory. The imperiled child spectator, like the hysteric, is a passive, innocent exposed to experience of the cinema without defence and always, prematurely; the fallen woman as spectator, like Freud's obsessive, has come to *actively* enjoy the seduction of the cinema. And, finally, the immigrant (ethnic other) comes to represent the seducer *par excellence*, as the agent of the confusion of tongues: as the one who invades the interior with his "foreign tongue" (to echo Ferenczi). In these historical figures we are obliged to see spectatorship theory in action, popular hypostases in you like, in its earliest forms. The lure of the filmic image, the fascinating aesthetic of the cinema, runs as a central anxiety through the first decades from *The Downward Path* on, and these melodramatic figures come to prominence as a way of symbolizing the danger of the film *attraction*. As I will look at great length at the figure of the immigrant as both object and subject of seduction in chapter four's discussion of Valentino, let us turn our attention to the two other figures of seduction: the spectator as youth and as woman.

The sheer number of youth going to the cinema on a regular basis at this time provoked urgent attention. One 1910 survey of New York put the percentage of children going to the cinema at least once a week at “fully three quarters of the children”; whatever the reality of these claims, youth (as a group) became the object of public management and “governmentality” increasingly in the 1910s (Simmon 31).<sup>45</sup> As part of a larger “child development” movement, children were “discursively position[ed]”, as Grieveson has put it, “as citizens-in-formation... as *tabulae rasae* for the imprinting of values, behaviours and ideals” (*Policing* 14).<sup>46</sup> Also in 1910, a *New York Times* editorial bemoaned the attractive address of moving pictures as “an impersonal and objective hypnosis” which leads the immature spectator (i.e., the child) to blindly imitate what (s)he sees on the screen (“Moving Picture Hypnosis”). The realism of the moving pictures could lead to psychological malformation of the child: “[n]ewspapers and reformers alike persistently conflated juvenile imitation of the movies with juvenile crime in a cycle that explicitly invoked the addiction of attendance and the hypnosis of the screen” (Maltby “The Social Evil” 220). In 1911 this concern over impressionability and imitation became the topic for two melodramas by D.W. Griffith; in *The Ruling Passion* and *As In A Looking Glass*, both tell the story of a child who has witnessed inappropriately exciting behaviour, and endeavours to imitate it (Usai *Griffith Project* 100, 158). In *The Ruling Passion*, a young boy attempts to recreate in real-life a pirate drama that he has just seen at the theatre, to perilous result. In *As In A Looking Glass*, a

---

<sup>45</sup> Grieveson also cites the founding of institutions in the 1910s like the Boy Scouts of America and the Girl Scouts of America (*Policing* 14). Grieveson’s exemplary study *Policing Cinema*, takes Foucault’s concept of governmentality as its guiding theme.

<sup>46</sup> For Grieveson, explicitly influenced by Foucault here, the threat of seduction functions like an alibi and mandate to manage and discipline the youth as a new biopolitical grouping.

child mimics the drunken and abusive behaviour of his father. The spectacle of this mimetic play convinces his father, who accidentally witnesses it, to quit drinking for good. While neither film literally implicates the cinema as such, both rehearse allegories of vision, mimicry and impressionability. What these films screen is the spectatorial scenario of the child, who innocently restages what (s)he sees, doomed to recreating the vision that has been impressed on the mind.

In the case of young women, after a 1909 journalistic *expose* of the New York City sex trade, public commissions were formed, studies were conducted, and laws were passed in response to the growing moral outrage over the sexual exploitation of women. As Stamp has shown, the fear that women were being abducted into selling themselves reflected, by the 1910s, the fact that young women were increasingly becoming workers and consumers; and yet, the figure of the fallen woman also reflects an exogenous theory of sexuality which circulated in the culture of the time, in that it posits the sexual life being incited by some outside force.<sup>47</sup> Our second position for the passive spectator of the cinema is *la traviata*, the woman gone astray by some weakness or perverse compulsion in the face of temptation. There is, then, serious public ambivalence expressed toward this figure, who has, unlike the child, actively converted her premature exposure into a corrupted spirit. The public sensation over sexual trafficking culminated in 1913 with the New York City debut of two sensationalist plays in August about the white slave trade: *The Fight* and *The Lure*. In a *New York Times* opinion piece published on September 14<sup>th</sup> 1913 called "Muensterberg Denounces Red Light Drama" [sic], the psychologist Hugo Münsterberg argues against depicting sexuality in the popular arts

---

<sup>47</sup> See Stamp's *Movie Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon*.

(including film). Apparently in response to these plays (though he makes no mention of their content), Münsterberg suggests that they force the public to consider the merits of depicting sexual matters. Can artistic depiction bring ignorant youth out of their troublesome ignorance (and into adult sexual knowledge and freedom), or is this aestheticized "sexual instruction" actually performing that same function of the white slavers themselves, i.e., the sexual exploitation of the spectator (Münsterberg "Red Light")? His answer falls clearly on the side of censorship and silence: "[w]e may instruct with the best intention to suppress, and yet our instruction itself must become a source of stimulation" ("Red Light"). And yet, before arguing that premature sexual instruction and "erotic overflow" in art lead astray into sensuality, Münsterberg also argues, in the name of psychology, that most "fallen women" are not the victim of criminal abduction, but are in fact complicit in their seduction because of their "lack of resistance to forbidden joys" ("Red Light"). I would suggest that this tension between a doctrine of psychological determinism (which sees temptation as stemming from some *a priori* weakness) and a culturalist, exogenous model which seems to follow (and which is indexed in his fear of the effects of the exploitation of sexuality in art), is at the heart of Münsterberg's thought. The crux of Münsterberg's essay (and arguably of his work generally) is that while he authorizes himself as an expert in psychology, he nonetheless perceives film and stage-drama as a laboratory or psychotechnology. While the psyche has its "own complicated laws", it nonetheless is subject to external conditions, and the aesthetic forms of the day pose new variables to consider (Münsterberg "Red Light").

The ambiguous position that Münsterberg forges here, I would like to suggest, stands like a dry-run of the theory of film that he will offer just two years later.

Münsterberg's position in this article seems to be clearly conservative, but it also reflects the chiasmatic relationship between the interior and the exterior which characterizes his 1915 theory of film: *The Photoplay- A Psychological Study*. In that work, famous for being the first systematic theory of film, the tension between the psychological interior and the aesthetic exterior is resolved via film's "adjusting" of the outer world to the laws and "forms of the inner world" (129). As a psycho-technical art of the interior, Münsterberg enthusiastically advocated for the fact that cinema had something unique to offer, as a window into the workings of the mind, and as a potent aesthetic which exploited, like hypnosis, the suggestibility of the spectator. But, in an essay posthumously published in a women's magazine in 1917 called "Peril to Childhood in the Movies", Münsterberg asks the question: "how can we make sure that this eagerly sought entertainment is a help and not a harm to young minds?" (*Photoplay* 191). In this article, he goes on to argue that while the cinema has potential to educate youth, to "cultivate the soul", it can also pose a serious danger to the youth because it exploits the child's immaturity, threatening to deform their interiors:

By its [the photoplay's] lack of words it is inclined to neglect all those subtle shades of feeling and reflection which the story or the drama on the stage allow. Hence it is forced to be satisfied with the coarser emotions and outer actions...they furnish dramatic interest without the need of delicate tracing of the inner life. (193)

From being praised as "the new art" of American modernity, Münsterberg returns to this problem of a technology which can 'get inside' its spectator; for him the question is of the danger of a technology that has apparent access to the processes of the interior? This,

I suggest is the hither side of the statement that cinema adjusts the world to the order of the interior: the inside takes on the forms of the outside. As we will see in our next chapter, I align this chiasmic movement with the influence of the melodramatic mode on American film-going.

Looking at the spectatorial figures of the youth and the fallen (New) woman as they appear in Münsterberg and more generally in the discourse of the time, what is at stake here is the problem of invasive seduction. The spectre of the exogeneity of psychic life, haunts these texts of Münsterberg, as it does the wider discourse on film. In the final section, I argue that this ritually repeated fear about the exposure of the spectator actually reflected the transitional 'turn' in the dialectic of spectatorship. As the direct address of the attraction was being prohibited as part of the moral outrage of the early 1910s, the gaze increasingly turned inward.

Recalling our discussion of aura in the introduction, the attraction is a "look that leaves a residue", in that it implies the implantation of an unspeakable alterity and its own scene of address. I will suggest that the ban on the attraction in the transitional era installs, via its residual presentational character, a category of alterity to which the spectator is beholden and watchable: the Monstrator.



### The Seduction Plot of the Film Spectator: The Transitional 'Latency' of the Attraction

In our discussion of early cinema's figures of spectatorship, we noted that the years of 1907-09 saw great development in the production, consumption and regulation of motion pictures in the United States. Historiographically, the transformation of the motion pictures into the cultural institution that we call today the cinema begins in these years; and yet, 'classical' film form, production and distribution did not actually become relatively standard until approximately 1915, so that these "transitional" years (1908-1915) are usually understood as characteristically liminal, hybrid and decisive. By 1908, narrative films were supplanting the dominance of the cinema of attractions (Bowser 53). This movement towards story films is generally seen as the end of the novelty period, and for Gunning it marks the passing from the cinema of attractions to the "cinema of narrative integration" (*D.W. Griffith* 6). Not unlike Gaudreault's position, Gunning has suggested that this formal development has something of a dialectical character: "the cinema of attraction[s] does not disappear with the dominance of narrative... but rather goes underground" ("Cinema" 382). Though Gunning has worked against understanding film history as simply a teleology of the classical cinema, he highlights the ways in which the early cinema is marked by what I earlier called its *constitutive repression*: the banishing of the attraction. He also speaks, in dialectical terms, of a "synthesis of attractions and narrative", and of the "primal power of the attraction running beneath the armature of narrative regulation" ("Cinema" 385-386). Indeed, the notion of the attraction has gained much prominence as not just a historical moment in the cinema, but also as kind of counter-current subtending the narrative mainstream, from which the

dominant mode may be questioned: “attractions form a fundamental mode of visual address and appear in periods other than early cinema. Certain genres, such as pornography, musical comedies... remain closely tied [to its methods]” (“Whole” 191). It is not surprising then that Williams has aligned the concept of the attraction with the “undervalued” visceral film body genres (“Introduction” 12). Gunning has gone even further in suggesting that the attraction may live on in the heart of classical cinema:

While narrative serves as the dominant [sic] which integrates the various elements of the classical Hollywood film, attractions persist in the interaction between spectacle and narrative so frequently observed in Hollywood genres. Perhaps even the close-up of Lillian Gish in *Way Down East* [the epitome of the classical era] retains something of an attraction beneath its clear narrative function. (“Whole” 191)

He implies here that there might be “something” of the attraction left in the classical expressive close-up. Recalling his homage to Mulvey, there are a number of moments when Gunning is interested in re-inscribing the attraction into the centre of the classical mode; and yet, besides his suggestive dialectical language, he has not developed this continuity. How might this “something” of the presentational address be retained in the heart of the diegetic world of classical cinema?

In his study *Early Cinema in Transition*, Charlie Keil argues that in the transitional years the “residual lure” of the attraction gets “contained” and redeployed by narrative concerns (81). He notes with interest that despite being generally understood as being formally *hybrid* and a composite of the novelty and classical periods, in the years 1908-09, there is a “notable... lack of attractions” in the films of the transitional years

(Keil "Integrated" 197). The well-worn form of direct address of the novelty is "not enlisted for the purposes of story-telling"; it is as if it must retire briefly, so that it may reappear again reassigned (197). But the direct address of the spectator, except for a few examples of emblematic shots, and comic winks, is banned from the transitional narrative cinema. Keil has argued that when these attractions do re-emerge they do so as elements of *style*, that is, as a kind of experimental "solution" to the narrative problems at hand. Keil further argues that it is when these stylistic experiments lose their novelty (and he implies, their attraction) that the classical period is born. Keil advocates here for the notion that in the classical era there is a total integration of the monstrative into the narrative. Fully conventionalized, the attraction loses its disruptive, oppositional character as direct address. As a scholar of this transition, Keil has questioned whether Gunning's narrative of historiography accounts for the spectatorial transition that must go along with this transformation of address. For if the cinema of attractions is associated with the tumult of modernity as Gunning argues, why (Keil asks) is there suddenly a move to melodramatic "nostalgia": a regressive, conservative, and increasingly narrative, form of filmmaking (Keil "Integrated" 196)? In our subsequent chapter, we will come back to Keil's question, and develop what the 'repression' of the attraction means in the melodramatic context of Hollywood cinema.

For his own view on the place of the monstrative in the transitional era, in his study of the early films of D.W. Griffith, Gunning seems to be in agreement that the attraction has been re-assigned, in his remarks on the side-effects of Griffith's parallel and repetitive editing strategies:

The structure and emotional effect of the film as a whole pivots on these overdetermined images. Creating images which act as emotional conductors throughout his films... Combined with parallel editing, it would yield a style of extraordinary abstraction. (*D.W. Griffith* 233).

Where Keil had suggested that the attraction had been cleansed of its disruptive properties, Gunning's comment is more ambiguous: these images, freighted with different meanings in the context of the narrative, are mobilized as part of a style (signed under the authorial name of Griffith), but the notion of an *emotional conductor* is also suggestive of an underlying affective 'current' in narrative film, which would link it to his theory of the attraction. The figure of the emblematic shot as a kind of internal *conduction* also leaves open the possibility (and the threat) of being mis-conducted, of having our insides controlled by a cinematic "Svengali".<sup>48</sup> While I would agree with Gunning that the attraction becomes *internalized* by narration, his ambiguous figure speaks to the ongoing repetition within the narrative cinema of a Monstrator-Seducer. Given this ambiguity, we might read Gunning here as hesitating on the edge of posing a dialectical continuity between the cinema of attractions and narrative cinema (although for Gunning this continuity remains 'the road not taken'). How might this dialectical continuity get plotted for the spectator?

In our previous section, we suggested that the aesthetic shift of the transitional era was correlated with a moral scandal over film monstration, and its potential effects on the spectator. The brief ban of the attraction, as we developed in our discussion, must be seen in the larger context of the dialectic of the spectatorial address. Münsterberg's

---

<sup>48</sup> Du Maurier, George. *Trilby*. Ed. Dennis Dennisoff. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998.

anxiety over the impressions left on vulnerable spectators (children and women) is, I would suggest, the most strikingly emphatic articulation of what I have called the cinematic seduction plot in the discourse of early film. But rather than moralizing with Münsterberg, if we look at it from the perspective of the seduction theory the concern over the undirected, disorienting nature of the attraction (which Gunning has valorized) with its potential to 'impress' itself on the interior of the spectator, can be understood on the model of the traumatic implantation of the cultural 'message' of film form.

For Laplanche, as we recall from our last chapter, trauma in the seduction theory suggests two moments, and two 'directions': in its first instance, the traumatic message must be radically unprecedented, a misaddressed sign "received passively" and prematurely; and in its second instance, due to this initial status, defensive attempts at contextualization and narration of the message only succeed in increasing its abstraction, detachment and fixation in the psychic life (*Essays* 136). In this second moment of implantation, the analogy with the attraction as *infans* becomes clearer; the attempt to take account of it, to recite it reflexively, leads to its being shut *into* the inside. Under the name of *latency*, the first strategy to deal with this internal foreign body is that of the ban. Though ultimately doomed to failure, this institution of the ban gives the subject its founding structure (the ego). If the cinema of attractions conforms to the fixating scene of implantation of the spectator's seduction plot (as the spectacle in all its bare visceral invasiveness--You Watch!-- to which an unprepared spectator is subjected), then this transitional era, I argue, conforms to the restructuring moment of the internalization, the making reflexive of the cinematic spectacle: I watch/ am watched/ am watchable.

Where Keil's assertion of a period of latency for the attraction highlights this important missing link in the historiography of the attractions model, the emphasis in his answer purely formal considerations (that the newly deployed elements of style lose their novelty as they are repeated in the context of the story-film) fails to account for the shift in the *object* of the attraction, and its correlative shift in spectatorial address. Film historians have been weary of tracing out the spectatorial dialectic that this implies because of the sense that a return to the hegemonic category of spectatorship is antithetical to the spirit of the historical turn in film studies, which itself was, of course, born out of rejection of spectatorship theory. In chapter one I suggested that it is precisely the contestation and reassessment of hegemony that melodrama is concerned with. There I suggested that *infancy* might be a way of thinking about these limits of the speakable, that are nevertheless expressed and symbolized in some way. I would then suggest that we take the historiographical rhetoric of the transition in the insistence on figures of internalization, containment and burial. What is "contained" about the attractions, what I would suggest is buried and *enclosed within* in the barring of the direct address, is the unilateral, asymmetrical relation to the image that characterizes the monstration of the cinema of attractions. In this sense, the need to make the image into stories, and to enlist the spectator in becoming active in this process is an effort to 'reverse the flow' of the image, an effort to neutralize or repress the invasiveness of this aesthetic.

Like the attraction (as we saw, tending toward graphic abstraction and what Gunning calls the "lust of the eyes") which resists capture by the logic of narrative disclosure, or the wild and untamed view (that Münsterberg implies) which cannot be

cultivated for educational purposes, the implant's danger manifests in its status as an unhomey invader which has the capacity to lead astray, from the inside. Also like the attraction in its monstrative aspect (as direct address), this psychic implant is fixed to a particular site, connected to a particular citation of the other. In the spectatorial dialectic of the film address, the attempt to narrativize the attraction, to make the relation to the it reflexive, simply internalizes it, fixing in monstration an aura of alterity, and projecting (as we suggested earlier) a *subject-supposed-to-show* as an external *conductor* of emotions, in excess of narrative.

#### The Wayward Gaze: The Monstrator-Seducer of the Feature Film in *Traffic in Souls*

As the dramas of film turn increasingly inwards in the 1910s, the image in its 'musicality' (in its repetition, in the montage of its relations) came to be 'overdetermined' in a way that was narratively exploited. Where the abstraction of the image as attraction had been disruptive and distracting, lodged within the web of narrative, this emblematic "emotional conductor" became the locus of absorption and spectatorial investment. But one of the key differences from the cinema of attractions is that in the transitional era this visceral form of address is *indirect* and as such tied to the person of a Narrator. The newly found expressive abstraction of narrative filmmaking is predicated on the consistency and conventionality of the narrative instance. Here, I would like to hazard an interpretation of Gaudreault's helpful notion of film narrativity as a dialectic between narration and monstration, to help us to develop our discussion of the ambiguities of the expressive possibilities of the narrative film. If Gaudreault understands the contradiction between monstration and narration dialectically, then, I argue, monstration's alterity

corresponds in the narrative era to its untranslatability within the terms of narrative code (division/ combination), and is embodied as an enigmatic locus of the address internal to, but beyond (or in excess of) narration: the agency that Gaudreault calls the film *Monstrator*. Insofar, then, that monstration gets linked with the structuring tendency of narrativity (as its dialectical partner) it is figured as this janus-like authorial instance of a Narrator-Monstrator, but insofar as it diverts from narrative interests, it is aligned with the dangerous, misleading alterity who can penetrate and manipulate the spectatorial interior: the cinema as Seducer-Monstrator.<sup>49</sup> The effort to ban the attraction not only leads to its internalization by the spectator, but it also leads to the defensive installation of a *Narrator-Monstrator* (as the hypostasis of a structured, authorial Other).<sup>50</sup> This ambivalence of the authorial Other of narrative cinema, as both the benevolent Master-Narrator and the Seducer-Monstrator is embodied in the narrative of one of the first original American feature films: *Traffic in Souls* (1913).

Made at the height of the white slavery panic, *Traffic in Souls* allegorizes the ambivalence of the inward gaze as a tale of both sexual exploitation and detection. Presented in the indirect address of narrative cinema, the plot revolves around the criminal activities of a network of brothels and the police troop pursuing it. The film tells the story of two sisters from New York City, the older Mary and her unnamed younger sister. The little sister becomes seduced and abducted by an agent of the local white slave trade. Her sister and her fiancé, an upright police officer named Burke, team up to lead the investigation and rescue. In the course of the story, we find out that the secret

---

<sup>49</sup> This figure is prevalent within film history: see Žižek's *The Pervert's Guide to the Cinema*.

<sup>50</sup> I evoke Lacan's notion of the analyst as the *subject-supposed-to-know*.



head of the slave trade, a man named Trubus, is actually also the leader of the local moral reform and uplift league. Mary's triumphant rescue of her sister, comes with her ability to infiltrate the criminal organization, and to use their technologies of surveillance against them. The 'wire' that Trubus uses to covertly oversee his business is commandeered and used to by Mary and Burke to apprehend the criminal mastermind.

As Ben Brewster documents, it was perhaps the first American feature film to heavily employ alternating intercutting to establish diegetic space of New York City (Brewster "Traffic" 231). The film also reflects the transitional era's evolving 'attitude' toward gratuitous visual display; as Staiger has noted, in an introductory scene of our hero and heroine, we find them meeting on a street corner about to kiss, when Mary stops him having noticed that they are being watched by a nearby window-cleaner (someone in a privileged place to look), while the viewer witnesses the short kiss (in a reserved medium shot) the window-cleaner agrees to look away as a courtesy (Staiger *Bad* 132). The film sets up the ambivalence of the gaze from the beginning: it exploits its object, and it can be used to detect this exploitation.

This general theme of surveillance is echoed in various scenes of the film, in which we witness as the 'slavers' watch their prey, and further, as the police watch over this predation. The surveillance technology is allegorically aligned with the novel narrative properties (the intercutting across the spaces of New York City) of the feature film. Gunning has suggested, in his "From the Kaleidoscope to the X-Ray: Urban Spectatorship, Poe, Benjamin, and *Traffic in Souls* (1913)" that the film allegorizes the new aesthetic that accompanied the all-seeing Dickensian gaze of the transitional years, with its emphasis on parallel editing. With the precision of a police operation, the film

uses cross-cutting to locate all of the story's prime characters, follows their movements and maps out their territories, culminating in a suspenseful climax which brings together all the lines of narrative traffic. The thrill of the film is less in any one view that is



**Figure 2.09** Trubus: The Apparatus of Exploitation (*Traffic in Souls*, 1913, Universal Pictures)

displayed, than in the multiplicity of views, in the startling geometry of their systematic network. In his discussion of the film, Gunning has suggested that:

the move toward a fully narrativized cinema could take the detective as one model for a classically conceived spectator, attentively observing the unfolding images for narrative enigmas, testing them with anticipatory schemata, predicting narrative outcomes and processing the image for its relevant narrative information and cues. (Gunning *X-Ray* 36)

Where in this essay Gunning, likens the cinema of attraction to a “kaleidoscope” (as an example of technologies of non-narrative visual wonders), he suggests that in *Traffic in Souls* the cinematic apparatus is presented as an x-ray viewing machine that allows the spectator privileged knowledge of the diegesis. *Traffic in Souls* screens the ambiguity of



**Figure 2.10** Mary: The Apparatus of Detection. (*Traffic in Souls*, 1913, Universal Pictures)

the narrative gaze precisely along the lines of narration/ monstration: the surveillance apparatus around which the whole plot turns (the wire) is alternatively useful and moral (Figure 2.10) when it is mobilized by the police and the film’s female hero to solve the case (a legal narrative to disclose the crime), and on the other hand, it is an exploitative and malevolent technology when used by the white slave traders to procure and abduct women for their human trafficking (Figure 2.09).

Following from this we could say that, in so far as it is *narrated* the story of the abduction and the rescue has a moralizing function, but insofar as it does not, it simply exploits the *monstrative* display of this unseemly subject: the film caused a sensation as both an early feature and the early exploitation film. With Gunning's suggestion of the apparatus of the film as an x-ray machine, I think that we should draw out the tension inherent in the way the film figures the Narrator/Monstrator. If the film has a penetrating view (particularly in the film's first half) this access is aligned with the sexual predation and kidnapping of the white slave trade's victims. Thematized in the film from a passive spectatorial position, this penetrating gaze of narrative cinema is associated with the monstrative display of the abducted, imperilled women: here the penetration has an obviously sexualized resonance, linked with an erotic, denuding display and assault. To extend Gunning's metaphor, we could say, if the x-ray machine is turned around, the spectator is exposed to truly toxic visions. While the film tries to keep its distance from anything too explicit by alternating between long and medium shots, and while the film obviously aligns itself with the enlightening virtue of narrative inspection and discovery, *Traffic in Souls* nevertheless poses (embodied in Trubus) the figure of cinema as *Monstrator-Seducer*: the exploiter of the wayward gaze, and the view that strays from its narrative purpose, the Monstrator exposes the eyes to views that should not be seen.

The anxious traffic of monstration being exploited and allegorized in *Traffic in Souls* is of an address erring from its original target: like the abstracted enjoyment of an image cleft from its everyday referents that Gunning associated with the attraction, the younger sister's sense of alienation and detachment makes her an exploitable good. Equally, Mary's surveillance is only able to unseat Trubus from his omniscient

perspective by intercepting an errant message: both characters, the fallen sister and hypocritical Trubus, are betrayed by wayward signs of their personhood. What *Traffic in Souls* plays out allegorically (as an example of a transitional era narrative feature) is the fundamental ambiguity of the penetrative narrative gaze; while letting the spectator see all, that the address of narrative film also presents a potentially dangerous monstrative excess in its message, which is linked in the film to the 'leading astray'. Like Trubus, the filmic apparatus is figured as simultaneously overseer and exploiter.

While this film, on the one hand, offers the technologies of oversight (the wire, the cross-cutting) as a new paradigm for telling stories, on the other hand, it also connects these technologies with sexual trafficking as the invasive penetration of interiors, and the production of the errant signs of the personal. Having said this, as a transitional film, *Traffic in Souls* looks upon these secret interiors decidedly *from the outside*; unlike the classical Hollywood films that would follow in making the personal the object of the drama (and that we will take up in our next chapter), *Traffic in Souls* remains relatively impersonal. It does not utilize the kind of perspectival focalization that, as we will see in the next chapter, characterizes the Hollywood film. The film thus reflects the tensions of the transitional era, in that it both bans the attraction and allegorizes the moral drama of this ban. Where the transitional era remains at a bashful remove, anxious about the penetrating possibilities of new narrative film form, the more melodramatic mode of the Hollywood era after 1915 affirms the intimate view, and makes it the privileged object of its monstration (as we will see in our next chapter).

The scandals that surrounded the cinema of attractions suggest that what is properly traumatic about the early form of film address within the dialectic of

spectatorship is not simply its propensity for distraction, but the danger that the aura produced by its monstration, which may take up residence in the viewer's interior.

Although the transitional cinema's ban of the attraction attempts to resolve this dangerously visceral element, I argue that it nevertheless accentuates and thematizes the ambiguities of the gaze of narrative cinema; in *Traffic in Souls* this gaze is figured as a troubling act of roving surveillance linked to an omniscient overseer (a Seducer-Monstrator) who must himself be overseen and deciphered. The transitional cinema's obsession with the morality of looking and the pathology of watching betrays its thorough complicity in the internalization of monstration in the emerging institution of narrative film spectatorship.

3  
**From Attraction(s) to Seduction:  
 The Melodramatic Compromise of Hollywood Fantasia**

Various rumors and claims circulate to this date about the supposed anachronistic wristwatches and tennis shoes that litter the *mise-en-scene* of Cecil B. DeMille's panoramically influential 1956 version of *The Ten Commandments*. While, for the tele-fans who watch this film religiously every year between Passover and Easter, there may be some "paracinematic" or camp intrigue which sticks to these elusive objects, beyond this, they seem to emblemize something fundamental to the experience of the film: that the epic film is today, and was when it was released, untimely and old-fashioned.<sup>51</sup> As the elderly master of the silent era, the feature was DeMille's last before his death: a picture, and we could say a whole way of making pictures, leftover (and revised) from a bygone era. The film was a remake of a silent picture that DeMille himself had made in 1923, and in it we see the forms of the past getting fitted (or misfit) to the issues of the present. Yet in this iconic example within the history of Hollywood film, we get condensed many of the charges which are leveled at the film melodrama, *per se*: of misusing history to address the popular topics of the day; of emphasizing affect and thrilling situations over plot consistency; of privileging adornment and histrionics over dramatic substance and character development. In the context of the history of American film, the question of anachronism resounds in the historiographical criticism of the melodramatic turn toward narrative in the mid 1910s. How could a technology so

---

<sup>51</sup> I refer to Jeffrey Sconce's notion of "paracinema" in his important work on trash cinema: "'Trashing' the academy: taste, excess, and an emerging politics of cinematic style."

steeped in the social and technological innovations of modernity turn backwards to find its narrative form? What becomes of film's modernity with the turn to melodrama?

In chapter one I suggested that the introduction of the problematic of the *infans* gives us another perspective on locating the American cinematic tradition in the context of the melodramatic mode, in the enlarged sense in which Williams and Brooks have mobilized it. In what follows, guided by the Laplanchean (translational) theory of repression, I will argue that the historiographic charge of anachronism indexes a dialectical conservation and transformation of past forms that happens as a result of American film's melodramatization in the mid 1910s. Amongst all of the other socio-economic factors that have been studied, the upliftment and reform of the cinema after 1908 can be understood as a way of highlighting and containing the danger of the attraction. The increasingly narrative and moralizing character of the films being produced after 1908 implied an evolving moral stance in relation to the potentially dangerous sensational aesthetics of the early cinema; and the melodramatic tradition was called upon to contain, and to aestheticize, the scandal of these thrilling views, by stitching them into a prescribed resolution.<sup>52</sup> However, as I began to develop in the previous chapter, the melodramatization of the film as "photoplay" did not banish the cinematic attraction, (it in fact) makes it the object of dramatic fixation and moral deliberation. This melodramatic 'translation' (as Laplanche would say) of the attraction can also be understood as a symptom of the emergence of a new invasive film aesthetic: the *seduction* of narrative cinema. The movement in film history towards an increasingly

---

<sup>52</sup> See Tom Gunning, "From Obscene Films to High Class Drama", in *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph*. Chicago: University of Illinois, 1991. 151-187. Print



narrative form corresponds to a change in status of the object of monstrative display. From an aesthetics of *attraction(s)* based on novelty repetition and direct address, towards an aesthetics of narrative *seduction* in the mid to late 1910s (e.g. in the work of directors like Griffith, and DeMille), the presentational, monstrative mode (the direct address) of the attraction film gives way to the 'indirect' address of narrative, whereby the diegetic world of the film is separated from the "space" of spectatorship by an imaginary barrier. We will explore the shift in the object of attraction: with the melodramatic aesthetic of narrative cinema *the attraction becomes the passions of the actor and "expressivity" of (mise-en-)scene*, and not just the visual 'presence' of the *novel act* captured.<sup>53</sup> What is indexed is no longer the pure present of the cinematic instant, but the address of the other as spectacle, which is epitomized in the *melodramatization* of the close-up. This chapter will reassess the melodramatic nature of the shift from the transitional era to the classical narrative era, by reading the spectatorial hypostases of two accounts (in Singer, and in Jacobs and Brewster) of the theatrical inheritance of the narrative cinema. Taking the melodramatic perspective seriously (on its own terms) will also require us to question the Metzian absorptive doctrine of primary identification (of the spectatorial *I* with the eye of the narrative gaze); I believe seeing the aesthetic transition in dialectical terms enables us to acknowledge that the film spectator was established not first and foremost as the subject of enjoyment, but as the recipient of a new kind of cultural address. Finally, looking at classical Hollywood films of Cecil B.

DeMille after 1915, I will make the argument that, for the American cinema, the ultimate

---

<sup>53</sup> For another account of the rise of "cinematic expressivity", see Thompson, Kristin. "The International Exploration of Cinematic Expressivity." *The Silent Cinema Reader*, Ed. Lee Grieveson and Peter Krämer. New York, NY: Routledge, 2004. Print.

compromise-formation with the attraction came in the form of what I call Hollywood *fantasia*. By aligning the attractions and flourishes of cinematic style with the fantasy-life of diegetic characters and the interiority of the spectator, narrative cinema was able to find the visual supplement to consolidate its 'language'. However, the roving, penetrative gaze of Hollywood came at the cost of a cinematic invasion of that spectatorial interior.

### The Melodramatic Anachronism: Revisiting the Conservatism of the Theatrical Inheritance

In our last chapter, we considered Keil's question regarding the utility of the modernity thesis with respect to the transition to narrative: to repeat, Keil wonders "must we subscribe to the notion that transitional cinema pulls the spectator away from any aesthetic based in the conditions of (modern) experience, in an admittedly clumsy effort, to impose the comforting nostalgia of more coherent (proto-classical) forms?" (Keil "Integrated" 196).<sup>54</sup> Many formative first wave accounts of the historiography of silent film locate the theatrical inheritance of film as being important in the move to popular narrative, a heritage that was, in fact, melodramatic.<sup>55</sup> In his formative essay on film melodrama, Elsaesser argues that:

all silent film drama... is 'melodramatic'... [silent film] directors had to develop an extremely subtle and precise formal language (of lighting,

---

<sup>54</sup> Keil sees in style, an attempt by film-makers to solve the formal problems associated with narration, the key to understanding the transitional period.

<sup>55</sup> See Vardac, A., Nicholas. *Stage to Screen: Theatrical Origins of Early Film, David Garrick to D.W. Griffith*. New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1987. Print.; and Elsaesser, Thomas. "Tales of Sound and Fury." *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*. Ed. Christine Gledhill. London: British Film Institute, 1987. Print.

stage décor, acting, close-up, montage and camera movement), because they were deliberately looking for way to compensate for the expressiveness, range of inflection... [etc.] present in the spoken word ("Tales of Sound" 51)

Theatre not only supplied early features with narratives and moral coordinates, it also supplied two of its greatest masters: the former thespians D.W. Griffith and the aforementioned Cecil B. DeMille. As one of the early versions of the cinematic creation myth, the explosion of film historiography since the 1980s has reconsidered this inheritance. I propose to consider the cases of two such works that have diverging perspectives on this shift: Ben Singer's *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and its Contexts*, and Ben Brewster & Lea Jacobs' *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and The Early Feature Film*. Rather than assessing the relative accuracy of these two accounts, I suggest we look to how they rhetorically frame the modernity of narrative film.

At first, these two important works on the role of theatrical forms on the early narrative films seem to take very different attitudes to the modernity of film as a form. Jacobs and Brewster try to rebuild the continuity of stage and screen pictorialism after its dismantling by generations of film historians eager to distinguish cinema from its heritage and celebrate its novelty (i.e., the film grammar of editing). While, for Singer, the connection between the early feature and the sensational stage melodrama is found in the ability of both forms to capture the visceral stimulations of the experience of urban modernization, an aspect of spectacle which has been buried by the absorptive paradigm of classical cinema. As we saw with Gunning, the debate over cinema's "modernity" is a

rhetorical Trojan horse, that stands in for a generally Benjaminian theory of film spectatorship; while taking up its detractors, Singer's account affirms the Benjaminian position. Both works on the theatrical inheritance seek to break down the hegemony of the linear evolutionary narrative of stage to screen, but they come at this transitional juncture from opposing sides: the one celebrates an *unrealized continuity* (Brewster & Jacobs), the other posits a *forgotten future* (Singer). In reading these two accounts side by side, I suggest that if they are taken together we can perceive a spectatorial dialectic at work in the development of the film address. What happens when the sensational attraction is supplanted by the pictorialist tableaux of the stage? In the last chapter we saw the movement to narrative was, in part, motivated by an attempt morally to account for the aesthetics of cinema's first era, and here melodrama's moral absolutism is taken up in the cause. But, beyond this moralizing, narrativizing function, both of these works also offer a critique of the "absorptive" conception of the classical narrative cinema.

In his *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and its Contexts* (2001), Singer has charged that the doxa of the theatrical legacy has been overwritten by an anachronistic conception of melodrama, informed by the classical Hollywood melodramas of the 1940s and 1950s. With this charge of anachronism, and in the name of cinema's modernity, Singer sets out to attack this presumption about the transition from the stage to the screen, and the move from the cinema of attractions to narrative cinema. Informed by what we might call a rhetoric of historical irruption, Singer argues that what was understood in the transitional period leading up to the advent of Hollywood narrative cinema as melodrama has very little to do with what lies under the banner of this term as it has developed since the influential publication of Peter Brooks' *The Melodramatic*

*Imagination* and Thomas Elseasser's "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama". In its critical currency, melodrama has been taken up by feminist, psychoanalytic film scholars, interested in affiliating themselves with the "mode of excess": "[for these scholars melodrama] foments psychic energies and emotions which the narrative "represses", blocks from full expression, gratification, or resolution, because they are fundamentally incompatible with the demands of dominant patriarchal ideology" (Singer *Melodrama* 39). Singer's contestation of melodrama has to be taken in the critical contexts in which he is writing. His research focuses on the migration of a particular genre of the "sensational melodrama" from the stage to screen in the early teens, and the book explicitly presents itself as a testing and apologia of the "modernity thesis". This Benjaminian notion that we examined in our introduction (that the urban environment "brought about changes in the prevailing 'mode of perception' which then somehow prompted corresponding changes in the formal qualities of cinema and other popular amusements") structures his rereading of the influence of melodramatic theatre of the 1900s and 1910s (Singer *Melodrama* 293). Singer's melodrama is a sensation-based form of theatricality, with action-oriented storylines geared to creating hyperrealistic, hyperstimulating spectacles, and evoking the timely dangers and troubles of the historical moment. The film serials of the early teens which he reviews (*Perils of Pauline*, *The Exploits of Elaine*, *A Woman in Grey*) work against (he argues) the picture of a passionate, domestic, expressive *mise-en-scene* that gets associated with the film melodrama today, presenting their strong female protagonists alternating between passive endangerment and heroic action. However, despite describing in detail the atmosphere of hyperstimulus and urban hazard that he argues forms the cultural context for sensational

melodramas, a discussion of trauma is conspicuously absent from Singer's account. With Gunning, Singer follows Benjamin's (anti-auratic) lead and gravitates to the psychophysical paradigm of shock and repetitive stress rather than to psychoanalytic accounts of traumatic incorporation. Like the intimately related 'cinema of attractions' thesis in Gunning, the sensationalist melodrama of the teens (as opposed to what Singer calls the "pathetic melodrama" which has since become hegemonic for the genre) functions like a path-not-taken in the history of the cinema, swiftly banished to the cinematic "underground" (295).

Brewster and Jacobs' 1997 study *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film* (1997) places the origins of the feature in the context of the stage pictorialism of the melodramatic theatre with its graphic use of staging and pantomimic acting and situation-based narrative structure. Developing from the melodramatic theatre, "pictorialism" operated by condensing into graphic monads, the punctual moments of drama: "[s]ituations were conceived of static states of affairs, an atemporality which made them particularly amenable to pictorial representation" (Brewster and Jacobs 22). Often given precedence over plot and character consistency, these thrilling "situations" organized the movement of the story forward, and for this reason were stigmatized as lowbrow theatre by elitist critics, offending the normative laws of Aristotelian drama.

Like Singer's work then, for Brewster and Jacobs, the sensational aspect of pictorialism (as it was internalized by the cinema) is fundamental to its particular mode, and not simply a failure to conform to the codes of drama. In its use of histrionic acting, its highly stereotyped gesture, and the explicit artifice of its *tableaux*, pictorialist theatre

ran counter to the naturalist, absorptive representationalism and indirect address that scholars have associated with the narrative cinema.<sup>56</sup> And yet, unlike Singer, Brewster & Jacobs reject any attempt to align this melodramatic form of presentation to the emergent conditions of modernity or to modernist cultural movements: “[t]here is nothing particularly ‘modern’ about the pictorial tradition... the cinema of the 1910s should not be seen as a ‘modern’ phenomenon” (Brewster and Jacobs 215). While they do not use the word anachronistic to describe the pictorialist turn in film-making, Brewster and Jacobs are clear that the cinema turned toward the past to raise itself up towards its future: “[a] pictorial cinema in our sense... has roots in the kinds of painting and theatre that the modernist movement set itself against” (214). This position seems profoundly at odds (if not the directly opposed) to that put forward in *Melodrama and Modernity*. And yet, in a recent article “The Antimodernity of Early Cinema: Problems and Paradoxes in the Film-and-Modernity Discourse” (2009), Singer has revised his earlier position, now claiming that in the writings of the French Impressionists (citing Jean Epstein and Antonin Artaud) and in the work of Hugo von Hofmannsthal “[m]odernity is inextricably intertwined with this Neo-Romantic metaphysic” (Singer “Antimodernity” 49). In Singer’s own deepening of his work on the modernity thesis and in Brewster & Jacobs assertion of the conservatism of the melodramatic turn in film, what was at first the tale of critical disagreement over cinema’s modernity now reveals a common dialectical model: 1) modernity gives birth to a wide array of responses, including ones that position themselves as anti-modernity; 2) that an anti-absorptive direct address (which we have associated with the modernity thesis) *lives on* in the era of narrative cinema as a result of

---

<sup>56</sup> A repeated target of their book is the work on the absorptive painting in Michael Fried’s *Absorption and Theatricality*.

the melodramatic incursion. I would suggest that behind the obvious differences here is the model of a transition in which an older form returns to take up residence on the ground of the new form. We might call this a melodramatic dialectic of *conservation*. I would agree with Singer that something new is born with the sensationalist aesthetic of early cinema: in film we have a mode of paradoxical presentationalism, at once visually addressing its viewer and yet abstractly cut off from the dynamic engagement of live performance. The film attraction is a novel expression of this singular arrangement. However, on the other hand, I follow the inspiration of Brewster and Jacobs, in asserting that the film aesthetic undergoes a profound change as it is commandeered and conserved under the edicts of the older melodramatic form.

What I would like to suggest is that what is at stake in both problematics is an attempt to think through the transition from the era of the spectacle show to that of the photoplay in a way which retains the older forms, and does not subsume them to the retrospective history of the classical Hollywood system. In other words, the implicit question in both books is: how might we account for the legacy of the cinema of attractions and its presentational direct address. On this matter, Singer has suggested that “it is more likely [that attractions do not disappear with the concern for narrative clarity, but] that classical narration amplified the stimulating capacity of attractions by endowing them with strong dramatic and emotional significance” (Singer *Melodrama* 129). For Keil, as we have already seen, the attraction is “integrated” as a function of narrative style in the transitional period. While Hansen has speculated, in *Babel and Babylon*, that the attraction might also be “traced in the development of the star cult, both in its general aesthetics of display and in the erotic personae of individual stars such as Valentino”



(*Babel* 24). What is the mode of this 'integration', that the attraction makes a reappearance in the cult of the star? To approach this question, let us turn to the seduction theory as our model for understanding the melodramatic translation of the attraction in the context of the dialectic of the spectatorship.

### The Seduction Plot of the Film Spectator: The Attraction as the Repressed of Classical Narrative Cinema

Within the seduction of plot of the classical spectator, this melodramatic, conservative turn, which coincides with the beginning of the dominance of the classical narrative cinema in the mid 1910s, sees the reintroduction of the attraction as a conspicuous form of monstration. This reappearance might be properly called the era of the *repression* of the attraction, after the latency period of the transitional "cinema of integration" (Gunning *D.W. Griffith* 6). Under the Laplanchean term *implantation*, I suggested in our last chapter that the proto-content (the *infans*) of the form of monstration of early cinema functions as an *enigmatic message* for its viewer. With the transition to narrative, and the emergence of new editing idioms, the direct address is largely banned, in favour of the indirect address of diegetic observation. The omniscient implications of narrative perspective evoke the figure of a Narrator/ Monstrator, which structures, and thus minimizes (and displaces), the alterity of film spectacle. However, if melodrama is looked upon as a narrative agent of the containment of the attraction, this is at some odds with its status (in thinkers like Brooks and Williams) as the great mass liberator of expression. How can melodrama be both an agent of repression of the visual attractions of film and of its cultural expressivity? For film historiography, this paradox has not

sufficiently been taken up. In our present discussion, I propose to rethink the paradoxical repression of the melodramatic in terms of Laplanche's theory of repression.

For Laplanche, repression must be understood as the "afterwardly" result of the (mis)translation of the implanted enigmatic messages; incapable of being incorporated in the idiom of the subject, the implant persists, radically out of circulation. Repression takes as its object that aspect of the adult's message that, despite the child's best efforts to map it within his/her discourse, persists as a traumatic remainder. But the introduction and consolidation of a language (which forms the period of latency) fundamentally transforms the traumatic adult address (as *signifier-to*), detaching the traumatic signified (the Freudian 'thing presentation') from its available translations/ symbolizations: "the enigmatic messages of adults undergo a reorganization, a dislocation. Some aspects are translated, while some anamorphic elements are excluded from the translation and become unconscious" (Laplanche *Essays* 97). This process of metabolization of the initial adult message (which always implies some failure to translate), cuts the traumatic signified off from its realist sources, thereby transforming it into a new "designified signifier": the repressed (97). Repression is thus a compromise(d) formation, in which the repressed is both banned and expressed in novel forms. The "after-pressure" of the repressed corresponds to its symptomatic transformation in the psychic life of the interior (Laplanche *Unconscious* 70). Where, in the moment of the implantation something coming from the cultural exterior is internalized, in repression this 'interior-exterior' is, after a process of psychic metabolization, externalized.<sup>57</sup> This *chiasmus* of the psychic life is reflected in Laplanche's emphasis (in contrast to Lacanianism) on psychic realism:

---

<sup>57</sup> For more on Laplanche's theory of the metabola, see "A Short Treatise on the

one of the principal discoveries of psychoanalysis [is]... the constitution within the subject of veritable internal objects, or even, to go farther, the constitution of the subject on the model of those objects. Freud's 'anthropomorphism' has been criticized for occasionally resulting in slightly ridiculous formulations, in a 'prescientific' realism. In point of fact, such anthropomorphism or psychological realism should be taken literally, as truly constitutive of the human psyche. (Laplanche *Life and Death* 136)

Laplanche's reference to psychological realism, reflected in the anthropomorphic figures of interiority (e.g., the homunculus, and the censor of the superego) are elaborations of the remnants of introjected messages originating on the outside. The chiasmatic structure of psychological realism is simply reversed in the aesthetic of melodrama. For Brooks this is very clearly reflected in melodrama's penchant for expressionism: "[t]here is no 'psychology' in melodrama... the characters have no interior depth, there is no psychological conflict. It is delusive to seek an interior conflict, the 'psychology of melodrama,' because melodrama exteriorizes conflict and psychic structure, producing instead what we may call the 'melodrama of psychology' (Brooks *Melodramatic* 35). What is important for melodrama *primarily*, is not the realism through which it represents the world but its ability to convey what Laplanche will call, the reality of the *message*: "[t]he category of the message, or the signifier in so far as it 'signifies to', is 'addressed to', is absolutely different from that of the [Lacanian] Symbolic" (*Essays* 91-92). In the notion of the *signifier to* the subject (as opposed to the signifier of something), Laplanche

---

Unconscious" in *Essays on Otherness*.

posits a registry of significance which is radically separate from that of the polysemy of the Symbolic; the reality of the message refers the influence of those signifiers which have become designified and cut off from their original referents through the process of repression. Laplanche (citing Lacan) likens these signifiers to the indecipherable hieroglyphs of the ancients: “[w]e know *that* it signifies, but not *what* it signifies (*New Foundations* 44-5). Ultimately, the reality of the message refers to and memorializes the traumatic legacy of the enigmatic aspect of the other’s address, and it is to this inheritance that melodrama refers.

In melodrama, characters are *not* simply representational, in the realist sense; instead, they are monopathic (i.e., one-dimensional) *representatives* of particular positions, feelings and ideologies. In this sense, melodrama works in *stereo*-types: aspects of the drama are simplified, precisely in order to *amplify* their message-value. For Brooks, melodrama is organized around this problematic of the cultural message (of sending it, receiving it, and of deciphering it):

[t]he articulation of melodrama’s messages is a kind of sign language... [which] suggests the extent to which melodrama not only employs but is centrally about repeated obfuscations and refusals of the message and about the need for repeated clarifications and acknowledgements of the message. (28)

And it is this process of articulation, of the movement from the secret interior to recognition of the exterior, that propels the melodramatic plot.

Melodrama’s penchant for excessive expression is intimately linked to its repression. Indeed, Brooks has made the problem of repression central to his theory of

the melodramatic mode: “the dynamic of repression and the returned of the repressed figure the plot of melodrama” (Brooks *Melodramatic* 201). The melodramatic imagination seeks to express, recognize and clarify repressed, unspeakable elements of society. In the context of American film, the *infans* of the attraction, as the aspect of the monstrative address of film which cannot be narrated, becomes the carrier and herald of the melodrama of the unspeakable cultural message. In our chapter one discussion of the spectatorship theory of Linda Williams, I suggested that what is at stake in the encounter with melodrama is the traumatic illegibility of the spectacle of affect, the *moving picture*. Unlike Brooks, Williams expresses discomfort in following Brooks in hypostatizing the repressed element in society, to which melodrama refers. Butler’s theory of hegemony was evoked to reread Brooks’ moral occult as a hegemonic struggle over the ‘unspeakably social’, as the proto-content of hegemonic *infans*. Williams’ concern over the dangers of positing an unspeakable inheritance remains prescient, however, in that this concept is in danger of tethering melodrama to a ritual repetition of old mythical themes, and so “seems doomed to locate archaic remnants of melodrama in more modern works” (*Playing* 315 n.17). How might we take seriously what Brooks says about repression and the unspeakably social, without cutting off melodrama from its trenchant timeliness?

Laplanche’s theory of the repressed as a traumatic proto-content, the seductive excess produced by the process of cultural metabolization, allows us to think through this process as a historically particular development. For Laplanche, repression is the psychic translation which accompanies the initiation into subjecthood of language, and the repressed is the contingent, untranslatable byproduct of this process. In the context of the

repression of spectatorship, the repressed is similarly intimately attached to the spectatorial form. One important difference here in the theories of repression in Laplanche and Brooks is that for the former there is no question of eradicating the repressed: new 'translations' imply new 'untranslatables'. While Brooks maintains in the name of combating repression, "[m]elodrama handles its feelings and ideas virtually as plastic entities, visual and tactile models held out for all to see and to handle", the form of this handling fundamentally affects how these feeling and ideas become culturally visible (Brooks *Melodramatic* 41). Thus the unspeakable referent (as *infans*) of the melodramatic film is particular to its form. This begs the question: does the cinematic form revise the melodramatic mode?

In chapter one, the melodramatic nature of cinema was introduced in our discussion of Williams and Brooks as a kind of populist form of aesthetic deliberation, recentered on what Butler calls the *unspeakably social*. Yet to speak of the melodramatic as a descriptive adjective for the cinema (as Williams does when she calls melodrama American cinema's "fundamental mode") does not reflect the fact that the cinema was also a decisive moment in the history of melodrama as an aesthetico-cultural mode. In the next section I would like to explore how the internalization of the attractions mode is coordinated with the spectacularization of the intimate. I argue the chiasmic reversal particular to Hollywood cinema marks the decisive point of spectatorial *intrusion*.

#### From the Situation to "A Scene at the 'Movies'": The Emergence of Hollywood Fantasia

At the end of "The Cinema of Attraction(s): Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde", speculating on the afterlife of the attraction, Gunning famously takes the

example of a program timetable outlining the itinerary of spectacles in the 1924 version of *Ben Hur*, which he takes as evidence of the “primal power of the attraction running beneath armature of narrative regulation”:

8:35 The Star of Bethlehem

8:40 Jerusalem Restored

8:59 Fall of the House of Hur

10:29 The Last Supper

10:50 Reunion...(Gunning “Cinema of Attractions” 387)

Commenting on this passage in Gunning, Brewster and Jacobs contest his radical reading of the program, contending instead that the program should be regarded as the “continuation of a theatrical tradition in which stories are divided in big scenes or situations themselves pictorially conceived, staged, and even advertised” (29). If we grant Gunning the singular ‘primal power’ of the film attraction against the pictorial theatre tradition (a step too far for Brewster and Jacobs), then the continuity plotted here changes its aspect. By 1924, the attraction is operating within the terms, and on the schedule of the narrative situation. But there is still another fundamental change in the object of film monstration.

In the conclusion to *Theatre to Cinema*, the authors go on to propose that while their position on the transitional period is “unresolved,” they “regard the cinema of attractions as essentially an institutional matter of a type of exhibition” (215). What is tellingly unresolved, it turns out, is not their theory of the development of film narrative out of the spectacle era (the through-line to this story is situational dramaturgy), but the extent to which the “exhibitionism” of the pictorial mode persists in the narrative era

(215). Brewster and Jacobs ask whether Metz's characterization, of the founding of the narrative cinema as synonymous with the voyeuristic ban on direct address, holds up given the influence of pictorialism.<sup>58</sup> What is at stake in the attraction and the situation alike, as Brewster and Jacobs imply, is the vessel of film monstration; and the indexical "here" of monstration also marks the weakness of the film paradigm in Metz's discussion of film as language (*Film Language* 67). As I have argued in the previous chapter, monstration in the film context cannot be thought of apart from its dialectic intimacy with narration, but as the aspect of filmic presentation that cannot be narrated (the excessive referent of the narration). Film monstration is situated at the limit of narrative film, and this limit is (for Metz) voyeuristically disavowed by the narrative film spectator. Metz's pithy discussion of film voyeurism in *The Imaginary Signifier* (like Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema") has remained a crucial reference point for spectatorship theory, even as it became the foil for new debates. What limits the voyeurism model (and makes it provocative) is its focus on the spectator's relation to the diegesis of the film as a kind of fetishistic disavowal of cinematic absence, rather than as a repression of film as a form of presentational address (what Metz himself calls "a rich message with a poor code") (*Film Language* 69). As we suggested in the prior section, the repression of monstration comes at the price of incorporation; Metz's diegetic disavowal implies (at another level) a participatory fluency in convention, which in turn presupposes the narrative film's status as address. Where, in the cinema of attractions the spectator was first and foremost engaged as an addressee, in the narrative era this primacy is given to

---

<sup>58</sup> Metz, Christian. "Story/ Discourse: A Note on Two Kinds of Voyeurism." *The Imaginary Signifier*. Trans. Celia Britton and Annwyl Williams. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1982. Print.



scopic identification with the gaze of camera. And yet, the so-called 'segregation of spaces' makes this 'internal view' (of primary identification) itself the object of display. While Metz saw primary identification with the camera as the psychical supplement to the weakness of the film code, this spectatorial relation to the gaze of the camera cannot be totally transparent and neutral; as we suggested in the first chapter, its discursive orientation is always overloaded by its indexical (in our expanded sense) capacities. The monstration of the narrative perspective thus amounts to the becoming-spectacle of the spectatorial gaze itself, which fundamentally implies its alterity. If we take this view seriously, the scopic binary of voyeurism-exhibitionism (which Metz and Gunning take as the libidinal supplements to film language) becomes melodramatized; from the perspective of these two kinds of fetishistic viewing positions aligned with scopic enjoyment and mastery, they become, instead, two melodramatic compartments to the enigma of the cinematic 'message', to be deciphered and morally recognized.

The spectatorial 'voyeurism' of narrative film can be understood then, as another era of film monstration and not as its terminus; as the film *Monstrator* probes deeper and deeper for its views, its takes as its object the scene of spectatorship itself. Keil has referred to the great incidence of dreams and visions in the transitional era ("visions would become plentiful, particularly by 1912, when approximately 10 percent of the film from... [his] sample contain visions and dreams") largely in terms of what they make possible in narrative terms, so that in the transitional era there is an attempt at a strong distinction between the diegesis of the vision and the diegesis of real world (Keil *Early 72*). Explicitly stylistic syntactic indicators like crossfades, superimpositions and matte-shots were often used to delimit the two realities. What changes, however, with

the classic Hollywood style is the regime of visual focalization: i.e., this distinct demarcation of the subjectivized point-of-view versus the omniscience of the narrational perspective.

Brewster has argued that the growing confusion of this focalization was a founding compromise with the gratuitous display of the attraction (in this case, of subjective POV) that lead to the installation of the singular Hollywood address: the “shift [in the mid 1910s]...from the presentation of scenes to the presentation of differing character perspectives... go[es] with a move from direct photography of real environments to the presentation of a world much more penetrated by fantasy. The American cinema... is becoming a dream factory” (Brewster 324). Brewster concludes this in an essay called “A Scene at the ‘Movies’” originally published fifteen years before *Theatre to Cinema*, in a 1982 issue of *Screen*.<sup>59</sup> There he notices an important shift in shot focalization in a group of D.W. Griffith films from the early 1910s, in which “[p]oint of view, in the sense of narrative perspective, the measurement of relative perceptions and knowledge of the characters by the development of the narrative, is here achieved without point-of-view shots” (323). Though it is the Biograph-era Griffith that Brewster is reading specifically, he notes in passing that this “point-of-view structure” was “absorbed” by the classical narrative system. This shift of focalization firstly means that the spectator knows more than the diegetic characters (which is what Keil has emphasized about Brewster’s essay), but it also means that the purportedly objective narrative perspective is shot through with ‘subjective’ indicators. Read in relation to the

---

<sup>59</sup> Brewster, Ben. “A Scene at the ‘Movies.’” *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*. Ed. Thomas Elsaesser. London: British Film Institute, 1990. Print.

later work of *Theatre to Cinema*, we might retrospectively read this essay as a pictorial account of the transitional era, and of the importance of the hierarchy of spectatorial knowledge for narrative films, but the scope of the short essay reaches much further. Where, in a film like *Traffic in Souls*, we are presented with a rapid montage of narrative medium shots punctuated with very occasional POV shots, in the Hollywood era, the distinction between narrative perspective and point-of-view shots becomes increasingly complex. I would like now to explore this implication of Brewster's thesis, that the spectator's "fantasy" is never fully reducible either to that of the character or the interests of narrative.

Brewster's evocative statement regarding focalization is framed by a larger question about the "penetration" of the diegetic world by cinematic markers of interiority, and of the results of that cinematic penetration on the fantasy life of the spectator. Brewster's essay opens with a passage from the 1923 novel *Stella Dallas* (of which two important films were subsequently made in 1925 and 1937), that describes in 3<sup>rd</sup> person limited narrative voice, a revelatory moment of one of the main characters, Stella's daughter Laurel Dallas:

[s]he, standing on the outside, was the only unreal thing in this home scene. She looked at her father. Suddenly the room faded, disappeared, and a close-up of his face dawned on the screen before her... It flashed over Laurel that perhaps this man wasn't really her father after all!

(qtd. in Brewster "Scene" 318)

Brewster highlights the fact that the fantasy is cinematic, that it involves a sense of segregation between the space of spectatorship and the space of the screen, but here the

separation of the fantasy perspective from the reality of the view has been inverted: “[t]he segregation involves a reversal of the opposition between reality and illusion, and the projection of the spectator into the scene” (318). Explicitly calling upon film spectatorship as a figure for personal revelation, Brewster asks: “what was the cinema, so that by 1923 it could provide such a metaphor?” (319). The essay goes on to suggest that this “metaphor” could not have existed before 1908, and that it is, in fact, made possible by the aforementioned shift in focalization practices. He implies that the cinema has fundamentally affected the way characters experience moments of intimacy, marked as it is by close-ups and the segregation of the spectatorial space.

Let us take an illuminating example of the way that point-of-view is shifting in the late teens, one which both cites and reflexively comments on the point-of-view shot as attraction. In the prologue to Cecil B. DeMille’s *Male and Female* (1919), playfully staged as a peeping-tom scene, the main characters of the cast are introduced one by one as a house servant boy steals views of each of them in the intimacy of their bedrooms through hallway door keyholes (Figures 3.01-4). In this opening cast call, spectators are introduced to each of the starring roles by an emblematic shot, a characteristic moving portrait voyeuristically staged. Following a regular structure, this series of shots proceeds one after another as the house boy makes his way from door to door down an upstairs hallway of the old Earl’s estate. The befreckled boy is first seen in a medium shot peering into the rooms as he places a pair of shoes at each bedroom door; this is followed by an intertitle introducing the character and the actor in the role, culminating in a point-of-view shot in an iris-frame of the character lying in bed. First we are introduced to the

Earl himself, followed by his lazy younger male cousin, his vain younger daughter, and culminating with the revelation of the view of the Earl's



**Figure 3.01** The Peeping Tom (*Male and Female*, 1919, Famous Players-Lasky)



**Figure 3.02** The Iris as Point of View. (*Male and Female*, 1919, Famous Players-Lasky)

older daughter Mary, played by the radiant Gloria Swanson. Unlike his view of the other characters, the boy's first peek into Mary's room reveals a chair over which lady's undergarments are hanging, followed by a reaction shot of the boy's anticipation of the exposure of Mary's body. However, in the second POV shot we see Mary rolling over in bed under her covers, as the boy looks on. The use of the iris as an indicator of point-of-view (in these keyhole shots) was a convention already familiar from the attractions era, linking it unmistakably with the peeping-tom film. And like the peeping-tom film, the sequence ends with the young voyeur's punishment by the head butler Crichton, whose introduction comes last as he walks up the stairs to witness the boy's transgressions. The servant child's view from the outside no doubt introduces the ironic 'external' perspective on the class division that the film will take on, but I would like to pay



**Figure 3.03** Voyeurism and/or the Spectacle of Intimacy? (*Male and Female*, 1919, Famous Players-Lasky)

attention to the strange focalization presented by the final moment of this sequence. Interestingly, despite getting an apparently 'objective' perspective of Crichton's entrance up the stairs, Crichton too is framed by the same iris, before (in a subsequent non-iris shot) he grabs the boy and scolds him. It should be pointed out that the iris-ing of the frame also had, at this time, a pictorialist tendency as a primitive way of marking an emblematic shot, and (almost literally) focalizing spectatorial attention on a detail view (often a cut-in) that was to be separated and highlighted in some way within the diegesis. This duality of the iris-effect, as being doubly inhabited by the attractions and the pictorialist mode is articulated prominently in this sequence in this surprising switch from voyeurist point-of-view to the emblematic shot. But with Brewster's analysis of focalization in mind, what exemplifies this transition from attractions to melodramatic



**Figure 3.04** The iris, but who's point-of-view? (*Male and Female*, 1919, Famous Players-Lasky)

emblem even more, I would suggest, is this switch from the coding of these iris shots as voyeuristic attractions, to its recoding (with the final shot of Crichton) as a penetrative melodramatic display of the intimacies of character.

Taking this scene from *Male and Female* as a kind of spectatorial allegory, we can perceive in this subtle shift a true revolution taking place in the object of monstration; in the unfolding of this scene spectatorial interest moves from catching an exposed, denuded view to the spectacle of intimate personality itself. Between the subjective 'first person' point of view of the character and the objective third person of the narrative master shot, the classical address makes use here of an impossible, a-personal 'perspective' in the second person: the *You* See of the Film Monstrator. At stake in the survival of a form of direct address within the context of film diegesis is a kind of nonreflexive viewing position, in which the *I* of the spectator is secondary to the cinematic gaze, and is subjected to the look. In speaking of the vision of the dream in relation to the theory of seduction, Laplanche has suggested a verb "where *the subject* [of the sentence] *is the other*": he suggests the French *chercher*, as to be looked for or sought out (Laplanche "Closing" 194). The presentationalism of Hollywood film resides in this *seeking out* of the spectator, masquerading as the presentation of an internal view. Gunning has suggested that "[n]arrative [film] invokes the spectator's interest by... posing an enigma" to be solved ("Now" 43). In the light of the seduction theory, we might say that this enigma is not primarily the "Macguffin" of the plot (as the conceit of something to be revealed), but the monstrative enigma of the cinematic address: what does this view that I am offered seek, what am I seeing? I propose to call this melodramatic 'internalization' of the attractions mode (and its consequent



sensationalization of the psychological) within the post-1915 classical mode, the *fantasia* of American narrative film.

Fantasia, a term originating in musical theory, refers to a composition which is relatively free in form and which accommodates improvised variations on a theme; it also has come to denote a poetic or dramatic work governed by the laws of fancy rather than of a clearly articulated diegetic reality. Both senses of this term have conceptual resonance for us here. In indexing the inspiring *melos* (the musicality) at the heart of the situational melodrama, the term refers to the centrality of affective response for the Hollywood situation, and the way that this form of cinema contains its attraction, taking it in narrative stride. The term also refers to the dominant mode by which this accommodation is presented by Hollywood: i.e., with the evocation and intrusion of fantasy and psychic life in the world of the diegesis. From its beginnings then, one of the primary ways that the American narrative cinema reintroduced the novelty of its attraction was by 'internalizing' it; that is, by displaying it in terms of *fantasy* or an internal vision. The *mise-en-scene* of fantasy held Busby Berkeley's musical world together, as it would frame the miraculous technicolor of *The Wizard of OZ* (1939) in sepia. Prefiguring the *fantasia* of the sound era, and the *fantasia* of the technicolor era, there was the *fantasia* of the narrative era. I emphasize three main forms which the monstrative compromise takes: the aforementioned 2<sup>nd</sup> person 'penetrative' focalization, melodramatic expressionism and the spectacle scene. I will take the silent films of Cecil B. DeMille, whose work during the mid 1910s to the early 1920s, I would suggest, is the epitome of the narrative exploitation of the attraction as melodramatic *fantasia*.

### The Inside Out: DeMille's Hollywood Fantasia

As we saw in the last chapter, the narrator system that emerged in the transitional period had, as one of its chief aims, to contextualize and make meaningful the novel views being displayed on film. The fear of being seduced and lead astray by the attractions of the new motion picture is constantly being rehearsed in the silent era. With the transformation of the cinema in the 1910s into a melodramatic form of fantasia (in which the internal is externalized through performance gesture and filmic technique) something new was becoming visible for film spectators. What film criticism has come to understand as the classical Hollywood mode, finds its melodramatic anchor in the spectacle of the *personal*. Not only does American film from the 1910s onward come to take as its centre of gravity the drama of interiority, the very form of its address gestures towards an interior: with the form of the close-up Hollywood finds its emblematic shot, and with a more fluid focalization it finds its unique 'penetrative' perspective. The revelation of true character, or the manifestation and demonstration of moral worth also becomes the object of cinematic display and 'exploitation'. However, the implications of public mass 'voyeurism' of the indirect address (which the narrative had instigated in its attempt to repress the attraction) and the chiastic reversal of the psychic interior and the cultural exterior which the form of the narrative film itself embodied, now became the object of melodramatic deliberation. The price paid for repressing the attraction came in its internalization, and fantasia is the name we have given to this compromise. As we will explore in the following chapter, one of the hypostatic elaborations which sought to domesticate this turning-inside-out of the personal would come in the advent of the star cults, and the cultural notion of sex appeal as a visual attribute of personality. Yet, while

these hypostatic attempts to normalize the invasion of the spectator emerged, American film allegorized its danger on the screen. DeMille's films of the silent era are singular in the American commercial market, I would suggest, in the way that they mobilize monstrative capacities toward narrative and moralizing ends, but they are also interesting for us in that they thematize both the repression and internalization of the attraction as a moral issue.

In 1927, after completing production on his silent religious epic, *The King of Kings*, Cecil B. DeMille wrote a short article called "The Screen as a Religious Teacher".<sup>60</sup> In it he expressed the hope that through his film he would share the drama of the life of the Christ with the world, and in so doing "gather" together and inspire a new audience from different faiths, languages and cultures. This manifesto, however, actually represents the culmination of a pastoral tendency within DeMille's work going back to the teens. The son of the protestant clergyman turned melodramatist Henry C. DeMille, DeMille took up the family legacy, moving to Hollywood to make feature films with moral and cultural value, after a relatively unsuccessful career in the theatre. Like Griffith, DeMille used literary source material and expressive visual composition to perform this "upliftment" of film from low-class thrill to middle-class artistic entertainment. In his 'Sin and Salvation' cycle of the mid 1910s to early 1920s, in films including *The Cheat* (1915), *Joan The Woman* (1916), *The Whispering Chorus* (1918), *Manslaughter* (1922), and his first silent version of *The Ten Commandments* (1923), DeMille uses special optical effects and grandiose spectacles to animate the flashbacks, hallucinations and miracles which form the moral centre of their plots. The new sensational capabilities of the

---

<sup>60</sup> DeMille, Cecil, B. "The Screen as a Religious Teacher." *Cinema Web*. N.p. n.d. Web. May 2006.

narrative cinema are mobilized to tempt and titillate and, at the same time, to gather the flock.

For the DeMille corpus then, there is a *dialectical intimacy* between profane exploitation and sacred upliftment. It is this tension that accounts for one of the most striking aspects of DeMille's early films: the seemingly perverse coincidence of exploitation and moral prescription (and sometimes both at the same time). In this final section, as a way of marking the transformation of the 'repressed' attraction, we will explore how the fantasia of two of these films, *The Whispering Chorus* and *The Ten Commandments*, utilize cinematic monstration from two different directions (positing film, on the one hand, as dangerous intrusion to punctuate their melodramas of interiority, and on the other, as powerful new tool for mass revelation in modernity) and how they, taken together, reflect a fundamental ambivalence in the DeMille corpus towards film as fantasia.

Films like *The Cheat* (1915) and *Joan the Woman* (1916) stand, in their use of *chiaroscuro* lighting and pictorialist *mise-en-scene*, as some of the earliest examples of American film expressionism to explore psychological themes. Both of these films, along with *The Whispering Chorus*, tell the story of protagonists going through internal struggles which find graphic expression on the screen. But with the end of the first world war, DeMille felt pressure to produce lighter films; and his sex comedies of the late teens and early twenties (*Old Wives for New*, *Don't Change Your Husband*, *The Affairs of Anatol*) have been read by Sumiko Higashi (and, *après coup*, by DeMille himself) as a divergence from his initial artistic vision of a cultured moral cinema, to a fetishistic, consumerist celebration of wealth and luxury (or as he is quoted as saying: he presented

for his audience “the chambermaid’s idea of glamour”), before once again making films with an explicitly moral orientation (Brownlow). Higashi has suggested that this must be understood in terms of the movement of commodity fetishism; referring to middle-class entertainment habits she states, that in the “private theatrical... social discourse became a charade in which actors engaged in self-theatricalization that ultimately meant the displacement of Protestant notions of character based on moral excellence in favor of personality molded by consumer society” (Higashi “Melodrama” 232).<sup>61</sup> In this vein, the excessively ornate ‘interior’ design of the sex comedies has been linked to the rise of consumerism in Hollywood. While, as we will see, DeMille would soon return to his moral directives, and while Higashi is right to highlight the ways in which American melodramatic individualism is tied to capitalist interest, the problem of ‘interiors’ and intimacy in modernity is an insistent theme going throughout DeMille’s films, and not just in the ‘light’ comedies of the late 1910s. In films like *The Whispering Chorus*, *Manslaughter* (1922) and *The Ten Commandments* (1923), the drama of the *interior* goes far beyond its encroachment by market interests. By associating cinematic monstration itself with vice and psychic struggle, these films allegorize the intrusion of narrative spectatorship as a new form of cultural alterity.

As DeMille’s most extreme example of film expressionism, *The Whispering Chorus* is the film that goes farthest in aligning cinematic techniques with the drama of interiority; in almost every scene of the film the internal states of the characters are represented (often through the use of double exposures and matte shots) as visual punctuation. The film tells the story of John Tremble, a bank clerk who embezzles

---

<sup>61</sup> In posing this alternative model of the publicization of the private, Higashi refers to Richard Sennett’s *The Fall of Public Man*.

money and then fakes his own death to evade the law by posing a mutilated dead body (that he happens upon) as his own. After his disappearance, his virtuous wife Jane remarries (and becomes pregnant with) a noble crusading legislator named George Coggeswell, whose investigation into corruption led to the discovery of Tremble's crime. When in the aftermath of the investigation, Coggeswell becomes state governor, the down and out Tremble decides to return to reveal himself. When he approaches his elderly mother first, she implores him not to identify himself to anyone else, as it would make his wife a bigamist, and would stain the good reputation of the governor. Just as his mother passes away, Tremble is arrested as his own murderer Edgar Smith, and is found guilty after a trial. Despite his mother's advice, Tremble announces his identity in court, but is not believed. Jane realizes her husband's true identity, and attempts to convince her husband to pardon him before his execution. In a final sacrificial gesture to save the happiness that his wife has found with the governor, Tremble agrees to his guilt, and is executed.

The interest of this film for us lies in the fact that DeMille's expressionistic superimposition of an internal 'whispering chorus', which seem to haunt Tremble in situations of decision (three distinct apparitions consistently turn up to suggest different paths forward) are not simply adornments of the plot (which became the charge against DeMille in the years to follow), but central to the problem of the film, as it is announced in opening intertitle:

You've heard them—these echoes which none but yourself can hear! The secret, private life of every man and every woman, is lived away in a Hall of Echoes, to the music of this Whispering Chorus—which fills life and colors

it, and makes it beautiful or otherwise. (*Whispering Chorus*)

Where film expressionism can often be read as reflecting the protagonist's descent into madness, this framing intertitle clearly implies (addressing the spectator directly) that this internal dissonance is in fact a psychological norm and not necessarily indexing mental instability. Indeed, the psychological manifestations are not strictly focalized around the perspective of Tremble, occurring to most of the main characters at some point in the film. It presents the intimate life of the individual as structured like an amphitheatre, with the manifestation of Tremble's interiority figured as a set of internal voices, a theatre of psychic *dramatis personae*, whose injunctions intrude on his thoughts and debate his fate. The visual 'tricks' of fantasia address Tremble directly, as they address the spectator, as an internal alterity erupting into the diegetic reality of the film. This allegorical connection between the themes of the film and the form of the cinema itself is cemented in *The Whispering Chorus*' conclusion.

In a climactic scene in his jail cell in the final minutes as he awaits his execution, debating whether to sacrifice himself for his wife's happiness or continue to insist on his true identity, Tremble is again visited by the three internal voices. But this time the three figures become a whole cacophony of voices, surrounding him from all sides; framed as a frontal medium shot, the more than fifteen faces appear behind Tremble, as if projected onto the wall of the cell in the frame's background (Figure 3.05). In a final moment of a cathartic exasperation, Tremble turns toward the back wall, as if to face the 'projection screen' of the chorus, and impotently thrusts his fists into it. While the scene obviously tries to capture the zenith of Tremble's personal struggle as a pictorial tableau, the turn



**Figure 3.05** An internal cacophony. (*The Whispering Chorus*, 1918, Jesse Lasky)



**Figure 3.06** Facing the Screen of the Interior. (*The Whispering Chorus*, 1918, Jesse Lasky)



toward the 'screen' also expresses the troubling nature of the intrusion of the cinema (Figure 3.06).

As we have already argued, the 'voyeurism' of the narrative cinema simply internalizes the direct address of monstration, introducing an alterity into the primary identification with the apparently objective narrational gaze, and investing filmic display with address-value. DeMille's early experimental feature screens the intrusive nature of the narrative film address as a seductive, indefensible internal attack.<sup>62</sup> Tremble is lead astray because he succumbs to the influence of a psychic reality, figured as an internal alterity, presented cinematically. Like the traumatic alterity internalized (in the process of repression) by the subject in the seduction theory, the intrusion implied in Hollywood fantasia comes to haunt the spectator, and is the legacy of the compromise with the monstration of first motion picture era.

Where DeMille would exploit the attractions of fantasia to mark the psychic excesses of the modern age, in the 1920s (and after his lighter films made with Gloria Swanson) he turned his attention increasingly to explicitly pastoral films, including the first version of *The Ten Commandments* and his last silent film, *The King of Kings*. In *The Ten Commandments*, the ambivalent tension between the dangerous seductiveness of the *graven image* and the utopian pastoral possibilities of the cinema as an art form is at perhaps its most acute. In the very seductiveness and indeterminacy of DeMille's pastoral

---

<sup>62</sup> Another DeMille film made after the sex comedies of the late 1910s and early 1920s is *Manslaughter* (1922). Like *The Whispering Chorus* and the first version of *The Ten Commandments*, *Manslaughter* uses the attraction (a spectacle scene fantasy of an ancient Mediterranean bacchanalia) to stand in for the compulsive excesses of the rich flapper protagonist.

spectacles (I would argue), the collectivizing potential of film monstration is put on display and allegorized.

*The Ten Commandments* is structured around two stories, a biblical prologue presenting the exodus of the bible, and a present-day melodrama telling the story of a young fun-loving woman named Mary (played by Leatrice Joy) and the two brothers who vie for her affection, John McTavish (played by Richard Dix) a carpenter who respects the holy laws but has to check his own impulses, and Dan McTavish (played by Rod LaRocque) who strays from the ancient law, and destroys everything dear to him, in the name of ambition, greed and lust. And yet, the film is organized around its chief spectacles, doubled in the film's dual structure. Where the prologue ends with the story of the golden calf, which seduces the tribes of Israel at the foot of Sinai after their exodus from Egypt, this temptation gets mirrored in the present-day story in which Sally Lung (the orientalized vamp played by Nita Naldi) tempts the impious Dan into adultery, and infects him with leprosy. And where Moses' introduction of the divine law leads directly to the violent destruction of the idols, in the present day narrative Dan's greedy negligence as a builder (he literally does not conform to building codes) leads to the collapse of his skyscraper and the accidental death of his mother. In a final gesture of hubris (or sacrifice), Dan attempts a futile escape by boat during a raging storm, abandoning his wife to be cared for by his loyal older brother.

As with *The Whispering Chorus*, the modern story tells the tale of moral transgression and compulsive abandon (which it punctuates with expressionistic lighting and special effects) but in its prologue it is also includes the pastoral use of the spectacle. In these spectacle scenes of the prologue, as in many others like them in DeMille's films

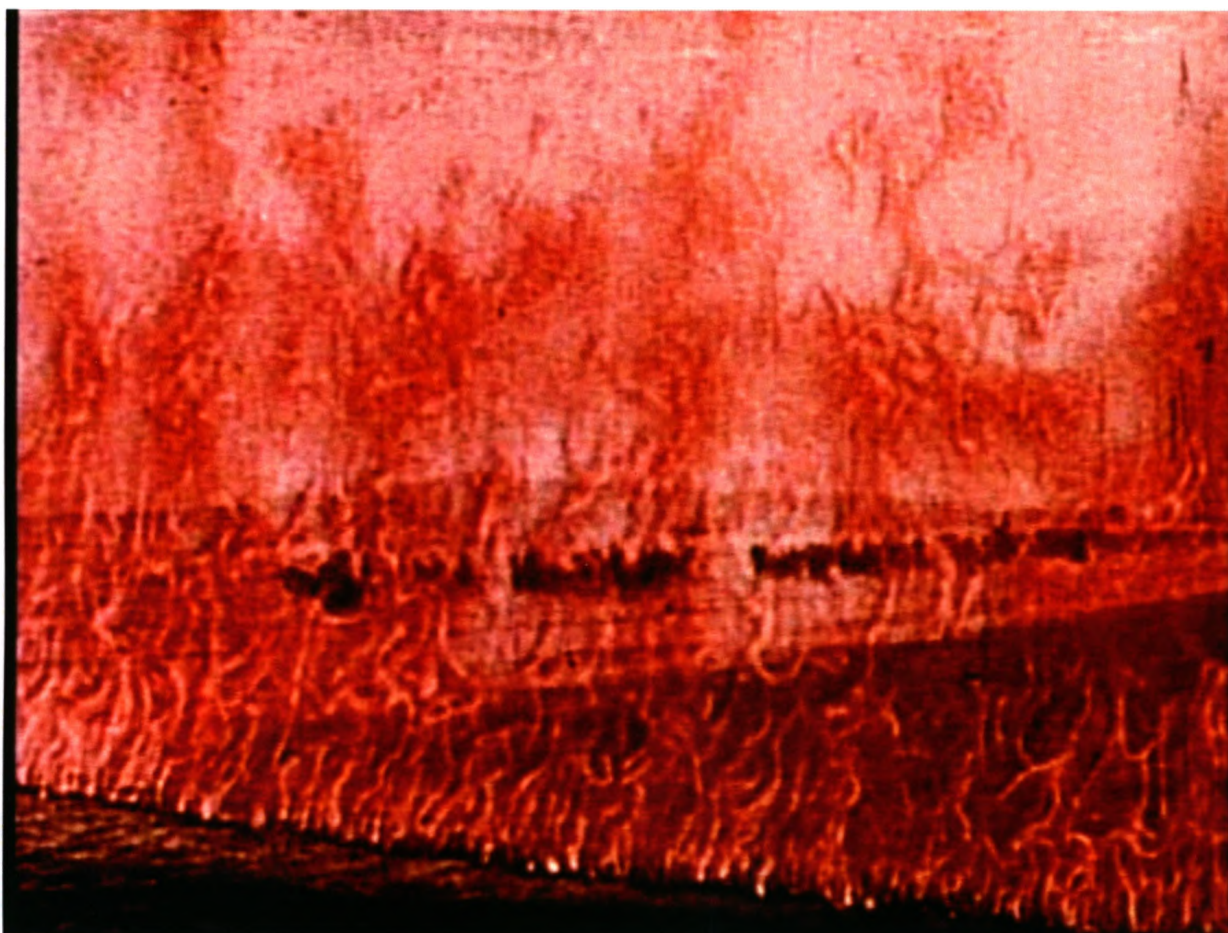
of the silent era, both transgression and its punishment are made cinematically *attractive*, in that they become the object of gratuitous display. DeMille had been developing a two-tone colour process since the teens that came to be known as the *Handschiegl* process. This process was used in a few of his other pictures (including *Joan the Woman*), but only in particular scenes. In *The Ten Commandments*, the colorized scene of the exodus from Egypt is bursting with formal and visual flourishes, and a cast of hundreds; here the cutting-edge special effects and the use of colorization are utilized to highlight the two miracles of the pillar of fire and the parting of the Red Sea (Figure 3.07). Clearly, as a novelty, the bright red of the pillar of fire (for instance) could be displayed and enjoyed for its own sake; and this danger of the spectacular is allegorized by the film in its next scene. In the scene of the temptation of the tribes of Israel by false idols, the film warns its spectators about the seductive power of images: the golden calf who causes the masses to transgress the law, clearly implicates the cinema itself as the Monstrator- Seducer with its non-rational, unbound attractions. Moses comes down the mountain with the holy laws in hand, to find an orgiastic chaos has taken hold of the people. In the final moment of the prologue, there is final divine act, as God destroys the idol with a bolt of lighting. The scene fades into an intertitle which cites the bible's narration of this event. With the subsequent first shot of the modern narrative, we find Mother McTavish has been reading the story of the ten commandments to her two sons. Framed as a fantasy recitation of the bible, and climaxing with the allegory of the false idols, one way of accounting for the seductiveness of the film would be to suggest that they are contained and contextualized by this narrational frame, and by the figure of the grand film Narrator (be it God or DeMille). While both narrative frames are no doubt important, it is, however, not enough

to say that attractions become integrated or bound by the narrative cinema and authorized by a Narrator (which is Keil's position). Film *monstration* is central to the moralizing of DeMille's film, and in his reputation as a showman director DeMille is not only the ultimate figure of the Narrator of his films, but the Monstrator.<sup>63</sup> Without accounting for this signature showmanship of his films, we ignore the mainspring of the popular power of his films. But in DeMille's flamboyant monstrative practices, I contend that we learn something about the development of the Hollywood mode; while DeMille's films were an extreme example of Hollywood monstration, they remained an amplified version of the conventional norm of the silent era.

The pastoral monstration of these spectacle scenes, I argue, brings out what is essentially melodramatic about Hollywood fantasia. Rather than taking for granted images as fetishistic units of enjoyment, as simply exploitative narrative containers for distracting spectacles, the monstration of fantasia is pregnant with messages, infiltrated by address-value. The fantasia of these scenes might then be better understood on the model of religious 'visions', in that their excessive significance points beyond themselves. Williams has noted that the "theatrical function of melodrama's big sensation scene was to be able to put forth a moral truth in gesture and picture that could not be fully spoken in words" (*Playing 18*). The revelation proper to film monstration is that of the *infans* (as the gap between the monstrative and the narrative, or the monstrative

---

<sup>63</sup> Famously, in his 1956 remake of *The Ten Commandments*, DeMille's dual presence as Narrator and as Monstrator is represented in the film: in an opening prologue, as Monstrator, on a stage in front of its curtains, he addresses the spectator directly regarding the relationship between the images of the film and their resonance with the global conflicts of the day (i.e., the Cold War); DeMille also figures as Narrator, as it his voiceover which narrates the transitions in the film's plot.



**Figure 3.07** The Pillar of Fire (*The Ten Commandments*, 1923, Famous Players-Lasky)

remainder that cannot be squared with narration), an index of the limits of cultural legibility in the face of collective enthusiasm. Here, we might take the colorized attractions of *The Ten Commandments* as themselves figures for this pastoral address: like the obstructing pillar of fire, these scenes, at first block the spectatorial pursuit of narrative meaning in their gratuitous display, but like the parting of the sea, they at the same time allow spectators to traverse a foreign, as yet un-mappable territory, without losing their narrative way completely. These attractions hold the place of an unspeakable cultural problem, one that is gestured to and approached obliquely, though not defined or resolved by the encounter. As both an act and a sign (indexical in the sense in which we developed in chapter one), the miraculous spectacle (amplified by their colourization) is in excess of its narrative significance: it both punctuates the diegetic world, and punctures

it. Its sensational force moves beyond its conventional significance: it is a monstrative revelation "in force without signification". In the case of the colourization of the exodus sequence, with its aesthetic isolation of the pillar of fire and the parting of the red sea, the colour/ special effects attraction is used literally as a highlighter and as a container of the moral drama. And yet, the spectacle scenes in DeMille's films are always set in the context of an intimate drama, of a family drama and/ or love triangle, so that the grandeur of the mass spectacle is always shown in counterpoint to the small interiors of the private drama (and *vice versa*). We have already discussed the ways in which the melodramatic mode stages societal/ cultural conflicts as personal and internal; in these pastoral films, the revelation of monstrative spectacles serve to introduce spectacles as cultural hieroglyphs (*signifiers-to*), cinematic spectacles that come to be the indexes of spectatorial (i.e., a populist) intimacy. Whether thought of in Metzian terms as collective voyeurism or in the melodramatic terms of this populist intimacy, DeMille's films draw out in various ways the chiasmatic exchange between the psychic interior and the cultural exterior that characterizes Hollywood fantasia.

I would propose, then that the anachronism and conservatism of melodrama's look backwards needs to be regarded as a strategy mobilized to problematize the implicit ideological assumptions of the historical *status quo* (be they progressive or conservative), and to challenge that state of affairs to find new nominations for the new unspeakable exigencies of the moment (be they more or less socially inclusive). Instead of thinking about this domain as a 'moral occult' of traces of past traditional codes, in DeMille we see that the myths of the past are exploited and translated by the technological innovations of the cinema as a way of approaching the topical problems of modernity.

Lodged between the determinants of the past and exigencies of the present, melodrama attempts to uncover, in the contradictions and limitations of the moment, a hegemonic *eventuality* that has yet to be articulated in terms of the present. It is precisely, then, the non-closure inscribed in these pastoral attractions, which allows the spectator to respond to the call from his or her own "viewing position", but it also implies a melodramatic irony, in that it asserts an unsurpassable attachment to the enduring sites of cultural seduction that it tries to overcome. Upliftment then, implies exploitation in DeMille's films, in that the project of a collective revelation is predicated on the enigmatic presentation of film monstration. Where the dangers of fantasia in DeMille are posed as the failure of the personal to fully incorporated into the social, in the pastoral tendency in his spectacles stand as the sublime markers of cultural unspeakability, as heralds of a universalizing call to spectatorial work, around intense sites of cultural enthusiasm and trouble.

In conclusion, if melodrama implies (in Gledhill's phrase) an "[i]nternalisation of the social [that] is accompanied by a process of exteriorisation in which emotional states or moral conditions are expressed as the actions of melodramatic types", we have suggested that the institution of American narrative film spectatorship (as fantasia) constitutes an event in this cultural process, in that 'objective' diegesis is intruded, *penetrated by fantasy* ("Signs" 210). While in this chapter we focused on the "internalisation" of the cinematic, in our next chapter, we will follow the development of this process of hypostatic "exteriorisation" of the cinematic, in the emergence of the screen stars, and the discourse of It. Beyond its solution to the formal problems of the cinema and ideological impasses, the address of Hollywood fantasia (with its apparent

anachronism) makes possible the melodramatic display and deliberation of cultural sites of unspeakably social enthusiasm (or we might say, populist intimacy), including (most prominently) film spectatorship itself. While we may read its containment of filmic novelty as the expression of the Hollywood address's conservative, psychologized illusionism, I read (following the suggestive statements of Brewster) the historical development of Hollywood fantasia as spectatorial repression of the attraction: as both a formal compromise (between narrative and monstration) and an intrusive sensationalization of spectatorial interiority.



## 4

**The Populism of IT:  
Film Stars and the Birth of Sex Appeal**

Capitalizing on the newly found recognition of “star” actors, American film companies of the 1910s created a new form of film promotion: the motion-picture still. Usually utilized as a set of “lobby cards” installed at the entrance of the theatre, the motion-picture still depicted scenes from the film as single images. And yet, these promotional stills often captured a view not included in the actual film. Whether derived from an excluded take or from a variant angle, or because they perform an impossible graphic condensation of a scene or set of scenes from the film, the motion-picture still often diverged from its filmic ‘referent’. How can we account for this discrepancy, what do we make of this ‘other scene’ as the referent of the promotional still? I suggest we regard the lobby card as a figure for a transformation in film culture that was taking place in the 1910s. At the end of the last chapter, I quoted Gledhill as describing the chiasmus of melodrama as simultaneously the internalisation of the social and exteriorisation of the psychic interior; this melodramatic *chiasmus* is reflected in two developments in film culture tied together in the lobby card. The promotional images of the lobby should be seen in the context of two tendencies within the film culture of the teens: on the one hand, they reflect the pictorialist aesthetic in which key narrative situations came to be graphically condensed into single images; while on the other, they clearly call upon the public recognition of movie stars as cults of personality. Straddled between *intramural* (internalized) action and *extramural* (externalized) passion, and physically located on the threshold of the spectatorial space, these images symbolize the striking melodramatic

inversion of intimacy. Intimacy, in the cinema, becomes the site of a strange transformation: *it is turned inside out*. In the previous chapters, I suggested that Laplanche's general theory of seduction supplies a model for thinking through the internalization of the cinema, and how its theory of repression implies a corresponding exteriorisation. But if in the 1910s American film sought to contain and 'repress' film monstration via the conservative frame of older theatrical modes, this melodramatic compromise would also be elaborated for the spectator in new ways by the 1920s. Here, inspired by Butler's statements on hegemony and hypostasis, I will argue that spectatorship sought out some externalized hypostasis of the newly implanted intrusive address of the narrative cinema. Drawing on our schema of the seduction itinerary, I will explore how a new creature was born out of this exteriorisation: the movie star. Butler's work since the late 1990s emphasises the "scene of address" which precedes the hypostatic gesture. Shifting back here from the psychic interior to the cultural exterior, I will develop Butler's alliance with Laplanche (with respect to the 'primacy of the other') to think through the populist hypostasis of universal spectator as a new hegemonic category. The scandalous erotic address of film came to be hypostatized and circulated increasingly by the early 1920s Hollywood as the notion of a substantive "sex appeal": I suggest that what was once a trait of the new cinematic form (the attraction) was becoming a characteristic of modern American (spectatorial) personality. American film spectatorship as a populist enterprise produced sex appeal as one of its hegemonic qualities. As Butler argues, this hegemonic gesture presupposes an underlying process of cultural translation. In this chapter, I will examine the work of the scholar, Miriam Hansen, who has arguably gone the furthest in understanding the ways in which the

Hollywood compromise was effected, and how it laid the populist foundations of the first golden age of the American cinema.

Following from this examination of the development of Hansen's theoretical work, in a discussion of early stars Theda Bara and Rudolph Valentino we will see that the first icons of cinematic sexuality also index the process of hegemonic translation and its discontents. These exoticised personalities betray the hypostatic gesture necessary to establish the Hollywood spectator. For Griffith's Babelian dream, the 'vamp' and the 'sheik' were the stain of an unsurpassable confusion of tongues, and yet, in these films it is photogenic personality itself that is the exigent site of a drive to translate. It is not accidental that it is first in exoticized stars that we see play out the personal drama of filmic attraction, as the drama of personality *as attraction*.

#### Hansen's 'Blue Flower': Stars and Hollywood Hegemony

In her work since the 1980s, from *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Cinema* (1991) to her long-standing work on Benjamin's reflections on film, Hansen tested ahistorical theories of spectatorship, arguing in favour of the less structural, more historically dynamic, participatory notion of *cinema as an alternative public sphere* in which film

offered an alternative because it engaged the contradictions of modernity at the level of the senses, the level at which the impact of modern technology on human experience was most palpable and irreversible...the cinema not only traded in the mass production of the senses but also provided

an aesthetic horizon for the experience of industrial mass society

(Hansen "Mass" 70).

In this model, of which she has produced numerous iterations over the years, she takes seriously the power of standardization to bring together diverse populations, even as she denies that this process is a totalizing one: mass culture is "often in excess and in conflict with the regime of production that spawned [it]" (69). The latest version of this model is the influential notion of classical cinema as "vernacular modernism" (1999): an attempt to understand the universalism of the Hollywood appeal, without grounding this appeal on some *a priori* (ideologically-inspired) norm. Instead of relying on these norms, the dream factory of Hollywood has "produced and globalized a new sensorium; it constituted, or tried to constitute, new subjectivities and subjects" (71). This theory of the mass appeal of Hollywood, I would suggest must be read as the culmination of the two dominant strands of Hansen's research over the last thirty years. Her numerous essays on Benjamin's engagement with cinema seem to have provided Hansen with a revision of her conclusions in *Babel and Babylon*, on the origins of the classical Hollywood spectatorship.<sup>64</sup> The vernacular modernism thesis is consistent with the themes highlighted in her more recent 'archeological' studies of the Benjaminian corpus, where Hansen argues that what is at stake in the optical unconscious that film reveals is a reawakening of the "mimetic faculty" (which grounds his theory of language). Benjamin understands the mimetic as the human capacity to perceive and process similarities.

Hansen consistently argues that while Benjamin sees cinema as a cultural formation

---

<sup>64</sup> In addition to "Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: "The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology", Hansen's other essays on Benjamin include: "Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street", "Room-for-Play: Benjamin's Gamble with Cinema", and "Benjamin's Aura".

symptomatic of modern shock, he also invests cinema with the utopian possibility of being its antidote. With the rearrangement of modern perception seen in the montage of film, the optical unconscious is like a nontechnical (“equipment-free”) outcome of technology, what he will call “the ‘blue flower’ in the land of technology” (which Hansen cites in her title):

although film as a medium enhances the historical demolition of the aura, its particular form of indexical mediation enables it to lend a physiognomic expression to objects, to make second nature return the look, similar to auratic experience... Such film practice... [would] focus its mimetic devices on a non-sensuous similarity, on hidden correspondences in which even the dreamworld of commodities may ‘encounter us in the structures of frail intersubjectivity.’

(Hansen “Blue” 204, 209-10)

Influenced as it is by the Benjaminian notion of the “optical unconscious,” then, Hansen’s conception of vernacular modernism is clearly affiliated with the aesthetic “register” that Gunning highlighted in his work on the visceral appeal of the cinema of attractions.<sup>65</sup> Like the Eisensteinian montage of attractions, the vernacular modernism of classical Hollywood “is crucially anchored in sensory experience and sensational affect, in processes of mimetic identification that are, more often than not, partial and excessive in relation to narrative comprehension” (Hansen “Mass” 70). Film vernacular works because it, at once, trains the perceptual apparatus and reflects upon (or at least dwells upon) this sensory discipline. While I whole-heartedly agree with Hansen when she

---

<sup>65</sup> This affiliation is indexed in citations and footnotes in the work of both scholars.

implicitly places the 'attractional' element back into the heart of classical narrative cinema, I would contest her account of vernacular modernism insofar as it is underwritten by the concept (as announced in her subtitle) of "the mass production of the senses". Like Williams' account of "film bodies" and Gunning's account of the modern urbanized body, Hansen here relies on the presuppositions of an immediate body, as the vessel or receptacle of modernity's pressures. As I have already argued in the cases of Williams and Gunning, emphasis on the concept of a disciplined body deemphasizes both the trauma (as opposed to shock) of these subjectivizing practices, and the larger movement of the dialectic of spectatorship in this production of a film mass. In response to the positing of this immediate body in Chapter 1, if we take the disciplined body as an already constituted product, the traumatic process by which this body is constituted, that is, the dialectic by which the body comes *incorporated*, is obscured. As I have argued, following Laplanche and Butler, the hypostasis of a spectatorial body presupposes and requires the prior incorporation of the foreign body of the cinematic address, as the site of cultural seduction. What Hansen neglects is that the attractions mode is transubstantiated by narrative cinema; translated into the terms of the narrative form, the attraction not only poses limits to filmic representation, it produces new unspeakable quasi-categories (foreign bodies) through the asymmetries of its address. Remembering that alterity in the theory of seduction represents the place of an insistent form as 'proto-content', I have argued that the attraction does not simply get incorporated as fetishistic excess by narrative film, but in the context of melodrama it becomes an index of hegemonic contestation and elaboration.

While Hansen's interest in cinema as "the blue flower in the land of technology" seems consistent with her vernacular modernism thesis, this consistency comes at the cost of an important exclusion in the development of her work. What gets cast away with the vernacular modernism thesis in Hansen's work after *Babel and Babylon* (what I would suggest one can see implied in her earlier work) is the important concept that cinema *itself* introduces an excess which checks its own totalizing tendencies. While in her later work she will hypostatize a collective, vernacular experience via the Benjaminian notion of "collective innervation" of a newly standardized sensorium, in her early work, as demonstrated in the introduction, this populist hypostasis is always mediated (via the concept of aura) through representations of an alterity which cannot be brought up into its collectivity ("Not a One-Way" 313). Hansen attempts in the notion of vernacular modernism to account for the Babelian aspect of Hollywood populism, but in doing so she deemphasizes the necessary problems of translation that haunt any hegemonic theory of film vernacular. Paradoxically, while the concept of vernacular modernism seems to highlight both film as vernacular, and (in its emphasis on the manufactured sensorium) film as a process of incorporation, the question of translation and a dialectic of spectatorship are strangely absent and/ or deemphasized.

Considering these claims regarding vernacular modernism (and the manufactured sensorium it posits) in the context of her broader corpus, we find that in Hansen's earlier work on the silent period, much more attention is paid to the crucial role played by the film star in classical cinema's establishment. At the end of *Babel and Babylon*, in what is arguably an earlier version of the vernacular modernism thesis, Hansen proposes that the stars arise as fantasmatic fetish-objects precisely when the fissures of the dream of film as

identificatory relation to Valentino functioned for the female viewer (*Babel* 250).

Whereas the excessive sexual display of Woman inhibited the universalist pretensions in *Intolerance*, the ambiguous appeal of Valentino seems to have the opposite function for Hansen: his erotic persona facilitates the expansion of the Hollywood address.

According to Hansen's historiographical account in *Babel and Babylon* then, it is the films of the late 1910s and 1920s, organized around the emergence of the film star, that provided the important bridge from the narrative films of the transitional period to the mass appeal of "classical" Hollywood. While in this earlier work Hansen calls upon a psychoanalytic theory of fantasy to engage with the star-vehicle films of Valentino, in the later "vernacular thesis" this frame has been abandoned and with it the notion that the exotic spectacle of feminine sexuality, as representation of the other's body (i.e., the body as foreign body, of the body in its foreignness) constitutes a limit to the universal pretensions of cinema. What is it in the conspicuous display of the star which first allows it take on this central place in the Hansen's historiography, and then be abandoned?

The shift away from the centrality of the star must, I believe, be thought of alongside another shift perceptible Hansen's work on Benjamin in the 1990s: from an interest in redeeming and developing the insistent alterity of the auratic in the Benjaminian theory of cinema (described in the introduction), Hansen increasingly (from 1999's "Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-way Street") puts emphasis on the theory of the optical unconscious, as a site of mimetic play in modernity. Like Benjamin then, Hansen drifted away from her advocacy of this problematic. I would like to return to this early work to reanimate its important contribution to film theory.



While in the series of articles in the 1990s and 2000s she explicitly cements this conceptual connection between her own work and Benjamin's, in her first article on the subject, Hansen claimed that Benjamin's ambivalence with regard to aura indexes another, more primary, psychic ambivalence. In the finale of "Blue Flower" Hansen argues that Benjamin's response to Adorno's reduction of aura to commodity fetishism itself betrays another form of fetishism: "his theory of experience hovers over and around the body of the mother" (Hansen "Blue" 214). The first returned gaze is maternal, so that the other who first gazed back is the mother: "[t]he prototype of a look that leaves a residue, that lingers beyond its actualization in space and time, is the maternal look" (215). Hansen charges that Benjamin's theory of experience "undeniably participates in a patriarchal discourse on vision insofar as the auratic gaze depends upon a veil of forgetting... a reflective yet unacknowledged form of fetishism which reinscribes the female body as a source of both fascination and threat" (215). And yet, Hansen sees a nuance in this charge: the auratic gaze in Benjamin is not only a form of fetishistic disavowal of the mother's difference, it is also an index of this primary 'direct address'. Nuanced as this may be, Hansen's critique of Benjamin is clear: the mimetic faculty, and its monument in the auratic experience can only come about through a psychic containment and disavowal of the maternal (its repression), which is its prototype. As she did in the historiographical work of *Babel and Babylon*, Hansen again argues that the universalizing gesture (Benjamin's positing of an apparently universal mimetic faculty) is interrupted by the repressed yet insistent contingency (the disavowed maternal gaze) out of which this 'universality' was born. In both cases, she is critiquing the Benjaminian hypostasis of the mimetic faculty.

In part, Hansen's discarded feminist critique of Benjamin is a function of the evolution of the critical atmosphere of film studies in the 1990s (as feminism became less central for a generation of film scholars); I would suggest that if we bracket for a moment the question of feminist political struggle, another resonance of Hansen's argument might be picked up. In both strands of her work, though she remains committed to thinking through the Babelian problem of film populism, what gets cast away increasingly is the foreignness implied in the cinematic address. In the key moments of Hansen's early work, as we have already suggested, we find this foreignness asserted in the idiomatic confusion reflected by the spectacle of feminine sexuality in the Babelian populism of American narrative cinema, and as an auratic remainder of the maternal gaze. Even when an apparent 'solution' is found in the star, it is crucially staged as a scene of this "confusion of tongues". At the nexus of discourses of gender, sexuality and ethnicity, Valentino is read as an ambiguous, liminal, transitional figure, but ultimately his alterity and his singular place in the history of American film is understood by Hansen in terms of gender. To come back to the question of the explicit feminism of Hansen's early work, we might suspect that it was this political exigency that caused her to read this Babelian confusion as fundamentally determined by gender trouble, and that it is this exigency that Hansen sought to let go of in an attempt to expand her theory of film populism. While, as we will see in the final chapter, Woman no doubt becomes the fundamental bearer of the scandal of the film address via melodramatic hypostasis, gender (I would suggest) nonetheless is not the heart of the problem of film populism *per se*. Having said this, Hansen's early work remains an important engagement with the foreignness of the film address. Before reformulating an engagement with Valentino's

films as a screening of this drama of translation, it will be useful to consider the development of the star's sex appeal as a hypostatic elaboration of spectatorial seduction.

### The Seduction Plot of the Film Spectator: *Photogenie* as Hypostatic Elaboration

With its cult of personality, the promotional arm of the studio system took the close-up out of the walls of the picture palace in order to offer its audience a new way of relating to the cinema. Richard de Cordova argues that the film star emerges in the 1910s as the *extramural* life of the actor becomes the focus of the close-up; the primary venue and support to this new form of film consumption is the film fan magazine, which specifically fostered fanaticism with the stars of the screen.<sup>66</sup> In his study de Cordova plots the moments in this development as follows: from 1907 to 1909 an initial interest with the actor's performance (a hold-over of the theatrical era), from 1909 to 1914 the appearance of the "picture personality", and from 1914 on the ascendance of the star. I would like to consider his distinction between the 'personality' and 'star' for a moment, as I think it brings into relief something crucial about the incorporation of the attraction. Whereas with the picture personality what was promoted was the "player's professional existence" (i.e., their name, their presence and reputation in various productions, and their acting experience), by 1914 (i.e., around the end of the transitional era) the object of interest for these promotional materials became the private life of the stars. In fan magazines like *Motion Picture World* and *Photoplay*, serial stories appear in the mid-teens (with titles like "My Experiences as a Film Favorite" and "The Real Perils of Pauline") which tell the tales of this rise to fame.

---

<sup>66</sup> See de Cordova's "The Emergence of the Star System in America."

With all this attention paid to the extramural, profilmic life of the actor, as Roberta Pearson has argued, screen performance was becoming less a matter of expressive skill and acting style (as it had been in the stage-inspired performances of early cinema), and more about the “verisimilitude” of the actor’s ‘screen presence’, about the cinematic appearance of their very being on the screen.<sup>67</sup> For a magazine story to successfully promote a star, it had to in some way capture something about (or at least refer to) this photogenic presence which was always represented by a star portrait. In other words, a star’s public personality should agree with their screen persona, which should, in turn, agree with and emphasize their screen presence. For the two most popular stars of the mid teens, Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin, this personal agreement was successfully constructed out of their biographies. This is the important point which must be emphasized in the theory of the star, the biography was ultimately a justification, or perhaps we could say an *alibi*, for this screen presence. It was not simply that these were charismatic people whose unique essence was expressed by the motion picture (we might call this the “substantialist” thesis), but that there was some singular quality about their presence on screen that had to be given a narrative frame. We have to look no further than the case of the third most popular star of the teens, Theda Bara, to find a vivid illustration of this phenomena (Brownlow *Hollywood* 160). Famously, Bara made her name with the film *A Fool There Was* (1915), in which she played a man-eating, gold-digging vamp whose seductive attention systematically destroys the life of the protagonist. This film would come to popularize this female type in the movies from that point on, and she continued making these kind of films until the end of the teens.

---

<sup>67</sup> See Roberta Pearson’s *Eloquent Gestures: The Transformation of Performance Style in the Griffith Biograph Films*.

But when, soon after its release, news came that her real name was Theodesia Goodman, and that she was born to a Jewish-American family from Cincinnati, one *Photoplay* reviewer wrote in an article called "Purgatory's White Angel" of September 1915: "I prefer to disbelieve those stupid people who insist Theda Bara's right name is Theodesia Goodman, and she is by, of and from Cincinnati...I see no reason for disbelieving what it most pleases me to believe..." (Franklin). The reviewer, credited as Wallace Franklin, goes on to describe an alternative history for Theda Bara (which happened to be complete fiction), in which she was the daughter of a French mother and Italian father, that she was a trained painter, that she had acted in the *Grand Guignol* theatre, and, finally, that she was a "professional sorceress". What do we make of this gesture of apparent disavowal in which the plain truth is revealed only to be denied, and then replaced with an exotic fiction? While there was obviously money to be made off of this fiction of Bara's persona, what this article attests to is that what was primarily important was not this persona, but what it attempted to narrativize: the exotic screen presence of Theda Bara. Here, I would suggest, we must attempt an interpretation of this myth of origin as indexing something real (i.e., efficacious) in the image. This myth has a hypostatic structure, positing a substantive to domesticate the implant of the cinema. Like this hypostatic positing of a fantasy-past to justify the exotic presence, the French concept of *photogenie* attempted to delineate a personal quality that is revealed uniquely by the cinema. And yet, in introducing this concept, that which is personal threatens to get invaded by the cinema. There is in this formulation, as there is in Benjamin's notion of aura, and in Münsterberg's theory of film, a tension between *photogenie* as something given by film or, rather, as an *a priori* merely enhanced by it.

In his review "Beauty in the Cinema" (1917) the French critic Louis Delluc discusses two of the greatest Hollywood film stars of the day, the British Charles Chaplin and the Japanese dramatic actor, Sessue Hayakawa (made famous in the DeMille's *The Cheat*). From his non-American perspective he argues that what represents beauty for the cinema (its properly aesthetic value) is manifested in the "absence of intellectuality" that these two stars share in common (Delluc 138). Where the European cinema of the time is characterized by aesthetic "embellishments" designed to raise film to the status of art, Delluc suggests that the great American films focus on the abstraction already inherent in the images of its scenes and stars. It is the "melancholic" being of these stars, of their quality of being both emotionally present for viewers and yet also mysteriously detached. Delluc, like other French critics writing in the 1910s, saw the properly cinematic not in terms of embellishment, but in terms of a revelatory endowment. In the work of Delluc, Louis Aragon and (in the 1920s) Jean Epstein, a concept of *photogenie* (the photogenic) was being developed which sought to define this singular endowment of the cinema. Indeed, in their critical reception of American films, this photographic quality of the stars shone most brightly to French eyes. For these theorists, cinema (and particularly the American cinema) invests the mundane with a

mysterious aspect and loses all relation to purpose... screen objects that were a few moments ago sticks of furniture or books of cloakroom tickets are transformed to the point where they take on menacing or enigmatic meanings. (Aragon 166)

The critic and filmmaker Jean Epstein famously developed the concept of *photogenie* in the 1920s to include "any aspect of things, beings, or souls whose moral character is

enhanced by filmic reproduction" (Epstein 314). The cinema granted personality as "the spirit visible in things and people, their heredity made evident... [e]very aspect of the world, elected to life by the cinema, is so elected only in the condition that it has a personality of its own" (Epstein 317). While Epstein clearly has a substantialist notion of personality here, I would suggest that we recall Benjamin's concept of aura and Hansen's early reading of it, in which he argues that aura is the personification of the impersonal; and with the advent of the silent movie star, aura becomes reattached to the person. Personality referred not to the authentic expression of the soul but to the screen image. Here I think that Benjamin's notion of aura can be used to complicate the substantialist thesis (i.e., that cinema reveals the truth of personality), as well as to question his own later anti-auratic positions in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"; in film aura, the spectatorial interior penetrated by film, is reexternalized. An uncanny implant, the screen aura became the ultimate referent of the star's 'personality'. For American spectators no less than for these French critics, what is perceived as the fascinating and foreign core of the new cinematic art is that personality without a name, the mute monstration of the personality as a new hegemonic, spectatorial category. We might then look at the theory of *photogenie* as an attempt to understand how the address of the cinema *in force beyond signification* comes to be associated with the personality via hypostatization (i.e., the positing of the substantive on the basis of some accidental).

When the novelist Elinor Glyn supervised Rudolph Valentino on the film *Beyond the Rocks* (1922), she had already written a serial in the early 1920s which had attempted to define the novel concept of "IT", of sex appeal and sexiness, which the new youth of

the Jazz Age seemed to embody.<sup>68</sup> Valentino, she announced, had IT. As we will see in the next chapter, this theme became the centrepiece for the Glyn-supervised film *IT* of 1927, starring Clara Bow. The nature of IT (as sex appeal, sexiness) is never defined in film, only indicated and presented cinematically: “she’s got IT!”, i.e., IT is indexed in the form of its presentation, e.g. the close-up of a gesture or affect, some filmic punctuation in the arrangement of the *mise-en-scene* or the editing. A populist theory of *photogenie*, the notion of IT attempts to hypostatize the internalized film attraction as the outward expression of personality, to universalize it as a cultural category, as something startlingly new revealed by of the encounter with cinema, for all to see.

At heart of the problem of Hollywood Babel, as a populist project, remains this question of mass appeal. To review, in the introduction we discussed Butler’s theory of hegemony and her insistence of a spectral particularity that haunts any populist category, and how its haunting return produces new unspeakable exigencies for hegemonic contestation. I suggested that we understand the establishment of the ‘classical’ spectator in these terms, in relation to its own ‘repressed’ content. In chapter two I argued that the theory of the attraction describes not only the *mise-en-scene* of early cinema spectatorship, but it also refers to the proto-content of spectatorial form: a traumatic excess of monstration over narration. In chapter three, I further argued that the melodramatic pictorialism of Hollywood introduced this monstration as a matter of spectatorial interiority. Hansen’s work on the classical period has drawn out the next turn of this hypostatic elaboration: as in the case of Benjaminian aura, that which has been traumatically internalized (which for Hansen is represented by the maternal seduction)

---

<sup>68</sup> Laura Horak’s “Would You Like to Sin with Elinor Glyn: Film as a Vehicle of Sensual Education.”



returns as an involuntary externalization of aura, only to be hypostatized as the spectator's photogenic substantive.

If we interpret Hansen's work on Valentino as a *de facto* response to Benjamin's abjecting statement on the star (and a turning of Benjamin against himself), we could say that the Valentino drama seeks to stage a reflexive encounter with this alien-ness of aura. Again recalling Butler's critique of Laclauian hegemony within the corpus of American silent film, the hypostatic category of personality is allegorically 'tested out' on figures of alterity. On the way to becoming universal, a hegemonic signifier is taken up, and challenged by the "impossible' figures" which inhabit its margins, so that for Butler hegemony is always responsible to, and dialectically "challenged" by an unspeakable which it inadvertently produces.

#### 'Confusion of Tongues': Rudolph Valentino and The Translational Scene

*Here look at the one with the torch... she's much safer!* (From *Cobra*, 1925: the character Jack Dorning to Valentino's Count Rodrigo Torriani, upon seeing the Statue of Liberty as they arrive in New York by boat)

If we were to return to Valentino following the trajectory of Hansen has taken since the publication of "The Mass Production of the Senses", we might say that he becomes a key conduit for sensual investment and identification in the context of woman's cinema of the early 1920s; just as in Williams' analysis of the treatment of female bodies in Muybridge, Valentino's movies train their spectators in scopic desire. But it is significant that in "The Mass Production of the Senses", Hansen does not take up the prominence that she had formerly given to the star, despite the fact that the cult of the star was established by the Hollywood vernacular, and that many of the star vehicles take the attractiveness and

charisma of the star as their main plot theme. This curious discontinuity with her previous work is instructive for us. Just as Hansen criticizes Benjamin fetishistically “forgetting” the maternal body as the prototype for his theory of auratic experience, Hansen here forgets her own work on the *aura* of the star, as the ‘foreign body’ whose translation initiates the hegemony of Hollywood spectatorship.

In the Babelistic context of *Babel and Babylon*, it is interesting that Hansen’s discussion of Valentino does not directly discuss the many scenes of translation in the majority of his films, in that her book is structured by a discussion of the fate of Griffith’s dream of film as a universal language. We noted already that though she argues that Valentino’s films (as instances of a genre specifically addressed to female spectators) came in direct response to the failure of Griffith’s dream, the problem of cultural / linguistic difference is consistently overlaid by (what for Hansen is) the more primary problem of sexual difference / identity. When reference is made to Valentino’s exoticization, it is therefore in the context of the culture war that surrounded him, in which he was either fetishized (by his fans) or demonized (by his detractors). However, if we look at his films, we find a profound engagement with the scene of translation. What does it mean that “the Great Lover” is positioned as a translator? The Valentino role is never that of the American man, and his ethnicity is always explicitly specified, so that his foreignness is not only part of his persona, it is part of his screen presence. Given this cinematic “confusion of tongues” that Hansen articulates, I would like to take up the theme of translation in Valentino’s films in relation to what psychoanalysis itself has said about the scene of translation. To open this discussion, I would call attention to an

particularly emblematic opening credit sequence in one of Valentino's most popular films: *Blood and Sand* (1922).



Figure 4.01 The Matador's Cape (*Blood and Sand*, 1922, Paramount Pictures)

At first glance, the opening credits of *Blood and Sand* seem to reflect, as a kind of framing emblematic shot, the doubly fetishistic dynamic that Hansen argues characterizes much Valentino's work: the credits roll against the background of a cape, frontally draped across the frame's field of vision, as if it is a projection screen (Figure 4.01). At the very top of the frame, peering over the cape, are the eyes of Valentino, Svengali-esque, barely visible and gazing directly towards the spectator. Perfectly still, acknowledging himself as an object for the spectator, Valentino is apparently passive as a screen for spectatorial desire, and yet he forcefully returns the spectatorial gaze. From

this perspective then, this scene (at first) seems to encapsulate Hansen's reading: here Valentino's "appeal depends to a large degree on the manner in which he



**Figure 4.02** The Valentino Look. (*Cobra*, 1925, Paramount Pictures)

combines masculine control of the look with the feminine quality of "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Babel 272). For Hansen, as Mulvey has recently confirmed, Valentino's case tests feminist theories of spectatorship (Mulvey, Doane), which give exclusive voyeuristic pleasure to the masculine position (i.e., making women abdicate the seat of their own scopis desire), by reversing the dynamic of the filmic gaze: "[t]he power of the Valentino gaze depends upon its weakness... upon its oscillating between active and passive... [t]he erotic appeal of the Valentinian gaze... is one of reciprocity and

ambivalence rather than mastery and objectification" (*Babel* 279).<sup>69</sup> Hansen argues in this context that female spectatorship is scopophilic rather than voyeuristic; i.e., less explicitly centred by the need for mastery because the feminine scopic component drives are not subject to the same phallic organization as that of the male gaze (*Babel* 278-9). Harkening back to the emblematic shots of early cinema, this opening *tableau* seems to sum up the perverse ambiguity of the Valentino scenario in the display of the exotic object (as a screen for spectatorial fantasy) which will represent him in the film: the *cape of the matador*. And yet, the direct gaze back at the spectator seems to make this scopophilic reading problematic, in that it disrupts the centre of gravity of the framing scenario. Valentino's signature display of the exotic ornament takes us beyond a simple fetishistic appeal of the difference he represents: like the function of the matador's cape, it is a fascinating lure, the frame for his piercing direct address.

In her scopophilic reading, Hansen relies on the notion that the polymorphous perversity of the feminine scopophilic gaze allows the spectator a more flexible identificatory play, "dressing up Rudy" in a variety of fantasmatic scenarios (scopophilic, sadistic, masochistic) (*Babel* 281). In this direction, Hansen concludes her discussion of Valentino by mobilizing Freud's notion of the staging of fantasy in "A Child is Being Beaten" to account for the multiplicity of identifications which Valentino evokes. We have previously discussed this article in the context of Linda Williams' work, but let it suffice to emphasize again that at the heart of this psychical process of fantasmatic elaboration is a *real* invasion: what sets in motion the reflexive, sado-masochistic

---

<sup>69</sup> Mulvey, Laura. "Thoughts on the Young Modern Woman of the 1920s and Feminist Film Theory". *Visual and Other Pleasures*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 213-32.

movement of fantasy is a more primary situation of passive reception and unilateral invasion by the adult. This scene of (what Laplanche would call) “originary masochism” returns us to the two discarded strands left out of the Hansen’s more recent engagement with Hollywood Babel (the auratic as the repressed maternal in Benjamin and the central gravity of the star as index of the limits of the Hollywood address); I suggest that these are both points in which the problem of seduction is encountered in Hansen’s work, even if then turned away from. We have already taken note of Laplanche’s translational reading of Freud’s seduction theory, but I would like to add to this discussion of Valentino a reference to the later work of the psychoanalyst (and Freud’s first lieutenant) Sandor Ferenczi, who provided a version of the seduction theory as a psychoanalytic Babelian myth.

In his final 1933 article, “Confusion of Tongues between Adults and the Child (The Language of Tenderness and of Passion)”, Ferenczi returned to Freud’s seduction theory in arguing that the role of sexual trauma in the neuroses “cannot be valued highly enough” (297). Of interest here though, is the way that Ferenczi sketches out seduction explicitly as a scene of (mis)translation between a child and the adult world. Trauma arises when the child’s call for “tenderness” (in that it’s dependently *attached* to the parent for its care) is inappropriately answered by the “passionate” [sexualized] language of the adult. Unable to translate the adult language, the child in these cases ‘swallows’ the sexualized address of the adult ‘whole’ (thereby incorporating the external attack as an internal one via a process of fantasmatic identification with the adult perpetrator). As we already saw in chapter one, Laplanche developed Freud (and we can add Ferenczi’s) restricted theories of the pathological seduction into a general theory of seduction as the

“fundamental anthropological situation”, and the “humanizing” traumatic condition of the unconscious. The adult world is first of all an overwhelming foreign tongue, which the infant is nonetheless forced to adopt but, paradoxically, this accommodation (or *compromised* translation) leads to the production of an unspeakable register that haunts the forms of the adult’s expression. Laplanche has, again, developed this point to say that (neurotic) psychic life as such, and the most intimate personal psychic reality is the result of the traumatizing (“detranslating”) messages from the other.

What can we take from this psychoanalytic hypothesis? This primal Babel myth replays the theme of Butler’s inflection of hegemony: within a hegemonic context, any effort to rise above (sublate) a primary contingency is in effect a tacit compromise formation with it. With respect to the question of Hansen’s development, that which



**Figure 4.03** Rudy as Argentine Tango Dancer/ Gaucho. (*The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, 1921, Metro Pictures Corporation)

she essentializes as the maternal (and/ or the feminine) and its patriarchal disavowal, is more usefully understood as the primal scene of (mis)address, a confusion of tongues; in the context of the establishment of the narrative cinema and its populism, the substantialization of the sex appeal and its hegemonic circulation, also replays the Babelian scene.

In the vast majority of Rudolph Valentino's films made between 1921 to 1926 (i.e., from 1921's *Four Horseman of the Apocalypse* to the posthumously released *Son of the Sheik* in 1926), we find a preponderance of scenes in which Valentino plays a hero inhabiting the interstitial space between two cultures. Whether his character is living in a foreign land (as in *Four Horseman of the Apocalypse*, *The Sheik*, *Young Rajah* and *Cobra*), or (as in *The Eagle*) he is posing as a foreigner in his own land, Valentino is positioned as the sender and recipient of foreign messages, in which he translates and is translated by others (Figure 4.03-6). In *Blood and Sand*, *Cobra* and *The Eagle* this moment of translation is literalized for the spectator as well; at different moments in these films foreign language intertitles (of Spanish, Italian, and Russian) are translated right before our eyes in a dissolve of the text. In this apparently small gesture repeated in a number of films over his career (and for different studios), we see the Hollywood film narrator presenting itself as above and beyond language, a cosmopolitan form that purports to translate in the blink of an eye. Valentino, the translator and the foreign body, is at the centre of a drama of film as global form. Gaylyn Studlar has developed some of the (post)colonial implications of cultural translation in a discussion of Valentino's ethnic masculinity in her book *This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age*.



There she recounts the public backlash against Valentino's stardom, often couched as it was in racist/ xenophobic terms of the post-Progressive Era 1920s. An affront to the



**Figure 4.04** Rudy as Indian Rajah. (*The Young Rajah*, 1922, Paramount Pictures)

apparently established values of white American masculinity, his Italian masculinity paints Valentino variously as a gigolo and lounge lizard, an effeminate “powder puff”, and a racial pollutant (“the ‘slag in the melting pot’ of America”) (Studlar 300). While there is no doubt that he stirred a diversity of passions in the American cultural imagination, less attention has been paid to populist implications of cultural translation in his work.



**Figure 4.05** Rudy as Spanish Matador. (*Blood and Sand*, 1922, Paramount Pictures)

While in some ways the posthumous *Son of the Sheik* can be seen as Valentino's most self-aware film (in that it mixes the blood and thunder of the original with a touch of the parodic), let us take the more earnest *Cobra* (1925). Though it is often seen as a late, lesser melodramatic version of the Valentino film it is, I will argue, unique in the way that it gives allegorical reflection to the Valentino predicament. In *Cobra*, he plays the Italian Count Rodrigo Torriani, the noble inheritor of both an ancestral "palace" with a large collection of exotic antiques, and a paternal passion for women. The narrative of *Cobra* is structured around Torriani's relationships with two American women:



**Figure 4.06** Rudy as Arabic Sheik. (*The Sheik*, 1921, Paramount Pictures)

a gold-digging society seductress named Elise Von Zile (played once again by the dark-haired, perennially exotic Nita Naldi) and the relatively plain, blond working girl Mary Drake (played by Gertrude Olmstead). The film presents two melodramatic outcomes to the problem of the Valentino's foreign sex appeal: 1) erotic abandon, which evidently leads from indulgence to self-destruction and the ruin of social order; 2) (and in this we find the film's novel clarity) Valentino as both translator and purveyor of the exotic.

The film opens in an Italian café terrace at dusk, and we are introduced to Torriani as the target of two different desiring gazes. Our first introduction is to Vittorio Minardi, a "gentleman by profession" who is looking for Torriani, to try to extort money from him. In a shot- reverse of Minardi, we see a figure in the corner of the café obscured by vined pillar. As Minardi says to the manager of the café with a suggestive glare, while he

does not know the count, his daughter does and “I have a letter...”. In the next frame we find Torriani sitting away from us, apparently watching as a couple who sits in the table next to his; the woman looks at him eagerly as she is seated. In the introductory intertitle that follows, we are told whether there was trouble or not “there was always something magnificent about the young Count Torriani”. The intertitle clearly attempts to account for the intersection of the two gazes. Finally making his appearance, in the next shot we see Torriani for the first time; he returns the glance of the young lady, and subtly raises his glass to her, as he drinks his *aperitivo*. Torriani’s appearance, from the start of the film then, takes place at the intersecting point of this exchange of views: the one captivated by him, the other seeking to exploit him. This crossfire of gazes is in fact a central motif in the film as a whole, and will be repeated a number of times, with varying outcomes. In this film then, as in his penultimate film *The Eagle*, the attempt to negotiate this intersection of addresses is to translate, and exchange the one (for a kind currency) for the other. As purveyor of exotic objects, Torriani capitalizes on his own foreignness; but as translator, he becomes the victim of it.

In this first scene this gets played out in a situation in which the scheming Minardi waits outside the café for Torriani, hoping to catch him as he exits. But cued to



**Figure 4.07** Torriani the Translator. (*Cobra*, 1925, Paramount Pictures)



**Figure 4.08** Torriani Translates. (*Cobra*, 1925, Paramount Pictures)

the trap, Torriani sets the would-be extorter on the wrong trail, one which leads Minardi to an innocent, plain-looking American antique dealer named Jack Dorning.

Mistaking him for the Count, Minardi pounces on Dorning, vehemently threatening him in Italian and waving his cane at him. At this point, Torriani intercedes (without introducing himself) and offers to translate between English and Italian, all the while knowing that Minardi's attack is meant for him (Figure 4.07-8). This is the first scene of a series in the film in which the Valentino character is forced into the middle of a conflict set off by some passionate act on his part. Here the love letter to the daughter Rosa, standing in as the written form of his passionate address, gets waylaid and puts the Count in an exposed position. While this conflict is temporarily deferred by Torriani's deception, in the next scene we find the three men together again, at the Count's estate. Minardi has identified Torriani, and has come to exchange the embarrassing letter (as the remainder of his exposing address) for money. Having nothing but his Italian antiques, Dorning offers to buy a precious goblet in exchange for the extortion pay-off: reluctantly, the Count agrees (Figure 4.09-10). The rest of the film follows from this act, repeating this scene, as the Count returns with Dorning to the U.S., taking a job as an assessor and broker of 'old world' European antiques. While trading in exotic objects to the wealthy but ignorant American "new rich", Torriani finds himself entangled with both Drake (his true love) and Von Zile (his true lust), all of which implicates his dear friend and boss, Dorning. Torriani evades (and at times unsuccessfully) the danger of his own seductiveness by selling it off, and literally exchanging his passionate attachments



**Figure 4.09** Minardi's Extortion, Dorning's Gain. (*Cobra*, 1925, Paramount Pictures)

alluring Von Zile as a snake (who has been introduced to Torriani in the preceding scenes)



**Figure 4.10** Torriani the Broker in the Exotic. (*Cobra*, 1925, Paramount Pictures)

for women (and antiques) with Dorning. This conflation of Torriani's personal sexual attractiveness and his expertise in dealing with the exotic objects of value becomes embodied in two moments of the film's *fantasia*. In a quintessentially melodramatic figure of simplicity, Torriani's character represents for America the allure of the old world, embodied in a short "flashback" scene in which Torriani seems to picture in his mind the stories of ancestral womanizing, in which we see his ancestor (played by Valentino in flamboyant period costume) trying to handle the fallout of his multiple sexual affairs. In a later scene which follows a second barter (where Dorning again pays off a would-be extorter), Torriani looks at two small sculptures of a cobra facing down a lion: an intertitle announces his expression, "[w]omen fascinate me...as that cobra does its victim". In a point of view shot we see the porcelain snake become (in a dissolve) the alluring Von Zile as a snake (who has been introduced to Torriani in the preceding scene) (Figure 4.11). This moment of reverie ends as Torriani looks up from the talisman, to gaze directly back at the spectator. It is as if the fetish object is literally struggling to become reanimated, and to take on a life of its own. Taken by itself, the reanimation invites a fetishistic reading of woman as castrator; read along with the flashback scene (as another reanimation) things seem quite different, with the sculptures and the portraits becoming ominous indexes of an internal attack. As nobleman from the old world, what allows Torriani to be reader and assessor of exotic objects, is that he is able to see beyond their exchange value: they are signs still immediately connected to their traumatic past (i.e., their aura). And this past, as we see in the flashback scene, is for Torriani, an invasive sexualized legacy. In addition to reading these scenes in terms of a psychical 'return of the repressed', we might think also think of them as a kind of allegory for the





**Figure 4.11** "Women fascinate me, as the cobra does its victim." (*Cobra*, 1925, Paramount Pictures)



**Figure 4.12** The Reanimated Old World. (*Cobra*, 1925, Paramount Pictures)

melodramatic exteriorisation of aura, which on the one hand attempts to give expression to the unrecognized, unspeakable subjects of hegemonic discourse (the foreignness of aura), but which on the other hand, can only do this by invoking an unsurpassable Babelian confusion (Figure 4.12).

Coming back to the emblematic scene of *Blood and Sand*, Valentino's exotic talismans pictorially represent within the scene the unassimilable, untranslatable point of his personality. His films are, in effect, allegories of assimilation, which attempt to understand the incorporation of the foreign appeal of *photogenie* in the dialectic of American film spectatorship, as itself a narrative of national assimilation. This problem of foreignness is overlaid onto the personality of the Valentino character, which in all of these films must not only attempt to translate those around him, but must melodramatically struggle to communicate his 'true self'. While he was not the first Latin lover or male seducer, the Valentino character was the first to shift the foreign seducer into a passionate, chivalrous heartthrob. For the American audience, this internal dichotomy is routinely conflated with the externalized conflict between his foreignness and his potential to be a new (American) man. In these translation films it is precisely this hegemonic shift that is at stake. And this scenario has different outcomes: where, in *Young Rajah* and *The Sheik* his character's true identity seems to coincide with the gratification of his true love for the girl, in *Cobra*, Torriani fakes a stereotyped persona to sacrifice his own happiness to secure that of his best friend. The expression of himself as a decent virtuous character always meets with a moment when it is derailed and overwhelmed by passions, by the other's, by his own. The Valentino character is caught between gentlemanly, fraternal tenderness and alien, sexualized passion, and it is only by

finding some (relatively tenuous) compromise between the two (which often includes some self-sacrifice) is the hero redeemed.

However, the scenario of the Valentino characters in these films is not sufficiently posed in the quest for authentic personal expression (i.e., in translating his interiority for the others), rather, as we see in all of these translation films, the focus of the drama is always on the passionate effect that he has on others, and that others have on him: the scene of the confusion of tongues. In other words, it is precisely in what the Valentino character cannot translate in his own personality that forms the crux of the drama. His capacity to seduce the women around him (his sex appeal) is aligned with his investment in foreign pursuits and practices. The famous "Valentino gaze" (in which a close-up and subsequent eye-line match inform us of the woman who will be the object of his attention and conquest) represents the seductive foreignness of his own personality as *photogenic*, but it is also important to note that in these films the female love-object is figured in the same way. The Valentino character is both the object and subject of seduction.

In conclusion, in the work of Studlar and Hansen, Valentino (as star) has been understood to crystallize the ambiguities of group spectatorial identification (whether the identification be by race, class, gender or sexual orientation). By symbolically embodying the ambivalent fractures of an identity group, the star is credited with making the Hollywood film appealing to a much wider audience. But, as I have tried to argue, the ascendancy of Hollywood changes the centre of gravity of narrative film, and gets *inside* the spectator. With this in mind, the cult of personality of the star might then be understood not just as a fetishistic or empty signifier that temporarily solves the social antagonism, but as emblemizing the site of a 'confusion of tongues', and a work of

hegemonic translation. I suggested that we think of cinematic aura as the excessive remainder that accompanies the hypostatic gesture of film populism; in Butler's terms though, we might also think of aura as a by-product of the translation undergirding hegemonic universality, an indicator of an unanticipated spectatorial intimacy, revolving around the cinematic presentation of the unspeakably social. In this sense, it is not enough to reject the hegemony of the classical spectator, but to understand the ways this new hegemonic form of universality was born out of its contingent cultural matrix and bears these marks fundamentally. It was necessary to investigate the way that this new form of intimacy became an issue not only within the cinema (we have already begun to consider this), but how the cinema itself became a site of *populist intimacy*, with anonymous others, and with the stars on the screen.

## 5

**Melodramatizing Visual Pleasure:  
The "New Woman" of the Gaze**

The cinema [at the time of Pandora's Box]... is still silent. Its expressivity, the way it speaks to the mind and the senses is different, and different affective values attach themselves to gesture, décor or face. With it, the relation of expression to repression changes; conflict and contrast, antinomies and argument are suggested, and perceived by an audience, in forms specific to the cinema. (Elsaesser "Lulu" 12)

Any analysis of the seduction plot must deal with the question of gender since women were, and still are, often assumed to be the predominant audience for this kind of sentimental or pathetic fiction. (Jacobs "Seduction" 425)

Back In Suicide Hall: The Legacy of Film Seduction

Critics like Jacobs and Staiger have noticed a decline in the seduction plot in the 1920s and the emergence of more active female types like the flapper, with our discussion of our last chapter in mind I would suggest that this is related to the relative domestication of visual sexuality during the IT craze of the 1920s. In this final chapter, we will consider the unhomey implications of this domestication for the American film spectator: the 'photogenization' of sexuality. Whereas with Kant, aesthetics had been grounded in a theory of the disinterested, autonomous subject, with the cinema, an aesthetics of invasive alterity comes into view as a dialectical counterpoint to the "excessive personalization" of the movie star cults (Gledhill "Stars" 218).<sup>70</sup> Cinematic seduction represents the spectre of a theory of aesthetics not secure in the boundedness of a mature, transcendental ego, but vulnerable to external influences: of a spectator *marked inside* by the traumatic visions of the darkened rooms of his/her youth. As I have argued throughout the dissertation, this aesthetic threat has been figured in *sexual* terms.

---

<sup>70</sup> See Kant's *The Critique of Judgement*.

Recalling our introduction, *The Downward Path*'s final reel (entitled *In Suicide Hall*) finds that the female protagonist of the serial has become a showgirl. She ends her life by ingesting poison in the same saloon that she previously had entertained in. Her downward path is completed not only at the diegetic level with her death and suicide, but with the conflation of her work of eroticized display, self-harm and the act of ingestion. In the mutoscope reel's hyperconcentration of action, the symbolism of swallowing is hardly innocent or incidental. The serial posits the true poison of the downward path as the young woman's internalization of the vice that has been thrust upon her. In the preceding reel, *The New Soubrette*, we find the woman in the same setting, apparently enjoying her role as central sexual attraction; the toxicity of this assumption of the soubrette role follows in this last scene. I suggested that this scene allegorized the moment of symptomatic return, in which the violence inherent in the process comes home to roost, in a reflexive way.

Thus far, we have looked at various theoretical hypostases mobilized by film historians, and in this chapter we will consider the legacy of internalizing the spectatorial hypostasis, and the melodramatic elaboration it involves. I will open the chapter with a discussion of the importance of feminist critique for early spectatorship theory. One of the lasting lessons of feminist film theory is to stage the drama of film spectatorship as an "expropriation" of the personal (Doane *Femmes* 78). I would like to read the feminist debate that arose after the publication of Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in the context of the tradition of melodrama in the West. Insofar as it invests "Woman" with the status of the *infans*, as the carrier of the burden of the unspeakable, I would suggest that feminist spectatorship theory be read *as melodrama*.

We will examine films of Louise Brooks at the end of the silent era which represent the violent seduction of youth as itself a scenario of spectatorship: the seducer bombards the innocent youth with exotic sexual messages which in her immaturity she is unequipped to defend against. I examine these seduction scenes in four of her films: *Beggars of Life* (1928) *Pandora's Box* (1929), *Diary of a Lost Girl* (1929) and *Prix de Beauté* (1930). The case of the iconic Brooks allegorizes the crisis that the cinema constituted for theories of aesthetic reception: cinema itself as an invasive sexual agent.

#### The New Woman of the Plastic Age: Spectatorship Theory and the Melodramatic Mode

If we regard the history of film spectatorship in America, including its theories in the criticism of the time and the academic debates of the 1970s and 1980s, we find that the spectator most referred to is not, in fact, the privileged ideological spectator, but the exceptional spectator: the innocent child, the non-acclimated immigrant, and the difficult new woman. While critics and promoters of the teens mused prescriptively about the ideal consumer, and critical theorists posited the monolithic spectator of the established Hollywood apparatus, this was most often in the context of questioning this model, and arguing with its exclusive terms. With a few notable utopian exceptions, debates regarding the film spectator have tended to work through exceptions to the rule.<sup>71</sup> Our wager is that this habitual itinerary is not simply a rhetorical strategy, but that the repeated positing of the exception indexes an acting out of the foreclosed *infans* of the spectator. In this light, it is significant that in the 1970s when the classical mode of Hollywood in the post-sound era was the chief object of research and debate, gender was

---

<sup>71</sup> First among these remains Balazs' "Der Sichtbare Mensch."

this privileged exceptional case. When feminist film theorists of this generation contribute to the establishment of the theory of the classical film spectator they highlight an irreducible sexual violence in the cinematic process for the female spectator. The grave severity of this line of critique has come under such heavy attack within film studies, that a number of key feminist critics have questioned their own commitments to previous positions. But in the context of the seduction of the spectator, film feminism's affirmation of the sexual violence of the classical film spectator brings something important into view.

In surveying the development of film spectatorship theory out of the encounter with French semiotics and psychoanalysis, we see that Mulvey's foundational "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" crucially exposed the political terms of the debate, under the sign of gender. Her theory, already discussed, that Woman is the symptomatic spectacle of classical Hollywood cinema, would become a key parameter of the spectatorial debate. The theoretical movement that followed from this, characterized by what Rodowick has called "political modernism", did not stray from the territory that Mulvey set out, even if it treated it as a battlefield of ideas about gender, spectacle and postmodern patriarchal culture.<sup>72</sup> In our introduction, we outlined the crisis within film studies that lead to the turn to history away from theoretical accounts of the film spectator. The abstract universalist aspect of film spectatorship, while leading to monolithic tendencies within theoretical positions, made it possible for film to be a site of hegemonic contestation within a heterogenous American social body. I suggested we read spectatorship as the flashpoint of a developing film populism the proper object of which

---

<sup>72</sup> After Mulvey, critics including Burch, Heath, Silverman, Williams, De Lauretis, Gledhill, Studlar and Doane belong to this discussion.



was its own unspeakable alterity. In chapter one, I read Peter Brooks work on “the melodramatic imagination” with Judith Butler’s account of hegemony: as populism, spectatorship embodies a process of “signs in conflict” (Peter Brooks), of “competing universalities” (Brooks *Melodramatic* 203, Butler *Contingency* 136). In the last chapter, we demonstrated how the establishment of the classical Hollywood spectator did not simply exclude marginal figures, it presupposed encounters with them, attempting to bring together a vast spectatorship under the hegemonic banner of personality and sex appeal. While American narrative cinema’s hypostatized spectatorial personality was its chief object (and so presented its own essentializing theory of the film spectator), building from our discussions of melodrama in chapters one and three, I would further argue that the “essentializing mode” of spectatorship theory (and particularly the feminist *gaze* debates) can be read melodramatically as pertaining to and wrestling with this cinematic hypostasis. If, as we have argued, melodrama is most productively thought not simply as a genre or sensibility, but as a form of hegemonic contestation and elaboration of society’s own unspeakable preoccupations, then affirming the melodramatic mode of gaze theory simply posits that while (at one level) it sought to locate the (gendered) substantial principle of film spectatorship, at another level it posited the female spectator as the subject of both suffering and virtue. Gaze theory articulated its spectatrix as a liminal figure which by its very being, represents the finitude of the ideology of looking in the Hollywood era. Perceived in its melodramatic aspect, the incredible preponderance of discussions (among feminist, postcolonial and queer theorists) of exclusions and exceptions to the universal logic of the spectator comes into some relief: rather than arguing over the *real* of spectatorship, these theorists enunciated different relations to the

*infans* of spectatorship, furthering film populism in different directions via the rhetorical strategy of positing various emblematic spectators. This is also to check the voluntarism of recent emblematic history, which emphasizes the scopic mobility of the flapper and restores continuity with the feminist spectatorship of the 70s and 80s.

As the silent era approached its end in the late 1920s, the erotic appeal of the first sex symbols had gone through a “process of humanization”, an increasing inclusion of *It* into hegemonic discourse (Higashi *Virgins* 72). Where from the mid teens, figures like Theda Bara and Nita Naldi played the popular Vamp as anxious representations of female sexual agency, by the mid twenties other feminine types were presented by the Hollywood film: the virtuous Pickford girl, the kept woman, the gold digger, etc.<sup>73</sup> As the notion of “sex appeal” as a popular category circulated, as it came to be associated less with marginal contingents within American society, a new figure of femininity comes to symbolize the dream of a new social change and mobility in American modernity: the flapper. Made famous in films starring Colleen Moore, Gloria Swanson and Joan Crawford (among others), the flapper presented a woman both approachable (unlike the serpentine opacity of the vamp) and coolly detached from the mundane. With the flapper, the female spectator finds both a new screen representative and a spectatorial compromise; the flapper looks and attempts to fabricate her own image. She is capable of both consuming images and posing (for) them. If the flapper is the direct descendent of this humanizing process associated with film publicity, then this, I would suggest, implies the flapper’s reflexive relationship to the cinematic image.

Recently, film scholars attempting to reengage film history with feminism have

---

<sup>73</sup> See Staiger’s “Les Belles Dames Sans Merci, Femmes Fatales, Vampires, Vamps, and Gold Diggers: The Transformation and Narrative Value of Aggressive Fallen Women”

turned to the historical figure of the flapper as “New Woman” as a way of displacing the spectatorship theory of 1970s. In scholarly anthologies of the past decade, the *flapper* has come to embody the missed encounter between feminist gaze theory and film history.<sup>74</sup> This critical discussion highlights the centrality of women, both as producers (novelists, screen-writers, personalities, actors) and consumers, something grossly neglected in the canonical history of Hollywood. If, as the argument goes, spectatorship theory of the 1970s saw Hollywood as masculinist hegemony, it passed over the cool feminine ambivalence of the last decade of the silent era. An illuminating example of this latest ‘emblematic’ turn to history in film studies is Laura Mulvey’s own revisitation of her work on the theory of the male gaze.

In “Thoughts on the Young Modern Woman and Feminist Film Theory”, Mulvey acknowledges that her pioneering work in film theory has been usefully tested by other scholars (including, prominently, Miriam Hansen) and needs to be reconfigured in relation to new historical research. For Mulvey, following and developing Hansen’s work on Valentino, it is the flapper’s spectatorial ambivalence which problematizes her original theory of the male gaze: “[r]ather than relaying the female spectator’s look at the female star through the male protagonist and constructing the voyeuristic spectator of ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, the flapper film creates a shifting pattern of looks” (“Thoughts” 214). As a way of historically *correcting* spectatorship theory, Mulvey aligns this apparent ability to fashion a more “active” and “desiring” relation to the gaze with a changing socio-economic milieu of the 1920s, in which young working women were influencing the commodity market, and their collective consumer demands

---

<sup>74</sup> See *Reclaiming the Archive* and *A Feminist Reader In Early Cinema*.

were being heard. Unsurprisingly (as we saw already with the early films of De Mille), work, consumption and leisure all become thematic sites of examination for early 'women's films'. As the protagonist/ hero of many of these films in the 1920s, the flapper is an agent in this world, able to 'dance' between the workplace, the night club or amusement park, and the home, deftly maneuvering (though not without some measure of dramatic conflict) between the different spheres of modern life. Mulvey affirms flapperism's cool ambivalence as a feminine emblem of mobility and modernity. The twenties cult of personal style is explicitly linked to the adaptive plasticity of the flapper-type. The flapper (as spectator) understands and seems able to take control of her appearances, and to put on different poses and roles: her self-reflexive gaze is presented as *self-fashioning*.<sup>75</sup> I have already mentioned Clara Bow's star-vehicle *IT* (1927) in the context of the hypostatization of *photogenicie* as the hegemonic category of sex appeal. *IT* follows the struggles of a young, attractive working girl to seduce her boss, who is the owner and manager of the New York department store that she works at (Figure 5.01). At first, Bow's Betty Lou is noticed by the boss's foppish friend, Monty (played by William Austin), but then her handsome boss Cyrus (Antonio Moreno) starts to fall for her, despite the class difference. The affair is interrupted by a misunderstanding when Betty Lou poses as a single mother to her roommate's infant, to protect the child from being taken away by child welfare. In the end, her sex appeal shines through to Cyrus despite his class anxiety, and is finally overcome by the revelation of Betty Lou's true moral worth. Despite the happy ending, the gravity of this flapper melodrama resides in the Betty Lou's ability to navigate the class conflict. What allows for the populist

---

<sup>75</sup> I refer here to the phrase in Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*.

resolution is the mediation of a third term to overcome the socio-economic difference; here again, as it had in the case of Valentino's ethnicity, it is the universalism of IT that surmounts the social antagonism. Where in the previous chapter I was interested in the populist implications of *It*, in this chapter I am interested in the fallout of this hegemonic category as it is integrated in Hollywood's staging of spectatorship. The drama of the sex appeal is at the centre of the flapper films as a reflexive staging of this 'taking on' of the sexy, which includes scenes of tailoring (for) the gaze.



**Figure 5.01** The Shopgirl's Desiring Look. (*It*, 1927, Paramount Pictures)



**Figure 5.02** The Flapper's Self-Fashioning Gaze. (*It*, 1927, Paramount Pictures)

Early in the film, after being asked out to dinner by Monty after work, Betty Lou goes home and surprises her roommate by taking out scissors, tailoring and redesigning her work dress (while still wearing it) into an evening gown. In this evocative moment in the film, Bow's flapper presents spectatorship as part of her comportment to the modern world; a freshness of vision, an ingenuity which allows the flapper to see new possibilities, new arrangements of the present (Figure 5.02). The roommate's initial reaction is that of disbelief and shock, but once she understands Betty Lou's intentions, she smiles, goes over to her and helps her with the alterations. The film then alternates to a scene of the upper classes getting ready to go out for dinner, but not before a little comic exclamation coming in the form of Betty Lou being accidentally poked by the edge of the scissors, while the roommate continues the tailoring work.

If Bow's character in *IT* represents the utopian assumption of the hegemonic category of sex appeal by the New Woman, if it holds out the promise of ultimate happiness and of the ability to pursue her own desire and ambitions (as the American dream), the film only subtly evokes a darker scenario in the representation of the life of Betty Lou's roommate, the single mother. The comedic glancing wound with the scissors which she accidentally gives Betty Lou, comes as a result of her re-designation. She is representative of another, darker outcome for the modern woman. The roommate is figured as a pathetic, fallen woman. Laden with maternal responsibility, Betty Lou's double in the film is unable to participate in the game of IT; the roommate is a woman stuck in the mundane, and tethered by her parenthood while Betty Lou repeatedly seems to escape all gravity because she has sex appeal, and can control her own display. The glancing wound of the tailoring scissors, I would suggest, evokes the violence of this reflexive gaze. In Mulvey's recent turn to the flapper as a new model of female spectatorship, thus, seems to leave the question of the violent legacy of the image unexamined, a legacy that was the critical hallmark of the first wave of feminist film studies.

As one of the sharpest of the gaze theorists, Mary Ann Doane has consistently highlighted the patriarchal exclusions of Hollywood cinema. She has written on a number of American and European films which allegorize the cinematic abstraction of Woman as spectacle, which (as she argues) "chronicle the expropriation of the woman's look and voice and the consequent transformation of the woman into Woman— a position inaccessible to women" (*Femmes* 78). The argument iterated in these essays develops her work on the impossible viewing position of the spectatrix in American

narrative film (which came to prominence with her essays on masquerade). Doane contends, in the essay “Remembering Women: Psychological and Historical Constructions in Film Theory”, that the film apparatus necessitates the forgetting of feminine memory, i.e., the real personal histories of women. In this context, she discusses Louise Brooks’s final starring feature role in *Prix de Beauté* (1930). The film opens to a scene at a French beach, in which Lucienne (played by Brooks) and her beloved, André seem to be the portrait of happiness, that is, until the next day when she finds out about a beauty contest to determine the “most beautiful woman in France”. But even in this first scene, we are privy to the coming attractions of the narrative; our first view of Luci is the admiring point-of-view of André’s best friend Antonin, as she changes into her bathing suit. First, we see only her bare legs protruding out of car door, then Antonin looks in through the back window of the car and watches her disrobe. The oval frame of the car window gives the point-of-view shot an iris-effect reminiscent of the old fashion peepshow, setting the table for the scopic problematic to follow. As the French title suggests, this film (a very early French sound production, though shot as a silent film) follows the rise and fall of ‘Miss Europe’ (a young, beautiful stenographer Lucienne), from the time of her ‘discovery’ in a public contest to her murder by the hand of the lover (André) whom she leaves to follow her stardom.

Despite hearing her lover’s scorn at the suggestion that she send in a picture of herself, she does so and wins. About to propose marriage, André is preempted by Lucienne’s sudden departure to take part in the Miss Europe pageant. She wins this contest too, and becomes the object of many suitors’ affection. Though André is eventually able to persuade Miss Europe to return to domesticity with him, one of the



suitors from the pageant appears later to seduce her into movie stardom (Figure 5.03). Finally, in one of the most evocative (and at the time shocking) final scenes in film history, Brooks' Lucienne is shot to death as she watches the rushes of her first film, consisting of footage of her singing on stage. As the projector flickers on, displaying her singing image on the screen in the background, in the foreground lies Lucienne's inanimate body (Figure 5.04).



**Figure 5.03** Seduced into the Movies. (*Prix de Beauté*, 1930, SOFAR Films)

The film's narrative presents something like the story of a star production line, a factory of images, as the spectator follows the days of the week that lead up to Lucienne's celebrity and then her demise. In this final scene, the cinema itself is fundamentally implicated in Lucienne's murder. Lucienne's downward path is clearly linked to the mediated dissemination of her image, having culminated in her becoming a



**Figure 5.04** Miss Europe, Forever Image. (*Prix de Beauté*, 1930 SOFAR Films)

budding movie starlet: “in *Prix de Beauté*, the successful cinematic abstraction of woman is simultaneous with her death... [i]n both states, she becomes the desirable image” (*Femmes* 93). The film suggests that this beauty process is intimately associated with the modern media world: the contest is put on by a national newspaper and the spectator is introduced to Lucienne early in the film as telephone operator and to André as a worker at a printing press (ostensibly for the very newspaper in which the contest is published). Cross-cutting early in the film between these protagonists and shots of various mechanical operations, are echoed again in the final murder scene; the montage there places the actions and gestures of the murderer side by side with those of the film’s director, the projectionist, and the moving parts of the film apparatus. To extrapolate on Doane’s argument, film here re-members Woman in its own disfiguring way, and

separates the spectatrix from experiencing her image and her viewing position as her own. The scenario reflected in the film is not simply abstract: it screens the itinerary of many of the silent film actresses of the time. The 'original jazz baby' Clara Bow got into motion pictures by winning a beauty prize at the age of fourteen. Growing up in a poor, dysfunctional Brooklyn tenement, Bow sent a photo of herself, and within weeks was making films (Koszarski 309). One of the top-grossing stars of the second half of the twenties, Bow was exploited and then dumped by studio system with the coming of the talkies. That undeniable token of her humble past-- her Brooklyn accent-- made her unfit, it was said, for sound films. After almost a decade making films, at the age of 26, Bow retired to a solitary life marked by mental illness and at least one suicide attempt. Viewed as a European commentary on the American cult of sex appeal of the 1920s, *Prix de Beauté* emphasizes the violence of the cinematic process in a way only implied in a film like *IT*.

According to Doane, along with a number of others in the motion picture canon, *Prix de Beauté* allegorizes the cinematic process as sexual expropriation, and therefore highlights an alienating female subjection to the external apparatus of the cinema. Doane would return a few years later to discussing the theme of expropriation in relation to another film starring Brooks, G.W. Pabst's *Pandora's Box* (1929). Again, Doane reads the film as an allegory of sexual expropriation in the dying years of Weimar Germany:

*Pandora's Box*, fairly classical in much of its design, does not, in its modernist moments, escape the power-knowledge relations of the problematic of sexual difference. Lulu [*the infamous Brooks*

*role*] occupies the derealized image, the image released from referential constraints—an image that only magnifies an exploitative desire and calls forth the modern anxieties of male consciousness. (Femmes 162)

As a representative emblem of (Americanist) modernity, the films of Louise Brooks seem to allegorize the dark implications of the reflexive gaze of the New Woman to which I referred earlier. And yet, the externality of Doane's apparatus means that Woman cannot occupy a position of agency in the diegesis of the film, nor as active viewer; she is relegated to the mythical icon of male sexuality. Here is an example of the way that spectatorship theory has been melodramatically attached to a reductive conception of scopic agency: either the flapper is a mercurial, self-fashioning spectatrix, or she is a dangerous *femme fatale* excluded and victimized by the alienating expropriations of the cinema. While we returned to Doane's account of the female spectator as a way of giving counterpoint to the voluntarism of the more recent accounts, Doane's emphasis on expropriation does not give a full description of the flapper's scopic reflexivity. To this point, we have focused on the Freudian theory of seduction as a way of dialectizing any notion of the spectator's agency. If one of the flapper's chief characteristics, as emblem of late silent film spectatorship, is her ability to manipulate and frame her own image, then this can only be possible on the basis of an internalization of and fluency with the spectatorial mechanism.

If we are to argue that the female protagonist of the late silent era plays out the ambivalence of film seduction, then we must take seriously the melodrama of this critical antagonism; in other words, our model going forward must not simply be to overcome

this antagonism, but to preserve it at some level. Along these lines, I would argue that the New Woman's assumption of sex appeal (as a key pillar of personalized spectatorship) forces us to consider the symptomatic return of the dangerous woman at the end of the silent era (which we will see allegorized in the films of Louise Brooks), as an after-effect of the penetration of the cinematic into the personal. The work of abstraction that the cinema expresses in terms of gender difference evokes not simply a lack of memory (as Doane would have it), but another kind of spectatorial remembrance that we have thus far modeled on psychic implantation, and associated in chapter 3 with the spectatorial *repression* of the attraction.

#### Lulu in Danger: The Seduction Plot of the Film Spectator

A trained modern dancer who toured with the Denishawn company, and then appeared in the Ziegfeld follies, Brooks worked in Hollywood from 1925 to early 1929, when she left Paramount with the emergence of the talkies to accept G.W. Pabst's invitation to work for him in Berlin. After making three important films in Europe at the end of the twenties, her move back to America was upset by the fact that she had burned her bridges at Paramount. Having fallen out of favour with the new Hollywood of the talkies, she sank into obscurity, before her films were 'rediscovered' among cinephiles in the 1950s. Thus, Louise Brooks' image today has largely been developed in relation to one film, *Pandora's Box*. The iconic German film tells the story of Lulu, as both 'kept woman' and elusive showgirl, her seductive beauty leads to the death and ruin of all who associate with her. Thomas Elsaesser and Doane have both framed Brooks' *Lulu* as more of an abstract icon than as a character in the classical sense. As we noted in the preceding

chapter, it was also European critics (French, more specifically) that introduced the concept of (what they called) *photogenie*, to the personal appeal of the American film stars that they loved watching. Brooks' work in *Pandora's Box* has been hailed as an embodiment of the "intelligence of the cinematic process" (Henri Langlois) and as the quintessence of the principle of *photogenie*. While three of the Louise Brooks films that I take up in this chapter are European productions, nevertheless, these films emphasize Brooks' Americanness as a kind of foreign presence, an embodiment of eroticized *photogenie*. This point is accentuated by a legend that circulates around Brooks' life and career: rumours have circulated that on her first trip to Europe in the early 1920s, Louise Brooks was the first person to dance the Charleston on the continent. While this claim may be apocryphal, like the myth that circulated around the life of Theda Bara it indexes a register of currency with regard to Brooks' Americanness, and her status as a carrier of a foreign enthusiasm plays a huge role in the success of these late silent films. Her screen presence is aligned with a New World exoticism, and her personal appeal becomes the object of her films' drama. Criticism of the film has been forced to give sense to this exoticism.

The debate between these Elsaesser and Doane reflects the aforementioned critical ambivalence surrounding the figure of the New Woman; in his essay "Lulu and the Meter Man", Thomas Elsaesser argues that Brooks's Lulu is the emblem of the new modernity. In an anticipation of recent work, Elsaesser aligns Lulu with the flapper:

she is a being of externality, animated without inwardness; attentive, but without memory; persistent but without will power or discipline; intelligent but without self-reflexiveness; intense but without pathos. Her

superiority resides in the fact that these effects-without-causes are experienced by the men as both fascinating and a threat. ("Lulu" 15)

Lulu, the showgirl seductress whose very presence seems to spell doom for all of the characters around her, is framed by Elsaesser as being an abstract image, without depth or psychology. Doane largely follows Elsaesser's account of Lulu in this regard, but emphasizes the gender politics of her abstraction: "[s]he exemplifies the power accorded to images which aligns them with a malignant femininity—most symptomatically when the images are not firmly anchored diegetically or referentially" (*Femmes* 154). For Doane, Lulu the temptress exposes and undermines the patriarchal propriety of the cinematic referent, whereby the incessant efforts to possess her or to exchange her ultimately lead to ruin, including her own. Doane's repeated engagement with the films of Louise Brooks on the theme of cinematic expropriation is no accident. Brooks' screen image came to intervene in the actor's life in a profound way. Much of the critical discourse surrounding Brooks emphasizes the ways in which she seemed to live out the self-destructive narrative of her most famous character. When later in life, Brooks came to write a set of memoirs of her experiences in the cinema, the collection was entitled *Lulu In Hollywood*. Lulu's murder by Jack the Ripper in the ambiguous finale of *Pandora's Box* has been alternatively read as either signifying the violent punishment of the patriarchal economy (Doane), and/or as an excessive 'pure gift' of death, in which something new has arrived on the scene (Elsaesser). In both cases, Brooks' iconic abstraction is highlighted over the diegesis of her performance. Pandora's black box, then, seems to be the cinematic apparatus which, with its exposing aperture, creates the icon of Lulu out of a photogenic presence.

Lulu has no depth, no psychology, and despite the fact that she seems constantly to be encountering her own image, there is no discussion of her as a spectator. Like *Prix de Beauté*, *Pandora's Box* ends with Lulu's sexualized murder by a man, this time, the serial killer Jack the Ripper. Unlike André, however, Jack's motivation is not developed in terms of his character psychology; its cause seems to come from a pure serial compulsion. But perhaps the most striking thing about the violent finale of Pabst's film is Lulu's part in it; Jack's murderous intentions seem, at first, to be disarmed and neutralized by Lulu's generosity. Destitute and working as a prostitute, Lulu 'gives herself' to Jack: she exposes herself to him, fully aware that he cannot pay, and that there is a sex killer on the loose. While Lulu is certainly not responsible for her own death, she is captivated by the scene of her own endangerment. It is perhaps in the mysterious appearance of the serial killer Jack, that we may get some perspective on the agency of Lulu, and of the problem of agency for spectatorship. For most of the film, any attempt on the part of the spectator to understand Lulu's intentions is aligned with the various characters in the film (e.g., her lover/ husband Dr. Schön, his son Alwa, the Countess Geschwitz) who try to win Lulu over: any effort is frustrated and ultimately leads to disaster. When she is put on trial for the murder of her newlywed husband Schön, the court finds her guilty on the basis of an assertion aligning her with the mythical Pandora, and not on her psychological motivation or evidence. But in the figure of Jack, I would argue, Lulu finds her double: an individual moved by the logic of compulsion, even when it leads beyond the Law. Against the argument that she is a depthless creature of modernity, Lulu presents us with a particularly arresting case of a flapper who, I would argue, bears the marks of a traumatic history with respect to her own image. As critics



of the film have noted, images of Lulu play an integral role in the film, being exchanged and displayed by the people around her (e.g., the portraits in Dr. Schön's apartment, Alwa's design sketches for her costume, the newspaper photos of Lulu at the trial and the white slave trader Casti-Piani's pictorials), but while this has been linked, alternatively, to her modernity and/or her exploitation, I would like to suggest a link between her compulsive endangerment and *exposing* herself to the image.

Quoting from a memoir and interpretation of her experiences written in her latter years called "Pabst and Lulu", Brooks explains: "*It is Christmas Eve and she is about to receive the gift which has been her dream since childhood. Death by a sexual maniac*" (Brooks "Pabst and Lulu" 13). She is describing the climax of *Pandora's Box* in which Lulu is the victim of the sex murderer; but the phrase also *points* to a violent legacy of the past, of the consummation of a fantasy-scene of sexual invasion. Her interpretation of the final scene suggests that the murder repeats something that has been latent all along for Lulu. A victim herself of sexual molestation at the age of nine, Brooks might also have been talking about herself. With this knowledge, it is indeed startling to note that in *all* of her last starring roles Brooks' characters are the subject of an act of sexual violence (and often the act is serially repeated), around which the narrative centers. Bracketing her Brooks' own biography, I think that this points us towards the cinematic seduction of her films.

In chapter three, in our discussion of Ben Brewster's work on the turn to what has become the Hollywood narrative form, I proposed the term "fantasia" to describe the melodramatic compromise (between narration and monstration) enacted by "a move from the direct photography of real environments to the presentation of a world much more

penetrated by phantasy" ("A Scene" 324). One of our "emblematic" examples of this move was the prologue sequence in DeMille's *Male and Female* (1919), in which a boy house servant spies on the various characters through their bedroom key holes, witnessing them in moments of private intimacy. In the spectatorial dialectic from attractions to seduction embodied in this emblematic moment of Hollywood fantasia, one of the things that I sought to highlight was the way in which the apparent voyeurism of classical narrative cinema had, in fact, lead spectatorship theory to leave the primacy of scopic identification unquestioned. In this final chapter, Brewster's characterization of the Hollywood diegesis as the "presentation of a world... penetrated by phantasy" must be reconsidered in thinking about American film spectatorship as a scene of sexual violence, putting emphasis on this cinematic *penetration*. Having been preceded, compromised, and incorporated by film as a monstrative form, American narrative film as fantasia was characterized by a penetration of the spectatorial interior, an *intrusion* of the cinematic gaze, to which no attempt to cover our eyes would bar its entry. It is of this aspect of Hollywood fantasia as scene of seduction that the late films of Louise Brooks screen with such vivid clarity. In her last American silent feature, William Wellman's *Beggars of Life* of 1928, Brooks plays a girl who murders the man who had adopted her, after being sexual assaulted repeatedly. After killing him in self-defense, she runs off with a young migrant who happened to stop by, looking for charity. The young man helps her to evade the law, and the various predators that they meet along the way, by riding the rails in poor, pre-depression America. While the film is Brooks' finest dramatic performance in an American production by far, it is of interest here because of the way its opening screens fantasia as seduction scene.



**Figure 5.05** The Beggar's First View: Dead Man Eating. (*Beggars of Life*, 1928, Paramount Pictures)

'He's always been after me —  
pawin' me with his hands —'

**Figure 5.06** The Girl's Disclosure. (*Beggars of Life*, 1928, Paramount Pictures)

The film begins *in media res*, focalized by the perspective of the young train-hopper, played by Richard Arlen, who follows his nose to the front door of a farmhouse. The 'beggar', who stands in for the spectator, comes to the front door of a house looking for charity, only to find the master of the house murdered at his breakfast (Figure 5.05). As the hobo enters the home, he discovers a young woman who seems to have committed the murder. Unlike the evocation of seduction in the Pabst film, in *Beggars of Life* the traumatic seduction is represented on screen, screened in flashback as an intrusive memory-vision: the seduction and murder is run in double exposure on an extreme close-up of Brooks' troubled face as she recounts the story to Arlen's confused youth (Figure 5.07-8). Like the hobo, the spectator is in the position of the one who does not know what he is seeing. The Arlen character first thinks he is seeing a man eating his breakfast, then he thinks he has caught the murderer, but by the end of flashback, the meaning of the initial crime scene has been again transfigured, and he, in sympathy, helps her to evade the law. Importantly, the spectator is not given a "censored" view. We do not begin 'after the fact' so as to expunge the incestuous sexual assault; in fact, having it stylized in this way only serves to emphasize it, to make of it the site of an (arguably, exploitative) display. The stylization of the *mise-en-scene* and of the montage in this first scene emphasize not only the actions of the plot, but also (and perhaps more prominently) their corresponding passions. The stylized flashback of the attack and murder place emphasis formally on this association of the novelty of the cinematic address and the force of the sexual assault.



**Figure 5.07** Fantasia: "Pawin' Me". (*Beggars of Life*, 1928, Paramount Pictures)



**Figure 5.08** Fantasia: In Danger. (*Beggars of Life*, 1928, Paramount Pictures)

Against the background of the film's conventional progression (both in terms of the generic and formal continuity rules), as a narrative of escape in which the boy tries to protect the girl both from the law and from the various seducers who attempt to possess her, the opening scene accentuates its fantasia (the shocking stylization of perspective) by focalizing the presentation of limited scopic information. In contrast to the rules of continuity, the spectator is without the traditional master shot in this first scene until the end of the flashback, which function as an ultimate perspective with which to identify. The disorientation of the narrative and the shot selection seem to be moving in the same direction: the violent fantasia repeats and gives sense to ambiguities of the initial scene. It is as if the boy's lack of knowledge (and, by extension, the spectator's) is repeated and completed by the girl's recollection. Brooks' young girl, adopted into the home, was also naïve and unprepared when she was assailed by the molesting advances of the old man: her innocent view was marked by an intrusion that is represented in the fantasia as spectatorial in nature. The scene displays, emblematically, the intrusive nature of Hollywood fantasia: figured as the Monstrator-Seducer, it *shows* more than it can *tell*, or we could say that its capacities for monstration are not equaled by its narrative capabilities. This scene of spectatorial intrusion is a motif in Brooks' films, and is figured as seduction scene. What Freud discovered in his (later abandoned) seduction theory, is allegorized here: the aestheticized display of passionate, sexualized images that spectators are inundated with in the narrative photoplay, threaten to inhabit the interior and to *lead astray*, as the etymology of *seducere* suggests.

With this in mind, let us reconsider the famous first scene of *Pandora's Box* in which the meter man, a proxy (as Elsaesser has noted) for the spectator within the

diegesis, is introduced to Lulu by witnessing an unexpected intimacy between her and the shabby old Schigolch. We can tell by their rapport that, in fact, there is personal history between them. Where Elseasser has taken this first scene as an emblem of the way Lulu produces spectatorial frustration (the meter man loses her attention in favour of the unlikely old man), the spectacle witnessed remains this unexpected intimacy. Whether it is Lulu's relationship to Schigolch, the 'theatre of jealousy' backstage at the revue, the ambiguous death scene of Dr. Schön, or her own death scene, Pabst's film is particularly reflexive in the way it makes this moment of witnessing the other's intimacy the centre of its drama. In this light, it is curious that Schigolch's virtual omnipresence in Pabst's film has not been addressed in the criticism. Why is this little old man present in some way, in virtually every scene of the film?<sup>76</sup> In the first scene (after the meter man has left), when Lulu is unable to recall a dance step to a song that Schigolch incants, he suddenly grows violently enraged and moves to strike her. The violence of this moment suggests that not only does he have a history with Lulu, but that perhaps part of this common past is introducing the showgirl into the business, that he has been the one to impress upon her the logic of display. In her recent commentary, Doane suggestively remarks that Schigolch is portrayed alternatively as a father-figure, and as a pimp.<sup>77</sup> Though Doane leaves this point undeveloped, she goes on to notice a motif that runs throughout the film in which Lulu sits in Schigolch's lap, a gesture (we might say with the seduction theory in mind) suspended between the sexual and the 'presexual'; the motif is then repeated at

---

<sup>76</sup> The one scene in which Schigolch is not present in the diegesis, the famous scene backstage at the cabaret, his henchman Rodrigo is present as one of the performers in the show, watching the dramatic triangular conflict between Lulu, Schön and his fiancé/ his son Alwa.

<sup>77</sup> See Doane's "*Pandora's Box* DVD commentary".

the narrative's climax (Figure 5.09-11). Lulu apparently disarmed by her john's charms, sits in the lap of The Ripper, in the lead up to her murder (Figure 5.12). I would argue that Schigolch is another allegorical representative of the cinematic Monstrator-Seducer: the one who exposes the innocent spectator to traumatic views. The precision of this 'visual rhyme' of the lap motif cannot be ignored; the serial repetition of this gesture, and punctuating variation of the finale forge an associative link between Schigolch and Jack. Indeed, in the final moments after Lulu's murder, the departure of The Ripper and Alwa is intercut with a view of Schigolch eating a Christmas cake in a public house, as a holiday parade marches by. This is followed by yet another visual rhyme that connects Jack and Schigolch, and which echoes the freshly committed murder. Schigolch's cake is adorned by mistletoe, just as Lulu had been at the moment of the murder; and the spoon that Schigolch picks up to devour the dessert glistens in the candlelight, just as the Ripper's murder weapon had in the preceding scene. It is as if,



**Figure 5.09** Lulu and Schigolch: Lap Motif #1. (*Pandora's Box*, 1929, Nero-Film)





**Figure 5.10** Lulu and Schigolch: Lap Motif #2. (*Pandora's Box*, 1929, Nero-Film)



**Figure 5.11** Lulu and Schigolch: Lap Motif #3. (*Pandora's Box*, 1929, Nero-Film)



**Figure 5.12** Lulu and Jack the Ripper: Lap Motif #4. (*Pandora's Box*, 1929, Nero-Film)

after the Ripper has walked into the foggy London night, he is replaced by Schigolch, the murder of Lulu associated with the gluttonous oral incorporation of the father-seducer. A kind of invasion has already taken place (represented by the Monstrator-Seducer, Schigolch), to which the murder would be a kind of return home. In other words, we might indeed think about the emphasis throughout the film on the spectacle of intimacy as an intrusive scene (the other *seen*), and of Lulu as haunted by a traumatic gravity, and not simply as modernity's emblematic "mercurial" nymph.

In *Diary of a Lost Girl* (Pabst, 1929), Pabst and Brooks' second collaboration, the theme of seduction is even more overt. Where *Pandora's Box* only suggests Lulu's seduction by Schigolch, *Diary of a Lost Girl* recounts the story of a girl's rape and subsequent excommunication. Brooks plays Thymian Henning, a young girl on the edge

of womanhood who is impregnated by her father's adult business partner. Banished to a perversely harsh boarding school where she is sadistically mistreated by the staff, Thymian survives her abandonment by seeking help from a friend of the family, the Count Orsdorff, whose 'help' includes finding her refuge and work at a local brothel.

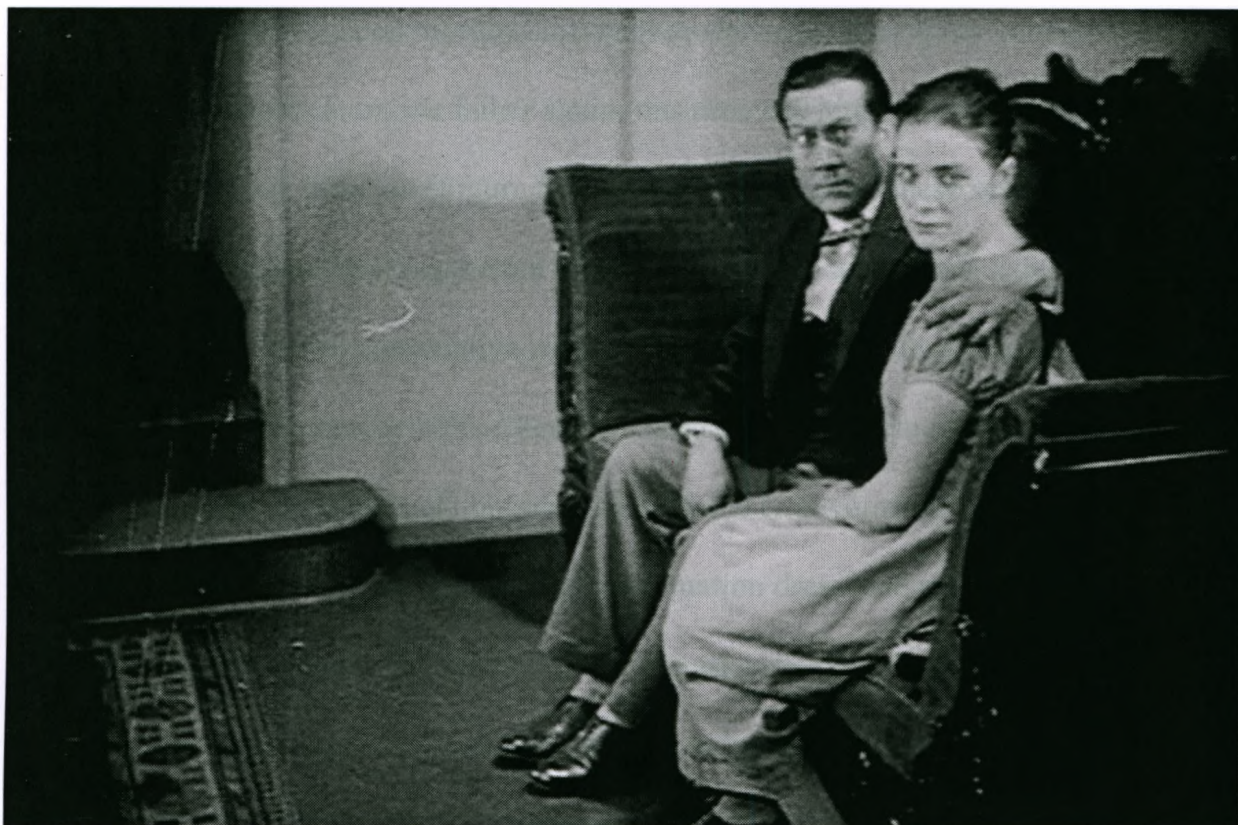
Once again, the first scene of this film begins in the middle of the action. The opening shot finds a middle-age bourgeois woman opening up a parcel. The spectator comes to the knowledge that the parcel contains what is to be Thymian's confirmation gift from her Aunt Freda: a diary. Aunt Freda looks into another room to find her brother (Thymian's father) the widower pharmacist Henning and the maid. The maid is distraught as she packs up her things. On entering the room Aunt Freda exclaims to Henning "So, you had your way with this house-keeper too!" While the spectatorial gaze is initially focalized around the figure of Aunt Freda, unexpectedly another view of the scene breaks in from the other side of the room. This medium longshot is followed by the reverse reaction shot of Brooks' Thymian, whose point of view it clearly was, having just witnessed the scene between her father, the housekeeper and Aunt Freda from another door (Figure 5.13). She rushes in and asks: "Why is Elisabeth leaving—today of all days?" This intrusion of Thymian's perspective on the scene accomplishes a startling disruption of continuity, introducing her in the film by associating her with an unbound, seeking view (Figure 5.14).



**Figure 5.13** Thymian Intrudes. (*Diary of a Lost Girl*, 1929, G.W. Pabst)



**Figure 5.14** “Why is Elisabeth leaving—today of all days?” (*Diary of a Lost Girl*, 1929, G.W. Pabst)



**Figure 5.15** Thymian Interrupts her Father's Conquest. (*Diary of a Lost Girl*, 1929, G.W. Pabst)



**Figure 5.16** Thymian Despairs. (*Diary of a Lost Girl*, 1929, G.W. Pabst)

This scenario is soon repeated in a subsequent scene during her confirmation party. Thymian walks in on her father again, this time catching him 'welcoming' the new maid that he has just hired on (Figure 5.15). I have highlighted these scenes in the film because they prefigure and prepare the way for Thymian's subsequent seduction. She catches her father in two consecutive scenes of secret passion with young house-girls, not much older than Thymian herself. These two scenarios amount to a seductive message to his daughter, who could not help but identify with the two women (Figure 5.16). Pabst adorns Brooks for both scenes in virginal confirmation dress, and a white garland of blossoms, emphasizing her innocence. When she asks her father's partner why the maid Elisabeth must leave, he promises to tell her, but only during a *rendezvous* that night. Following her party, at the appointed time, the lecherous partner descends on Thymian in her room, letting her in on her father's secret by repeating it with her. In his first appearance, the father's 'partner' (and so symbolically, we could say, *alter ego*) watches the young maid depart in distress, while looking at pornographic images behind the pharmacy counter. As it was in *Pandora's Box* and *Prix de Beauté*, the seducer is associated with the consumption and exchange of sexualized images. Once again, the father's partner is figured as Monstrator; i.e., simultaneously seducer and someone seduced by the sexuality of images.

In conclusion, the preponderance of these seduction scenes in the late films of Louise Brooks allegorize, I argued, a fundamental dynamic for the American narrative film of the pre-talkie era: above and beyond her status as seductress (viewed playfully or nefariously), the flapper is a figure of a spectator who is herself seduced by the moving image. Indeed, if as we suggested, the notion of sex appeal is marked by its encounter

with film, then I would argue the hypostasis of gender and sexuality in the cinematic age benefits from the dialectical model of the seduction theory. Feminist theorists have long highlighted the violent legacy of images in processes of feminine subjectivation, and, I suggested, what is played out in the development of the polemical debate within feminist film studies over the sexual violence of film spectatorship is precisely this exposure to the cinema, to what I have called the *infans* born out of the cinematic spectatorship, the founding pregnancy of its silence. In previous chapters I have aligned the silence of the pre-sound era with the productive discrepancy inherent between *showing* and *telling* in the American cinema; in this chapter, I tried to demonstrate the ways that this fundamental discrepancy gets internalized as a problematic for the film spectator and projected allegorically as a Monstrator-Seducer. As the final instance in the seduction itinerary, the symptomatic return of the *infans* of the cinema is played out reflexively in the fantasia of the final years of the silent era explicitly as seduction scene.

If, as I argue, we are seduced into spectatorship, we must reread the critical discourse on visual pleasure in its melodramatic context, as a forum for debating the key hegemonic terms of film spectatorship, as sites of populist intimacy and exchange. By reconsidering the question of the visual pleasure of film spectatorship (and the various theoretical and cultural hypostases of a spectatorial body) as a melodrama, that is, as indexing an exposure to the unspeakably social, we can approach what remains crucially important in this hegemonic category: that the classical film spectator named an emerging populist form of intimacy in America.

**Conclusion**  
**Screen Memories?:**  
**The Afterlife of Seduction**  
**and the Intimacies of Hollywood Fantasia**

Too Early! Too Late!: Early Freud Reads Early Cinema...After Freud, After Cinema

In the early 1930s, a series of studies were published on the effect of motion pictures on children, known as the 'Payne Fund' Reports. Numbering a majestic thirteen studies in all, they generally confirmed what censorship advocates had been asserting for more than two decades: that being a film spectator has an impact on children and youth. In one of the studies, the sociologically-oriented *Movies and Conduct*, Herbert Blumer echoes Münsterberg's earlier work in speaking of "implant[ed] attitudes" and "emotional possession" to describe the child's reception of the cinema (Blumer 194, 126). Like the other accounts of the cinema's seduction of the youth, Blumer also obliquely confirms the sexual nature of that influence. In an interesting elliptical 'omission' in the preface to his work (which functions rhetorically like the suggestive 'screen' of the peepshow), Blumer remarks:

No treatment is given in this volume to the influence of motion pictures on sex conduct and life. Materials collected in the course of the study show this influence to be considerable, but their inclusion has been found inadvisable. The omission is not to be construed as implying the absence of the influence. (Blumer 1)

In the preceding chapters, I have argued that the sexualized rhetoric which pervaded the discourse of American film spectatorship (in its first thirty years, and in its academic incarnation) speaks to the insistent anxiety around the seduction of moving pictures, as an



agent of cultural invasion. While certainly the findings of the Payne Fund studies must be put in the context of the cultural war that was going on in America (which led in 1934 to the strict enforcement of the Hays Code in American film production), they also position their subject, the young spectator, as a victim of seduction tragically and helplessly stuck between two temporal moments: the child having watched *too early* (prematurely) with recognition and help coming *too late*. While these broad-based findings arriving at the end of the silent era (after a generation of children have grown up in the cinema) appear a fitting bookend and support for the themes of this research, the reason I highlight them here is because they speak to the apparent untimeliness of a study of cinematic seduction.

By definition, the afterwardly nature of seduction (in Freud and Laplanche) is in the discovery, paradoxically in the present, of something which must have already happened, as something which *will have* happened as a result of its 'deferred action.' It is partly owing to the temporal conundrum of the *après coup* that Freud would come to abandon the realism of his exogenous theory of sexuality, in favour of the endogenous notion of infantile sexuality. Necessarily then, to speak of seduction is always after the fact and retrospectively: it arrives belatedly, because it was sent too early. In this light, we might consider the apparently untimely presentation of this dissertation research: a theoretical re-evaluation of the classical film spectator after the demise of its theoretical frame (psychoanalysis) and, arguably, after the demise of its form (cinema), from the perspective of the abandoned 'pre-psychoanalytic' seduction theory and the scholarship of the (arguably) 'pre-cinematic' era of motion pictures (*too early* and *too late*).

In terms of the currency of the field of film studies, this project appears almost anachronistic in its investment in spectatorship theory and psychoanalysis. And in more cultural terms, what does it mean to speak of seduction (as the traumatic gravity of moving pictures, with their singular aura and address), in a moment of hyper-sexualization, and unprecedented technological reproducibility and dissemination. That is, what can seduction mean in a culture in which, as Jean Baudrillard wrote, “the sexual has become strictly the actualization of a desire in a moment of pleasure”, and for which hyper-monstration of sexual and intimate ‘reality-shows’ is the rule (Baudrillard 39). Surely spectatorial seduction has been abandoned? To this post-Benjaminian question our research poses, I think, two responses. The first is that, the notion that the era of seduction has ended due to the rise of pornography and citation culture, amounts, I believe, to a contemporary version of the anti-auratic ‘modernity thesis’: that sexuality and the gravity of the image has been so evacuated by its hyper-reproducibility, that consumers of images are no longer captivated by the anachronistic aura of the cinematic image. This post-auratic, post-traumatic (and perhaps post-subjective) view is to my mind far too premature, and as I argued with respect to the modernity thesis itself, it does not account for the continuing hyper-auratic tendencies in the media culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The second point that I would make is, as I argued in chapter three, taken melodramatically, anachronism indexes aspects of a historical legacy which have seemingly been put of circulation, but which nevertheless become revived in new and unexpected ways.<sup>78</sup> In taking up the abandoned theory of the film spectator with the

---

<sup>78</sup> This problem has been taken up in various ways in the recent anthology, edited by

abandoned seduction theory (not to mention the old metaphysical charge of hypostasis), I propose a theory which gives priority to the scene of address of the other, i.e., a theory of exogenous, traumatic enculturation can help excavate the exposure at stake in the concept of the film spectator. The inevitable (indeed, necessary) hypostatic gesture of theory (of critical theories, of 'working' populist theories) is a response to the unspeakable exigency of the cultural address: *in force beyond signification*.

### That Downward Path: Plotting Seduction

The anachronistic paradox of my operation has been in the name of working backwards to find the enduring early crisis to which the psychoanalytic theory of film spectatorship would form an afterwardly melodramatic response. The hypostatic charge against this field of film theory is entirely apt in that it was, indeed, mobilized to project its notions of the subject onto film as a screen. And yet, we entirely miss the enduring truth of the psychoanalytic moment in film studies, if we disregard the correlation that it posits between cinema and sexuality, and more broadly between the practice of spectatorship and, what I will call, *the cultural life of interiority*. In the work of the scholars to whom I have paid the most attention in the preceding pages, I have attempted to follow the inspiration of their gesture to take cinema first, which by and large has gone hand in hand with a historiographical study of film. In different ways, I have argued that Linda Williams, Tom Gunning, Miriam Hansen, Ben Singer and Ben Brewster have offered, in the *bodies* of their historiographic works, theoretical hypostases of a film spectator which have (in reaction to narcissism of the psychoanalytic model) emphasized the ways that

cinema intervened and forged its spectators out of the manifold conditions of modernity. While taking this inspiration, and guided by the historical persistence of the sexualized rhetoric circulating around the problem of film's spectatorial influence, I sought a dialectical middle ground which would both honour the gesture of historiography (of turning back to the film object in its contingent history) and reengage with what in the theory of the classical film spectator should not be ignored (the cultural chiasmus of film and sexuality).

In positing *the seduction plot of the film spectator* on the model of Laplanche's general theory of seduction and Butler's theories of hegemony and subjection, my intention was to sketch out a dialectic of spectatorship internal to the formal developments of early American film history as a seduction subplot in counterpoint to the important discoveries of film historiography. As the theoretical 'patron-saint' of film historiography, this sub-plot was, I discovered, already nascently at work in Walter Benjamin's various ambivalent reflections on the concept of aura in modernity. Aura, as Hansen has found, holds the place in Benjamin's thought of the primal relation to the other: it is the residue generated out of an encounter with the traumatic proto-content of the other. Returning to our first point, the seduction theory gives an alternative account of the way that the cinematic address (as traumatic proto-content) has been incorporated by the spectator, and of how this hypostasis relies fundamentally on the foreign body of the film address. Whereas, the various Lacanian hypostases of the spectator in the 1970s and 1980s were guilty of what Butler calls empty, abstract *formalism* (disregarding as Imaginary detritus the founding, foreclosed, contingent 'contents' out of which its 'empty' form appeared), Laplanche and Butler emphasize the *realism* of this preserved

proto-content (as the legacy of the historical accidents which haunts its substance). In focusing my chapters around how film historiographers theorize particular momentous events in American film history, I have sought to highlight this dialectical legacy.

In chapter one, I introduced the traumatic encounter with this proto-content of silent film in a discussion of the mythical "first sex act" in film history (the Edison Company's 1896 one-reeler, *The Kiss*), and the pioneering work on the history of cinematic sexuality of Linda Williams. I argued that in her Foucauldian concept of the film body, as the institution of film as a biopolitical site of investment, Williams rightly highlights the way in which film intervenes in the culture of sexuality. I also suggested that in the developments of her spectatorship theory over time, we can perceive an emerging narrative of an insistent dialectical counter-piece in the foreign body of the spectacle of alterity. After regarding a corresponding incongruity in the laughing film bodies of the spectators of *The Kiss*, I argued that Williams reading of this film as *the first sex act* should be further nuanced; thought of as a spectatorial primal scene, it is the site of a traumatic deposit: the kiss is sent too early, arriving belatedly. As prototype, *The Kiss* (including accounts of its reception) allegorizes the encounter with the cinematic spectacle of the other's intimacy as an enigmatic address; I argued that it should be thought of as a cultural embodiment of the contemporary Freudian seduction theory of the mid 1890s. After developing the notion of a proto-content of this traumatic address as a message 'in force beyond signification' in the works of André Bazin, Giorgio Agamben and in a (refreshingly uncharacteristic) statement by Slavoj Žižek, I suggested that we give the provisional name of the *infans* to the traumatic silence of silent cinema. Finally, I took up the melodramatic turn in Williams' more recent work, arguing that as

the foreign body of the cultural message, the *infans* might be thought as the *unspeakably social* referent of the melodramatic mode of American moving pictures.

The purview of chapter two consisted of a discussion of the period between the late 1890s and 1913, known as *early cinema*, which I characterized as the instance of spectatorial implantation. Within this historical era, two distinct periods have been critically agreed upon: the spectacle era (or the cinema of attractions) and the (increasingly narrative) transitional era. In its emphasis on spectacle over narrative, Gunning has developed an extremely persuasive and influential model for thinking about the specificity of the first period between the emergence of the motion pictures and 1907, the *cinema of attractions*. Mobilizing direct address, optical trickery and visual novelty, Gunning regards the cinema of attractions in the context of modernity, as a Benjaminian practice of distraction which amplifies and inoculates the spectator from the novel shocks of modernity. In a discussion of Gunning's work, (and his early collaboration with André Gaudreault) and a number of peepshows from 1904, I suggest that there is a tension in his notion of the attraction between its visceral visuality and its monstrative address, and that this requires us to question the appropriateness of his 'exhibitionist' model for thinking about the spectator of this era. I then regard the 'ban' on the attraction in the transitional era as kind of latency period, as analogous to the abstracting fixation of the address of the other in the early life of the psyche. In a discussion of Hugo Münsterberg and *Traffic in Souls* (1913), I suggest that we find in the discourse of the early 1910s a figure of the cinema as a Monstrator-Seducer. This should be seen, I argue, in counterpoint to the narrative project of the transitional era to make of the promiscuous 'traffic' of the film address the object of oversight and growing internalization.

I follow the development of this internalization of the film attraction after 1915, arguing in chapter three that, fully incorporated, not only is the attraction integrated into the narrative form, but that its status is melodramatically translated by the new Hollywood mode. From the visceral attractions of early cinema to this period of narrative seduction, monstration comes to have a gestural address-value. In light of Keil's critique of the modernity thesis (as not able to account for the seeming *anachronism* of the melodramatic turn,) I review two important works on the theatrical inheritance of narrative film (Singer, Brewster & Jacobs) tracing (between them) a dialectic of transition which, I argue, amounts to a melodramatic conservation (as Laplanchean repression) of film monstration. After circling back to earlier statements of Brewster's on the larger implications for the spectator of the emergence of the Hollywood address as *penetrated by fantasy*, I introduced the concept of "fantasia" to describe the monstrative compromise that melodrama enacts. The Hollywood Monstrator stages its attractions in terms of an eruption of the spectatorial interior: fantasia looks inward by mobilizing a new roving focalization of perspective, melodramatic expressionism and 'fantasy' spectacle scenes. I regard how these new formal tendencies became taken up allegorically as a dramatic 'content' of the exemplary silent era films of Cecil B. DeMille: the quintessential Hollywood Monstrator-Showman. With the consolidation of the fantasia form of Hollywood, as the public monstration of intimacy, I argued that classical narrative cinema should be regarded as a *development* of the American melodramatic mode.

In chapter four, framed by a discussion of the film corpus of Hansen, I suggested that her forgetting of star appeal in the theory of vernacular modernism, mimics the

forgetting of aura which she had discovered in her important work on Benjamin. Where in *Babel and Babylon* she had given a central position to the star appeal of Valentino in the constitution of film as an alternative public sphere, in her later anti-auratic model the star is absent. In its populist golden age, I argue that aura becomes a central hegemonic category for the Hollywood spectator as a result of fantasia's melodramatic monstration of the interior. The hypostatic elaboration (or we could say cultural sublimation) in the early twenties of *It* as sex appeal, is a populist universalization (and domesticating humanization) of the invasion of cinematic *photogenie*. Reading Butler's emphasis on the translation dynamic that underwrites hegemonic categories with Ferenczi's primal scene of (mis)translation, I suggest that the emblematic drama of sex appeal, in Valentino's films, is an allegorical screening of the foreign 'confusion of tongues' at the heart of the constitution of Hollywood film's spectatorial populism of *It*.

Finally, in the last chapter, coming back from historiography to the emblematic feminist theories of the (female) spectator, I suggest that the enduring melodramatic truth of these gaze theories is the positing of spectatorship as a cultural form of sexual invasion: i.e., that behind all of the *substantial* debates over the gender of spectatorship was the thoroughgoing problematic of the internal violence of the spectatorial legacy. The chapter ends with a discussion of the motif of sexual violence in the films of Louise Brooks, as final screening of the symptomatic return of the seduction of the film spectator. Where in chapter three, I considered the intrusive nature of fantasia, in the films of Brooks this invasion is explicitly sexual in nature, and once again, the cinema itself is presented as a dangerous Monstrator-Seducer.



The Penetralia of the Cinema: Hollywood Fantasia and the Intimacy of Film Populism

But is intimacy not precisely the name that we give to a proximity that also remains distant, to a promiscuity that never becomes identity? (Agamben *Remnants* 125)

In conclusion, while this study has sought to excavate the traumatic legacy of spectatorship, it does this in an effort to rethink the gravity of this concept in the wake of its apparent decline. In this regard, the narrative of our argument tends to swing dialectically from a discussion of the developmental exigencies of the seduction scene towards hypostatic efforts to incorporate this otherness. By re-grounding spectatorship on the foreignness of film as cultural address, I see this project as an attempt to develop Williams' notion that American cinema is a fundamentally melodramatic mode. I believe the virtue of this frame is to seriously account for the hyper-auratic essentializing tendencies within American film culture since the early days, while at the same time, seeing these cultural hypostases as directly responding to the inexhaustible invasiveness of cultural enthusiasm.

It was the American poet Vachel Lindsay, who in his 1915 book on film, *The Art of the Moving Picture*, suggests that *intimacy* characterizes one of the three genres of the moving picture (with action and splendour).<sup>79</sup> What characterizes the intimate film is cinema's ability to pose an *interior* for the spectator's view. While Lindsay's argument would equivocate on the meaning of this *interior*, I would like to take this suggestion as a way of thinking about what is at stake in the continuing legacy of Hollywood fantasia. Fantasia, I argued, developed as an accommodation (repression) of the monstrative novelties of the cinematic attractions, first emerging from early cinema into narrative, by

---

<sup>79</sup> Lindsay, Vachel. *The Art of the Moving Picture*. Ed. Stanley Kauffmann. New York, NY: Modern Library, 2000. Print.

reinterpreting them as interior views. Cinema's intimacy was thus born out of its incorporation of its own *infans*. I also suggested in passing that one could read the entire history of formal innovation of Hollywood in terms of this spectatorial dialectic of fantasia: every incorporation of a novel attraction (sound, colour, widescreen, 3-D, CGI), in turn fabricates a new interior for the Monstrator. In its melodramatic compromise, fantasia creates a contained dioramic vessel for the circulation of its enigmatic messages, for the encounter with the cultural secrets of the unspeakably social. The cinema is posed as (and poses) an interior to allow spectators to approach the unhomely penetralia of culture, the call of the *infans*. Agamben's comment that intimacy does not close the distance with the other, but is the mark of an uncertain proximity and exposure seems apt to describe the populist intimacy made possible by Hollywood fantasia.

Reanimating for collective monstration the abandoned contents trapped in the inner "crypt" (as the exteriority lodged at the heart of the interior), Hollywood film's makes these secret views the auratic object of populist spectacle.<sup>80</sup> Cinematic seduction, I would suggest, is not at an end; its life has always been in its after-life. The motion-picture may be moving out of the space of the cinema, but it was always moving and changing: incorporating unprecedented views and presenting them to the collective exposure of the screen.

---

<sup>80</sup> For the figure of the "crypt" as an alternative way of thinking about the uncanny alterity at the heart of the subjective interior see Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's *The Wolf Man's Magic Word* and Jacques Derrida's "Fors: The English Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok."

## Bibliography

- Abraham, Nicolas and Maria Torok. *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*. Trans. Nicholas Rand. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986. Print.
- Acland, Charles. Ed. *Residual Media*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. Print.
- Adorno, Theodor W. *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. Ed. J.M. Bernstein. New York, NY: Routledge, 2001. Print.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998. Print.
- . *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*. Trans. Liz Heron. New York, NY: Verso, 2007. Print.
- Aragon, Louis. "On Décor." *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/ Anthology 1907-1930, Volume I: 1907-1929*. Ed. Richard Abel. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988. 159-164. Print.
- As Seen On the Curtain*. American Mutoscope and Biograph Co., 1904. Film.
- Aumont, Jacques, Alain Bergala, Michel Marie, and Marc Vernet. *Aesthetics of Film*. Trans. Richard Neupert. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004. Print.
- Balazs, Bela. "Der Sichtbare Mensch." *Theory of Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*. London: Dennis Dobson, 1953. Print.
- Barthes, Roland. "The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Several Eisenstein Stills". *Image, Music, Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1978. 52-68. Print.
- . "Upon Leaving the Movie Theatre." *Cinematographic Apparatus: Selected Writings*. Ed. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. New York, NY: Tanam Press, 1980. Print.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Forget Foucault*. Trans. Nicole Dufresne. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2007. Print.
- Baudry, J-L. "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus." *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Ed. Gerald Mast et al. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992. Print.

- . "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema." *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Ed. Gerald Mast et al. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992. Print.
- Bazin, Andre. *What is Cinema?: Volume I*. Ed and trans. Hugh Gray. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984. Print
- Bean, Jennifer, M. and Diane Negra. Eds. *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002. Print.
- Beggars of Life*. Dir. William Wellman. Perf. Louise Brooks, Richard Arlen, and Wallace Beery. Paramount Pictures, 1928. Film.
- Behind the Screen*. American Mutoscope and Biograph Co., 1904. Film.
- Bellour, Raymond. *The Analysis of Film*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000. Print.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. Tr. Harry Zohn. New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1969. Print.
- . *Reflections*. Tr. Edmund Jephcott. New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1978. Print.
- . "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility." *Selected Writings*. Vol. 4 Ed. Howard Eiland and Micheal W. Jennings. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1996. Print.
- Bergstrom, Janet. (Ed.) *Endless Night: Cinema and Psychoanalysis, Parallel Histories*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. Print.
- Blood and Sand*. Dir. Fred Niblo. Perf. Rudolph Valentino, Lila Lee, and Nita Naldi. Paramount Pictures, 1922. Film.
- Blumer, Herbert. *Movies and Conduct*. New York, NY: Macmillan, 1933. Print.
- Borch-Jacobsen, Mikkel. *The Emotional Tie: Psychoanalysis, Mimesis, and Affect*. Trans. Douglas Brick. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993. Print.
- . *The Freudian Subject*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991. Print.
- Bowser, Eileen. *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990. Print. History of the American Cinema 2.
- Brewster, Ben. "A Scene at the 'Movies.'" *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*. Ed. Thomas Elsaesser with Adam Barker. London: British Film Institute, 1990. Print.

- . "Traffic in Souls (1913): An Experiment in Feature-Length Narrative Construction." *The Silent Cinema Reader*. Ed. Lee Grieveson and Peter Krämer. New York, NY: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- Brewster, Ben and Lea Jacobs. *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997. Print.
- Brooks, Louise. "Pabst and Lulu." *Pandora's Box (Lulu): A Film by G.W. Pabst*. Trans. Christopher Holme. New York, NY: Lorrimer Publishing, 1971.
- Brooks, Peter. *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995. Print.
- Brownlow, Kevin. *Hollywood: The Pioneers*. New York, NY: Knopf, 1979. Print.
- Brownlow, Kevin, and David Gill. *Hollywood: A Celebration of the American Silent Film, Volume 7: The Autocrats*. Thames Television, 1980. Video.
- Burch, Noël. *Life to those Shadows*. Trans. and ed. Ben Brewster. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990. Print.
- . *Theory of Film Practice*. Trans. Helen R. Lane. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981. Print.
- Butler, Judith. *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2005. Print.
- . "Lana's "Imitation": Melodramatic Repetition and the Gender Performative." *Genders*. 9 (November 1990): 1-18. Print.
- . *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997. Print.
- Butler, Judith, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek. *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. New York, NY: Verso, 2000. Print.
- Callahan, Vicki. Ed. *Reclaiming the Archive: Feminism and Film History*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2010. Print.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996. Print.
- Charney, Leo and Vanessa R. Schwartz, ed. *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995. Print.

*The Cheeky Book Agent*. American Mutoscope and Biograph Co., 1900. Film.

Clover, Carol J. *Men, Women, and Chain Saws Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992. Print.

*Cobra*. Dir. Joseph Henaberry. Perf. Rudolph Valentino. Paramount Pictures, 1925. Film.

Cohen, Tom. *Ideology and Inscription: "Cultural Studies" after Benjamin, de Man, and Bakhtin*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Print.

Copjec, Joan. "The Ortho-psychic Subject." *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994. Print.

Cowie, Elizabeth. "Fantasia." *The Woman in Question: M/F*. Ed. Parveen Adams and Elizabeth Cowie. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990. Print.

Crary, Jonathan. "Modernizing Vision." *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*. Ed. Linda Williams. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995. Print.

---. *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990. Print.

Davidson, Arnold I. *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001. Print.

Dayan, Daniel. "The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema." *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Ed. Gerald Mast et al. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992. Print.

De Cordova, Richard. "The Emergence of the Star System in America." *Stardom: Industry of Desire*. Ed. Christine Gledhill. New York, NY: Routledge, 1991. Print.

De Lauretis, Theresa. "The Stubborn Drive." *Critical Inquiry*. 24.4 (Summer 1998): 851-877. Print.

Delluc, Louis. "Beauty in the Cinema." *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology 1907-1930, Volume I: 1907-1929*. Ed. Richard Abel. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988. 159-164. Print.

DeMille, Cecil, B. "The Screen as a Religious Teacher." *Cinema Web*. N.p. n.d. Web. May 2006. Print.

Derrida, Jacques. "Fors: The English Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok." By Abraham, Nicolas and Maria Torok. *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*. Trans. Nicholas Rand. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986. Print.

---. Preface. *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*. By Catherine Malabou. Trans. Lisabeth During. New York, NY: Routledge, 2005. Print.

*Diary of a Lost Girl*. Dir. G.W. Pabst. Perf. Louise Brooks and Fritz Rasp. G.W. Pabst, 1929. Film.

Doane, Mary Ann. "Aesthetics and Politics." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 30.1 (2004): 1230-1235. Print.

---. *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1991. Print.

---. "Pandora's Box: DVD Commentary." *Pandora's Box*. Dir. G.W. Pabst. Criterion Collection, 2006. DVD.

Elsaesser, Thomas. "Discipline Through Diegesis: The Rube Film between "Attractions" and "Narrative Integration"." *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*. Ed. Wanda Strauven. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006. Print.

---. Ed. *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*. London: British Film Institute, 1990. Print.

---. "Lulu and the Meter Man: Louise Brooks, Pabst and 'Pandora's Box.'" *Screen*. 24.4-5 (1983): 4-36. Print.

---. "Tales of Sound and Fury." *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*. Ed. Christine Gledhill. London: British Film Institute, 1987. Print.

Epstein, Jean. "On Certain Characteristics of Photogenie." *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/ Anthology 1907-1930, Volume I: 1907-1929*. Ed. Richard Abel. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988. 159-164. Print.

Ferenczi, Sándor. "Confusion of Tongues Between Adults and the Child (The Language of Tenderness and of Passion)." *Selected Writings*. Ed. Julia Borossa. New York, NY: Penguin, 1999. Print.

Fischer, Lucy, ed. *American Cinema of the 1920s: Themes and Variations*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009. Print. Screen Decades.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Vol. 1. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1990. Print.

---. "Power Affects the Body." *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1961-1984)*. Ed. Sylvère Lotringer. New York, NY: Semiotext(e), 1996. Print.

---. "Schizo-Culture: Infantile Sexuality." *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1961-1984)*. Ed. Sylvère Lotringer. New York, NY: Semiotext(e), 1996. Print.

*The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. Dir. Rex Ingram. Perf. Pomeroy Cannon, Josef Swickard, Bridgetta Clark, Rudolph Valentino, Alice Terry, and Wallace Beery. Metro Pictures Corporation, 1921. Film.

Franklin, Wallace. "Purgatory's White Angel." *Photoplay*. Sept. 1915. Print

Freud, Sigmund. "Child is Being Beaten". *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 17 Ed. James Strachey. London: Vintage, 2001. Print.

---. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 3 Ed. James Strachey. London: Vintage, 2001. Print.

Fried, Michael. *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1988. Print.

Gaudreault, André. *From Plato to Lumière: Narration and Monstration in Literature and Cinema*. Trans. Timothy Barnard. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2009. Print.

---. "From 'Primitive Cinema' to 'Kine-Attractography'". *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*. Ed. Wanda Strauven. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006. Print.

Gaudreault, André and Tom Gunning. "Early Cinema as a Challenge to Film History." *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*. Ed. Wanda Strauven. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006. Print.

*Girl Who Went Astray*. American Mutoscope and Biograph Co., 1900. Film.

Gledhill, Christine. "Signs of Melodrama." *Stardom: Industry of Desire*. Ed. Christine Gledhill. New York, NY: Routledge, 1991. Print.



- Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Print.
- Grievesson, Lee. *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early Twentieth-Century America*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004. Print.
- Grievesson, Lee and Haidee Wasson. Ed. *Inventing Film Studies*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008. Print.
- Guattari, Felix. *Soft Subversions*. Ed. Sylvère Lotringer. New York, NY: Semiotext(e), 1996. Print.
- Gunning, Tom. "1902-1903: Movies, Stories, Attractions." *American Cinema, 1890-1909: Themes and Variations*. Ed. André Gaudreault. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009. Print.
- . "An Aesthetics of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator." *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*. Ed. Linda Williams. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995. Print.
- . "Attractions: How They Came into the World." *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*. Ed. Wanda Strauven. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006. Print.
- . "The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde." *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*. Ed. Wanda Strauven. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006. Print.
- . *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994. Print.
- . "From the Kaleidoscope to the X-ray: Urban Spectatorship, Poe, Benjamin and Traffic in Souls (1913)." *Wide Angle*. 19.4 (October 1997): 25-61. Print.
- . "From the Opium Den to the Theatre of Morality: Moral Discourse and the Film Process in Early American Cinema." *The Silent Cinema Reader*. Ed. Lee Grievesson and Peter Krämer. New York, NY: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- . "'Now You See It, Now You Don't': The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions." *The Silent Cinema Reader*. Ed. Lee Grievesson and Peter Krämer. New York, NY: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- . "What I Saw From The Rear Window of the Hôtel Des Folies-Dramatiques, Or the Story Point of View Films Told." *Ce que je vois de mon ciné: la représentation du regard dans le cinéma des premiers temps*. Ed. André Gaudreault. Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1988. Print.

- . "The Whole Town's Gawking: Early Cinema and the Visual Experience of Modernity." *The Yale Journal of Criticism*. 7.2 (1994):189-201. Print.
- Hamann, Johann Georg. *Writings on Philosophy and Language*. Trans. Kenneth Haynes. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Print.
- Hansen, Miriam. *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991. Print.
- . "Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street." *Critical Inquiry*. 25 (Winter 1999): 306-343. Print.
- . "Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: 'The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology.'" *New German Critique*. 40 (Winter 1987): 179-224. Print.
- . "Benjamin's Aura." *Critical Inquiry*. 34 (Winter 2008): 336-343. Print.
- . "Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Transformations of the Public Sphere." *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*. Ed. Linda Williams. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995. Print.
- . "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism." *Modernism/Modernity*. 6.2 (1999): 59-77. Print.
- . "Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship." *Cinema Journal*. 25.4 (Summer 1986): 6-32. Print.
- . "Room-for-Play: Benjamin's Gamble with Cinema." *October*. 109 (Summer 2004): 3-45. Print.
- Heath, Stephen. "Narrative Space." *Screen*. 17.3 (1976): 68-112. Print.
- Higashi, Sumiko. "Melodrama as a Middle Class Sermon: *What's His Name*." *L'Eredità DeMille*. Ed. Paolo Cherchi Usai. Pordenone: Edizione Biblioteca dell'immagine, 1991. Print.
- . "The New Woman and Consumer Culture: Cecil B. DeMille's Sex Comedies." *The Silent Cinema Reader*. Ed. Lee Grieveson and Peter Krämer. New York, NY: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- . *Virgins, Vamps and Flappers: The Silent Movie Heroine*. Montreal, QC: Eden's Press Women's Publications, 1978. Print.
- Horak, Laura. "Would You Like to Sin with Elinor Glyn: Film as a Vehicle of Sensual Education." *Camera Obscura* 25.2.74 (2010): 75-117. Print.

*In Suicide Hall*. American Mutoscope and Biograph Co., 1900. Film.

*It*. Dir. Clarence G. Badger. Perf. Clara Bow, Antonio Moreno, and William Austin. Paramount Pictures, 1927. Film.

Jacobs, Lea. "The Seduction Plot: Comic and Dramatic Variants." *Film History*. 13 (2001): 424-442. Print.

Kant, Immanuel. *The Critique of Judgement*. Trans. J.H. Bernard. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000. Print.

Keil, Charlie. *Early American Cinema in Transition: Story, Style and Filmmaking, 1907-1913*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001. Print.

---. "Integrated Attractions: Style and Spectatorship in Transitional Cinema." *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*. Ed. Wanda Strauven. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006. Print.

Keil, Charlie and Ben Singer, ed. *American Cinema of the 1910s: Themes and Variations*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009. Print. Screen Decades.

Kittler, Friedrich, A. *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*. Trans. Michael Metteer and Chris Cullens. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990. Print.

---. *Grammophone, Film, Typewriter*. Trans. Geoffrey Winthrop Young and Michael Wutz. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999. Print.

*The Kiss*. Dir. William Heise. Perf. May Irwin and John Rice. The Edison Company, 1896. Film.

Koszarski, Richard. *An Evening's Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915-1928*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990. Print. History of the American Cinema 3.

Kuhn, Annette. *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality, 1909-1925*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1988. Print.

Lacan, Jacques. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Ed. Jacques-Allan Miller. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981. Print. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI.

---. *Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953-1954*. Ed. Jacques-Allain Miller. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991. Print. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book I.

- . *Ecrits: Complete Edition*. Tr. Bruce Fink. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006. Print.
- Laclau, Ernesto. *Emancipation(s)*. New York, NY: Verso, 2007. Print.
- . *On Populist Reason*. New York, NY: Verso, 2007. Print.
- Langdale, Allan, ed. *Hugo Münsterberg On Film: The Photoplay: A Psychological Study and Other Writings*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2002. Print.
- Laplanche, Jean. "Closing and Opening of the Dream." *The Dreams of Interpretation: A Century Down the Royal Road*. Ed. Catherine Liu. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2007. Print.
- . *Essays On Otherness*. Ed. John Fletcher. New York, NY: Routledge, 1999. Print.
- . *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*. Tr. Jeffrey Mehlman. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990. Print.
- . *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*. Trans. David Macey. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1989. Print.
- . *Seduction, Translation and the Drives*. Ed. John Fletcher and Martin Stanton. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1992. Print.
- . *The Unconscious and the Id*. Tr. Luke Thurston and Lindsay Watson. London, UK: Rebus Press, 1999. Print.
- Laplanche, Jean and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis. "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality." *Formations of Fantasy*. Ed. Victor Burgin et al. New York, NY: Methuen, 1986. Print.
- Lebeau, Vicky. *Childhood and the Cinema*. London, UK: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2008. Print.
- . *Lost Angels: Psychoanalysis and Cinema*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1995. Print.
- Leclaire, Serge. *A Child Is Being Killed: On Primary Narcissism and the Death Drive*. Eds. Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press: 1998. Print.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Existence & Existents*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2001. Print.

- . *Time and the Other*. Trans. Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1987. Print.
- Leclaire, Serge. *Psychoanalyzing: On the Order of the Unconscious and the Practice of the Letter*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998. Print.
- Lindsay, Vachel. *The Art of the Moving Picture*. Ed. Stanley Kauffmann. New York, NY: Modern Library, 2000. Print.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Lyotard Reader*. Ed. Andrew Benjamin. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1998. Print.
- McGowan, Todd. *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007. Print.
- Malabou, Catherine. *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*. Trans. Lisabeth During. New York, NY: Routledge, 2005. Print.
- Maltby, Richard. "The Social Evil, The Moral Order and The Melodramatic Imagination, 1890-1915." *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*. Ed. Jackie et al. London: British Film Institute, 1994. Print.
- Male and Female*. Dir. Cecil B. DeMille. Perf. Thomas Meighan, Theodore Roberts and Raymond Hatton. Famous Players-Lasky, 1919. Film.
- Manslaughter*. Dir. Cecil B. DeMille. Perf. Leatrice Joy, Thomas Meighan. Paramount, 1922. Film.
- Masson, Jeffrey Mousieff. *The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1985. Print.
- . ed and trans. *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887-1904*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995. Print.
- Mayne, Judith. "Paradoxes of Spectatorship." *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*. Ed. Linda Williams. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995. Print.
- Metz, Christian. *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*. Trans. Michael Taylor. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1991. Print.
- . *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982. Print.
- Mitchell, W.J.T. *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Print.

Morin, Edgar. *The Stars*. Trans. Richard Howard. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005. Print.

"Motion Picture Hypnosis." *New York Times* 14 August 1910. Print.

Mulvey, Laura. "Thoughts on the Young Modern Woman of the 1920s and Feminist Film Theory." *Visual and Other Pleasures*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print.

---. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Ed. Gerald Mast et al. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992. Print.

Münsterberg, Hugo. *Hugo Münsterberg on Film- The Photoplay: A Psychological Study and Other Writings*. Ed. Allan Langdale. New York, NY: Routledge, 2002. Print.

---. "Muensterberg Vigourously Denounces Red Light Drama." *New York Times* 13 September, 1913. Print.

Musser, Charles. *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990. Print. History of the American Cinema 1.

---. "The May Irwin Kiss: Performance and the Beginnings of Cinema." *Visual Delights II*. Ed. Vanessa Toulmin and Simon Popple. Eastleigh, UK: John Libbey, 2005. Print.

---. "Rethinking Early Cinema: Cinema of Attractions and Narrativity." *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*. Ed. Wanda Strauven. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006. Print.

*The New Soubrette*. American Mutoscope and Biograph Co., 1900. Film.

Nichols, Bill. *Introduction to Documentary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010. Print.

*One Way of Taking a Girl's Picture*. American Mutoscope and Biograph, 1904. Film.

Oudart, Jean-Pierre. "Cinema and Suture." *Screen*. 18.4 (1977): 35-47. Print.

*Pandora's Box*. Dir. G.W. Pabst. Perf. Louise Brooks. Nero-Film, 1929. Film.

Pearson, Roberta E. *Eloquent Gestures: The Transformation of Performance Style in the Griffith Biograph Films*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992. Print.

Peirce, Charles, S. *The Philosophy of Peirce: Selected Writings*. Ed. Justus Buchler. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace, 1956. Print.

Petro, Patrice. *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989. Print.

*The Picture the Photographer Took*. American Mutoscope and Biograph, 1904. Film.

*Prix de Beauté*. Dir. Augusto Genina. Perf. Louise Brooks, Georges Charlia, and Augusto Bandini. SOFAR Films, 1930. Film.

Rajan, Tilottama. *Deconstruction & the Reminders of Phenomenology: Sartre, Derrida, Foucault, Baudrillard*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002. Print.

Rank, Otto. *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*. Trans. Harry Tucker Jr. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1971. Print.

Rodowick, David Norman. *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994. Print.

---. *The Difficulty of Difference: Psychoanalysis, Sexual Difference and Film Theory*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1991. Print.

Santner, Eric L. *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2001. Print.

Sconce, Jeffrey. "Trashing' the academy: taste, excess, and an emerging politics of cinematic style." *Screen* 36. 4 (1995): 393. Print.

Sennett, Richard. *The Fall of Public Man*. Cambridge, UK: University Press, 1977. Print.

*She Ran Away with the City Man*. American Mutoscope and Biograph Co., 1900. Film.

*The Sheik*. Dir. George Melford. Perf. Rudolph Valentino, Agnes Ayres, Adolphe Menjou, and Walter Long. Paramount Pictures, 1921. Film.

Silverman, Kaja. *The Subject of Semiotics*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1983. Print.

Simmon, "1910: Movies, Reform and New Women." *American Cinema of the 1910s: Themes and Variations*. ed. Charlie Keil and Ben Singer. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009. Print. Screen Decades. 26-47.

Singer, Ben. "The Antimodernity of Early Cinema: Problems and Paradoxes in the Film-and-Modernity Discourse". *Film 1900: Technology, Perception, Culture*. Ed. Annemone Ligensa and Klaus Kreimeier. Herts, U.K.: John Libbey Publishing, 2009. Print.

---. "Film, Photography and Fetish: The Analyses of Christian Metz." *Cinema Journal*. 27.4 (Summer 1988): 4-22. Print.

---. *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2001. Print.

*The Son of the Sheik*. Dir. George Fitzmaurice. Perf. Rudolph Valentino, Vilma Banky. Feature Productions, 1926. Film.

Staiger, Janet. *Bad Women: Regulating Sexuality in Early American Cinema*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995. Print.

---. "Les Belles Dames Sans Merci, Femmes Fatales, Vampires, Vamps, and Gold Diggers: The Transformation and Narrative Value of Aggressive Fallen Women." *Reclaiming the Archive: Feminism and Film History*. Ed. Vicki Callahan. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2010. Print.

Stamp, Shelley. *Movie Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000. Print.

Studlar, Gaylyn. "'The Perfect Lover': Valentino and Ethnic Masculinity in the 1920s." *The Silent Cinema Reader*. Ed. Lee Grieveson and Peter Krämer. New York, NY: Routledge, 2004. Print.

---. *This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age*. New York, NY: Columbia Press, 1996. Print.

*The Ten Commandments*. Dir. Cecil B. DeMille. Perf. Richard Dix, Rod La Rocque, Leatrice Joy. Famous Players-Lasky, 1923. Film.

*The Ten Commandments*. Dir. Cecil B. DeMille. Perf. Charlton Heston, Yul Brynner, and Anne Baxter. Paramount, 1956. Film.



- Thompson, Kristin. "The International Exploration of Cinematic Expressivity." *The Silent Cinema Reader*, Ed. Lee Grieveson and Peter Krämer. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- Traffic in Souls*. Dir. George Loane Tucker. Perf. Jane Gail, Ethel Grandin, and Matt Moore. Universal Pictures, 1913. Film.
- Usai, Paolo Cherchi, ed. *The Griffith Project*. Vol. 5. London, UK: British Film Institute Publishing, 2001. Print.
- The Whispering Chorus*. Dir. Cecil B. DeMille. Perf. Raymond Hatton. Jesse Lasky, 1918. Film.
- Williams, Linda. "Discipline and Fun: Psycho and Postmodern Cinema." *Reinventing Film Studies*. Ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.
- . "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess." *Film Quarterly*. 44.4 (Summer): 2-13. Print.
- . "Film Body: An Implantation of Perversions." *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*. Ed. Philip Rosen. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1986. Print.
- . *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the "Frenzy of the Visible"*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989. Print.
- . "Introduction." *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*. Ed. Linda Williams. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997. Print.
- . "Melodrama Revised." *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, ed. Nick Browne. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. Print.
- . "Of Kisses and Ellipses: The Long Adolescence of American Movies." *Critical Inquiry*. 32 (Winter 2006): 288-340. Print.
- . *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White From Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001. Print.
- . *Screening Sex*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008. Print.
- . "'Something Else Besides a Mother': *Stella Dallas* and the Maternal Melodrama." *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Women's Film*. Ed. Christine Gledhill. London: British Film Institute, 1987. Print.

---. "When the Woman Looks." *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Ed. Gerald Mast et al. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992. Print.

---. "Workshop on 'Affect as Rhetorical Strategy.'" SCMS Annual Conference. The Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans. 10 Mar. 2011. Lecture.

Vardac, A., Nicholas. *Stage to Screen: Theatrical Origins of Early Film, David Garrick to D.W. Griffith*. New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1987. Print.

*The Whispering Chorus*. Dir. Cecil B. DeMille. Perf. Raymond Hatton. Jesse Lasky, 1918. Film.

*The Young Rajah*. Dir. Phil Rosen. Perf. Rudolph Valentino. Paramount Pictures, 1922. Film.

Žižek, Slavoj. *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992. Print.

---, perf. *The Pervert's Guide to the Cinema*. Vol. 1-3. Dir. Sophie Fiennes. Lone Star, 2006. DVD.