I. Heads in Hieroglyphic Bonnets

IN HIS LECTURE on 'Femininity', Freud forcefully inscribes the absence of the female spectator of theory in his notorious statement, '...to those of you who are women this will not apply—you are yourselves the problem...'. Simultaneous with this exclusion operated upon the female members of his audience, he invokes, as a rather strange prop, a poem by Heine. Introduced by Freud’s claim concerning the importance and elusiveness of his topic—‘Throughout history people have knocked their heads against the riddle of the nature of femininity...’—are four lines of Heine’s poem:

Heads in hieroglyphic bonnets,
Heads in turbans and black birettas,
Heads in wigs and thousand other
Wretched, sweating heads of humans...

The effects of the appeal to this poem are subject to the work of overdetermination Freud isolated in the text of the dream. The sheer proliferation of heads and hats (and hence, through a metonymic slippage, minds), which are presumed to have confronted this intimidating riddle before Freud, confers on his discourse the weight of an intellectual history, of a tradition of interrogation. Furthermore, the image of hieroglyphics strengthens the association made between femininity and the enigmatic, the undecipherable, that which is ‘other’. And yet Freud practices a slight deception here, concealing what is elided by removing the lines from their context, castrating, as it were, the stanza. For the question over which Heine’s heads brood is not the same as Freud’s—it is not ‘What is Woman?’, but instead, ‘...what signifies Man?’ The
The question in Freud's text is thus a disguise and a displacement of that other question, which in the pre-text is both humanistic and theological. The claim to investigate an otherness is a pretense, haunted by the mirror-effect by means of which the question of the woman reflects only the man's own ontological doubts. Yet what interests me most in this intertextual mis-representation is that the riddle of femininity is initiated from the beginning in Freud's text as a question in masquerade. But I will return to the issue of masquerade later.

More pertinently, as far as the cinema is concerned, it is not accidental that Freud's eviction of the female spectator/auditor is co-present with the invocation of a hieroglyphic language. The woman, the enigma, the hieroglyphic, the picture, the image—the metonymic chain connects with another: the cinema, the theatre of pictures, a writing in images of the woman but not for her. For she is the problem. The semantic valence attributed to a hieroglyphic language is two-edged. In fact, there is a sense in which the term is inhabited by a contradiction. On the one hand, the hieroglyphic is summoned, particularly when it merges with a discourse on the woman, to connote an indecipherable language, a signifying system which denies its own function by failing to signify anything to the uninitiated, to those who do not hold the key. In this sense, the hieroglyphic, like the woman, harbours a mystery, an inaccessible though desirable otherness. On the other hand, the hieroglyphic is the most readable of languages. Its immediacy, its accessibility are functions of its status as a pictorial language, a writing in images. For the image is theorised in terms of a certain closeness, the lack of a distance or gap between sign and referent. Given its iconic characteristics, the relationship between signifier and signified is understood as less arbitrary in imagistic systems of representation than in language 'proper'. The intimacy of signifier and signified in the iconic sign negates the distance which defines phonetic language. And it is the absence of this crucial distance or gap which also, simultaneously, specifies both the hieroglyphic and the female. This is precisely why Freud evicted the woman from his lecture on femininity. Too close to herself, entangled in her
In other words, the woman can never ask her own ontological question. The absurdity of such a situation within traditional discursive conventions can be demonstrated by substituting a 'young woman' for the 'young man' of Heine's poem.

As Oswald Ducrot and Tzvetan Todorov point out in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Sciences of Language*, trans. Catherine Porter, Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979, p 195, the potentially universal understandability of the hieroglyphic is highly theoretical and can only be thought as the unattainable ideal of an imagistic system: 'It is important of course not to exaggerate either the resemblance of the image with the object—the design is stylized very rapidly—or the “natural” and “universal” character of the signs: Sumerian, Chinese, Egyptian and Hittite hieroglyphics for the same object have nothing in common.'

Thus, while the hieroglyphic is an indecipherable or at least enigmatic language, it is also and at the same time potentially the most universally understandable, comprehensible, approachable of signs. And the woman shares this contradictory status. But it is here that the analogy slips. For hieroglyphic languages are not perfectly iconic. They would not achieve the status of languages if they were — due to what Todorov and Ducrot refer to as a certain non-generalisability of the iconic sign:

Now it is the impossibility of generalizing this principle of representation that has introduced even into fundamentally morphemographic writing systems such as Chinese, Egyptian, and Sumerian, the phonographic principle. We might almost conclude that every logography [the graphic system of language notation] grows out of the impossibility of a generalized iconic representation; proper nouns and abstract notions (including inflections) are then the ones that will be noted phonetically.

The iconic system of representation is inherently deficient—it cannot disengage itself from the 'real', from the concrete; it lacks the gap necessary for generalisability (for Saussure, this is the idea that, 'Signs which are arbitrary realise better than others the ideal of the semiotic process'). The woman, too, is defined by such an insufficiency. My insistence upon the congruence between certain theories of the image and theories of femininity is an attempt to dissect the episteme which assigns to the woman a special place in cinematic representation while denying her access to that system.

The cinematic apparatus inherits a theory of the image which is not conceived outside of sexual specifications. And historically, there has always been a certain imbrication of the cinematic image and the representation of the woman. The woman’s relation to the camera and the scopic regime is quite different from that of the male. As Noël Burch points out, the early silent cinema, through its insistent inscription of scenarios of voyeurism, conceives of its spectator's viewing pleasure in terms of that of the Peeping Tom, behind the screen, reduplicating the spectator’s position in relation to the woman as screen. Spectatorial desire, in contemporary film theory, is generally delineated as either voyeurism or fetishism, as precisely a pleasure in seeing what is prohibited in relation to the female body. The image orchestrates a gaze, a limit, and its pleasurable transgression. The woman’s beauty, her very desirability, becomes a function of certain practices of imaging—framing, lighting, camera movement, angle. She is thus, as Laura Mulvey has pointed out, more closely associated with the surface of the image than its illusory depths, its constructed 3-dimensional space which the man is destined to inhabit and hence control. In *Now Voyager*, for instance, a single image signals the momentous transformation of the Bette Davis character from ugly spinster aunt to glamorous single woman. Charles
Affron describes the specifically cinematic aspect of this operation as a ‘stroke of genius’:

The radical shadow bisecting the face in white/dark/white strata creates a visual phenomenon quite distinct from the makeup transformation of lipstick and plucked eyebrows. . . . This shot does not reveal what we commonly call acting, especially after the most recent exhibition of that activity, but the sense of face belongs to a plastique pertinent to the camera. The viewer is allowed a different perceptual referent, a chance to come down from the nerve-jarring, first sequence and to use his eyes anew.\(^9\)

A ‘plastique pertinent to the camera’ constitutes the woman not only as the image of desire but as the desirous image—one which the devoted cinéphile can cherish and embrace. To ‘have’ the cinema is, in some sense, to ‘have’ the woman. But *Now Voyager* is, in Affron’s terms, a ‘tear-jerker’, in others, a ‘woman’s picture’, i.e. a film purportedly produced for a female audience. What, then, of the female spectator? What can one say about her desire in relation to this process of imaging? It would seem that what the cinematic institution has in common with Freud’s gesture is the eviction of the female spectator from a discourse purportedly about her (the cinema, psychoanalysis)—one which, in fact, narrativises her again and again.

II. A Lass But Not a Lack

Theories of female spectatorship are thus rare, and when they are produced, seem inevitably to confront certain blockages in conceptualisation. The difficulties in thinking female spectatorship demand consideration. After all, even if it is admitted that the woman is frequently the object of the voyeuristic or fetishistic gaze in the cinema, what is there to prevent her from reversing the relation and appropriating the gaze for her own pleasure? Precisely the fact that the reversal itself remains locked within the same logic. The male striptease, the gigolo—both inevitably signify the mechanism of reversal itself, constituting themselves as aberrations whose acknowledgment simply reinforces the dominant system of aligning sexual difference with a subject/object dichotomy. And an essential attribute of that dominant system is the matching of male subjectivity with the agency of the look.

The supportive binary opposition at work here is not only that utilised by Laura Mulvey—an opposition between passivity and activity, but perhaps more importantly, an opposition between proximity and distance in relation to the image.\(^10\) It is in this sense that the very logic behind the structure of the gaze demands a sexual division. While the distance between image and signified (or even referent) is theorised as minimal, if not non-existent, that between the film and the spectator must be maintained, even measured. One need only think of Noël Burch’s mapping of spectatorship as a perfect distance from the screen.
But the most explicit representation of this opposition between proximity and distance is contained in Christian Metz’s analysis of voyeuristic desire in terms of a kind of social hierarchy of the senses: ‘It is no accident that the main socially acceptable arts are based on the senses at a distance, and that those which depend on the senses of contact are often regarded as “minor” arts (= culinary arts, art of perfumes, etc.).’ The voyeur, according to Metz, must maintain a distance between himself and the image—the cinéphile needs the gap which represents for him the very distance between desire and its object. In this sense, voyeurism is theorised as a type of meta-desire:

If it is true of all desire that it depends on the infinite pursuit of its absent object, voyeuristic desire, along with certain forms of sadism, is the only desire whose principle of distance symbolically and spatially evokes this fundamental rent.\(^\text{13}\)

Yet even this status as meta-desire does not fully characterise the cinema for it is a feature shared by other arts as well (painting, theatre, opera, etc.). Metz thus adds another reinscription of this necessary distance. What specifies the cinema is a further re-duplication of the lack which prompts desire. The cinema is characterised by an illusory sensory plenitude (there is ‘so much to see’) and yet haunted by the absence of those very objects which are there to be seen. Absence is an absolute and irrecoverable distance. In other words, Noël Burch is quite right in aligning spectatorial desire with a certain spatial configuration. The viewer must not sit either too close or too far from the screen. The result of both would be the same—he would lose the image of his desire.

It is precisely this opposition between proximity and distance, control of the image and its loss, which locates the possibilities of spectatorship within the problematic of sexual difference. For the female spectator there is a certain over-presence of the image—she is the image. Given the closeness of this relationship, the female spectator’s desire can be described only in terms of a kind of narcissism—the female look demands a becoming. It thus appears to negate the very distance or gap specified by Metz and Burch as the essential precondition for voyeurism. From this perspective, it is important to note the constant recurrence of the motif of proximity in feminist theories (especially those labelled ‘new French feminisms’) which purport to describe a feminine specificity. For Luce Irigaray, female anatomy is readable as a constant relation of the self to itself, as an autoeroticism based on the embrace of the two lips which allow the woman to touch herself without mediation. Furthermore, the very notion of property, and hence possession of something which can be constituted as other, is antithetical to the woman: ‘Nearness however, is not foreign to woman, a nearness so close that any identification of one or the other, and therefore any form of property, is impossible. Woman enjoys a closeness with the other that is so near she cannot
possess it any more than she can possess herself.' 14

Or, in the case of female madness or delirium, ‘...women do not manage to articulate their madness: they suffer it directly in their body...' 15 The distance necessary to detach the signifiers of madness from the body in the construction of even a discourse which exceeds the boundaries of sense is lacking. In the words of Hélène Cixous, ‘More so than men who are coaxed toward social success, toward sublimation, women are body.’ 16

This theme of the overwhelming presence-to-itself of the female body is elaborated by Sarah Kofman and Michèle Montrelay as well. Kofman describes how Freudian psychoanalysis outlines a scenario whereby the subject’s passage from the mother to the father is simultaneous with a passage from the senses to reason, nostalgia for the mother henceforth signifying a longing for a different positioning in relation to the sensory or the somatic, and the degree of civilization measured by the very distance from the body. 17 Similarly, Montrelay argues that while the male has the possibility of displacing the first object of desire (the mother), the female must become that object of desire:

Recovering herself as maternal body (and also as phallus), the woman can no longer repress, ‘lose,’ the first stake of representation.... From now on, anxiety, tied to the presence of this body, can only be insistent, continuous. This body, so close, which she has to occupy, is an object in excess which must be ‘lost,’ that is to say, repressed, in order to be symbolised. 18

This body so close, so excessive, prevents the woman from assuming a position similar to the man’s in relation to signifying systems. For she is haunted by the loss of a loss, the lack of that lack so essential for the realisation of the ideals of semiotic systems.

Female specificity is thus theorised in terms of spatial proximity. In opposition to this ‘closeness’ to the body, a spatial distance in the male’s relation to his body rapidly becomes a temporal distance in the service of knowledge. This is presented quite explicitly in Freud’s analysis of the construction of the ‘subject supposed to know’. The knowledge involved here is a knowledge of sexual difference as it is organised in relation to the structure of the look, turning on the visibility of the penis. For the little girl in Freud’s description seeing and knowing are simultaneous—there is no temporal gap between them. In ‘Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes’, Freud claims that the girl, upon seeing the penis for the first time, ‘makes her judgement and her decision in a flash. She has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it.’ 19 In the lecture on ‘Femininity’ Freud repeats this gesture, merging perception and intellection: ‘They [girls] at once notice the difference and, it must be admitted, its significance too.’ 20

The little boy, on the other hand, does not share this immediacy of understanding. When he first sees the woman’s genitals he ‘begins by showing irresolution and lack of interest; he sees nothing or disowns what he has seen, he softens it down or looks about for expedients for

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20 Freud, ‘Femininity’, op cit, p 123.
bringing it into line with his expectations. A second event, the threat of castration, is necessary to prompt a rereading of the image, endowing it with a meaning in relation to the boy’s own subjectivity. It is in the distance between the look and the threat that the boy’s relation to knowledge of sexual difference is formulated. The boy, unlike the girl in Freud’s description, is capable of a re-vision of earlier events, a retrospective understanding which invests the events with a significance which is in no way linked to an immediacy of sight. This gap between the visible and the knowable, the very possibility of disowning what is seen, prepares the ground for fetishism. In a sense, the male spectator is destined to be a fetishist, balancing knowledge and belief.

The female, on the other hand, must find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to assume the position of fetishist. That body which is so close continually reminds her of the castration which cannot be ‘fetishised away’. The lack of a distance between seeing and understanding, the mode of judging ‘in a flash’, is conducive to what might be termed as ‘over-identification’ with the image. The association of tears and ‘wet wasted afternoons’ (in Molly Haskell’s words) with genres specified as feminine (the soap opera, the ‘woman’s picture’) points very precisely to this type of over-identification, this abolition of a distance, in short, this inability to fetishise. The woman is constructed differently in relation to processes of looking. For Irigaray, this dichotomy between distance and proximity is described as the fact that:

The masculine can partly look at itself, speculate about itself, represent itself and describe itself for what it is, whilst the feminine can try to speak to itself through a new language, but cannot describe itself from outside or in formal terms, except by identifying itself with the masculine, thus by losing itself.

Irigaray goes even further: the woman always has a problematic relation to the visible, to form, to structures of seeing. She is much more comfortable with, closer to, the sense of touch.

The pervasiveness, in theories of the feminine, of descriptions of such a claustrophobic closeness, a deficiency in relation to structures of seeing and the visible, must clearly have consequences for attempts to theorise female spectatorship. And, in fact, the result is a tendency to view the female spectator as the site of an oscillation between a feminine position and a masculine position, invoking the metaphor of the transvestite. Given the structures of cinematic narrative, the woman who identifies with a female character must adopt a passive or masochistic position, while identification with the active hero necessarily entails an acceptance of what Laura Mulvey refers to as a certain ‘masculinisation’ of spectatorship.

... as desire is given cultural materiality in a text, for women (from childhood onwards) trans-sex identification is a habit that very easily becomes second Nature. However, this Nature does not sit easily and shifts restlessly in its borrowed transvestite clothes.
The transvestite wears clothes which signify a different sexuality, a sexuality which, for the woman, allows a mastery over the image and the very possibility of attaching the gaze to desire. Clothes make the man, as they say. Perhaps this explains the ease with which women can slip into male clothing. As both Freud and Cixous point out, the woman seems to be more bisexual than the man. A scene from Cukor’s Adam’s Rib graphically demonstrates this ease of female transvestism. As Katherine Hepburn asks the jury to imagine the sex role reversal of the three major characters involved in the case, there are three dissolves linking each of the characters successively to shots in which they are dressed in the clothes of the opposite sex. What characterises the sequence is the marked facility of the transformation of the two women into men in contradistinction to a certain resistance in the case of the man. The acceptability of the female reversal is quite distinctly opposed to the male reversal which seems capable of representation only in terms of farce. Male transvestism is an occasion for laughter; female transvestism only another occasion for desire.

Thus, while the male is locked into sexual identity, the female can at least pretend that she is other—in fact, sexual mobility would seem to be a distinguishing feature of femininity in its cultural construction. Hence, transvestism would be fully recuperable. The idea seems to be this: it is understandable that women would want to be men, for everyone wants to be elsewhere than in the feminine position. What is not understandable within the given terms is why a woman might flaunt her femininity, produce herself as an excess of femininity, in other words, foreground the masquerade. Masquerade is not as recuperable as transvestism precisely because it constitutes an acknowledgement that it is femininity itself which is constructed as mask—as the decorative layer which conceals a non-identity. For Joan Riviere, the first to theorise the concept, the masquerade of femininity is a kind of reaction-formation against the woman’s trans-sex identification, her transvestism. After assuming the position of the subject of discourse rather than its object, the intellectual woman whom Riviere analyses felt compelled to compensate for this theft of masculinity by over-doing the gestures of feminine flirtation.

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

The masquerade, in flaunting femininity, holds it at a distance. Womanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed. The masquerade’s resistance to patriarchal positioning would therefore lie in its denial of the production of femininity as closeness, as presence-to-itself, as, precisely,
imagistic. The transvestite adopts the sexuality of the other—the woman becomes a man in order to attain the necessary distance from the image. Masquerade, on the other hand, involves a realignment of femininity, the recovery, or more accurately, simulation, of the missing gap or distance. To masquerade is to manufacture a lack in the form of a certain distance between oneself and one’s image. If, as Moustafa Safouan points out, ‘...to wish to include in oneself as an object the cause of the desire of the Other is a formula for the structure of hysteria’, then masquerade is anti-hysterical for it works to effect a separation between the cause of desire and oneself. In Montrelay’s words, ‘the woman uses her own body as a disguise.’

The very fact that we can speak of a woman ‘using’ her sex or ‘using’ her body for particular gains is highly significant—it is not that a man cannot use his body in this way but that he doesn’t have to. The masquerade doubles representation; it is constituted by a hyperbolisation of the accoutrements of femininity. A propos of a recent performance by Marlene Dietrich, Sylvia Bovenschen claims, ‘...we are watching a woman demonstrate the representation of a woman’s body.’ This type of masquerade, an excess of femininity, is aligned with the femme fatale and, as Montrelay explains, is necessarily regarded by men as evil incarnate: ‘It is this evil which scandalises whenever woman plays out her sex in order to evade the word and the law. Each time she subverts a law or a word which relies on the predominantly masculine structure of the look.’ By destabilising the image, the masquerade confounds this masculine structure of the look. It effects a defamiliarisation of female iconography. Nevertheless, the preceding account simply specifies masquerade as a type of representation which carries a threat, disarticulating male systems of viewing. Yet, it specifies nothing with respect to female spectatorship. What might it mean to masquerade as spectator? To assume the mask in order to see in a different way?

III. ‘Men Seldom Make Passes at Girls Who Wear Glasses’

The first scene in Now Voyager depicts the Bette Davis character as repressed, unattractive and undesirable or, in her own words, as the spinster aunt of the family. (‘Every family has one.’) She has heavy eyebrows, keeps her hair bound tightly in a bun, and wears glasses, a drab dress and heavy shoes. By the time of the shot discussed earlier, signalling her transformation into beauty, the glasses have disappeared, along with the other signifiers of unattractiveness. Between these two moments there is a scene in which the doctor who cures her actually confiscates her glasses (as a part of the cure). The woman who wears glasses constitutes one of the most intense visual clichés of the cinema. The image is a heavily marked condensation of motifs concerned with repressed sexuality, knowledge, visability and vision, intellectuality, and desire. The woman with glasses signifies simultaneously intellectuality and undesirability; but the moment she removes her glasses (a moment
which, it seems, must almost always be shown and which is itself linked with a certain sensual quality), she is transformed into spectacle, the very picture of desire. Now, it must be remembered that the cliché is a heavily loaded moment of signification, a social knot of meaning. It is characterised by an effect of ease and naturalness. Yet, the cliché has a binding power so strong that it indicates a precise moment of ideological danger or threat—in this case, the woman’s appropriation of the gaze. Glasses worn by a woman in the cinema do not generally signify a deficiency in seeing but an active looking, or even simply the fact of seeing as opposed to being seen. The intellectual woman looks and analyses, and in usurping the gaze she poses a threat to an entire system of representation. It is as if the woman had forcefully moved to the other side of the specular. The overdetermination of the image of the woman with glasses, its status as a cliché, is a crucial aspect of the cinematic alignment of structures of seeing and being seen with sexual difference. The cliché, in assuming an immediacy of understanding, acts as a mechanism for the naturalisation of sexual difference.

But the figure of the woman with glasses is only an extreme moment of a more generalised logic. There is always a certain excessiveness, a difficulty associated with women who appropriate the gaze, who insist upon looking. Linda Williams has demonstrated how, in the genre of the horror film, the woman’s active looking is ultimately punished. And what she sees, the monster, is only a mirror of herself—both woman and monster are freakish in their difference—defined by either ‘too much’ or ‘too little’. Just as the dominant narrative cinema repetitively inscribes scenarios of voyeurism, internalising or narrativising the film-spectator relationship (in films like Psycho, Rear Window, Peeping Tom), taboos in seeing are insistently formulated in relation to the female spectator as well. The man with binoculars is countered by the woman with glasses. The gaze must be dissociated from mastery. In Leave Her to Heaven (John Stahl, 1945), the female protagonist’s (Gene Tierney’s) excessive desire and over-possessiveness are signalled from the very beginning of the film by her intense and sustained stare at the major male character, a stranger she first encounters on a train. The discomfort her look causes is graphically depicted. The Gene Tierney character is ultimately revealed to be the epitome of evil—killing her husband’s crippled younger brother, her unborn child and ultimately herself in an attempt to brand her cousin as a murderess in order to insure her husband’s future fidelity. In Humoresque (Jean Negulesco, 1946), Joan Crawford’s problematic status is a result of her continual attempts to assume the position of spectator—fixing John Garfield with her gaze. Her transformation from spectator to spectacle is signified repetitively by the gesture of removing her glasses. Rosa, the character played by Bette Davis in Beyond the Forest (King Vidor, 1949) walks to the station every day simply to watch the train departing for Chicago. Her fascination with the train is a fascination with its phallic power to transport her to ‘another place’. This character is also specified as having a ‘good eye’—she can shoot, both pool and guns. In all three films the woman is constructed as the site of

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30 Linda Williams, ‘When the Woman Looks . . .’, in Revision: Feminist Essays in Film Analysis, ed Mary Ann Doane, Pat Mellencamp and Linda Williams, forthcoming.
an excessive and dangerous desire. This desire mobilises extreme efforts of containment and unveils the sadistic aspect of narrative. In all three films the woman dies. As Claire Johnston points out, death is the ‘location of all impossible signs’, and the films demonstrate that the woman as subject of the gaze is clearly an impossible sign. There is a perverse rewriting of this logic of the gaze in *Dark Victory* (Edmund Goulding, 1939), where the woman’s story achieves heroic and tragic proportions not only in blindness, but in a blindness which mimes sight—when the woman pretends to be able to see.

**IV. Out of the Cinema and into the Streets: The Censorship of the Female Gaze**

*Un Regard Oblique*: a dirty joke at the expense of the woman’s look.

This process of narrativising the negation of the female gaze in the classical Hollywood cinema finds its perfect encapsulation in a still photograph taken in 1948 by Robert Doisneau, *Un Regard Oblique*. Just as the Hollywood narratives discussed above purport to centre a female protagonist, the photograph appears to give a certain prominence to a woman’s look. Yet, both the title of the photograph and its organisation of space indicate that the real site of scopophilic power is on the margins of the frame. The man is not centred; in fact, he occupies a very narrow space on the extreme right of the picture. Nevertheless, it is his gaze
which defines the problematic of the photograph; it is his gaze which effectively erases that of the woman. Indeed, as subject of the gaze, the woman looks intently. But not only is the object of her look concealed from the spectator, her gaze is encased by the two poles defining the masculine axis of vision. Fascinated by nothing visible—a blankness or void for the spectator—unanchored by a ‘sight’ (there is nothing ‘proper’ to her vision—save, perhaps, the mirror), the female gaze is left free-floating, vulnerable to subjection. The faint reflection in the shop window of only the frame of the picture at which she is looking serves merely to rearticulate, en abyme, the emptiness of her gaze, the absence of her desire in representation.

On the other hand, the object of the male gaze is fully present, there for the spectator. The fetishistic representation of the nude female body, fully in view, insures a masculinisation of the spectatorial position. The woman’s look is literally outside the triangle which traces a complicity between the man, the nude, and the spectator. The feminine presence in the photograph, despite a diegetic centring of the female subject of the gaze, is taken over by the picture as object. And, as if to doubly ‘frame’ her in the act of looking, the painting situates its female figure as a spectator (although it is not clear whether she is looking at herself in a mirror or peering through a door or window). While this drama of seeing is played out at the surface of the photograph, its deep space is activated by several young boys, out-of-focus, in front of a belt shop. The opposition out-of-focus/in-focus reinforces the supposed clarity accorded to the representation of the woman’s ‘non-vision’. Furthermore, since this out-of-focus area constitutes the precise literal centre of the image, it also demonstrates how the photograph makes figurative the operation of centring—draining the actual centre point of significance in order to deposit meaning on the margins. The male gaze is centred, in control—although it is exercised from the periphery.

The spectator’s pleasure is thus produced through the framing/negation of the female gaze. The woman is there as the butt of a joke—a ‘dirty joke’ which, as Freud has demonstrated, is always constructed at the expense of a woman. In order for a dirty joke to emerge in its specificity in Freud’s description, the object of desire—the woman—must be absent and a third person (another man) must be present as witness to the joke—so that gradually, in place of the woman, the onlooker, now the listener, becomes the person to whom the smut is addressed...’. The terms of the photograph’s address as joke once again insure a masculinisation of the place of the spectator. The operation of the dirty joke is also inextricably linked by Freud to scopophilia and the exposure of the female body:

_Smut is like an exposure of the sexually different person to whom it is directed. By the utterance of the obscene words it compels the person who is assailed to imagine the part of the body or the procedure in question and shows her that the assailant is himself imagining it. It cannot be doubted that the desire to see what is sexual exposed is the original motive of smut._

From this perspective, the photograph lays bare the very mechanics of the joke through its depiction of sexual exposure and a surreptitious act of seeing (and desiring). Freud's description of the joke-work appears to constitute a perfect analysis of the photograph's orchestration of the gaze. There is a 'voice-off' of the photographic discourse, however—a component of the image which is beyond the frame of this little scenario of voyeurism. On the far left-hand side of the photograph, behind the wall holding the painting of the nude, is the barely detectable painting of a woman imaged differently, in darkness—out of sight for the male, blocked by his fetish. Yet, to point to this almost invisible alternative in imaging is also only to reveal once again the analyst's own perpetual desire to find a not-seen that might break the hold of representation. Or to laugh last.

There is a sense in which the photograph's delineation of a sexual politics of looking is almost uncanny. But, to counteract the very possibility of such a perception, the language of the art critic effects a naturalisation of this joke on the woman. The art-critical reception of the picture emphasises a natural but at the same time 'imaginative' relation between photography and life, ultimately subordinating any formal relations to a referential ground: 'Doisneau's lines move from right to left, directed by the man's glance; the woman's gaze creates a line of energy like a hole in space... The creation of these relationships from life itself is imagination in photography.'

'Life itself', then, presents the material for an 'artistic' organisation of vision along the lines of sexual difference. Furthermore, the critic would have us believe that chance events and arbitrary clicks of the shutter cannot be the agents of a generalised sexism because they are particular, unique—'Keitesz and Doisneau depend entirely upon our recognition that they were present at the instant of the unique intersection of events.' Realism seems always to reside in the streets and, indeed, the out-of-focus boy across the street, at the centre of the photograph, appears to act as a guarantee of the 'chance' nature of the event, its arbitrariness, in short—its realism. Thus, in the discourse of the art critic the photograph, in capturing a moment, does not construct it; the camera finds a naturally given series of subject and object positions. What the critic does not consider are the conditions of reception of photography as an art form, its situation within a much larger network of representation. What is it that makes the photograph not only readable but pleasurable—at the expense of the woman? The critic does not ask what makes the photograph a negotiable item in a market of signification.

V. The Missing Look

The photograph displays insistently, in microcosm, the structure of the cinematic inscription of a sexual differentiation in modes of looking. Its process of framing the female gaze repeats that of the cinematic narratives described above, from *Leave Her to Heaven* to *Dark Victory*. Films
play out scenarios of looking in order to outline the terms of their own understanding. And given the divergence between masculine and feminine scenarios, those terms would seem to be explicitly negotiated as markers of sexual difference. Both the theory of the image and its apparatus, the cinema, produce a position for the female spectator—a position which is ultimately untenable because it lacks the attribute of distance so necessary for an adequate reading of the image. The entire elaboration of femininity as a closeness, a nearness, as present-to-itself is not the definition of an essence but the delineation of a place culturally assigned to the woman. Above and beyond a simple adoption of the masculine position in relation to the cinematic sign, the female spectator is given two options: the masochism of over-identification or the narcissism entailed in becoming one’s own object of desire, in assuming the image in the most radical way. The effectivity of masquerade lies precisely in its potential to manufacture a distance from the image, to generate a problematic within which the image is manipulable, producible, and readable by the woman. Doisneau’s photograph is not readable by the female spectator—it can give her pleasure only in masochism. In order to ‘get’ the joke, she must once again assume the position of transvestite.

It is quite tempting to foreclose entirely the possibility of female spectatorship, to repeat at the level of theory the gesture of the photograph, given the history of a cinema which relies so heavily on voyeurism, fetishism, and identification with an ego ideal conceivable only in masculine terms. And, in fact, there has been a tendency to theorise femininity and hence the feminine gaze as repressed, and in its repression somehow irretrievable, the enigma constituted by Freud’s question. Yet, as Michel Foucault has demonstrated, the repressive hypothesis on its own entails a very limited and simplistic notion of the working of power. The ‘no’ of the father, the prohibition, is its only technique. In theories of repression there is no sense of the productiveness and positivity of power. Femininity is produced very precisely as a position within a network of power relations. And the growing insistence upon the elaboration of a theory of female spectatorship is indicative of the crucial necessity of understanding that position in order to dislocate it.

This article is an expanded version of a paper presented at a symposium on recent film theory at Yale University, February 1982, organised by Miriam Hansen and Donald Crafton.

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