

Les Flâneurs du Mal(l): Cinema and the Postmodern Condition

Author(s): Anne Friedberg

Source: *PMLA*, Vol. 106, No. 3 (May, 1991), pp. 419-431

Published by: [Modern Language Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/462776>

Accessed: 09/06/2011 19:08

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=mla>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



Modern Language Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *PMLA*.

## *Les Flâneurs du Mal(l)*: Cinema and the Postmodern Condition

ANNE FRIEDBERG, assistant professor of film studies at the University of California, Irvine, has published essays on female literary modernists, psychoanalytic film theory, the cinematic avant-garde, and postmodernism. Most recently, her “Mutual Indifference: Feminism and Postmodernism” appeared in *The Other Perspective: Gender and Difference*, ed. Juliet Flower MacCannell (Columbia UP, 1991). She has expanded the themes and arguments of this essay into a book-length manuscript of the same title.

*Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came up the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go travelling. (my emphases)*

**T**HIS WELL-TRAVELED passage from Walter Benjamin’s now canonical essay on modernity, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” is embedded in a discussion of the close-up. For Benjamin, nineteenth-century architectural space was a prison world before the explosive advent of the cinema reduced it to ruins and debris and offered a calm and adventurous new way of traveling.

The above passage is followed by an even more familiar one, which has become a maxim: “[W]ith the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. The enlargement of a snapshot does not render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals *entirely new formations of the subject*” (236; my emphasis). Benjamin attempts to measure the various cultural effects of photography and the cinema, of mechanical reproduction and the loss of aura—to gauge the impact of an “unconscious optics” (237). In my essay, I extend his “entirely new formations of the subject” to include the postmodern subject.<sup>1</sup> While Benjamin assesses the spatial alteration of proximity made possible by the close-up and examines the transformation of temporality occasioned by slow motion, I consider the exponents of these changes in postmodernity.

To describe the role of the cinema in postmodernity adequately, one must detail the cultural effects of two forms of proliferation: spatial (mass distribution and its flip side, mass reception) and temporal (repetition—the metonymic aspect of mechanical reproduction). The cinematic apparatus—Benjamin’s liberating dynamite—has produced

cumulative and severe changes in our experience of both space and time. The most profound symptoms of the postmodern condition diagnosed by theorists as diverse as Jean-François Lyotard, Fredric Jameson, Jean Baudrillard—the disappearance of a sense of history, entrapment in a perpetual present, the loss of temporal referents—have been, I argue, caused at least in part by the implicit time travel of cinematic and televisual spectation.<sup>2</sup>

For Marx, the key aspects of modernity were the dramatic changes in consciousness brought about by industrialized space and time—“the annihilation of space by time,” as he famously put it. I detail an additional and converse transformation—the annihilation of time by space—and claim it for cinematic travel and for postmodernity. The mechanical (and now electronic) capacity to manipulate time and space, essential features of cinematic and televisual apparatuses, has produced an increasingly detemporalized subject. And at the same time, the ubiquity of these simulated experiences has fostered an increasingly derealized sense of presence and identity.

Rather than proclaim a single distinct moment of rupture—when the modern ended and the postmodern began—I suggest a gradual and indistinct epistemological tear along the fabric of modernity, a change caused by the growing cultural centrality of a feature that is integral to both cinema and television: a mobilized gaze that conducts a *flânerie* through an imaginary other place and time.

In the social formations of modernity, the mobilized gaze was restricted to the public sphere (arcades, department stores, dioramas and panoramas) and to high art (painterly views, theatrical presentations). During the mid nineteenth century, the coincident introduction of department-store shopping, packaged tourism,<sup>3</sup> and protocinematic entertainment began to transform this gaze into a commodity, sold to a consumer-spectator. In postmodernity, the experience of spatial and temporal displacement has become fully integrated into everyday life, extending beyond high art and the public sphere (now represented, for example, by the shopping mall) to mass culture and the private realm (through television and the VCR).

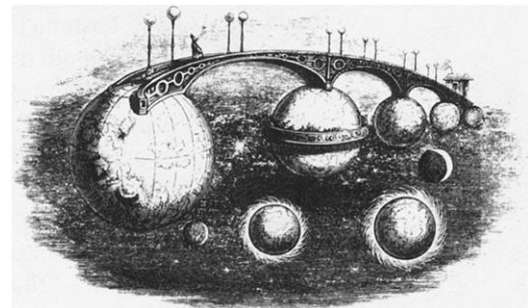
This essay is, then, a route, an itinerary. It begins by situating the origins of the mobilized gaze

and identifying them with a paradigm of modernity, the *flâneur*—the male dandy who strolled the urban streets and arcades in the nineteenth century. As the department store supplanted the arcade, the mobilized gaze entered the service of consumption, and space opened for a female *flâneur*—a *flâneuse*—whose gendered gaze became a key element of consumer address. And such spatial and temporal motility led to a unique apparatical sequel: the cinema.

These historical underpinnings provide a narrative prologue for theorizing the role of the cinema in postmodernity. The present-day extension of the arcade and the department store—the shopping mall—has the multiplex cinema as an apparatical exponent. The essay concludes with a brief epilogue on the marketing, viewing, and consuming of two films made by women who began their careers in the feminist avant-garde: Chantal Akerman’s *Window Shopping* (1986) and Lizzie Borden’s *Working Girls* (1987). In the shopping-mall cinema, strategies of feminist filmmaking must confront consumer culture’s recuperative web.

### *Les Flâneurs du Mal(l)*

Baudelaire’s collection of poems, *Les fleurs du mal* (*Flowers of Evil*), is the cornerstone of Benjamin’s massive work on modernity, an uncompleted study of the Paris arcades.<sup>4</sup> For Benjamin, the poems record the ambulatory gaze that the *flâneur* directs on Paris, “the capital of the nineteenth century.” The *flâneur*, “who goes botanizing on the asphalt” (“Second Empire” 36), was the quintessential modern subject, wandering through



**The flâneur of the universe.** Illustration by Grandville, from *Un autre monde*, Paris: Fournier, 1844.

urban space in a daze of distraction.<sup>5</sup> Benjamin traces this figure from the arcades into the department store: “[T]he construction of the department store . . . made use of flânerie itself in order to sell goods. The department store was the *flâneur*’s final coup” (“Capital” 170; my emphasis). Traffic and the decline of the arcade may have killed the *flâneur*. But his perceptual patterns—distracted observation and dreamlike reverie—became a prototype for those of the consumer, whose style of “just looking” is the pedestrian equivalent of slow motion.

Yet it was men who were at home in this privatized public space. As Susan Buck-Morss has detailed, if women roamed the street they became streetwalkers, carnal commodities on sale alongside other items in the arcade (“Flâneur”). Women were objects for consumption, for the gaze of the *flâneur* or of the poet, who, like Baudelaire, would notice them as mere passersby.<sup>6</sup>



**The shop window was the proscenium for visual intoxication.** Eugène Atget, *Mannequins, Avenue des Gobelins, Paris, c. 1910–20*.

### The *Flâneuse*

The female *flâneuse* was not possible until a woman could wander the city on her own, a freedom linked to the privilege of shopping alone. Certainly the development in the late nineteenth century of shopping as a socially acceptable leisure activity for bourgeois women, as a “pleasure rather than a necessity” (Bowlby 6), encouraged women to be peripatetic without escort. Department stores became central fixtures in capitalist cities in the mid nineteenth century. Bon Marché opened in Paris in 1852 and Macy’s in New York in 1857. Gradually these *grands magasins* began to employ female salesclerks, allowing women to be both buyers and sellers (Leach; Miller; Porter-Benson). To Benjamin, as to Baudelaire, women in public spaces are “seller and commodity in one” (“Capital” 171), not observers but objects in the panopticon of the sexual market. A poem from *Les fleurs du mal*—“Tu mettrais l’univers entier dans ta ruelle”—provides illustration:

Tes yeux, illuminés ainsi que des boutiques  
Et des ifs flamboyants dans les fêtes publiques,  
Usent insolemment d’un pouvoir emprunté,  
Sans connaître jamais la loi de leur beauté.

(209)

Your eyes, lit up like shops to lure their trade  
or fireworks in the park on holidays,  
insolently make use of borrowed power  
and never learn (you might say, “in the dark”)  
what law it is that governs their *good looks*.

(32)

It was not until the closing decades of the century that the department store became a safe haven for unchaperoned women (Wilson). The great stores may have been the *flâneur*’s last coup, but they were the *flâneuse*’s first.<sup>7</sup>

Shopping, like other itinerancies of the late nineteenth century—museum and exhibition attendance, packaged tourism, and, of course, film going—relied on the visual register and helped to ensure the predominance of the gaze in capitalist society. The department store, like the arcade before it, constructed fantasy worlds for itinerant lookers. But unlike the arcade, it offered a pro-

tected site for the empowered gaze of the *flâneuse*. Endowed with purchasing power, she became a key target of consumer address. Yet from the beginnings of consumer culture, women were empowered only in a paradoxical sense, as feminist theorists have illustrated (Doane; Wilson). While acquiring new freedoms of life-style and choice, women became subject to new desires created by advertising and consumer culture—desires elaborated in a system of selling and consumption that depended on the relation between looking and buying, on the indirect desire to possess and incorporate through the eye.

Zola's 1883 novel of a *grand magasin*, *Au Bonheur des Dames*, makes apparent the purpose of the department store: to please women. The novel describes the transformation of Denise, a young woman of twenty who comes to Paris from the country town of Valognes. In her first moments in the teeming metropolis, fresh from the train station with her two younger brothers, Denise stands transfixed in front of the windows of a great store, Bonheur des Dames. Zola makes the equation between women and the commodity clear. The mannequins "peuplaient la rue de ces belles femmes à vendre, et qui portaient des prix en gros chiffres, à la place des têtes" "peopl[ed] the street with these beautiful women for sale, each bearing a price in big figures in the place of a head" (33; 8). After Denise goes to work in the store, she "eut la sensation d'une machine fonctionnant à haute pression. . . . [A]vec une rigueur mécanique, tout un peuple de femmes pass[ait] dans la force et la logique des engrenages" "began to feel as if she were watching a machine working at full pressure. . . . [W]ith mechanical regularity, quite a nation of women pass[ed] through the force and logic of this wonderful commercial machine" (45; 16–17; my emphasis).

The owner, Mouret, arranges displays of umbrellas and silks and woolen mantles, intent on producing an effect on the passing women:

Mouret avait l'unique passion de vaincre la femme. Il la voulait reine dans sa maison, il lui avait bâti ce temple, pour l'y tenir à sa merci. C'était toute sa tactique, la griser d'attentions galantes et trafiquer de ses désirs, exploiter sa fièvre. (298)

Mouret's unique passion was to conquer woman. He wished her to be queen in his house, and he had built this temple to get her completely at his mercy. His sole aim was to intoxicate her with gallant attentions, and traffic on her desires, work on her fever. (208)

While these merchandising changes were transforming the bourgeoisie in Paris, in other capitalist cities—New York, Chicago, London, Berlin—the department store was also becoming a common temple of consumption, a "cathedral of modern commerce" (Zola 208).

The shop window was the proscenium for this visual intoxication, the site of seduction for consumer desire. In 1900, in addition to writing *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, L. Frank Baum published a treatise on window display entitled *The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows and Interiors*.<sup>8</sup> Baum describes a variety of techniques for catching the eye of passing window-shoppers and turning them into absorbed spectators:

How can a window sell goods? By placing them before the public in such a manner that the observer has a desire for them and enters the store to make the purchase. Once in, the customer may see other things she wants, and no matter how much she purchases under these conditions the credit of the sale belongs to the window. (146; my emphasis)

One of Baum's recommended techniques is an "illusion window" that will be "sure to arouse the curiosity of the observer" (82). A display called "the vanishing lady" uses a live female model who, at intervals, disappears into a drapery-covered pedestal and reappears after changing her hat, gloves, or shawl.

Baum's conception of the show window seems to bear a clear analogy to the cinema screen. The window frames a tableau, placing it behind glass and making it inaccessible, and arouses desire. Cinematic spectation, a further instrumentalization of this consumer gaze, produced paradoxical effects on the newfound social mobility of the *flâneuse*. By the middle of the nineteenth century, as if in a historical relay of looks, the shop window succeeded the mirror as a site of identity construction, and then—gradually—the shop window was displaced by the cinema screen. Window-

shopping becomes an apt paradigm for cinematic and televisual spectatorship (Doane; Eckert; Gaines).

### A World in Miniature

The arcade, writes Benjamin, presented a “world in miniature” (“Second Empire” 37), a “grand poème de l’étalage,” a spatial verse of visual display (“Capital” 157; a phrase borrowed from Balzac). The following brief architectural and social history demonstrates how the cinema was born out of the social and psychic transformations that the arcades produced. The cinematic apparatus, a simple technical development in the context of nineteenth-century optical research, played an important and complex role in the burgeoning consumer culture (Hansen).

Protocinematic devices offered an immobile spectator the timeless space that arcades and department stores opened to the stroller. The panorama and diorama, for example, provided fantasies of spatial and temporal mobility, virtual tours that brought the country to the town dweller and that transported a constructed past to the present.

A panorama is a cylindrical painting that encircles the viewer.<sup>9</sup> The pictorial illusion is created by realist techniques of representing perspective and scale and by lighting that illuminates the painted scene while leaving the viewer in the dark. “The spectator,” as Helmut and Alison Gernsheim note, “lost all judgement of distance and space. . . . [I]n the absence of any means of comparison with real objects, a perfect illusion was given” (6).

Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, known for his 1839 patent on the daguerreotype photographic technique, began his career as an assistant to the celebrated panorama painter Pierre Prévost. In 1822, Daguerre debuted the diorama, his first device for changing space and time. The diorama differed significantly from the panorama: Daguerre’s visitors looked through a proscenium at a scene composed of objects arranged in front of a backdrop; after a few minutes, the auditorium platform rotated, exposing another dioramic opening (Gernsheim and Gernsheim 19–20). The entire diorama building became a machine for changing the spectator’s view. Like the dia-

panorama—in which translucent watercolors were illuminated from behind—the diorama included semitransparent paintings that could be modified by moving the lights. The exhibit was thus designed to construct and restructure the viewer’s relation to the spatial and temporal present.<sup>10</sup> Helmut and Alison Gernsheim cite a local newspaper’s assertion that the diorama made it possible for “Parisians who like pleasure without fatigue to make the journey to Switzerland and to England without leaving the capital” (18). As they suggestively indicate, “The many foreign views . . . no doubt had a special appeal to the general public who, before the days of Cook’s Tours, had little chance of travelling abroad . . .” (47). The audience of the Pleorama, which opened in Berlin in 1832, sat in a ship and took an hour’s “voyage” as a backdrop moving slowly across the stage created the illusion of movement.<sup>11</sup>

The tours in space and time offered by these entertainment devices were apparatical extensions of the spatial *flânerie* through the arcades. In Paris, the Galerie Vivienne (constructed in 1823) contained the cosmorama, an 1832 invention by Abbé Gazzara that used magnifying mirrors to reproduce landscapes with illusory depth (Geist 490). The Théâtre Seraphin, the site of marionette theater, shadow plays, and phantasmagorias, moved in 1858 from the arcade of the Palais Royal to the Passage Jouffroy, an extension of the Passage des Panoramas. In 1882, the Musée Grevin, a wax-figure museum modeled after Madame Tussaud’s London exhibition, opened in the Passage Jouffroy.<sup>12</sup> These architectural passages, as much sites of departure as destinations, became depots for the temporal slippage of a mobilized gaze.

R. W. Paul, a British inventor inspired by H. G. Wells’s 1895 novel *The Time Machine*, created a cinematographic “time machine.” His patent application, of 24 October 1895, includes the following description: “spectators have presented to their view scenes which are supposed to occur in the future or past while they are given the sensation of voyaging upon a machine through time” (Chanan 224–27). On 22 March of the same year that Paul requested his patent, the French brothers Louis and Auguste Lumière gave their first private showing of a film recorded and projected with their patented device, the Cinématographe. And on 28

December 1895, the first public projection of Lumière *actualités* took place in the basement of the Grand Café, on the boulevard des Capucines. The Cinématographe had brought time travel to the boulevard café.

### The Shopping Mall

Let us now shift from origins to exponents, from causes to effects, from the first fissures in modernity to its present-day debris. Nineteenth-century artificial city environments—parks, passageways, department stores, exhibition halls—seem to have culminated in today’s urban “center”: the shopping mall. Malls provide a sense of place, but a peculiarly timeless place.<sup>13</sup> And movie theaters, now located increasingly in shopping malls, carry this timelessness to a further psychic exponent.

The mall is not a completely public place. Like the arcade, it keeps the street at a safe distance. The mall engulfs a passive subject within an illusory realm. Like the theme park, the mall is “engineered” with maintenance and management techniques, concealing the delivery bays and support systems, the security guards and bouncers who control its entrances. It defers urban realities, blocks urban blights—the homeless, beggars, crime, traffic, even weather. While it is a temperature-controlled refuge from hostile en-

vironments, it contains trees and large plants that give the illusion of outdoors. Visitors can walk from store to store without encountering wind or rain and without taking off or putting on garments at each entrance and exit. The mall creates a nostalgic image of a clean, safe, legible town center.

The mall is open to anyone—regardless of race, class, and gender—and no purchase is required. If shopping activates the power of the consumer gaze, then purchasing asserts power over the objects beheld.<sup>14</sup> But the shopper who buys nothing pays a psychic penalty—the unpleasure of unsated consumer desire. As a form of incorporation, shopping can be likened to identification: “I shop, therefore I am” but also “I am what I buy.” The *flâneuse* may have found a space for an empowered mobilized gaze—women constitute eighty-five percent of mall shoppers (Hahn 7)—yet analysis of the images she is encouraged to consume reveals this empowerment to be questionable.

Shopping-mall cinemas demand an expenditure. They offer the pleasure of purchase, but instead of delivering a tangible product, they supply an experience—a time tourism similar to that of the panorama and diorama. Like tourism, which mass publicity and cliché prepare, the shopping-mall cinema encodes the foreign in the familiar, introduces the new and exotic from the vantage of comfort and safety.

In *The Malling of America*, William Kowinski provides a detailed description of “mall” as the “chief cultural activity in America” (24). He asserts, “There are more shopping centers in the United States than movie theaters (and most movie theaters are now in shopping centers)” (20). Yet Kowinski’s mathematics do not calculate the exact relation between the movie theater and the shopping center. He approaches an equation between them in the following epiphanic passage:

I saw the white pools of light, the areas of relative darkness, the symmetrical aisles and gleaming escalator, the bracketed store facades, the sudden strangeness of live trees and plants indoors. It was as if I were standing on a balcony, looking down on a stage, waiting for the show to begin. . . .

That was it. This theatrical space. The mall is a theater.



Untitled photograph. Barbara Kruger, 1987.

But it is not a movie theater:

[T]his sense of a special world . . . permits a kind of unity of experience within an effortless enclosure that is something like the classic theater's unities of time, place and action. It's all here, now. The mall concentrates drama, suspends disbelief. (62)

While the grand equation "mall as theater" is suggestive, Kowinski leaves it undeveloped. Compared with the theater, which still retains an aura of performance and the real, the cinema offers a less aura-endowed, more uniformly repeatable experience. The shopping mall has become the logical extension of the movie theater, not its replacement. The mall is a machine of timelessness, a spatial and architectural manifestation of the cinematic and televisual apparatuses, but it is a selling machine.<sup>15</sup>

### The Westside Pavilion

Jon Jerde, the architect of the Westside Pavilion, a West Los Angeles shopping mall, has written a policy document called "Scripting the City." This



An architectural time machine: the Westside Pavilion, Los Angeles.

document textualizes urban space (as does *The Language of Postmodern Architecture*, by Charles Jencks)—an approach appropriate for Los Angeles, where the script is a major commodity. Jerde writes:

Urban and suburban Americans seldom stroll aimlessly, as Europeans do, to parade and rub shoulders in a crowd. We need a *destination*, a sense of arrival at a definite location. My aim, in developments such as Horton Plaza and the Westside Pavilion, is to provide a destination that is also a public parade and a communal center. (Whiteson 2; my emphasis)

The Westside Pavilion, which opened in May 1985, features canonical mid-1980s mall attributes: skylit clerestory with a vaulted, iron-and-glass roof; interior landscaping (ficus and palms); fountains; park benches; neon signs; a food court. It has flooring of European glazed street tiles and includes a mixture of Mediterranean and stucco walls in Jerde signature colors—pale plum, salmon, aqua, rose, and lime.

Shopping-mall planners use a mechanist rhetoric to describe the circulation of consumers: *magnet stores, generators, flow, pull* (Hahn; Rathbun). The mall cinema, placed as a lure at the end of the route past the store windows, increases traffic through the sales space and, by keeping the mall open at night, offers noctambulation to cinema-going *flâneurs*. Visiting the four-screen Samuel Goldwyn Pavilion—the cinema on the top floor of the Westside Pavilion—entails a full escalator tour of the shop windows on two levels.

A comparison of the Westside Pavilion with another site of cultural consumption, the Musée d'Orsay, in Paris, illustrates the place of the cinema in Jerde's architectural time machine. Both buildings were designed to quote or reappropriate a nineteenth-century space. The Westside Pavilion displays wares and goods of consumer culture; the Musée d'Orsay displays wares and goods of a culture to be consumed.

### The Musée d'Orsay

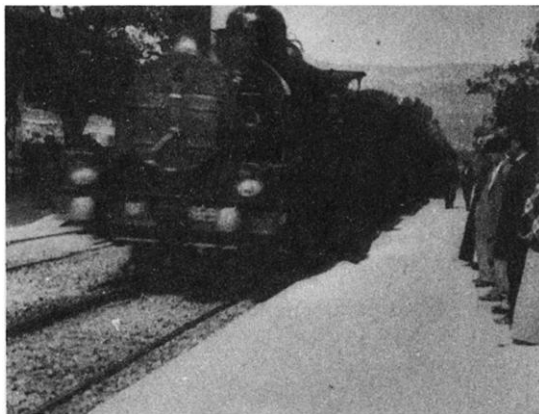
The Gare d'Orsay, a train station in operation from 1900 to 1939, is now the site of the major museum of nineteenth-century French art. Since the Musée



d'Orsay opened in 1987, there has been much ado about the revisionist subtexts of its curatorial and architectural decisions. Marvin Trachtenberg muses on the presence of ghostly trains in this revamped depot (104). In the massive twin constructions lined up on either side of the building's grand nave, he sees "lithic trains," frozen in monumental stone and almost hidden by their obviousness. They are "waiting to carry the museum visitor . . . back into the world of 19th century art" (105). But other visitors may be struck

by something else: the sense that the museum is indeed an elaborate waiting room, a station for departure and destination, and that the awaited train is the long-overdue Twentieth Century.

The museum's design prescribes an itinerary for visitors, a linear progression disallowing random peripatetics. Those who follow this route through the institution's chronology of art history (roughly 1848–1914) are led into the twentieth century. In the uppermost corner, the last and most obscure part of the specified course, is an exhibit called *La naissance du cinéma*.



**The Twentieth Century arrives in the Musée d'Orsay.** Frame enlargement from Louis and Auguste Lumière, *L'arrivée d'un train en gare*, 1895.



**Lithic trains in the Musée d'Orsay.**

Here, amid many protocinematic toys and devices (including Etienne-Jules Marey's chronophotogun), are selections from the program presented at the first public projection of films: the *actualités* shown by the Lumière brothers in 1895. And here one witnesses a train pulling into a station, endlessly repeated in a loop of the Lumières' *L'arrivée d'un train en gare*. This seemingly anticlimactic end to the museum visit is actually fitting, for the arrival of the cinematic apparatus rather unceremoniously "burst asunder" the nineteenth century, when, as Benjamin declares, "our railroad stations appeared to have us locked up hopelessly."

Both the Musée d'Orsay and the Westside Pavilion require that full tours of the wares on display precede entry into the uppermost corners, which house, either as aside or as central lure, the cinemas. It is here that the museum and the mall dramatically open other times, other spaces, other imaginaries. The traveler-tourist and the shopper-browser need not travel further. The imaginary museum of the cinema satisfies the peripatetic urge, mobilizes a gaze in static comfort.

### The Cinema and Postmodernity

In his two key essays on postmodernity, Fredric Jameson establishes an analogy between borderline schizophrenia (a language disorder where a

break in the relations of signifiers plunges the subject into a perpetual present, marked by uncertainty, paradox, contradiction) and postmodern subjectivity (which Jameson characterizes by the collapse of temporality, the failure of the ability to locate or fix events historically, the *mise en abîme* of referents lost in the labyrinthine chain of signifiers) (“Consumer Society”; “Cultural Logic”). Jameson’s discussion of the cinema and the postmodern focuses on “nostalgia” films. This genre—or, perhaps, period style—includes films that not only address the past but also somehow evoke a past, even when they are set in the future. Jameson cites films that take place in some “indefinable nostalgic past” (“Consumer Society” 117) or, like *Chinatown* and *The Conformist*, in “some eternal Thirties; beyond historical time” (“Cultural Logic” 68). His discussion of the cinema, therefore, is quite literal; it assumes that the stylistic or diegetic world of a film, rather than its effect on the spectator, is sufficient to illustrate his models of schizophrenia or pastiche.

While Jameson does not make the following taxonomy explicit, his descriptions divide nostalgia films into three categories: (1) those that are about the past and set in the past (*Chinatown*, *American Graffiti*; we could add *The Last Emperor*, *Harlem Nights*, *Diner*), (2) those that reinvent the past (*Star Wars*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*; we could add *Batman*, *Blade Runner*, *Robocop*, *The Terminator*), and (3) those that are set in the present but invoke the past (*Body Heat*; we could add *Blue Velvet*, *Trouble in Mind*, *The Fabulous Baker Boys*). The narrative or art direction of a nostalgia film may confuse its sense of temporality. But cinematic spectation itself confirms the illusion of a perpetual present interminably recycled. Taken to its apparatical extreme, what Jameson describes only in the nostalgia genre is true of every film’s relation to its historical referent. Cinema and television spectation, in the age of easily replayable, accessible “time-shifting,” becomes the model for the spectator as time tourist.

### The Apparatus of Simulation

As many film theorists have argued, the cinematic apparatus provides the illusion of a present as well as of a different, absent time. Jean-Louis Baudry

describes the “artificial psychosis” produced in the “cine-subject” by the “simulation apparatus”: “It can be assumed that it is this wish which prepares the long history of cinema: the wish to construct a *simulation machine* capable of offering the subject perceptions which are really representations mistaken for perceptions” (“Apparatus” 315; my emphasis). This epistemological twist—representations mistaken for perceptions—is, as Baudry argues, the locus of the apparatus’s ideological power. And, in Baudry’s analysis, the pleasure found in this misapprehension is precisely the wish that “prepares the long history of cinema.” The cinematic apparatus provides a desired psychosis in its mechanically reproducible construction of another place and time. One of the essential properties of cinema is its temporal displacement of the spectator: the time of a film’s production, the time of its fiction, and the time of its projection are all conflated into the same moment in viewing. The reality effect, created by cinematic conventions of narrative and by illusionistic construction, works to conceal this conflation, to produce representations that are taken for perceptions, or—as Christian Metz would have it—*discours* that is taken for *histoire*.

The time-shifting changes produced by the multiplex cinema and the VCR have transformed cinema spectatorship in the 1990s. Multiplex cinemas metonymize the cinema screen into a chain of adjacent shop windows. The screens in a shopping-mall cinema transform the stillness of the shop mannequin into the live action of film performance, as if the itinerary through the mall to reach the cinema theater reenacts the historical impulse from photography to film. The VCR metonymizes the same bounty of images temporally. Films are packaged and boxed as uniform commodities regardless of production date. The multiplex cinema and the VCR have taken the *flânerie* of the mobilized gaze and recast it into a more accessible and repeatable exponent.<sup>16</sup>

In this way, the VCR has become a private museum of past moments—of different genres, times, commodities—all reduced to uniform, interchangeable, equally accessible units. A remote-control “magic wand” governs this time tourism; each spectator has become the Doctor Crase of René Clair’s 1924 film *Paris qui dort*—possessor

of a machine to stop, accelerate, and reverse time. The videocassette turns film experience into a book-size, readily available commodity. Videotapes market an exponent of the spatial loss (the loss of aura that, as Benjamin describes, accompanies mechanical reproduction) and offer a loss of aura of the second order, the temporal loss (which the opportunities for replay produce). Multiple-screen cinemas become contiguous VCRs, presenting a ready panoply of other moments, the not now in the guise of the now.

The cinema spectator and the armchair equivalent—the home-video viewer, who commands fast forward, fast reverse, and many speeds of slow motion, who can easily switch between channels and tape, who is always able to repeat, replay, return—are lost in time. The cultural apparatuses of television and the cinema have gradually become causes for what is now blithely described as the postmodern condition. In short, our prior theorizations of the cinema have been burst asunder.

### *Working Girls versus Window Shopping*

So far I have discussed the cinema as an institution, as a commodity available to consumers of both genders, but have not fully considered the distinctive gendered gazes of the *flâneur* and the *flâneuse*. The destination of my itinerary is two films by women who began their careers in what was the feminist avant-garde and who have since entered a different space of reception—their films no longer circulate in the closed circuit of avant-garde distribution and exhibition but in the shopping-mall cinema. These two texts—Chantal Akerman's *Window Shopping* (1986) and Lizzie Borden's *Working Girls* (1987)—allow us to begin to consider the power and reach of consumer culture's recuperative web.

Akerman originally planned to film *Window Shopping* in a Brussels shopping mall (Akerman 113). The film was, however, made on a soundstage in Paris and has been shown in only one shopping mall, in Brussels.<sup>17</sup> In its present form—a palimpsest of many versions and incarnations—*Window Shopping* has enjoyed a tangled critical reception. The film had a bigger release than any previous Akerman work had had (it played on the Champs-

Elysées and in Parisian suburbs) but has only received limited screenings in the United States.

*Window Shopping* is a musical set in a shopping mall. The female salesclerks and beauticians become subjects with desires, not merely objects of them. The characters are not commodities for sale, but they are caught up in a consumer system that their musical numbers seem to celebrate. The ostensible narrative of *Window Shopping* is a *La Ronde*-esque gavotte of crossed desire: A loves B, who is smitten with C, who in turn. . . . Unlike less ironic treatments of this narrative trope, *Window Shopping* seems not so much to venerate love as to situate it in its social context and show its complexity. The lover's gaze is explicitly conflated with the shopper's.

*Working Girls*, set in a downtown New York bordello, intends to demystify sex as work, to describe this work from the commodities' point of view, to film sex scenes using an unerotic gaze. In *Working Girls* women sell their bodies, and in *Window Shopping* they sell "looks"; in both films these exchanges become means of female bonding. *Working Girls* uses the sex act (in which the consumers are male) as the central narrative transaction, and *Window Shopping* uses the spectacle of shopping (in which the consumers are female).

Despite these resemblances, the films had very different market receptions. *Working Girls* was the top-grossing film in New York during the weekend of its premiere. Vincent Canby's review sums up the film's position: "Sex is a natural resource that, as long as society remains as it is, might as well be exploited. Other feminists might object, but Miss Borden is worth listening to." *Working Girls* opened in Los Angeles at the Westside Pavilion. *The Los Angeles Times* ran an article about the film that carries the headline "A 'WORKING GIRLS' BOSWELL" and that includes an alluring four-column-wide photograph of Borden. She is reclining on her side, not unlike the figure in Manet's *Olympia*, in a pose associated with submission to an owner, to a man. Borden herself says, "Prostitution is perhaps the lowest form of selling yourself in this culture; but within capitalism, one is always selling an aspect of oneself. . . . Who can decide whether renting your body is worse than renting your brain?" (Insdorf). But we must ask whether Borden, a filmmaker marketing herself

as a commodity, uses strategies that have been recuperated by the system of publicity and mass distribution. The question is, quite simply, How does a filmmaker (as distinct from artists in other media) resist the logic of consumer capitalism? Has Borden succeeded in this resistance by using herself in an erotic pose, by equating selling her work with selling her body, by turning herself as filmmaker into sex commodity? *Working Girls* may have fully intended to use the insights of feminism to its benefit, to flatten out the fascination with prostitution. Yet consider some ad copy for the film, from a distribution catalog:

The controversial and provocative new film . . . is sure to fascinate. On the surface, the film seems to be a remarkably even-tempered view of prostitution. . . . [H]owever, things are not as serene as they first seem. . . . Graphic though never pornographic.  
(*Prestige* 3)

I do not intend to be unsparingly harsh about *Working Girls*, but it vividly raises questions about the limits of transgressive strategies and suggests the problem of market recuperation. In the shopping mall, the *flâneuse* may have found a space to roam, a way to avoid being the object of the look. She may be empowered, like the *flâneur*, with the privilege of just looking—but what is it she sees?

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Benjamin's phrase "neue Strukturbildungen der Materie," translated as "entirely new formations of the subject," refers to the material representation of the close-up and not to subjectivity (*Kunstwerk* 41). Nevertheless, my sentence performs an avowed sleight of hand by sliding ambiguously into a consideration of the postmodern subject, a rhetorical twist that the translation allows.

<sup>2</sup>The term *postmodernism* has been used in literature since the early 1960s, in architecture since the middle 1970s, and in dance and performance since the late 1970s, but it has been applied to film and television only since the late 1980s. In film studies, the term usually describes a style, not the social dimension of postmodernity. To clarify the debate about the postmodern, I use *modernism* and *postmodernism* to denote the cultural movements and *modernity* and *postmodernity* to refer to their social and philosophical dimensions (see Schulte-Sasse). Film theorists have not fully related the post-

modern to modernism or modernity. To characterize cinematic and televisual apparatuses in postmodernity, one has to go beyond a stylistic description of diegetic properties and consider the apparatus of reproduction and distribution.

I use the term *cinematic apparatus* not simply in the narrow sense of *appareil* (the mechanical aspects of film) but also in the more general sense of *dispositif* (the devices and arrangements that include the metapsychological effects on the spectator (see Baudry, "Apparatus"; "Effects"). Such an apparatusal system concerns not the textuality of specific films but rather the social and psychic configurations produced by cinematic spectation.

Jameson, one of the key nosographers of postmodernity, catalogs its symptoms as "the *disappearance of history*, the way in which our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past, has begun to live in a *perpetual present* and in a perpetual change that obliterates traditions . . ." ("Consumer Society" 125). While television differs greatly from the cinema in its perceptual transmission and reception, it has, in the age of the VCR, produced many of the same subjective manipulations of space and time.

<sup>3</sup>Unfortunately, packaged tourism cannot be discussed at any length in this essay. Thomas Cook, the British entrepreneur, began organizing tours in 1841. A collaborator with the temperance movement, he posed the tour as a substitute for alcohol. The tourist industry successfully commoditized a combination of voyeurism (sight-seeing) and narrative. The tourist, like the cinema spectator, is simultaneously present and absent, positioned both here and elsewhere.

Work on travel has suggested productive analogies among shopping, tourism, and film viewing. Wolfgang Schivelbusch describes the connections between the railway journey and other forms of "panoramic travel"—walking through city streets and shopping in department stores. (The moving walkway, the *trottoir roulant*, was introduced at the Paris exhibition of 1900.) Also see MacCannell.

<sup>4</sup>*Das Passagen-Werk* 'The Arcades Project,' which occupied Benjamin from 1927 until his death, in 1940, was not published in his lifetime. Only a few shards of the work have appeared in English (*Charles Baudelaire*; see Buck-Morss, *Dialectics*).

<sup>5</sup>For Siegfried Kracauer, this form of distracted observation reached its epitome in the "mass ornament" of the cinema (see also Schlüpmann).

<sup>6</sup>"A une passante" is one of the most famous sonnets in *Les fleurs du mal*, and Benjamin discusses it in the "*Flâneur*" section of "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire":

Un éclair . . . puis la nuit!—Fugitive beauté  
Dont le regard m'a fait soudainement renaître,  
Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l'éternité? (276)

Lightning . . . then darkness! Lovely fugitive  
whose glance has brought me back to life! But where  
is life—not this side of eternity? (98)

<sup>7</sup>Macy's tearoom for ladies opened in 1878, and by 1902 it was a restaurant catering to 2,500 diners. The tearoom that Marshall Field's, in Chicago, opened in 1890 had by 1902 become a restaurant taking up an entire floor.

Janet Wolff argues that the *flâneuse* was an impossible figure in modernity, which was predominately identified with the public spheres of work, politics, and urban life—realms that were exclusively male. In her account, the literature of modernity accepts the confinement of women to the private sphere and hence fails to investigate women's experience. Certainly the literature that Wolff surveys—by Georg Simmel, Baudelaire, Benjamin—describes the experience of men and ignores women's. But someone, like Wolff, who wants to produce a feminist sociology that would include women's experience should also turn to literary texts by female "modernists" (H. D., Dorothy Richardson, Gertrude Stein). And although Wolff mentions that consumerism is a central aspect of modernity and that the establishment of the department store created a new arena for the public appearance of women, she does not consider the female consumer important. It is precisely in this figure that I find a new social character, the *flâneuse*.

<sup>8</sup>From 1897 to 1902, Baum edited the trade journal *The Show Window: A Monthly Journal of Practical Window Trimming*. Stuart Culver's analysis relates Baum's work on window display to the representation of advertising and consumerism in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.

<sup>9</sup>The first patent on panoramic painting as an entertainment spectacle was granted to the Irishman Robert Barker in Edinburgh, in 1787. Five years later, Barker opened the first completely circular panorama, in Leicester Square, London; it had three circular areas, each ninety feet in diameter.

The Parisian arcade called the Passage des Panoramas was built in 1800 to connect the Palais Royal to the panorama on the boulevard Montmartre. Visitors entered the cylindrical panorama building through the arcade; the same glass-and-iron skylight illuminated both structures. One of the paintings in the panorama—a view of Paris from the Tuileries—presented the immediate city to itself. Another, which showed the British evacuation during the Battle of Toulon, in 1793, constructed a distant city and another time.

<sup>10</sup>Daguerre's diorama brought the spectator scenes from remote places and times. Of the thirty-two paintings exhibited during the diorama's seventeen years of existence, before its destruction by fire in 1839, ten were interiors of chapels or cathedrals (Gernsheim and Gernsheim 182–84). While most scenes showed distant churches, views of other cities, or rural landscapes, the diorama presented in January 1831 a depiction of a recent local event: "28 July 1830 at the Hôtel de Ville (The July Revolution)." The exhibit ran for a year.

Unfortunately, the English translation of Benjamin's "Paris, die Hauptstadt des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts" has fostered a confusion between panoramas and dioramas. Benjamin entitled the second section "Daguerre: Oder, Die Panoramen." This was mistranslated as "Daguerre: Or, The Dioramas" ("Capital").

<sup>11</sup>This attraction is much like the "tours" introduced in 1903 by George C. Hale of Kansas City, in which the specta-

tor sat in a simulated railway car and viewed a film taken from the front of a train.

<sup>12</sup>The Musée Grévin was also the site of the first Paris performances of legerdemain by another soon to be famous illusionist, Georges Méliès. While the Musée Grévin is still in the Passage Jouffroy today, it has opened a branch in the underground shopping mall of Les Halles. This expansion proves that the museum's spectacles—like those of the multiplex cinemas in the mall and of the Vidéotheque, also located there—are extensions of the mobilized gaze that travels past shop windows.

<sup>13</sup>In an analysis of "pedestrian speech acts" (97), Michel DeCerteau describes the spatial nowhere produced by "walking as a space of enunciation" (98). For DeCerteau, "[t]o walk is to lack a *place*" (103).

<sup>14</sup>Meaghan Morris argues, "Like effective shopping, feminist criticism also allows the possibility of rejecting what we see, and refusing to take it as 'given'" (5).

<sup>15</sup>Kowinski catches some of these apparatical similarities but does not develop them: "Watching TV, we can be everywhere without being anywhere in particular. . . . [T]he mall is like three-dimensional television" (74).

<sup>16</sup>If Benjamin can compare *flânerie* to the distracted style of newspaper journalism in the feuilleton, it does not take much to see in the television spectator's use of a remote-control device the present-day equivalent of the radio listener's channel switching, which Theodor Adorno calls aural *flânerie* (Buck-Morss, "Flaneur" 105).

<sup>17</sup>A number of screenwriters were engaged in the project, including Leora Barish, who wrote *Desperately Seeking Susan*. An earlier version of *Window Shopping* was released in limited exhibition as *Les années quatre-vingts (The Golden Eighties)*. This version begins with an hour of rehearsals videotaped in black and white and concludes with an elaborate twenty-minute color production number that incorporates the songs from the rehearsals.

Baudelaire's complaint about Belgium makes this screening in Brussels an ironic testimony to the saturation of contemporary Western culture by the shopping mall: "Among the many things that Baudelaire found to criticize about hated Brussels, one thing filled him with particular rage: 'No shop-windows. Strolling, something that nations with imagination love, is not possible in Brussels'" (Benjamin, "Second Empire" 50).

## Works Cited

- Akerman, Chantal. "La galerie." *Atelier des Arts* (1982): 113–18.
- Baudelaire, Charles. *Les fleurs du mal*. Trans. Richard Howard. Boston: Godine, 1983.
- Baudry, Jean-Louis. "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in the Cinema." Trans. Jean Andrews and Bertrand Augst. *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*. Ed. Phil Rosen. New York: Columbia UP, 1986. 299–318.

- . "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus." Trans. Alan Williams. *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*. Ed. Phil Rosen. New York: Columbia UP, 1986. 286–98.
- Baum, L. Frank. *The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows and Interiors*. Chicago: Show Window, 1890.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. London: Verso, 1983.
- . *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1966.
- . "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century." Trans. Quentin Hoare. Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire* 157–76.
- . "Paris, die Hauptstadt des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts." Benjamin, *Passagen-Werk* 45–60.
- . "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire." Trans. Harry Zohn. Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire* 11–106.
- . *Das Passagen-Werk*. Ed. Rolf Tiedemann. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982. 2 vols.
- . "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken, 1969. 217–51.
- Bowlby, Rachel. *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing, and Zola*. New York: Methuen, 1985.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Cambridge: MIT P, 1989.
- . "The Flaneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering." *New German Critique* 39 (1986): 99–140.
- Canby, Vincent. "Working Girls." Rev. of *Working Girls*. *New York Times* 27 Feb. 1987: C8.
- Chanan, Michael. *The Dream That Kicks: Prehistory and Early Years of Cinema in Britain*. London: Routledge, 1980.
- Culver, Stuart. "What Manikins Want: *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and *The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows*." *Representations* 21 (1988): 97–116.
- DeCerteau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Rendall. Berkeley: U of California P, 1984.
- Doane, Mary Ann. *The Desire to Desire*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987.
- Eckert, Charles. "The Carole Lombard in Macy's Window." *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 3.1 (1978): 1–21.
- Gaines, Jane. "The Queen Christina Tie-Ups: Convergence of Show Window and Screen." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 11.1 (1989): 35–60.
- Geist, Johann Friedrich. *Arcades: History of a Building Type*. Trans. Jane O. Newman and John Smith. Cambridge: MIT P, 1985.
- Gernsheim, Helmut, and Alison Gernsheim. *L. J. M. Daguerre: The History of the Diorama and the Daguerreotype*. New York: Dover, 1968.
- Hahn, Ernest. "The Shopping Center Industry." *Shopping Centers and Malls*. Ed. Robert Davis Rathbun. New York: Retail Reporting, 1986. 6–7.
- Hansen, Miriam. "Benjamin, Cinema and Experience." *New German Critique* 40 (1987): 179–224.
- Insdorf, Annette. "A 'Working Girls' Boswell." *Los Angeles Times* 7 April 1987, sec. 4: 1.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 53–92.
- . "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." *The Anti-aesthetic*. Ed. Hal Foster. Port Townsend: Bay, 1983. 111–25.
- Jencks, Charles. *The Language of Postmodern Architecture*. New York: Rizzoli, 1984.
- Kowinski, William. *The Malling of America*. New York: Morrow, 1985.
- Kracauer, Siegfried. "The Mass Ornament." Trans. Barbara Correll and Jack Zipps. *New German Critique* 5 (1975): 67–76.
- Leach, William R. "Transformations in a Culture of Consumption: Women and Department Stores, 1890–1925." *Journal of American History* 71 (1984): 319–42.
- MacCannell, Dean. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Schocken, 1976.
- Metz, Christian. "Story/Discourse (A Note on Two Kinds of Voyeurism)." Trans. Celia Britton and Annwyl Williams. *The Imaginary Signifier*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982. 91–97.
- Miller, Michael B. *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869–1920*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981.
- Morris, Meaghan. *Things to Do with Shopping Centres*. Working Papers 1. Milwaukee: Center for Twentieth Century Studies, 1988.
- Porter-Benson, Susan. *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890–1940*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1986.
- Prestige Film and Video Catalogue*. New York: Prestige Film, 1988.
- Rathbun, Robert Davis. *Shopping Centers and Malls*. New York: Retail Reporting, 1986.
- Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. *The Railway Journey*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1986.
- Schlüpmann, Heide. "Kracauer's Phenomenology of Film." *New German Critique* 40 (1987): 97–114.
- Schulte-Sasse, Jochen. "Modernity and Modernism, Postmodernity and Postmodernism: Framing the Issue." *Cultural Critique* 5 (1986–87): 5–22.
- Trachtenberg, Marvin. "The Lithic Trains of Gae Aulenti." *Art in America* Jan. 1988: 104–06.
- Whiteson, Leon. "'This Is Our Time': And Architect Jon Jerde Is Trying to Write 'a Different Urban Script' for L.A." *Los Angeles Times* 20 Jan. 1988, sec. 5: 1–2.
- Wilson, Elizabeth. *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*. London: Virago, 1985.
- Wolff, Janet. "The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity." *Theory, Culture and Society* 2.7 (1985): 35–44.
- Zola, Emile. *Au Bonheur des Dames*. Paris: Gallimard, 1980.
- . *The Ladies Paradise*. London: Vizetelly, 1886.