

2004

The attractions of the "cinema attractions" to female spectatorship

Silvia Diaz
Lehigh University

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Diaz, Silvia

The Attractions of
the "Cinema of
Attractions" to
Female
Spectatorship

May 2004

The Attractions of the “Cinema of Attractions” to Female Spectatorship

By

Silvia Diaz

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

Of Lehigh University

In Candidacy for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

English

Lehigh University

March 15, 2004

This thesis is accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts.

4 | 5 | 04
Date

Alexander Dóty
Thesis Advisor

Chairperson of Department

Acknowledgements

This project is a byproduct of Alexander Doty's amazing class, where a group of women felt safe to challenge themselves and each other.

His brilliance frightened and inspired me.

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Abstract

Much of analysis that has intended to revise the bedrocks of feminist theory has focused on the possible different spectator positions that a particular film offers. Theorists such as Modleski and Studlar reveal the need to look beyond the “male gaze” to other possible avenues of feminist intervention.

A study of early film is attractive because it allows glimpses into the possible directions that cinematic representation could have taken before the dominant narrative film language, constructed around the male gaze, was implanted. It perhaps offers a distinctly unadulterated view of possibilities, since it is not a reaction to classical narrative such as counter-cinema and the avant-garde. Looking at a number of characteristics unique to early films, such as the direct gaze and the tableau, might provide tools to expose more types of discourses pertaining to female spectatorship than classical narrative cinema offers.

Only by broadening our notions of spectatorship and reception to include different groups and arenas can we begin to understand the complex factors that have shaped – and continue to shape – the ideological direction of American cinema (107).

-Steven J. Ross.

Much of analysis that has intended to revise the bedrocks of feminist theory has focused on the possible different spectator positions that a particular film offers. Theorists such as Modleski and Studlar reveal the need to look beyond the “male gaze” to other possible avenues of feminist intervention. A study of early film is attractive because it allows glimpses into the possible directions that cinematic representation could have taken before the dominant narrative film language, constructed around the male gaze, was implanted. It perhaps offers a distinctly unadulterated view of possibilities, since it is not a reaction to classical narrative such as counter-cinema and the avant-garde. Looking at a number of characteristics unique to early films might provide tools to expose more types of discourses pertaining to female spectatorship than classical narrative cinema offers. Early cinema may suggest ways of redefining and reformulating the relationship between the spectator and film as customarily understood by feminist theory and offer the prospect of getting closer to an understanding of how women have experienced cinema and the meanings they create out of that experience.

Because of the visual position it privileges, classical narrative cinema is often defined as an expression of the patriarchal unconscious in the way it constructs points of view or looking positions. “At issue here,” argues Gaines,

is the way these viewing vantage points control the female body on the screen and privilege the visual position (the gaze) of the male character(s) within the film. The governing “look” of the male character in the film merges with the spectator’s viewing position in such a way that the spectator sees as that character sees (200).

In classical narrative cinema, the range of positions possible to a female spectator is often interpreted as limited, since they are often defined in relation to masculinity. The question that arises is whether the female spectator is restricted to viewing the female body on the screen from the male point of view under a cinema defined under the “patriarchal unconscious?”

Theorists such as Mulvey and Doane would answer “yes” to the question of a limited female spectatorship. For Mulvey, a female spectator’s identification is either with the “typical” objectified portrayal of femininity, or with the image of man as the locus of power. Both options prove rather bleak for the female spectator’s desires; she is either identifying with a disempowered image of woman or is placed in a masochistic “transvestite” position when identifying with the man. Mulvey argues,

The masculine identification, in its phallic aspect, reactivates for her a fantasy of ‘action’ that correct femininity demands should be repressed. The fantasy ‘action’ finds expression through a metaphor of masculinity (32).

In order to identify with active desire, the female spectator must assume a (uncomfortably) masculine position:

...the female spectator’s fantasy of masculinization is always to some extent at cross-purposes with itself, restless in its transvestite clothes (32)

Women spectators can hold no other visual “power” beyond assuming a masculine form of looking and oscillating between the two modes of identification by temporarily becoming a “transvestite.” In a similar grain to Mulvey, Doane argues that female spectatorship is an impossibility because the female cannot assume a voyeuristic and fetishistic position in regard to the image on the screen. Women are too close to that

image which is ultimately her own. Women are thus limited to masochistically over identify with female images or they can narcissistically become their own object of desire. Her argument relies on the idea that woman is over-identified with the image of the feminine on the screen and can only gain distance from the feminine by “masquerading,” or flaunting, excessive femininity.

Much of the discourse concerned with female spectatorship has been a response to contest Mulvey and Doane’s groundbreaking assertions. Modleski, for example, turns to Hitchcock films, which she argues reveal the ways women are oppressed by patriarchy and “allow the female spectator to feel anger that is very different from the masochistic response” (61). For Studlar, a focus on the pre-oedipal stage of psychoanalysis yields the possibilities of positive masochism for a female or male spectator desiring a strong female (maternal) character. Theorists such as Gaines and De Lauretis have begun to look at other under-represented groups, such as black women and lesbians (who can always be seen to work outside of the “white straight male” locus of desire) to expand the discourse of spectatorship to a wider spectrum of perspectives.

All of these theorists who have contended with the issue of female spectatorship have one thing in common: they all strive to negotiate and re-theorize the role of the feminine in an institutional mode of representation inscribed by the masculine. The attractive quality of early cinema, with its own particular elements and narrative styles, is that it offers a space away from the indoctrinated classical narrative cinema. Although patriarchally-influenced coding (about sexuality, gender, race and class) already existed in these early films, they can perhaps open up different spectator positions that destabilize

or, to use Doane's terminology, "disarticulate male systems of viewing (49)" which are often normalized and upheld in classical narrative cinema (Williams 21).

Early Cinema Audiences

A study of spectatorship and early film must almost inevitably contend with the force of early audiences, who played such a pivotal role in the experience of early film. It is difficult for a modern audience to comprehend the level of awe that the beginning of cinema triggered in its earliest audiences. This was the first time that human beings were actually watching other human beings moving on a screen. There were numerous debates about the social function of moving pictures – what moving pictures are for and how they should function in society. Spectators were the central figures in these debates, and the early films often are at play with these very anxieties. As Kathryn Fuller recounts in *Viewing the Viewers: Representations of the Audience in Early Cinema Advertising*, the alarm that cinema was capable of producing in its audience was intense and powerful:

Popular historical accounts of the earliest film exhibitions have emphasized how spectators would flee in alarm from images of crashing waves that they believed were descending from the screen. Such films as *Black Diamond Express* are described even today by some scholars as featuring a train 'rushing toward the camera and visually assaulting the spectator' (113).

This notion that spectators might have found films overly realistic, frightening, threatening or fascinating reveals that although early films have many theatrical qualities, cinema offered a unique and potent spectacle of its own for a spectator. Fuller's argument focuses on the fact that images of audiences were integral to the selling of the movie-going experience to the public. Advertisements depicting an opera house full of fascinated spectators were at one and the same time ingenious marketing tools and "an

attempt at audience education and clever depictions of the cinema of attractions” (Fuller 117). Movie-show advertising images portrayed a panorama of the half-lit opera house, full of upstanding, well-behaved, well dressed and attentive audience members “who were fully visible to the viewer and to each other” (117).

Despite any disparities between poster versions of the early film-viewing experience and the real thing, the essential truth portrayed by the posters was the centrality of audiences to the movie show. As Tom Gunning notes, “spectorial identification with the viewpoint of the camera is a linchpin of early cinema” (101). Gunning postulates that these audiences went to the show to see the mechanical apparatus *and each other*, as well as to watch films, and that audiences had an undisguised awareness of their active position as viewers. Spectators did not attend the movies expecting an anonymous absorption into the film narrative as in much of classical narrative cinema. Although the potential of the moving image was a captivating, and sometimes frightening factor, early film spectators did not attend a film expecting to be lost in the reality of the narrative, but were rather conscious of their roles as spectators.

Furthermore, the fact that we can talk of audiences (of all genders) so moved by their emotional response to the film gives these emotions value and significance that has been undervalued under classical cinema in women-centered genres such as melodramas. One can combine the emotional and the rational in a response permitting positive claims about the viewer: that she is active not passive, cognizing not simply reacting, and potentially critical not simply absorbing ideological effects.

Exhibitionism and Spectacle in the “Cinema of Attractions”

Yet the complex reality-based narrative structures of a melodrama are a long way from the visual extravaganza of early film. One of the most distinctive qualities of what Gunning refers to as the “cinema of attractions” is its performative nature. The scenes that are usually depicted on the screen are appropriately dream-like spectacles of exotic spaces where desires can be effortlessly conjured and satisfied. “Exhibitionistic” is a word that often surfaces when discussing films such as *Serpentine Dance* (1896) and *Seminary Girls* (1897) in their presentation of the spectacle for the sake of its audience. There is a fascination in the films themselves with the machinery that makes it possible to see other human beings move on a screen. They mark the existence of a film that shows itself for what it is, and which addressed anyone who wishes to receive it.

Evidence of exhibitionistic spectacle is in abundance in the earliest films. In *Serpentine Dance*, we have a woman displaying a dance routine for the camera. “That the woman is performing for the camera is clear,” argues Mayne, “but the movements of her body and the swirling fabric do not seem to be anchored in a specific context” (161). The lack of characterization and narrative is imperative to the spectacle. Since we do not know what motivates this woman to perform, the spectator is not driven to identification as understood through Mulveyan theory, and therefore a female spectator is not limited to her conception of female spectatorship. There is no situation inspiring the character’s actions, making the spectacle its own means and its own end. Mayne adds, “the film screen, like the fabric, conceals the female body and displays it simultaneously.” Speaking of the fabric in relation to the cinematic display of the woman’s body hints at a

cinema that can speculate about itself and express concerns about concealment and display not only in relation to the woman's body, but pertaining to cinema itself.

In *From Show Girl to Burlesque Queen* (1903) the same concerns over concealment and display are exposed in the woman's stripping. She appears to be aware that others are looking as she casually glances at her image in the mirror while she undresses, and ultimately turns towards the audience at the end of her performance. The woman herself as exhibitionist, as well as the camera, can control what is concealed and revealed. We are made witness to the complete disrobing only to conceal the actual moment of nudity. The conscious movement to concealment by the woman reveals her understanding of an exhibitionism that involves choice. Rather than being the passive objectified figure that masculinity inscribes, this woman chooses to actively perform her exhibitionism for all spectators to derive pleasure.

In a number of these films the primary action taking place is people watching other people. In *Glenroy Brothers* (1894) the spectator is observing as a group of men watches a boxing fight. *Cockfight* (1896) has a similar scene of placing the spectator in a position where they are watching other people look. The lack of narrative and characterization emphasizes the spectacle of looking and makes it the central point, rather than the means to resolving the narrative action, as is usually the case in classical narrative cinema. We are not watching Johnny's voyeuristic chase of Madeline normalized into a detective story as it is in *Vertigo* (1958), which serves to mask the scopophilic pleasures behind a complex narrative plot. A film such as *Cockfight* is not interested in any events that inspired the spectacle, but rather with watching an action for the sake of looking. In effect, these scenes in early cinema are duplicating onscreen the

act of spectating, making the audience aware of their status as spectators. Although it is important to note that it is still primarily men who are doing the looking, these early films still manage to leave distinctive room for feminine discourse.

In a rare treat, it is the women of *Mabel's Busy Day* (1914) who are showcasing their status as spectators. The fast-paced film seems to linger for a few moments with the women who excitedly stand as a group to watch the auto race together. The film spectator watches the women displaying their status as spectators as they peak through binoculars in the chatter and exhilaration of the scene. There is pleasure to be derived from the centrality of the power, freedom and adventure for the women spectator in the experience that is highlighted.

The Direct Address: Dialogue Between Spectator and Character

The active position of the spectator is due in part to the possibility of the direct address, which is later eliminated as an option in most classical narrative cinema. Allowing the person filmed to break the barrier between film and audience is indicative that the film realizes in itself its status as image by addressing the implied audience the camera stands in for. Such moments of direct address have the power to literally illuminate a film's structures: they reveal what is usually hidden (the camera editing and the work they accomplish) and they tear apart the fabric of the fiction by provoking the conscious awareness that "we are at the movies," which "by revealing the game, destroys it" (Munsterberg 56). Direct address allows the cinema to represent itself clearly as what it is, yet at the same time raises question about the reality of all of our perceptions. It indicates an encounter with the individual who, sitting in the theater and attending to what appears on the screen, guarantees the possibility of connection. This encounter

necessitates a deliberate, unmediated relationship between character and spectator. A character, eyes turned toward the spectator, makes an explicit attempt to initiate a dialogue that will end the isolation of the participants and assure them an authentic and legitimized meeting.

Thus, the direct address confirms a relationship between the audience and the character or person on screen, but it is a different type of identification with this character or person than that found in classical narrative. For the spectator, the direct address establishes distance from the film because it reveals that the actions are taking place for their benefit. The direct address pinpoints a character as an entertainer, not as a point of identification or voyeuristic desire. It makes it difficult for the spectator to completely be absorbed in the identification with the character if the character is explicitly establishing themselves as an “other” capable of communicating with the spectator.

In addition, direct address offers a number of spectatorial positions in relations to the character that may not be available in the closed space of classical narrative film. As Mayne contends:

The direct address to the camera would constitute one of the many taboos of the classical cinema, and the relative autonomy of the image – that is, the fact that it is not defined completely within the look of another, a designated spectator within the film – suggests an ambiguous status (160).

In classical narrative, the space of the film remains completely isolated from that of the auditorium. The spectator in classical narrative remains a pure onlooker whose participation is constructed indirectly through the narrative’s mechanisms of identification and desire. The fact that these narratives are gendered in certain ways is at the heart of what feminist theory aims to explore. Early cinema is a space where

participation is structured through different types of mechanisms, and as a result may offer different types of desires.

The mechanisms allow many possible spectators who can give meaning to the image directly presented, and therefore alternative positions to the male gaze are possible and the engagement with the image can take a number of different forms. If a woman does identify with a female character on screen, the connection is not filtered through the male gaze. This presents a space where a woman spectator's vision is filtered by the male "look" of the camera and its trajectory of narrative and visual desire. Even in an act that seems so particular to male desire, such as the stripping in *From Showgirl to Burlesque Queen*, there is nothing to prevent a lesbian spectator from perceiving herself to be the direct object of the character's gaze. From a straight female spectator watching the stripping, the obvious look into the camera itself to be subjected to criticism and derision, and open the possibility of a position of anger or opposition. The direct address might be a confrontational response about a mechanical apparatus that objectifies the bodies of women.

Furthermore, the direct address negates the assumption made by many of the founders of feminist film theory (such as Mulvey and Doane) that a "female body can only be capable of possessing a look only when that look solicits the attention of a male viewer" (Mayne 166). The character that engages in a direct address can be relating to any audience member. As Casetti argues in *Inside the Gaze*,

By claiming responsibility for this filmic project, this character [who engages in direct address] establishes itself as, on the one hand, a "sign" or "emblem" of the principles which the text obeys, and on the other a "direct source" of information and "immediate regulator" of their circulation.

Briefly, the character puts himself at the service of the enunciator, becomes the narrator, and thereby dominates the entire narrative (33).

Looking directly at the camera accentuates the role of the character as solicitor of the audience's attention and marks them active agents that may aim to inform, solicit or exhort. A female character who looks back, like some of the women in the Méliès films (such as *The Mermaid*) or in Segundo de Chomón's *The Golden Beetle* (1907) are capable of breaking the "self-enclosed narrative universe" of a film (Mayne 166). *The Golden Beetle* begins with the conjuror directly addressing his audience and establishing his authority over the image. From the onset, however, his delicate treatment of the artifact that later becomes the woman suggests his control of it is not absolute. He inches toward it, almost as if he had to sneak up in order to contain it. After a series of magical explosions, two assistants reveal the beetle woman. The fact that it is the two women who present the beetle woman to the audience, rather than the conjuror, marks the shift in power that occurs in the film. The two female assistants ultimately drag the frightened conjuror into the vase of fire he himself created. The last image we are given is of the beetle woman staring straight at the audience, surrounded by her two female companions that display her to the spectator. Although this beetle woman is put on display, she stands triumphantly on the pyre the conjuror has been burned in.

A film such as *The Golden Beetle* may be read by a female spectator as demonstrating the different results of female display and male display to the power dynamics of a film. When the conjuror displays the woman she is contained, but when women display each other she can still possess a commanding female gaze. The burning of the conjuror of the image might also serve as a warning about the dangers inherent in

the role of creator of film or the male creator of images of femininity. Perhaps once the image is created, its power extends outside the domains of male control. If this is a warning for men, it is a hopeful message for women that they can escape the confines of their status as objectified image.

Thus, the female character engaging in a direct address opens up the possibility of an active and powerful female gaze. The direct address suggests a hyperphrase of the type “*I* (character) gaze, and I make *you* (spectator) see that.” They hold the power to deliberately and directly request its spectator’s attention. Even in later, more highly narrativized films such as *How Men Propose* (1913) and *A House Divided* (1913), the direct address serves to deflect the power dynamics from the most prevalent and most common locus of power, the suitors and the husband, to the women and their concerns about work and career.

In *How Men Propose*, the first scene situates the narrative using a familiar place, in a gathering of men who are talking about women (although they are unaware it is the same woman). These men all speak to each other, but none are granted the ability to speak directly to the audience. The woman, however, addresses the spectator before ever corresponding with anyone within the story to inform us of her first suitor’s arrival. Between suitors she continues her repertoire with the audience, turning to the camera as she removes each ring from her finger. Through her continual interaction with the audience, she breaks down the spectators’ impulse to identify with the male point of view and marks herself as our direct and primary point of identification even before we know of her ultimate purpose.

How Men Propose is an example of how the female look can suppress the male point of view. Straight and lesbian spectators can easily find pleasure in this deflection of power. A lesbian spectator can find pleasure in the play with the conventions. The main character is a woman who can use the romantic conventions that usually oppress her, to boost her career and personal goals.

The Tableau: Identification in the Absence of Point of View Shots

In addition to the direct address, the filmmaking style of early cinema is characterized by the tableau. The tableau is defined as mid-to long distance shots with long takes and no moving camera. The absence of the point of view shots is a key characteristic of these shots-scenes and also is relevant to providing a wider range of audience access. Consequently, the absence of point of view shots makes it more difficult to guide the spectator into a focused mode of identification, making the motivations and intents of the film difficult to easily “read.” This critical distance, which is ultimately a consciousness change, can be affected in the audience by annihilating or complicating the pleasure of identification as we have come to understand it.

The spectator is then at liberty to assume a wider range of positions in relation to understanding the film. In *Seminary Girls* (1897), for example, there are alternative modes to understanding the framed scene beyond the obvious scopophilic “Mulveyan” understanding of male desire for these girls. The film begins in the midst of the pillow fight the young schoolgirls are engaging in. We are directly brought into the center of the pleasures of these girls. Because of the fact that these are only women and it is clear that they are enjoying their games, there is room for a female spectator to watch this scene as brief utopian glance at a community of young women that can attest to the signifying

power of female-to-female bonds. Only when the “headmistress,” who is really a man in drag, interrupts the games, are there any intrusions from the outside world.

This scene can be read as an expression of the way that intrusions and authority, contain and repress women and their pleasures in each other, be they erotic or not. The man in drag interrupts the girls to enforce order and his control over the scene. Yet the film ends before we see the headmistress completely gain control of the feisty girls. The last shot we have is of the headmistress attempting to pull out of the girls who is trying to escape by crawling underneath the bed, but we never witness her success. The girls’ refusal to passively submit to the headmistress can be another call to action against masked male authority figures that intrude to prevent female pleasures.

While the classical narrative cinema attempts to lock the image into the structure of the male gaze, the female spectator of an early film is free to see herself as the primary intended spectator. As Hansen argues in *Babel and Babylon* (1994),

Women enjoyed the cinema as a space for public collective activity that was very different from that provided in the family. In this space, among other things, they were offered the rare pleasure of gazing upon the male body as a sexual spectacle (169).

A film such as *Sandow* is the perfect depiction of the male body as a sexual spectacle. As the man flexes his muscles for his spectators, the possibilities of female desire (and also clearly homosexual desires for another male body) are put into play. Through such interactions, the female viewer experiences the pleasure of confirming, through their active position in the film, their membership in the culture and the legitimacy of their desires.

Magic, Transformations and the Fluidity of the Body

Through the direct address, the tableau, and its visual representational style, early films create a space where the blurring of the subject (masculine)/object (feminine) dichotomy is possible. This blurring of this gender binary opposition is exhibited in the ways the narrative of these early films are themselves invested in showing the fluidity of the image.

The Méliés films depict the easiness through which the created object, such as a card in *The Living Playing Card* (1905), could easily be transformed into the subject. By the end of *The Living Playing Card*, the conjuror who has managed to enlarge cards, change the faces of, and even give life to the Queen card, is attacked by his own object as it takes on life, forcing the conjuror to run away. The subject and object of the scene become difficult to decipher when the King, the object that is given life to, turns out to be the conjuror himself. It is impossible to clearly mark this progression of when the subject becomes the object in the film.

The gender of the conjuror in these films, although predominately established as masculine, can still manage a level of instability that would be problematic in the narrative constructs of classical narrative. In *The Enchanted Sedan Chair* (1905), by veiling the people's bodies or having them sit in the sedan chair, men are effortlessly transformed into women and women into men. By the end of the film the conjuror throws two bodies together and can transform them into one body. In these films concerned with magic and transformations, the spectator's relation to the image is constantly shifting to adapt to shifting registers of meaning. There is a certain thinking about the body as a malleable entity or medium for transformation. Involved in these

early films is thus an interrogation concerning dichotomies inherently assumed a part of classical narrative, carried out by the very characters represented, through the complex analysis of their possibilities and degrees of intervention with the representation. Giving a female spectator an idea that the body is not a prison. The capacity to imagine a film body without limits can be cathartic and liberating.

The Male Gaze: The "I" of the Camera

The ability of the image to offer different registers of meaning is limited and constrained in classical narrative by the male gaze. The fact that these early films are not restricted to the male gaze does not mean that they are not voyeuristic. Yet the voyeurism is inherently different as it is exposed as voyeuristic and not normalized by certain stylistics and narrative elements (Mayne 176). In *Peeping Tom* (1901), the character's status as voyeur, if not established by the name of the film, is definitely pronounced as he directly addresses his audience through exaggerated hand motions. While relating directly to the audience, the Peeping Tom gestures to his eyes and the keyhole before committing the voyeuristic act. He enables a situation where the representation, through an explicit gesture of involvement, refers to its fundamental parameters before pursuing its own process of development.

The voyeur of *Peeping Tom* does not give us any context to his peeping, just an act without any real motivation beyond the pleasure of voyeurism itself. The scene once again begins with the voyeur addressing the audience and gesturing his intentions. The actual look through the keyhole is framed by the keyhole, not giving the camera the complete liberty to invade that space without calling attention to itself.

Even in a classical narrative film such as *Rear Window* (1954), which does make voyeurism its major concern, the voyeurism is inherently different from that of a film such as *Peeping Tom*. Although concerned with the act of voyeurism, *Rear Window* is highly narrativized and does aim to present itself as a realistic slice of existence. In *Peeping Tom*, the middle scene has a cross-dresser making it known that often things are not what they seem. In addition, the voyeur of *Peeping Tom* is ultimately punished for his voyeuristic act, while *Rear Window* narratively legitimizes Jeff's pleasure in voyeurism by having him play a key role in solving a crime. The small screens we voyeurize in *Rear Window* are more than just spectacles; they are parts of very intricately constructed narratives that are ultimately neatly united in Jeff's central narrative.

In early cinema, through the "primitive narrator," the function of the camera is separated from complete compliance to the narrative structure of the film. As Mayne argues,

The absorption of the "primitive narrator" into the movement of the camera across the threshold is emblematic of how classical film narration would envelop such bold figures of visual authority and fascination and render them invisible through the apparently seamless narrative of linear, novelistic film narrative (169).

The "primitive narrator's" function eventually becomes obsolete in classical narrative cinema as the look of moving the camera takes over her/his function. Classical narrative cinema intertwines the narrative and the stylistic elements of camera movement and connects them visually to a male character to the extent that they become impossible to differentiate. The moving camera becomes the silent instrument of narration and characterization, associated with creating the realism and identification we have come to expect of film.

Film viewers were a continuously visible and tangible presence in early film through their physical presence in the theatre, as the subject of address of the film, and as participants in the presented spectacle. In our training as spectators of classical narrative, we have come to accept such cinematic stylistic elements, such as the close-up and point of view shot, as a normalized component of films which forms and structures our identification. Historically, the close-up had only come into widespread use in the second half of the 1910s. Before that, people not only hardly ever got to see a close-up in films – they never saw one in real life. Real life does not allow people to look at strangers (particularly women) so coldly, worshipfully, appraisingly – and safely. Modern audiences are usually not made to realize the role that camera positioning plays in classical narrative: it not only reveals to us what is a culturally “legitimate” desire, but it simultaneously reinforces and instructs those desires.

Those stylistic elements that have been normalized and characterized as the means of making film more “real” and visually accessible have placed constraints on female spectatorship that feminist theory is constantly struggling to re-conceptualize. If narrative structure is an analogue for social hierarchy then the disruption of, or messing around with narrative coherence has a positive function in pointing towards possibilities for a more fluid and open organizing of social relations. Early cinema de-stabilizes all assumptions that the cinematic apparatus and the male gaze always are indistinguishable, and that the world on screen is a mirror of the patriarchal unconscious. The feminist experimentation with formal reduction and the impulse to return to what B. Ruby Rich “cinema degree zero.” identifies the ambition that by looking at the different mode of

representation existent in early film, we can challenge “traditional” feminist film criticism. We can perhaps develop a discourse where women can have agency, desire, subjectivity and even a sort of “gaze” in film, although these differ from classical (male) notions of agency and subjectivity. Feminist film theory can develop a way of exposing the visual and mechanical structure of cinema for the cultural spectacle it really is.

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Vita

Silvia Diaz was born to Nurys Diaz on October 17, 1980 in New York City. Her family moved to Jersey City, New Jersey where she graduated from William L. Dickinson High School in June 1998. She attended Lehigh University where she majored in English, and Economics, with a concentration in Public Policy. She graduated with a B.A. in May 2002 and became a Presidential Scholar at Lehigh University. As a Presidential Scholar, she worked towards a Masters in English, where she developed an interest in Feminist Theory and Colonialism. She is a Teach For America Corps member teaching in a Middle School in Harlem in New York City.

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TITLE**