conversation, gesture, even the love/hate relation to food preparation reflecting woman’s contradictory nurturing/dieting impulses—reflect current issues under discussion within the women’s movement.

Daughter Rite’s formal invention similarly parallels issues under discussion by feminist film and television critics regarding the function of soap opera and its viability as a “woman’s” form. Just as critics like Molly Haskell were able to find certain positive values in the “woman’s film” (the respect for emotion, the displacing of action into talk and internal change), so now there is an ongoing re-examination of soap opera’s emphasis on domestic life, its spinning out of conversation, and the relegation of events to off-screen space, providing an endless verbal replay that retards the forward movement of the narrative in order to explore the lateral repercussions of each action on everyone’s life.9

Over the course of the past decade, there has been a dearth of work by filmmakers who are both committed to the woman’s community as an audience and yet equally influenced by the developing theory of feminist critics. By daring to enter into this seeming limbo, Michelle Citron has succeeded in opening up a major new direction for feminist filmmaking. The emphasis on gesture, conversation, and other modes of communication between women moves Daughter Rite’s audience beyond the previously acknowledged boundaries of valorizing positive “images” or lamenting the eternal inscription of women within patriarchal language.

More important, because Daughter Rite is self-explanatory in its critiques and priorities, it represents a significant alternative to films that base their forms of subversion upon extra-filmic texts, thereby creating a protective shield beyond which inexplicability most women will not venture. Because the documentaries taken as the film’s starting point are a mutual resource for both filmmaker and audience, and because soap operas have already entered the home (and women’s consciousness) through television’s inclusion in the daily rituals of domestic maintenance, Citron’s work can potentially carry the pink glass swan back to the silver screen.

Notes

5. Distributed by Iris Films, Box 5353, Berkeley, CA 94705.
7. Rich, p. 338. “Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of self, in the desire to become purified once and for all of our mother’s bondage, to become individuated and free.”
8. Citron is working in quite a different direction, for example, from that taken by Mulvey and Wollen in Riddles of the Sphinx. Like Daughter Rite, Riddles takes its subject matter directly from the women’s movement but it takes its formal strategies from theories of avant-garde film, placing itself within an ever widening gap between the avant garde and the women’s movement. Citron, however, begins with forms familiar to the woman’s movement and builds from there.

GENTLEMEN CONSUME BLONDES

MAUREEN TURIM

Maureen Turim’s article pursues a question closely related to the question raised in the preceding article: In what way is the blatantly exploitative “sexual display” of Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell in Gentlemen Prefer Blondes offset or undercut by their own clearly communicated self-awareness of this display, by their “cynicism and cleverness” ? Turim places this remake of Anita Loos’s satiric novella of 1925 in the context of postwar American culture, where display of the female body took on particular connotations associated with commodity consumption. These connotations invite us to reflect on the linkage between the utopian sensibility conveyed by musicals and the premise that utopia can be realized on the terms of the capitalism that prompts the envisioning of an alternative realm in the first place, the premise that Richard Dyer discusses in his article in Part 2. In the framework of Turim’s article, this linkage involves the channeling of sexual desire into heterosexual monogamy and a transformation of the body as signifier of personal style or individuality into a commodity. Not only is this commodity then put on display for the (male) viewer, its idealization as a commodity demonstrates the distinctive form of social organization that underpins capitalism, namely, the private ownership of the means of production and, in the patriarchal family, of reproduction.

Turim’s article demonstrates the applicability of some general theories of visual pleasure and the patriarchal ordering of narrative to a specific text. However, she warns in her addendum against overly generalized accounts of narrative or spectacle, since specific textual operations may not fit the broad theory and in fact may contradict it.

In this regard, Turim’s position resembles that of several other authors in this volume—for example, Salt, Loader, Polan, Browne, and Andrew—who emphasize the primacy of specific analyses over general theories. To what extent
general theories, such as those advanced by Mulvey, Johnston, or Baudry, account for the major effects of most films and to what extent they obscure important differences among them remain central questions for contemporary film theory and criticism. It seems very unlikely that these questions can be answered in any general, all-encompassing manner. Instead, each particular application and reassessment must be weighed in the balance. Turin’s effort to show the limit to which a “positive” image of women fully aware of their status as objects of erotic desire and capable of exploiting it can be carried in a fifties musical—a limit that falls short of feminist consciousness or group solidarity by remaining “enlightened” self-interest—contributes significantly to an assessment of visual pleasure and the image of women.

I. SATIRE/SEDUCTION—THE FILM AS ENTERTAINMENT MACHINE

The line which separates celebration from satire in American culture is perniciously thin; no place is that lack of differentiation more evident than in Howard Hawks’s Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, in which the excesses of the representation create a terrain of ambiguity fertile enough to support the perfect musical entertainment—a film whose ideological foundations are at once so evident and so hidden as to escape analysis.

Gentlemen, an elaborate Cinemascope Technicolor production of 1953, is in this light a totally different cultural artifact from the short volume Anita Loos wrote in 1925 which served as the source for the Broadway musical from which the film was derived. Loos’s original work, first run as a serial in Harper’s Bazaar, was more clearly a satire. The narrative takes the form of diary entries made by a flapper whose malapropisms, misspellings and child-like reasoning have the same force as Tom Sawyer’s observations, ridiculing the surrounding society.

The transformation of diary into spectacle affects the possibility of a primarily satiric mode; in Hawks’s film, the flapper and her best friend become two showgirls, objects continually on display for us, the viewing audience. Before examining the significance of this transformation, it is useful to trace the development of Gentlemen through the versions which lie between the magazine serial and the Fifties movie.

Edgar Selwyn persuaded Miss Loos to write a straight dramatic play based on her story, but after she signed the contract she discovered to her dismay that Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr. wanted to produce a musical version. . . . In collaboration with her husband, John Emerson, she wrote a comic play which starred brunette Jane Walker wearing a blonde wig to play Lorelei. . . . The show was successful both in New York and on the road, where at least three companies toured simultaneously.

Paramount Pictures bought the film rights. The studio officials, deciding to cast an unknown actress in the role of Lorelei, selected Ruth Taylor, a wide-eyed blonde. . . . Miss Loos said that John C. Wilson had repeatedly asked her to adapt her story as a stage musical comedy, but that she had been too busy writing movie scripts. . . . Miss Loos went to work on the book and co-authored the adaptation with Joseph Fields. . . . [They] kept the spirit of the original book and the atmosphere of the 20s but gave the story a somewhat different treatment.

The plot was certainly farfetched, but the book was not the primary reason for the musical’s phenomenal success. The dances, the music, the sumptuous sets, the costumes, the cast, and above all, Carol Channing as Lorelei made the production a fast-moving extravaganza with an emphasis on entertainment. Disregarding integrated score or songs that developed the action, Gentlemen Prefer Blondes followed the pattern of the old-fashioned musicals, which shunted plot aside to make way for elaborate musical production numbers.

While the 1949 Broadway version contained many elements of the new brashness and sexual appeal infused into the original story by the addition of the musical performances, it remained deeply rooted in the Twenties, including an opening song about Prohibition and a closing number entitled “Keeping Cool with Coolidge.” The Hawks film, then, was the first version to update the story, moving it to a Fifties setting, amplifying the sexual play/exchange against a backdrop of the increasing reification of consumerist values. The musical numbers are treated differently—there are fewer songs in the film and they are more integrated.

Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell.

Gentlemen opens with a dance number which is both invitation and threat as the “two little girls from Little Rock” maneuver their bodies in a perfectly matched and coordinated assault which begins with them tossing their ermines at the audience/camera. The channels of signification are flooded; ermines tossed away, the fantastic power of being able to discard a commodity of so great an exchange value in order to expose a more precious commodity, the sexually cultivated self-aware female body. The number stresses the cooperative effort of the two, as lyrics are either delivered in unison, or, as when Lorelei delivers her verse on her retribution of the boy who once broke her heart and Dorothy, left off-screen for the moment, comes back in to reify the ranks for the chorus:

I was young and determined
To be wined and dined and ermined
Every night opportunity would knock.
For a kid from a small street,
I did very well on Wall Street
Although I never owned a share of stock.
Men are the same way everywhere.

The lyrics enhance the provocation, opening a paradigm which informs the structure of the narrative—an opposition between the sexual display made of these women (their exploitation as objects within the film’s narrative and for the film’s appeal) and the women’s expressed cynicism and cleverness (the satire in which the objects take on the role of critical subjects). This opposition between
“come on” and “put down” provides the ambiguity which is essential to the
ambiance of the sophisticated tease.

This opposition is also evidenced in a larger structural alternation between
segments of musical performances and segments of other kinds of narrative
development. The songs function as structural high points, intense, privileged
moments of the film’s expressivity. Among the five songs, two can be distinguished
as differing from the others; “Little Rock” and “Diamonds” stand apart since
they are stage performances, therefore having double audiences (one represented
in the film and the film’s real audience) and both play on the codes of nightclub
extravaganzas. These two performance numbers almost frame the narrative—
“Little Rock” at the beginning and “Diamonds” close to the end. This framing
function can be seen as extending to the songs in general since they are grouped
towards the beginning and end of the film with a large narrative block uninterruptedly
by song comprising the film’s center (from the cocktail party aboard ship
to the hotel in Paris). Also, the songs are alternated with non-musical narrative
sequences in the sections of the film in which they do occur:

OPENING SEGMENTS

STAGE BACKSTAGE BOAT DECK POOL

“Little Rock” “Bye, Bye, Baby” “Anyone Here For Love?”

CLOSING SEGMENTS

CAPE BACKSTAGE STAGE BACKSTAGE COURT WEDDING

“When Love Goes Wrong” CHEZ LOUIS “Diamonds”

This alternation is important to the system of embedding, of narrative motivation
operative in the film’s use of songs. We are never given spectacle for its own
sake—each instance of performance/seduction is grounded in a logical purpose,
hardly “naturalistic,” but not freestanding either. This embedding acts as a justifying
force, tempering the eroticism—the film’s audience is not watching an
enticing performance directly exhibited for them, but rather the film’s audience is
witness to a nightclub performance directed at an audience within the film. So
even though camera angles and distance increase and highlight the film’s audience’s
voyeurism and fetishism over what is attainable at the local establishment, this
vision is made innocent. We need not consider ourselves voyeurs and fetishists,
habitués of cheap strip shows—we prefer “sophisticated musical comedy.”

A corollary function of the alternation of song and narrative segments is to
structurally disperse and alternate moments of more intense titillation and provocation.
The film as machine to entertain needs this pattern of dispersion; it is dependent on recurrent stimulation, not only on the sways, rhythms and beats,
but also on the very fact of creating moments when the spectator is encouraged to
partake of the forbidden vision, to watch with prurient pleasure. The success of
the entertainment derives from this indulgence of an erotic vision, but not continually.
Intermittence—privilege—must be associated with this vision if it is to retain its power within the spectator’s imagination.

II. WOMAN OBJECT

Marilyn Monroe/Lorelei Lee—star persona and character—are flattened
into a single myth. It is ironic that in a film about performances, acting
denied in favor of “matching.” Even the Twenties locations which remain
(“Thank you ever so”) become simply another of Marilyn’s idiosyncrasies, part
of her essence as instantaneous artifact and pop art sex goddess, part of the arsenal
along with quivering lips and dresses drawn tight across her hips.

A major force developed in the film is the contrast/complement relationship
between Lorelei and Dorothy, between Monroe and Russell. For beneath an initial
opposition, Blonde/Money versus Brunette/Love, is an overriding similarity
which ideologically anchors certain traits and powers as inherently female. This
shared quality is the skillful manipulation of men (in the attempt to regain an
incriminating photo: “If we aren’t able to empty his pockets between us, we
aren’t worthy of the name Woman.”). The courtroom impersonation of Lorelei
by Dorothy emphasizes this sameness beneath the superficial difference—the
difference is marked ironically by the disguise, the affected manners, while the
sameness is marked by the willingness and ability to so deceive.

Hawks himself has interpreted this united front as a joke, a “reversal” of the
sexual structures of his other films’ narratives:

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes was only a joke. In the other films, you have two men who go out
and try to find some pretty girls in order to have a good time. We thought of the opposite
and took two girls who go out and find some men to have a good time: a perfectly modern
story. It pleased me, it was funny. The two girls, Jane Russell and Marilyn Monroe, were so
good together that each time I didn’t know what scene to invent, I just had them walk back
and forth and everyone adored it; they never tired of watching these two pretty girls walk.
I built a staircase so that they could go up and down and as the girls were well-built . . .

Somehow Hawks’s words are more revealing than informative. They disclose that
beneath the “joke” of depicting women in an active sexual role is their exploitation
as objects being trotted back and forth, up and down the screen like ducks in a
shooting gallery.

Dorothy/male object/love.

The characterization of Dorothy as coconceuse of the male body and yet fall-girl
for old-fashioned romantic love blends the modern (sexual) woman with the
Victorian. Her number, “Ain’t There Anyone Here for Love?” has her satirizing
the athletic cult as sexual sublimation while she actively displays a body in training for
sexual activity. “Love” here clearly equals sex, as Dorothy flings herself at the
oblivious muscleman saying, “I need a shoulder to lean on and a couple of arms to
hold me,” and calls out such teasers as, “Doubles, anyone?” Ideological transformation:
Dorothy’s “excessive” sexuality, her freely expressed lust, disappears behind “true love” for Malone. Desire is tamed before the film’s end.

Lorelei/diamonds.

Lorelei’s desire to marry for money, unlike Dorothy’s sexual drive, undergoes no
transformation. It is merely explained in practical terms as good business sense,
the female parallel to any male commercial transaction. Like “Little Rock,” “Diamonds,” puts gold digging into a social context which makes it highly rational:

A kiss may be grand
But it won’t pay the rental
On your humble flat
Or help you at the Automat.

Men grow cold as girls grow old
And we all lose our charms in the end.
But square-cut or pear-shape
These rocks don’t lose their shape.

Over and over the lyrics say men are un dependable and women have one commodity to exchange, and that for a limited time (youth). At one point Lorelei is choreographed as the center of a cluster of women, her song offered to them as advice: Get diamonds, a commodity of ever-rising exchange value; get diamonds, security. It is the clever logic of a deeply alienated woman. A dramatic lighting change punctuates the number, coming in the middle of the line, “Stiff-backed or stiff-kneed, you stand straight at Tiff’ny’s.” Later Lorelei explains to Gus’s father, “A girl being pretty is like a man being rich. . . . If you had a daughter, you’d want her to marry a rich man.” The Fifties capitalist must agree, for what is being embodied in Lorelei is the understanding of the exchange value of sex, although not uniquely, not even primarily as concerns the gold digger. Rather, Lorelei must be seen as just an exaggerated form of the role assigned all middle-class women in Fifties culture, while Dorothy complements this role by being transformed by romantic love. The amalgam of the two is the ideological prescription of the film.

In the reprise of “Little Rock” for the marriage ceremony at the film’s end, the women boast, “At last we won the big crusade.” About to attain the ultimate victory, marriage, the two women stand as equally successful. For love or money, with blondes or brunettes, marriage provides the closure for this film as it does for so many in which happiness/success of women is sustained as the hermeneutic question, the question which informs the narrative. Considering this closure, considering the film’s function as machine to entertain through intermittent stimulation, considering the cloaking of this stimulation in a narrative framework of “good cultural object” which justifies and excuses the inclusion of the erotic, what is left to be said of the satire? Is the satire guiltless, only a variant on bourgeois entertainment with no power to challenge? Is it just a frill, an embellishment, or perhaps even part of the cloaking of the exploitation? Is it not perhaps the satire which provides a pleasurable and necessary ambiguity which disguises the seduction and diverts our attention from the ideological functioning of the film?

What must be remembered in arriving at the answer to these questions is the manner in which this film uses the female body. It is the hourglass figure, the lush, full body of Fifties fashion which sells the film. The female body is not only a sex object, but also an object of exchange; its value can be sold (prostitution) or it can be incorporated into another commodity which then can be sold (the film).

In the universe of consumerism, there is an object more beautiful, more precious, more striking than any other—brides with appendages plus open the automobile: it is the body. Its rediscovery after the era of puritanism under the sign of physical and sexual liberation; its omnipresence (and specifically the feminine body) in advertising, fashion, mass culture; the hygienic, dietetic, and therapeutic cults which surround it; the obsession with youth, elegance, virility/femininity, treatments, diets, and sacrificial practices attached to it; the Myth of Pleasure which envelops it—all are evidence that today the body has become a sacred object. It has literally been substituted for the soul in its moral and ideological function. . . .

The status of the body is culturally determined. In each culture the mode of organization of the relationship to the body reflects the mode of organization of the relationship to objects and the social relations. In a capitalist society the general laws of private property apply to the body, to the social practice and the mental representation of it.

These comments by Baudrillard on the status of the body invite speculation on the specific treatment of the female body in Gentlemen in relationship to American culture of 1953. There is the same combination of gaudiness and elegance evidenced in the finned Cadillacs. There is a fullness which can be associated with fertility and prosperity. This film is the product of an age when a fortune can be made on the skillful marketing of air-brushed pin-ups, an age which no longer exists in its pure form (styles change), but which was influential in establishing the social relations and mental representations which have lingered on over more than twenty years to find a new form today.

III. THE REFERENCE AND THE SYMBOLIC: IDEOLOGICAL FUNCTIONS

Is it by chance that “Piggy” Beekman, the object of Lorelei Lee’s quest throughout the central portion of the film, is the owner of a South African diamond mine? Is it by chance that Lorelei Lee is a blonde? Is it by chance that the narrative centers on a voyage to France? The referential code—the discrete references the text makes to social and historical phenomena—how do these references mobilize, reproduce and generate cultural mythologies, in Barthes’s sense of this term? Capitalist values are at the base of Gentlemen; they are the assumption, the context. Racist, sexist and imperialist assumptions intriguingly surround the core depiction of consumerist values inherent in capitalism.

Piggy/South Africa/diamonds.

The text, even within its satire, treats this subject frivolously. The name “Piggy” is mildly satirical, but endearing. Piggy is ridiculous but not dangerous or evil. South Africa and diamond mines are part of a caricature, an idiosyncrasy, and are fundamentally depoliticized. When Piggy is first introduced to Lorelei, there is a shot of him, taken as her subjective vision, which has a diamond superimposed where his head should be. To Lorelei, Piggy has only one signification, wealth, which she intends to exploit, “to mine.” If gold digging is justified within the film as the female form of capitalist enterprise, what underlies this “justification” is the assumption that capitalism and thus imperialism are unquestioned, natural. The satire does not touch this assumption.
Gentlemen prefer blondes.  

Blondness as a criterion for sexual preference is racist. Consider a publicity still for silent screen star Colleen Moore: a photo of her in blackface, wearing an Afro wig, bore this caption—"What will I do if it's true that gentlemen prefer blondes?"  

Blondness is also easily appropriated for commercial reasons—consider the years of Clairol ads, followed by a more recent series lauding Hanes stockings as blonde models are placed in the fetishist glance of males with the slogan, "Gentlemen prefer Hanes." Blondness is a cultural fetish, the sexual ideal of a racist society.

France! the crossing on the Ille de France! les chanteuses américaines.  

Why does the theme of a voyage to France recur in the Fifties musicals—An American in Paris (1950), April in Paris and On the Riviera (1951), The French Line and Gentlemen Prefer Blondes (1953), Silk Stockings (1956), Funny Face (1957), Gigi (1958)? The film industry has its own mystique. It is a limited, intense time when anything goes, perfect for the portion of the narrative which necessitates complications, intrigues. The film can make use of this setting in innumerable imaginative ways: Lorelei surveying the passenger list or trapping herself in the porthole. France fits into the imaginary of musicals as a fantasy land of culture combined with risqué morality and sexual excitement, the blend which is the goal of the musical's structure.  

Finally we come to the instance at which the reference and the symbolic become totally enmeshed. It is most helpful to this argument that Barthès, outside the context of this film, has already remarked on the relationship between women and diamonds which is so central to this film. He suggests that not only are diamonds considered a girl's best friend, but also that a girl is considered a diamond:

The classical props of the music-hall... Feathers, furs and gloves go on pervading the woman with their magical virtue even once removed, and give her something like the enveloping memory of a luxurious shell, for it is a self-evident law that the whole of strip-tease is given in the very nature of the initial garment: if the latter is improbable, as is the case with the woman in furs, the nakedness which follows remains itself unreal, smooth and enclosed like a beautiful slipper object, withdrawn by its extraordinary human use: this is the underlying significance of the G-string covered with diamonds or sequins which is the end of the strip-tease. This ultimate triangle, by its pure and geometrical shape, by its hard and shiny material, bars the way to the sexual parts like a sword of purity, and definitively drives the woman back into a mineral world, the [precious] stone being here the irreducible symbol of the absolute object, that which serves no purpose.

Notes


Addendum

Looking back over this article, I realize I might now pose some of the questions it raises more forcefully. The question of adaptation and revision of the Loos book into a stage musical, into a film, with which the article begins could do more than raise the question of the difference in dominance between the satiric mode and the entertainment mode of celebration. It seems that these artifacts could be looked at from a perspective I have called elsewhere "semiotic layering," that is, the accrual and transformations of meanings associated with an artifact as it passes through history, or as it is presented in different versions. In the case of Gentlemen, there is a curious shift of the Twenties heritage into the Fifties context which is then affected by our vantage point as analysts of the film in the late Seventies. The Twenties gold digger arose from the working class and the recesses of rural America alongside the other immigrant aspirants in America's rush for gold. It follows, then, that she should become a heroic figure of so many Thirties films as a reincarnation of a true-heart Susie, a working-class heroine who only seems to be losing after money, but in fact seeks love, security, community, aspirations precariously mixed in the growth of sisterhood amongst the chorus, with a final marriage which appears to doom that vital, creative group activity.

She is a gold digger in ironic appellation only; actually, she is the "good wife," as exemplified by Joan Blondell in Footlight Parade kicking her rival, the pretentious floozy, out the door. When the fifties Gentlemen return to this gold digger myth, it is not just as renewal and updating into Fifties values, but it also holds on to the layers of meanings circulating in American popular culture for thirty years. This explains the Pop Art, prefabricated texture of the Hawks film and of its "star," Marilyn Monroe (the quotations serve to remind us that she was still fighting for that status at the time of the film's production). Consider the availability of such curious manuals as the Bonomo "Original" Hollywood Success Course, published in 1945 (the quotes are in the "original" title). Young Norma Jeane all over the country could study such texts, learning the correct answers to the questions proved in "Personality Tests" (pp. 81-82), such as "Do you laugh charmingly? Can you talk for half an hour without mentioning yourself? Have you looked at yourself in a mirror in the past two weeks?"

Obviously gold-digging is to be taken very seriously in the Fifties as the entrance into the culture itself. I indicated this in the article by asserting that the amalgam of Lorelei and Dorothy was the ideological proscription of the film, telling us to temper an acceptance of the female position with both an understanding of the exchange value of sex and the channelling of the power of that sexuality into a romantic love; thus we again see the culture reifying contradictory values, that signal for the participants' suicidal deaths and bra advertisements.

It is interesting that, in the three years since the article first appeared, American culture has danced its way back to the high-heeled steps of the Fifties in which bustiers, cinched waists and tight skirts splash feminine charms in the face of the movement for feminist consciousness. Dassin brought out a leotard this year which resembles the "Playboy bunny" costumes used in the "Little Rock" opening number. Here we come to an analysis that overlaps with a topic which I am
currently working on with Fina Bathrick, the role definition of fashion as transmitted through Hollywood films. These images have literally designed our lives for us, as we look in three-way mirrors before buying.

Another point that I find deserves some amplification is the analysis in the article of the psychoanalytic operation of the film as it manipulates the spectator through a network characterized by the body as source of spectacle by using such devices as doubling, repetition, alternation of denial and access, and the focusing on fragments as symbolic replacement which typifies fetishism. I want to make it clear that, in evoking these basic operations of fascination and pleasure, it is the specific ideological functions of their inscription in the film which is to be examined critically. The point is not to negatively critique all spectacle, as some film theorists have tended to do recently, but rather to show how the cultural references and ideological determinants of the commercial spectacle have in fact created a very restricted access to pleasure, to eroticism, to the viewing experience. This is what I tried to do in this article and continue to do elsewhere.3

To add, then, one point on this topic that is specific to Gentlemen which is not brought out in the article is the appeal of the two women performing movements in rhythmic coordination. How do we understand the fascination of what I called the “perfectly matched and coordinated assault” of this dancing team? Here I think we need to blend some very abstract psycho-perceptual concepts about the appeal of symmetry, rhythm and patterning within a visual field with an historical analysis of how lesbianism has served in male-oriented pornography to increase visual stimulation and to ultimately give twice as much power to the eye, which can penetrate even the liaisons which would appear to deny male entry.4 Lesbians exist in pornography and advertising as a trope; they are not really women given to each other erotically rather than to men, but pseudo-lesbians given over to the gaze which truly possesses them. In Gentlemen the narrative assures us that, despite the bonds between Dorothy and Lorelei, their relationship is not self-sufficient; it seeks males for completion, so that when (heterosexual) love goes wrong, nothing goes right.

Notes

1. This was developed in a paper given at the Purdue Film Conference, 1979, called “Layers of Meaning: Enoch Arden and an Historically Wrought Semiotics.”
4. Ibid.

THE PLACE OF WOMAN IN THE CINEMA OF RAOUl WALSH

PAM COOK AND CLAIRE JOHNSTON

This discussion of the image of women in the films of Raoul Walsh, and of Jane Russell in particular, first appeared in 1974. It calls for a challenge to the “delineation to the ideology of patriarchy—by which we mean the Law of the Father—within the text of the film,” a challenge that Laura Mulvey also makes. Cook and Johnston’s analysis is localized in the film itself; it does not extend to the place of the viewer, but it draws on the same set of psychoanalytic semiotic assumptions that Laura Mulvey does. Here, these assumptions are used to lay a Lacanian conception of human communication over the narrative treatment of a female heroine in order to resolve the apparent contradiction between the “strong and independent” women in Walsh’s films and the dominance of a patriarchal capitalist order. Like Turin, these authors find the resolution of this contradiction in the means by which a woman asserts her strength, namely “through the exploitation of a fetishized image of woman to be exchanged within the circulation of money.” They trace the implications of this process of exploitation in considerable detail, which, after an introduction to difficult Lacanian terminology, becomes an exceptionally clear example of textual analysis. Referring to the Cahiers du Cinéma editorial that identifies a group of Hollywood films riven by an “internal criticism” (see “Cinematology/Criticism” in the first volume of Movies and Methods), they place Walsh’s films within this category of films that cannot fully contain their own contradictions. Such films serve as reminders of the radical disjunction between the discovery of internal but acknowledged criticism and the development of a feminist counter cinema. (The issues of authorship, ideology, and feminism raised here are further explored in a review by Colin MacCabe of the Edinburgh Film Festival book in which Cook and Johnston’s article first appeared and in a reply by Elizabeth Cowie in Screen 16, no. 1 [Spring 1975]: 128–34 and 134–39.)

PRESENTATION

The following analysis of the place of women in some of Raoul Walsh’s films relies on concepts borrowed from the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, whose work constitutes a radical re-reading of Freud. The basis of that reading is the insight that Freud thought his theory of the unconscious in terms of a conceptual apparatus which he forged in the face of pre-Saussurian linguistics, anticipating the discoveries of modern linguistics. Lacan therefore proceeds to a re-reading of