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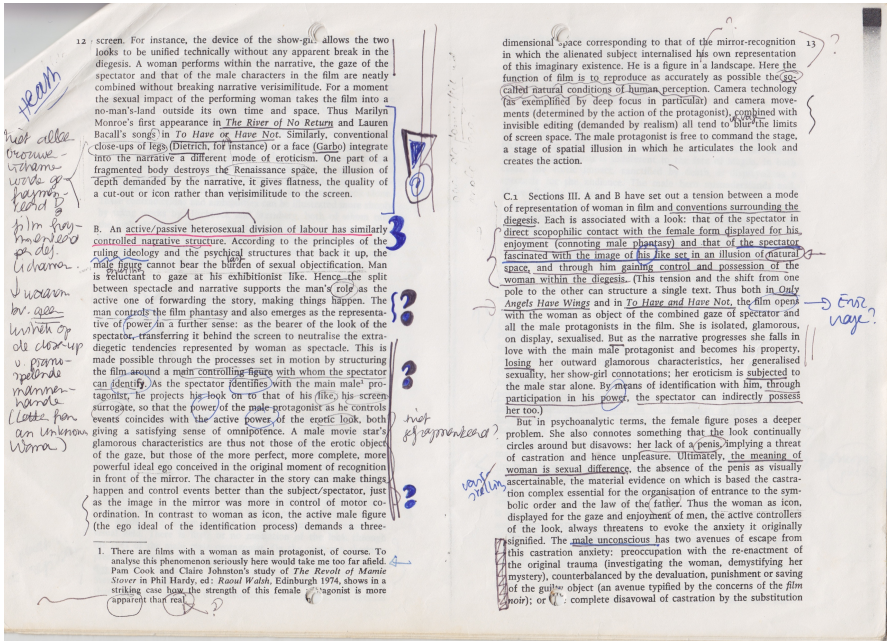
21. SCHRIKBEELDEN

Op de omslag van het themanummer een fragment van het stilleven 'Is, was, komt' [2016] van fotograaf Dik Nicolai (c), speciaal voor dit themanummer over SCHRIKBEELDEN gemaakt (bijdrage 19).

MULVEY'S ONE-DIMENSIONAL SYSTEM



12 screen. For instance, the device of the show-girl allows the two looks to be unified technically without any apparent break in the diegesis. A woman performs within the narrative, the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude. For a moment the sexual impact of the performing woman takes the film into a no-man's-land outside its own time and space. Thus Marilyn Monroe's first appearance in *The River of No Return* and Lauren Bacall's songs in *To Have or Have Not*. Similarly, conventional close-ups of legs (Dietrich, for instance) or a face (Garbo) integrate into the narrative a different mode of eroticism. One part of a fragmented body destroys the Renaissance space, the illusion of depth demanded by the narrative, it gives flatness, the quality of a cut-out or icon rather than verisimilitude to the screen.

B. An active/passive heterosexual division of labour has similarly controlled narrative structure. According to the principles of the ruling ideology and the psychical structures that back it up, the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like. Hence the split between spectacle and narrative supports the man's role as the active one of forwarding the story, making things happen. The man controls the film phantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen to neutralise the extra-diegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle. This is made possible through the processes set in motion by structuring the film around a main controlling figure with whom the spectator can identify. As the spectator identifies with the main male[1] protagonist, he projects his look on to that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence. A male movie star's glamorous characteristics are thus not those of the erotic object of the gaze, but those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror. The character in the story can make things happen and control events better than the subject/spectator, just as the image in the mirror was more in control of motor co-ordination. In contrast to woman as icon, the active male figure (the ego ideal of the identification process) demands a three-

1. There are films with a woman as main protagonist, of course. To analyse this phenomenon seriously here would take me too far afield. Pam Cook and Claire Johnston's study of *The Revolt of Mamie Stover* in Phil Hardy, ed: *Raoul Walsh*, Edinburgh 1974, shows in a striking case how the strength of this female protagonist is more apparent than real.

13 dimensional space corresponding to that of the mirror-recognition in which the alienated subject internalised his own representation of this imaginary existence. He is a figure in a landscape. Here the function of film is to reproduce as accurately as possible the so-called natural conditions of human perception. Camera technology (as exemplified by deep focus in particular) and camera movements (determined by the action of the protagonist), combined with invisible editing (demanded by realism) all tend to blur the limits of screen space. The male protagonist is free to command the stage, a stage of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates the action.

C.1 Sections III. A and B have set out a tension between a mode of representation of woman in film and conventions surrounding the diegesis. Each is associated with a look: that of the spectator in direct scopophilic contact with the female form displayed for his enjoyment (connoting male phantasy) and that of the spectator fascinated with the image of his like set in an illusion of natural space, and through him gaining control and possession of the woman within the diegesis. (This tension and the shift from one pole to the other can structure a single text. Thus both in *Only Angels Have Wings* and in *To Have and Have Not*, the film opens with the woman as object of the combined gaze of spectator and all the male protagonists in the film. She is isolated, glamorous, on display, sexualised. But as the narrative progresses she falls in love with the main male protagonist and becomes his property, losing her outward glamorous characteristics, her generalised sexuality, her show-girl connotations; her eroticism is subjected to the male star alone. By means of identification with him, through participation in his power, the spectator can indirectly possess her too.)

But in psychoanalytic terms, the female figure poses a deeper problem. She also connotes something that the look continually circles around but disavows: her lack of a penis, implying a threat of castration and hence unpleasure. Ultimately, the meaning of woman is sexual difference, the absence of the penis as visually ascertainable, the material evidence on which is based the castration complex essential for the organisation of entrance to the symbolic order and the law of the father. Thus the woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified. The male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety: preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object (an avenue typified by the concerns of the *film noir*); or complete disavowal of castration by the substitution

A last look at 'Visual Pleasure'

Heidi de Mare

English translation of 'Mulvey's eendimensionale systeem. Bij dezen dan voor het laatst "Visual Pleasure"', in: *Versus*, no. 2 [1986]: 35-54. Translated by Gawie Keyser.

Introduction

Feminist film theory posits a game of questions and answers that have largely remained unchanged since the seventies. Elsewhere I have tried to examine this statement in detail.[1] I would like to resume my hypothesis, albeit in a different manner, and in doing so explore anew the nature of the central text in feminist film theory: *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* by Laura Mulvey.[2]

In 'Van horen zien' I have shown what the purpose of Mulvey's proposition is. She has developed a strategy to study the classical Hollywood film from a feminist as well as a theoretical standpoint. This strategy has received the support of a whole generation of feminists from inside and outside of the world of film theory. In this article I would like to take a closer look at the other side of the coin. In doing so I will question the theoretical tactics that form the basis of Mulvey's program. I will show how Mulvey uses the notion of castration anxiety to create a watertight – but one-sided – system.

Secondly I would like to show the consequences of this way of thinking concerning the treatment of filmic images. Lastly I shall try to put forward conclusions – on the one hand by describing the theoretical impasse that has resulted from the massively positive reception of 'Visual Pleasure' within the current feminist film theory, and on the other hand by asking the question if a feminist film theory is even possible in light of Mulvey's influence. Does the need for another kind of feminist film theory still exist, perhaps of the kind presented in the writings of Claire Johnston?

I. CASTRATION ANXIETY

'Visual Pleasure' has monopolised feminist film theory through an approach that tries to explain the role or roles of woman in classical Hollywood cinema in a more theoretical way.[3]

Mulvey has answered the question regarding the correlation between four levels satisfactorily. These levels are: the biological difference between men and women; the societal relationships between men and women (in which power plays an important part); the male and female psychic constitution; and the masculine and feminine in cinema. Each of these registers of reality corresponds to knowledge domains that cannot be reduced to one another. For example, in biology no statement can be made between men and women in cinema, in the same way in which social and political theory is unable to give a decisive answer regarding the psychic world. To put it differently, epistemologically speaking, these four levels should remain distinct from one another.

The theoretical surplus value Mulvey's program promised – her pretension to construct a *theoretical* rather than a purely empirical connection between the four dimensions – speaks to the desire of feminists in the academic world. The need for 'more theory' is, after all, not self-explanatory, certainly not for every woman who is involved in the feminist movement that has manifested itself at the beginning of the 1970's.In formulating her system Mulvey not only engaged with theoretical arguments: women studies and feminist theory still have roots in the women's movement and in feminism. The experiences that gave rise to this political movement should be honoured. To put it differently: the experience of repression and the idea of female victimhood *should* echo in Mulvey's theory to prevent a breach in the relationship with the women's movement.[4]

I will now put forward a series of steps that explains why 'Visual Pleasure' presents a mind set acceptable for feminists. Mulvey's way of thinking distances itself from a too direct and vulgar reference to the societal (subordinate) position of women in a way that is both typical and ingenious. She does this by using the psychoanalysis of Freud and Lacan as a base, while this theoretical (psychoanalytical) explanation is only accepted if it refers to a social reality. This double movement consequently makes both a feminist and a theoretical standpoint possible.

The problem of castration forms a junction where the feminist experience of subordination conjoins with the psychoanalytical explanation of that experience. The concept of castration anxiety is, either way, the focal point in the discourse of 'Visual Pleasure'. Without it the argumentation falls apart.

Mulvey introduces the concept of castration anxiety by stating that the female figure (the female image, the female, 'the' woman) has a specific meaning in psychoanalysis: 'She also connotes something that the look continually circles around but disavows: her lack of a penis, implying a threat of castration and hence unpleasure. Ultimately, the meaning of woman is sexual difference, the absence of the penis as visually ascertainable, the material evidence on which is based the castration complex essential for the organization of entrance to the symbolic order and the law of the father. Thus the woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified' (p. 13). This description appears sound. It is true that men have penises. However, a closer look reveals that Mulvey's reading of the castration complex and its use in feminist film theory is a construction based on four systems of equalisations.

1. Biological difference = psychic distinction

Mulvey emphasises a real penis that is present or absent. It is the one biological trait that distinguishes men from women. But in doing so she fails to see that a manifestly present threat is not essential in the reality of the castration threat as a psychological phenomenon. The castration complex is part of the imaginary world. For Freud castration is related to the envisioning of (biological) sex difference, and this is not an exclusively male experience.[5] Contrary to Mulvey's supposition, in which she simply transposes biological sex difference to a parallel, psychic distinction, Freudian psychoanalysis states that *both* sexes have to deal mentally with the biological difference. Freud emphasises that women as well as men should follow a certain path in order to accept this physical difference. Both sexes should learn to accept the difference: men by accepting castration threat, women by accepting the fact that they are castrated.[6] The ways in which men and women try to solve this *mental* problem can for both be 'male' or 'female', depending on the situation in the Oedipus complex to which the castration complex is related.[7]

The fact that men and women solve the biological distinction between the sexes in different ways does not mean that they are mentally different – that is the shortened conclusion that Mulvey reaches[8] – but that they take ownership of their position as one of both sexes by way of similar, psychic (unconscious) processes. Or like Juliet Mitchell states: 'The necessarily different attitudes of man and woman toward the castration complex, illustrate the way in which they, by repressing the traits of the other sex, are able to appropriate psychologically the social meaning of their biological sex more or less successfully (but never completely). This repression is (…) not a biological, but a psychological process.'[9] The recognition of the castration by the girl and the recognition of the castration threat by the boy means for *both* an entrance into the cultural order that includes a social difference between the sexes. Put differently, the castration complex is for *both* sexes of crucial importance for their admission in culture as a 'normal' woman and a 'normal' man, it does not only apply to the man, like Mulvey suggests.

2. Psychic imagination = filmic image

By dismissing the psychic dimension – by constantly linking castration anxiety to having a penis – a second dimension disappears. Mulvey fuses the *psychic* imagination of castration – supposedly exclusively present in men – with the *filmic* image, 'the female image as a castration threat' (p. 18). In doing so Mulvey reduces the workings of the psyche to something that can be consciously perceived. Mulvey incorrectly sees the result of unconscious processes, like disavowal, displacement and repressing of the castration complex as the essence of what she calls the male psyche. Consequently, the female filmic image is simply seen as equal to the men's 'phantasy', resulting in the disappearance of any material difference between filmic and psychic reality. Or like she puts it, 'the female form displayed for his enjoyment (connoting male phantasy)' (p. 13).

Mulvey projects biological difference between the sexes on psychic reality as well as filmic reality. Castration anxiety – seen as the typification of the psychic reality of men – has to be exorcised. The classical Hollywood film would be one of the forms in which that happen – by way of the female image that has been developed in that domain. Mulvey thus connects the castration threat (for men) and the (temporary) relieve from it to the filmic image of the woman: 'Hence the look, pleasurable in form, can be threatening in content, and it is woman as representation/image that crystallizes this paradox' (p. 11).

Along the lines of Freudian theory as explained in the previous paragraph (1), another difference in Mulvey's interpretation can be noticed. Psychoanalysis indeed states that the boy and the girl resolve the

castration complex in different ways, but it also shows that both have to relate to the Law of the Father. It is not the woman (or girl), but the Father who presents the castration threat. The contrast between 'male genitalia' and 'being castrated' is the central issue for both boy and girl. For the boy the threat comes from the Father who has the power to punish the boy for his sexual deeds. The recognition by the boy that this threat exists implies at the same time recognition of the Law of the Father. In this way the boy can become a 'normal man'. For the girl the situation is different, in as far that she, in dealing with the Law of the Father, has to admit that she does not posses the male sex and is therefore castrated. In this way the girl submits herself to the Law – a Law to which both father and mother are subjected too – that is necessary in order to become a 'normal' woman.

By forgetting these stories, and by diminishing the role of the psychic submission of the boy and the girl to the Law of the Father by way of a struggle between the boy (man) and the girl (woman), Mulvey is able to point to the female image as the cause of castration anxiety instead of to the Father. Classical Hollywood cinema consequently becomes the prototype of different ways in which the male psyche exorcises castration anxiety through the female image. 'The male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety: preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counter-balanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object (an avenue typified by the concerns of the *film noir*); or the complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous (hence over-valuation, the cult of the female star).This second avenue, fetishistic scopophilia, builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself. The first avenue, voyeurism, on the contrary, has associations with sadism: pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration), asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness' (pp. 13-14).

For Mulvey every female image in classical Hollywood cinema *means* solely castration anxiety. This is accentuated by her disinterest in de nature of the image: in her article she uses general terms like 'female figure' and 'female form' when speaking about the female image in film. These are terms that connote a biological context: not being in the possession of a penis. This will have an influence on film analysis, as I shall point out.

3. Filmic difference = social difference

Mulvey goes even further in her thought process of equalisation. In her approach of de classical Hollywood film the male psyche appears to be embodied by social 'men', that is to say the directors of these movies. According to Mulvey male directors invest their castration anxiety in their movies in a direct way: 'While Hitchcock goes into the investigative side of voyeurism, Sternberg produces the ultimate fetish...' (p. 14). Mulvey's focus on *conscious* issues (and not on unconscious processes) is being underlined by her when she says: 'Hitchcock has never concealed his interest in voyeurism, cinematic and non-cinematic' (p. 15).

Castration anxiety, in Mulvey's conception, is not only the driving force behind the work of male directors. It also applies to male viewers and protagonists. That is to say, classical Hollywood cinema organises the gaze of the 'spectator fascinated with the image of *his* like set in an illusion of natural space, and through *him* gaining control and possession of the woman within the diegesis' (p. 13, italics, *H.d.M.*). Apart from the viewer and the director, the protagonist is also considered to be 'male'. This form of masculinity is equated with socio-cultural activity.

'In contrast to woman as icon, the active male figure (...) demands a three-dimensional space' (pp. 12-13). It is in this three-dimensional illusion of reality that the male protagonist fulfills the desires of male directors and spectators. 'The male protagonist is free to command the stage, a stage of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates the action' (p. 13).

Opposite the male pole in classical Hollywood cinema – the position representing social reality – stands the female aspect. The female image is a product of the paradoxical *phantasy* of men. On the one hand the man is able to create a simulacrum in which he owns the woman – 'gaining control and possession of the woman within the diegesis (p. 13). On the other hand, the female image is a (castration) threat able to destroy the male simulacrum: 'the female image as a castration threat constantly endangers the unity of the diegesis and bursts through the world of illusion as an intrusive, static, one-dimensional fetish' (p. 18).

According to Mulvey, men (as social actors) as well as the male protagonist are being subjected to castration anxiety by the female image in classical Hollywood cinema. This link between men as a social category and the male protagonist results in a confrontation between the male three-dimensional reality and the one dimensionality of the female pole. Put differently: Mulvey assigns no reality to the female aspect in classical Hollywood cinema, it is only a male phantasy. The equivalent of a female reality is only virtually present: Mulvey suggests an autonomous female subconscious and an autonomous female image.[10] Mulvey-epigones have filled this void in her program by turning the attention to the woman as a director, actor and spectator.[11]

By intertwining the filmic dimension into the social dimension, Mulvey constructs an asymmetry between the male and female poles that is crucial for feminism. By viewing the male side as a (three-dimensional) reality, inside as well as outside the film, the female side is locked out. Mulvey creates this asymmetry in such a way that the female is excluded from the social reality. In this way her conceptions accord with feminism, in which it is essential that the social reality (and *power*) belongs to the male pole, and the female pole is excluded from that reality. The value that feminism attaches to this asymmetry (male power reigns, within cinema and beyond), now appears also in film theory.[12] The benefit of this is that, by looking at classical Hollywood cinema, the male psyche as well as the biological man can now be held accountable.

4. Social relation = biological distinction

Classical Hollywood film represents social relationships between men and women, according to Mulvey: men control reality while women are excluded from this reality. This male-female relationship typifies the patriarchal culture: 'Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning' (p. 7).

Finally, we see that Mulvey equates male and female in a social sense with the male and female bodies in a biological sense. This brings Mulvey unwittingly back to the point of departure in her argument. In the same way that the biological difference between the sexes determines the psychic difference (male bodies have castration anxiety) as well as the filmic difference (castration-fear is grounded in the female image), it also determines in the end that men make their own reality: they have the power and they repress women. Although Mulvey's intension was to distance herself from vulgar feminist viewpoints in film criticism dating from the beginning of the seventies, the opposite is true. By utilizing an

alleged psychoanalytical conceptional apparatus she is capable of masking her pre-Freudian position. In 'Visual Pleasure' men (as social-biological beings), become the embodiment of the male psyche almost *by chance*. In the same random manner, women – not surprisingly – turn out to be the *victims* feminists always knew they were: they do not have a penis, they have no psyche, no image of their own, and they do not have a reality.

For Mulvey, 'male' and 'female' ultimately connote the biological essence – this determines each dimension she treats. She does this by rating the distinction in terms of feminism: possessing a penis equals possessing power. Feminism wants to appropriate both aspects. Because this is biologically impossible, the 'penis owners' have to be violated in a symbolic way. Resulting in the abolition of the diversity of meanings that 'male' and 'female' might have (for example on a psychic level and in cinema). In short, the *different* truths in the four dimensions are subjected to the one and only Truth in 'Visual Pleasure'. The magical word used to transgress all epistemological borders is: 'castration anxiety'.[13] It is this term that Mulvey astutely uses to create a system in which everything falls in place. The woman in her role as victim stays in tact, resulting in the safeguarding of a 'more theoretical stance', so that it falls in good favour with the women's moment and feminist academics alike. Even so, the connection between a feminist standpoint and a theoretical standpoint forms a façade in Mulvey's argumentative positioning: in reality, the feminist view prevails while Freudian theory – an area in conflict with that view – is being sacrificed.

II. THE FILMIC IMAGE

In this section I would like to examine the consequences of this feminist film theory from a different starting point. How does Mulvey treat filmic images and what are her assumptions in reading them? What is her idea of the relationship between images and social reality?

Mulvey considers the classical Hollywood film as a monolithic whole (p. 7), that in 'its formal preoccupations reflects the psychical obsessions of the society which produced it' (p. 8). As a patriarchal product the 'neurotic needs of the male ego' rules Hollywood cinema in its classical period (p. 18). What men lack in their real lives they find in the 'complementary phantasy world' of film (p. 11). 'In the highly developed Hollywood cinema it was only through these codes [mainstream film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order] that the alienated subject, torn in his imaginary memory by a sense of loss, by the terror of potential lack in phantasy, came near to finding a glimpse of satisfaction: through its formal beauty and its play on his own formative obsessions.' (p. 8). This means that the phantasy world has to appear as much as possible to be like the reality outside of the cinema. Hollywood cinema thus shows 'a convincing world in which the spectator's surrogate can perform with verisimilitude' (p. 18).

Opposite the freedom of men to act (in cinema even more than outside it) Mulvey positions the woman's lack of freedom. In contrast to men, women are passive in cinema. She is the erotic object for the male protagonist as well as for the spectator.[14] Precisely in this capacity the woman is denied a three dimensionality. She is degraded – she has become an icon (p. 12), 'an intrusive, static, one-dimensional fetish' (p. 18). The fetishisation of the woman is necessary, according to Mulvey, to exorcise the castration anxiety, and to obviate the interrupting intervention of the female image in the narrative development: 'as soon as fetishistic representation of the female image threatens to break the spell of illusion, and the erotic image on the screen appears directly (without mediation) to the spectator, the fact of fetishisation, concealing

as it does castration fear, freezes the look, fixates the spectator and prevents him from achieving any distance from the image in front of him' (p. 18).

How is the male phantasy of a perfect reality in classical Hollywood cinema constructed according to Mulvey? To do so, film has to 'reproduce as accurately as possible the so-called natural conditions of human perception' (p. 13). Through a technique developed in the classical Hollywood film it is possible to create an 'illusion of natural space' (p. 13) that joins the 'normal viewing process' (p. 15). Mulvey points to different technical procedures that guarantee the three-dimensional reality in cinema. 'Camera technology (as exemplified by deep focus in particular) and camera movements (determined by the action of the protagonist), combined with invisible editing (demanded by realism) all tend to blur the limits of screen space' (p. 13). To accentuate the illusionary reality of the male protagonist, it is necessary that the camera gaze on the pro-filmic situation *and* the gaze of the public on the filmic screen be subjected to it (p. 17).

In her eagerness to expose patriarchal Hollywood cinema, and in order to explain the exclusion of women from this, Mulvey has to believe in the reality she assigns to the male protagonist. 'The camera becomes the mechanism for producing an illusion of Renaissance space, flowing movements compatible with the human eye, an ideology of representation that revolves around the perception of the subject; the camera's look is disavowed in order to create a convincing world in which the spectator's surrogate can perform with verisimilitude' (p. 18). But what are the presuppositions on which Mulvey can claim the exclusion of the female image from the three-dimensional (illusionary) reality of the man (the male protagonist)?

To substantiate this impression of reality, Mulvey has to assume that the human form, the human eye, the Renaissance space are *natural* givens and *universal* constants. By referring to the workings of a Renaissance perspective in twentieth century cinema she suggests that the way in which the human eye perceives the natural world has remain unchanged. Of course, biologically that is the case – but we are not concerned with biology here. The fact that the human eye has remained unchanged biologically does not mean that human perception has been the same throughout history.*

According to Mulvey, the only difference between a Renaissance painting, in which perspective has been applied, and a classical Hollywood film lies in the fact that the latter is 'an advanced representation system' (p. 7). However, in classical Hollywood cinema the organised exchange of glances between viewer and image is extremely specific. Art historian Erwin Panofsky formulates the situation in cinema as follows: 'Here the spectator occupies a fixed seat, but only physically, not as the subject of an aesthetic experience. Aesthetically, he is in permanent motion as his eye identifies itself with the lens of the camera, which permanently shifts in distance and direction. And as movable as the spectator is, as movable is, for the same reason, the space presented to him. Not only bodies move in space, but space itself does, approaching, receding, turning, dissolving and recrystallising as it appears through the controlled locomotion and focusing of the camera and through the cutting and editing of the various shots – not to mention such special effects as visions, transformations, disappearances, slow-motion and fast-motion shots, reversals and trick films.'[15] Human perception as a cultural product – and as a consequence acknowledging differences in Renaissance and twentieth century perceptions – does not appear in Mulvey's thinking. The differences between Renaissance art and classical Hollywood film, let alone the differences between Hollywood films as such, of course then

become less interesting. In the end Mulvey considers the classical Hollywood film as a reflection of a preceding reality. She suggests that the reality as a whole is always present – as a 'pro-filmic event' (p. 17).

We now come to the final aspect: the question of the human form defining the nature of classical Hollywood cinema: 'The conventions of mainstream film focus attention on the human form. Scale, space, stories are all anthropomorphic. Here, curiosity and the wish to look intermingle with a fascination with likeness and recognition: the human face, the human body, the relationship between the human form and its surroundings, the visible presence of the person in the world' (p. 9). Mulvey *believes* in film images, as if they simply show the human form in the three-dimensional reality. But she forgets that this belief is not self-evident, that it has taken cinema decades to establish this 'recognition effect'. Many different codes and artistic devices are necessary – rhythm in shots, editing, the actions of actors — to enable the viewer to recognise 'men and women' in film and to distinguish between them. The fact that Mulvey 'recognises' men and women in a film is symptomatic of the humanist desire underlying feminism.[16] When we look at the scale and the internal fragmentation of film images, it would be almost impossible to postulate that these images concern human representations outside of the realm of cinema. Mulvey, however, attaches a rather different value to this fragmentation. 'One part of a fragmented body destroys the Renaissance space, the illusion of depth demanded by the narrative, it gives flatness, the quality of a cut-out or icon rather than verisimilitude to the screen' (p. 12). Precisely because she considers film as a medium through which the (three-dimensional reality) can be shown, she also observes the film image as a – in principal not fragmented – cut-out of the real world. When fragmentation appears, it is according to Mulvey always in the form of the female, which confirms the fact that the female is excluded from the real word.

Trying to understand film as a cultural form that itself *creates a new reality* –one that is in many ways different from the alleged reality in a Renaissance painting – means that we do not focus on the accepted impression of veracity inherent in the filmic image. Instead, we attempt to discover which codes and rules are being used in cinema to establish this impression of veracity. In film, the eye is constantly being moved, through location as well as by way of scale, in such a way that has not been shown before, and that answers the so-called 'flowing movements compatible with the human eye' (p. 18). The close-up illustrates the appearance of a different kind of reality. As Panofsky puts it: 'In showing us in magnification, either the face of the speaker or the face of the listeners or both in alternation, the camera transforms the human physiognomy into a huge field of action where – given the qualification of the performers – every subtle movement of the features, almost imperceptible from a natural distance, becomes an expressive event in visible space and thereby completely integrates itself with the expressive content of the spoken word... '.[17] The fact that the spectator currently understands the scale of the face as a battlefield of emotions as well as the scale of a battlefield in full size says something about the visual subjectivity of the spectator. In the same way a Renaissance painting says something about the gaze of the historical spectator. It is a risky undertaking to look at a historical image with our twentieth century eyes, formed by cinema and later by television. Cinema generates a new reality, which is, compared to a Renaissance painting, not a 'better' registration of something that waits outside of cinema to be recognised and to be represented. It would be more correct to regard the relationship between image and subjectivity as one that is historically changing, a relationship I would like to articulate with the concept of the *glance*. By studying this relationship the difference in subjectivity *and* the difference in visual material can be done right.

Mulvey's conception of the relationship between film and social reality can be seen in her interpretation of scenes from two different movies. According to her the sequences show the *same issue*, that is a woman performing in front of a male audience. 'For a moment the sexual impact of the performing woman takes the film into a no-man's-land outside its own time and space. Thus Marilyn Monroe's first appearance in RIVER OF NO RETURN and Lauren Bacall's songs in TO HAVE AND HAVE NOT.' (p. 12). Instead of developing a theory putting forth instruments that can be used in an analysis of film sequences, Mulvey is satisfied with her general impression of both sequences. Simply telling what the effect of a film is, does not, however, help to understand the way in which it has been constructed, so criticism is premature. It would be more relevant to know how 'the female image' was organised. To what rules and conventions do filmic images obey? Should the different number of shots that are necessary to make 'the same impression' not be taken into account? (In RIVER OF NO RETURN two shots are needed, in the case of the first song in TO HAVE AND HAVE NOT the number is eighteen). In addition, should questions not be asked regarding framing changes, the assembling of various shots, the play between the gazes of different characters and the relationships between them? Only when these differences are classified (for both male and female characters, in both scenes) can fundamental conclusions be drawn regarding regularity in the filmic treatment of 'male' and 'female'. In a next article I shall try to work out these issues based on the aforementioned scenes. **

My statement will be that feminist research into the 'female image in film' cannot end in a first impression of the film material, because one would then see oneself, in this case the feminist researcher, as the predominant point of reference. I propose that feminist research should concern itself primarily with analysing the tactics used by an institution like Hollywood to tell cinematic stories, and with the way in which Hollywood positions itself in relation to the culture in which these stories appear. The question is which historical legacy is being put into play and which strategies are being used to appear 'natural' and evident. Moreover, feminist (film) theory will have to take into account the meaning of 'male and female' as being interdependent factors, within the symbolic order.[18] Although this does not imply that the opposition male-female determines and explains *everything* in culture. This brings us to a next stage.

III. THEORETICAL STALEMATE

Mulvey's system can be summarised by describing it as a biased view on the all-encompassing difference between a male and a female pole. This distinction determines everything she studies (psychic dimension, film analysis). It also prescribes how theories are being used. In short, the feminist experience that suffers from a socio-cultural difference between men and women is Mulvey starting point. This suffering is the female truth that has to be confirmed everywhere. As we have seen, this leads to the subjection of all other truths that other disciplines may produce.

From this flows the equation sign by which Mulvey brings biological, psychic, filmic and social knowledge under the same denominator. By doing so, she places them under the sign of the one and only Truth that is being dictated by the feminist experience. The woman, in Mulvey's view, forms the evident object of investigation as well as the departing point of the production of truth. This is a double movement that Foucault considers the basis of social science.[19] In addition this kind of thinking claims all knowledge that has been produced in other domains. The danger in this approach, in the case of film analyses as well as where psychoanalysis is concerned, is clear: in both domains *own disciplinary rules* are being ignored, and as a consequence the filmic and the psychic are being reduced to what women experience empirically (in their

biological and social existence). In this way psychoanalytic theory is being used as a theoretical smokescreen behind which a system of social science can be expanded. Mulvey's theory constructs an exclusive system, and therein lies its attraction. Her tactic involves the disregard of multiple dimensions, whereby the notion of 'castration anxiety' – after being released from the clinical practice in which it has a clear meaning — has become a magical, transgressive word.

Despite the psychoanalytic terminology, Mulvey does not succeed in freeing herself from political feminist viewpoints. However, through this psychoanalytic terminology she is able to frame 'female repression' with an abundance of theory, so that this formulation can be accepted in academic circles. So, this theoretical detour does not result in a different view on feminism, it only confirms and extends the existing viewpoints.

The suggestion of progress in feminist film theory is being supported by a whole range of writing appearing after 1975. People *believe* the program developed by Mulvey – even if there are at some points differences of opinion.[20] However, Mulvey-adepts do not succeed in keeping up the appearance of theoretical progress. It is through the expansion of Mulvey's program within feminist film theory that new axioms have crept in. This is the reason for the stagnation in feminist film theory and the failure it has shown in breaking through the barrier of the game of questions and answers. So the question regarding the 'position of women in cinema' remains the central issue. Whether it concerns the director, the spectator, the character or, later, the imagining of female desire and female visual pleasure – the 'woman' as a biological-social being has remained the evident embodiment of all of this, even in the face of the fierce rejection of 'sociological associative theorising' that has for a couple of years accompanied this question.[21]

In short this is the problem of feminist film theory: Mulvey claims, based on biological difference between men and women, an exclusive reality for women. But this reality can only exist when the biological difference is denied. This issue of difference-or-equality forms the fundamental, but insolvable question in feminist (film) theory.[22] Insoluble because feminism only sees a struggle between men and women, in which all cultural means are used by men. What feminists ignore is that the cultural or symbolic order into which each individual – man or woman – enters, exists *preceding this entrance*. The 'patriarchal culture' that Mulvey speaks of does not have the purpose of repressing women; its main aim is sustaining itself. One of the fundamental issues that has to be organised by a culture is the relation between the sexes. The difference between the sexes does have to be resolved, often not in the social reality, but in a symbolical way. In this sense cultural phenomena like cinema often transgress the possibilities of the social reality. Feminism, that is one of the signs of a flexible and changing cultural order, has to address the meaning of its own appearance, in much the same way in which it has to take stock of the singularities of cultural forms that to a certain extend are immune to a direct (political) attack.

IV. OTHER DIMENSIONS?

Can it be said that the history of feminist film theory begins with Mulvey's article? Is it true that Mulvey's program is the only reaction to feminist film criticism since beginning of the seventies? And does the theoretical trajectory like the one in 'Visual Pleasure' represents the only possible way for the feminist's movement represented in academia by women's studies? These are some of the questions that arise while reading articles by the English film theoretician Claire Johnston published simultaneously with Mulvey's work. In what way does Johnston's approach differ from Mulvey's program?

Elsewhere in this issue of *Versus* I have given a short description of her article 'Women's cinema as Counter Cinema'.[23] This text, dating from 1973, is widely regarded as preceding the thinking that comes through in 'Visual Pleasure'.[24] From this viewpoint is becomes necessary to put this sequence in parenthesis.

Where Mulvey, whose feminist experience has the same beginning and end, Johnston aspires to delve into the complexity of the question. She attaches importance to attempt to differentiate between two realities: the (feminist) experience *and* filmic material. Both phenomena come by way of (different) cultural structures. Johnston *questions*, Mulvey *believes*. From this position Johnston does not understand classical Hollywood film as an unbroken reflection of (sexist) society, c.q. as a patriarchal subconscious. The parallel between a social reality and a filmic reality exists in her view only in the subjective experience. Johnston proposes an analysis of this experience itself by understanding what the reality of film as a cultural form is, whereby she aspires to respect the specific position of film within the cultural order.[25]

Mulvey provided the women's movement with a scientific justification of the feminist experience ad requirements. Johnston, on the other hand, uses certain forms of thought to separate the feminist experience and classical Hollywood cinema in an analytical way: she refuses a definite solution. This does not make Johnston's views appealing. The reason for the massive propagation of Mulvey's standpoint is evident: it speaks to the desire for new identities (for modern women). It would appear that Johnston's attempt to analyze the complexity of these themes have vanished from most feminist articles on film published after 1975. To be sure: after 1975 there has been such a multiplication of writings that it would be save to say that the underlying reason for this has been ignoring of complexity. With Mulvey's program, replacing the serious questions posed by Johnston, came a theoretical lightness that has characterised feminist theory-forming ever since. With the transference of attention from Johnston to Mulvey the legacy of Marxist thinking, as well the core of works by Barthes, Panofsky and others, has disappeared.

Since 1975 'woman' has become a fetish in feminist thought on film, to put it in psychoanalytic terms. Sex difference is being denied (by striving for equality) and identity is being accentuated (by stating difference), which also is a denial of sex differences. Underlying this double-sided dilemma is a negation of the existence and workings of the cultural order, which has its own temporality. In other words, feminist (film) theory reduces – and this is the lasting legacy of Mulvey's work – all experience to the level of a struggle between women and men, while the third instance *as regards to which* this 'struggle' stands is, either ignored or not recognized.

Only when, as in the instance of Johnston's 'Women's Cinema', the cultural or symbolic order is considered as something that appoints a place in society to women and men alike can this lead to a feminist film theory that adds value to the feminist experience as well as to film theory.[26] The question whether such an interest can be shared and appreciated by women's studies in its current form, remains to be seen.

* Note by the author: years later, during my dissertation research, I got acquainted with the work of the art historian Michael Baxandall, who already in 1972 confirmed this in his book *Painting & Experience in fifteenth-century Italy* [Oxford University Press], see his chapter on 'The period eye', especially pp. 29-32.

** See H. de Mare, 'Visuele aspecten van drie filmische vrouwbeelden. Bacall, Monroe en Dietrich', in: *Versus*, no. 3 [1989]: 54-75.

[1] See H. De Mare, 'Van horen zien. "De vrouw" als onmogelijke kategorie in feministies filmtheoreties onderzoek'. in: *Tijdschrift voor vrouwenstudies* 27 (1986): , pp. 302-321. Together with this article it forms the basis of the doctoral seminar 'Laura Mulvey and the feminist film theory' that was held in the autumn of 1995 at the Catholic University of Nijmegen.

[2] L. Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in: *Screen*, vol. 16. nr. 3 (1975), pp. 6-18. Page numbers in the text refer to this publication.

[3] The idea of the woman as spectator and the notion of female visual pleasure as research objects are not self-evident. They are subjected to certain parameters that define our thinking. It is important to identify these parameters in order to answer the question regarding the possibility (and desirability) of (another) feminist film theory.

[4] In The Netherlands this problem has only been addressed once in a theoretical way. In 1981 Mieke Aerts refered to similar problems that were at stake in the English magazine *m/f*: 'The *m/f* way of thinking, after all, is being rejected, because it is harmful to the women's movement, or even stymies the movement, especially in the event of feminist theories ignoring repressed female subjects.' M. Aerts, 'Het raam van de studeerkamer', in: *Tijdschrijft voor vrouwenstudies* 7 (1981), p. 370. The fact that the political argument has been dominant is evident in the theoretical state of affairs, in which this question has not been addressed sufficiently.

[5] The *phallus* as a concept is distinguished from the penis: the penis is an anatomical reality whereas the phallus exists in the domain of the symbolic. In other words, the phallus is the *imagination* of the male genitals.

[6] Lacan stands even further from the genital connotation in his views on castration. For him castration signifies the split that generates the (speaking and longing) subject. The concept of the phallus then obtains the meaning of the lost object that is being longed for. Castration anxiety – not exclusively male – shows itself every time when loss is clear and present and when the (imaginary) unity of the subject is being threatened.

[7] 'What Freud now calls a *complete* Oedipus complex (distinguished from his earlier, *schematic* concept that was almost exclusively based on *Oedipus the King*) reveals the double sided nature of the situation. The boy can also react in a female way: take the father as an object of love and identify with the mother (as in the case of the Wolf man), in which case the ambivalence of rivalry comes into play. It also happens that the girl, after she has to relinquish the father as an object of love, identifies with him (the father) and in doing so making the 'male' dominant (like the girl in *Ueber die Psychogenese eines Falles von weiblicher Homoseksualität*). In the solution of the Oedipus complex all four possibilities (both parents taken as love objects and both parents functioning as figures of identification) are present in different strength.' J. Mitchell, *Psychoanalyse en feminisme*. Deel 1. *Psychoanalyse en Vrouwelijkheid*. Nijmegen (SUN) 1981, p. 95. (original English version published in 1974).

[8] 'We are still separated by a great gap from important issues for the *female* unconscious which are scarcely relevant tot *phallocentric* theory...' (p. 7) and 'The *male* unconscious had two avenues of escape from this *castration anxiet*y...' (p. 13), (italics H.d.M.).

[9] J. Mitchell, *Psychoanalyse en feminisme*, op.cit., p. 165.

[10] See note 7. Furthermore: 'Women, whose image has been stolen… ' (p. 18).

[11] See H. de Mare, 'Van horen zien', op.cit. pp. 311-314. For a treatment of the female director see Bernadette van Dijck and Anneke Smelik, *Dutch women movies: developments and interrelations.* Utrecht, feb. 1986, p. 40: 'Finally, in the last few years, women directors not only try to present new stories from a female point of view, but also try to establish new ways of telling these stories. The searching and researching of new film forms started. The prescriptive and programmatic norms of the Women's Films have been left behind to make place for a tentative quest after female desire and female pleasure.' A recent example of the female (lesbian) spectator can be found in: Margriet Kruyver, 'Vrouwen en film. Hoe vrouwelijk is het kijkplezier?', in: *Homologie*. sept./oct. 1986, especially on p. 19: 'The question surrounding female visual pleasure remains. For example, how does female visual desire works? Does this desire exist to the same extend for women as for men?'. Finally, the title of E.A. Kaplan's book puts forward precisely what drives feminist film theory: *Women & Film. Both sides of the camera*. New York 1983.

[12] This conception of power – as a form of exclusion, repression and deprivation – is exclusive to the powerless. With this *negative* conception of power it has become impossible to zoom in to the way in which power works. M. Foucault has redefined the concept of power by accentuating the techniques by which power is exerted and the reality that power produces. In other words, he puts forward a *positive* conception of power.

[13] This concept apparently catches the imagination even if it is used outside the original psychoanalytical context. The loss of the male genitalia is, obviously, smoothly and readily imagined. It then is understandable that the female image is an anxiety inducing device for men.

[14] 'In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking had been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness* (....). Traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen' (pp. 11-12).

[15] E. Panofsky, *Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures*', in: D. Talbot. *Film: An Anthology* (1934), New York 1959, p. 19.

[16] The fact that a social-political movement utilizes a humanist ideology is easy to imagine, because it forms the basis of the movement. But it has to be questioned whether feminist theory can use this as a point of departure without becoming entangled in its own thinking: by attempting to support the movement and at the same time reflecting on the knowledge that this political movement desires, especially when film or other cultural phenomena are being examined. It is quite possible to take a *theoretical anti-humanist* perspective as a starting point to study film, without undermining the fundaments of the feminist movement. See for example E. Borms, *Humanisme-kritiek in het hedendaagse Franse denken*. Nijmegen (SUN) 1986. Also see note 3.

[17] E. Panofsky, 'Style and Medium', op.cit., p. 21.

[18] Does a feminist film theory have to be held accountable of the fact that the critical thinking on which it is based comes from the desire to 'be different'? And to what extent does that theory understand the fact that up to now all cultures have been able to function through a strategic division of labour, of positions in ritual action and the such, where use is being made of obvious sex differences? This distinction re-appears in the symbolic organization; it plays a role in stories and in filmic images. When the mutual interdependence between the sexes is taken seriously, the way in which feminism justifies its desire to be 'the other' can be re-examined. To view a division as a reduction is only possible in a modern society in which sexual difference is of lesser importance and in which the humanist ideology is dominant. For a definition of 'mutual interdependence', see C. Lévi-Strauss, *Het gezin*. Nijmegen (SUN) 1983 (org. 1956).

[19] See M. Foucault, *De woorden en de dingen*, Baarn (Ambo) 1973 (org. 1966).

[20] See H. de Mare, 'Van horen zien'. op. cit.

[21] M. Kruyter, 'Vrouwen en film', op.cit. (note 11), p. 17.

[22] See also the anniversary issue of *Tijdschrift voor vrouwenstudies* 24 (1985), A. Sommer, 'Het verschil en de gelijkheid. Inleiding bij de lezingen'.

[23] Specifically the article 'Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema' dated 1973 is of interest here. I refer to a short description of the issues she discussed. In the seminar 'Claire Johnson: het begin van een feministische filmtheorie?', [Spring 1987], we will start with a research in which the place that Johnston takes up in English (feminist) film theory will be studied.

[24] 'After Claire Johnston's work provided an important impulse, another important British article was published: *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* by Laura Mulvey. In this Mulvey builds on the work by Johnston and the *Camera Obscura*-collective.' M. Kruyver, 'Vrouwen en Film', op. cit., p. 17.

[25] Johnston uses different concepts, attained from the art historian E. Panofsky, R. Barthes and also the writings of Marx and Lenin on ideology and art. She uses these texts not as citation reservoirs out of which one can take whatever one wants. Rather, she attentively works through the text, so that her thinking changes, leading to the formulation of new questions.

[26] It is possible that Claire Johnson has not been able to fully study the complex problem in her later articles, and that her analyses can be seen as isolating the symbolic, cultural aspect.