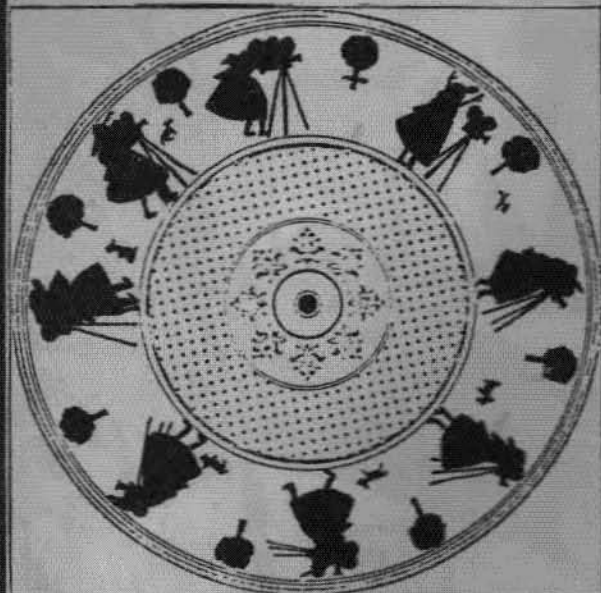


# WOMEN & FILM NO. 1



FILM HISTORY REVISED  
HAWK'S WOMEN  
FESTIVALS  
GODARD  
MARILYN • MAO



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# OVERVIEW

The tape in the Museum of Cinema History at Universal Studios begins by quoting Stalin: "Give me the cinema and I'll rule the world." Stalin didn't have his way; Hollywood rules the world. The Hollywood movie is an international film model. Europe, Africa, Japan, S.E. Asia (particularly under the Shaw monopoly), and India (to name a few) have been extraordinarily conscientious in patterning their packages after every detail of the Hollywood product. Whatever is peculiar to American film is easily transplanted (where there is the same pattern of exploitation and monopoly film conglomerates) in other countries for local audiences. Other peoples of the world come to know the real/unreal movie lives of Americans but not vice versa. The U.S. cinema, joining hands with local capitalists of other countries, has deformed peoples everywhere forcing them to be passive consumers of an alienating ideology but not creators of their own ideology.

Hollywood (System) cinema is not only the country's principal vehicle for ideological oppression but also a major economic exploiter. In the silent era Hollywood was the fifth industry in the nation rising to take fourth place when sound came in. Even though the industry suffered during WWII, McCarthy, and television, it always maintained significance in the stock market and business world. It viciously generates enormous surplus value off the labor and talents of thousands of workers with an inher-

ent hierarchy of exploitation according to education, color, and sex -- no different from the Detroit assembly lines.

In the Hollywood top echelon were Zukor, Fox, Mayer, Laemmle, Goldwyn, the Warner brothers and Loew - all without exception originally petit bourgeois European immigrants - who created big monopolies and incredible wealth as business tyrants and kitschmen with artistic pretensions. They survived the cut-throat industrial wars and established destructively competitive patterns in the film industry there after. These movie barons generated oppressive ideology, perpetuating false sentiments and values, and reinforcing stereotypes. The top male stars, directors, and other male lackeys had it good, as long as they conformed to System Cinema. Also, a handful of women who became big stars (especially at Warner's in the 40s) made it materially, but most were ultimately destroyed by the roles they had to play and perpetuate. These roles - child/woman, whore, bitch, wife, mother, secretary or girl Friday, frigid career woman, vamp, etc. - were all portrayed falsely and one dimensionally. The 40s saw a flourishing of interesting female roles because the women, left home by their soldier husbands and lovers, formed a large audience to which the eternally opportunistic bourgeois catered. The word went out to package movie glamour queens. Yet these female characters had to sell out within the last minutes of the film (e.g. Barbara Stanwyck running after Barry Sullivan in *Forty Guns*) so as not to jeopardize the system. The white, glamorous women who played men's inferiors and stereotypes were paid more than blacks, chicanos, Indians, Chinese, and Japanese playing niggers, chinks or gooks. The voracious appetite of the industry also swallowed child stars (Judy Garland, Mickey Rooney, Linda Darnell) who grew up destroyed by a dream machine.

CINEMA





While Hollywood ran rampant, the guardians of public morality and decency in the form of censorship boards set up extensive codes against obscene or gangsterish behavior which could "incite to crime" or "appeal to prurient interest" or that might "jeopardize the safety of the government". In Memphis there were codes against using any songs by Lena Horne "because there are plenty of good white singers" or of a film Curley which showed Black children visiting a white school: "the south does not permit Negroes in white schools nor recognize social equality between races even in children" (Movies, Censorship, and the Law by I. Carmen). Thus while censorship boards everywhere were diligent over maintaining public "morality and decency" and System safety, they never even bothered about the derogatory, stereotyped image of women, children, and third world people. They never once agitated against the perniciousness of false values, perpetuation of false sentiments, or misleading superficial interpretations of Freudian psychology turned out by the dozen by hack writers and directors. As Marcuse says in One-Dimensional Man "Institutionalized desublimation thus appears to be an aspect of the 'conquest of transcendence' achieved by the one dimensional society. Just as this society tends to reduce, and even absorb opposition (the qualitative difference!) in the realm of politics and higher culture, so it does in the instinctual sphere. The result is the atrophy of the mental organs for grasping the contradictions and the alternatives and, in the one remaining dimension of technological rationality, the Happy Consciousness comes to prevail." So while we exist with this one layered consciousness, the System continues to cause and reinforce our neuroses. Those who have a healthy reaction by allowing their neuroses to surface, are conveniently put into a hospital or jail.

It is no mere coincidence that Los

Angeles is the world's most kitsch city. (Kitsch being the sick development of the Romantic tradition initiated by the bourgeoisie and destined to be the middle-class way of life). It is a city largely founded by Hollywood and lived according to its values. The vicious circle becomes incredibly pernicious when entertainment figures like Lawrence Welk who provides family entertainment with kitsch from "down-home", rise from farm boy status to owner and controller of skyscraper office monstrosities which oppress inhabitants physically and aesthetically. Here, Ronald Reagan governs, made popular by his all-American "perfect male" roles (even as gangster disguised as policeman in The Killers (1965) he is an All-American male) and his super patriotic speeches in the movies of the war years. The movies become a dangerous vehicle of false values and sentiments when people begin to live by movie standards, cite movie characters as exemplary figures, and adhere to movie values for definitions of what is good, bad, love, hate, beauty, ugliness, marriage, patriotism, etc. For example, Linda Darnell's mother was known to wear a snake or two around her neck and insist that the height of all her aspirations was a costly bedroom completely lined with white satin. Women aspired to look like Jean Harlow or Marilyn Monroe and other trendy stars, to have 40" busts even though manufacturers are too practical to make 40" bras. This is a small detail out of numerous daily situations that cause women to be schizophrenics -- the screen, supported by magazines, set up ideals impossible to imitate (while objective living calls for a more practical approach to life). Hollywood settings (e.g. Cecil de Mille among others) created a flourish of kitsch decor, architecture, and life styles all over the country. According to Gillo Dorfles in the book Kitsch: "...kitsch is essentially the falsifica-

tion of sentiments and the substitution of spurious sentiments for real ones. That is to say that real feelings become sentimentality; this is the moral argument against kitsch... Nevertheless it is possible to say that kitsch goes practically hand in hand with bourgeois morals, which are now in decline although they reigned supreme in the golden age of Kitsch...

Legitimizing stereotypes and false values is a significant part of the kitsch element. When the System movie image and System movie values are substitutes for real values, then schizophrenia, superficiality, perverted egocentricity, violence, and other neuroses become rampant.

#### ABOUT THIS ISSUE

The women in this magazine, as part of the women's movement, are aware of the political, psychological, social and economic oppression of women. The struggle begins on all fronts and we are taking up the struggle with women's image in film and women's roles in the film industry -- the ways in which we are exploited and the ways to transform the derogatory and immoral attitudes the ruling class and their male lackys have towards women and other oppressed peoples. We realize that the System will attempt to divide us politically and economically. There will be frequent confrontations with the System and its accomplices dressed up as "progressives". In order to keep pace with trends to ensure its survival, the System Cinema will produce seeming "radical" or "women's lib" films. It is for us to realize their limitations and watch that the carpet is not, yet again, pulled from under our feet. "In reality the area of 'permitted protest' is much greater than the System is willing to admit. This gives the

artist the illusion that they are acting against the Establishment by going beyond certain narrow limits. They do not realize that even anti-system art can be absorbed and utilized by the system as both a brake and necessary self-correction." Irwin Silber, "USA: The Alienation of Culture," Tricontinental 10.

We will at times be our own worst enemies, coming from an oppressed situation with our head level and gut level at a disparity. But with our awareness of internal conflicts and psychological conditionings we dare attempt to tear down the old vicious structures and assumptions that victimize us. We condemn presumptuous self-elected male interpreters who set the ground rules as to how women function or ought to function, how women feel or ought to feel, how women think or ought to think. We want to take charge over our minds, bodies, and image. As Solanas and Getino said in "Toward a Third Cinema (Cineaste, vol. IV, no.3), "Revolution does not begin with the taking of political power from imperialism and the bourgeoisie but rather begins at the moment when the masses sense a need for change and their intellectual vanguards begin to study and carry out this change through activities on different fronts."

For the Women in Film the immediate problems are 1) A closed and sexist industry whose survival is precisely based on discrimination. (If women are accepted to work in the industry they are usually given servile roles - receptionist, secretary, odd job girl, script girl, prop girl etc. 2) The persistently false image of women on the screen no matter how "liberal" looking Ali McGraw is in Love Story. 3) The persistence and consistency of the publicity department's packaging of women as sex objects, victims of chain or cycle gangs, or vampires of horror stories. 4) The auteur theory which has evolved into a male and masculine theory on all levels (e.g., pg. 216 of Andrew Sarris' The American Cinema). Even if the auteur theory should include



an equal number of women directors, it is still an oppressive theory making the director a superstar as if filmmaking were a one-man show. 5) The process of System Cinema filmmaking itself, which is inhuman, involving an elitist hierarchy, destructive competition, and vicious internal politics. 6) The prejudice on the part of film departments in universities and film institutes in accepting women in the faculty or as production students.

Our goal is to create a People's Cinema where human beings are portrayed as human beings and not servile caricatures. A cinema that is close to the masses who watch it. We wish to change the process of filmmaking to one of collectivism, and away from a sexist-elitist hierarchy. We wish to change the traditional modes of film criticism dominated by male critics and historians. At best their works are descriptive and interpretive within the confines of traditional criticism which focuses solely on aesthetics and the individualistic values of the middleclass way of life. Therefore it is up to the women who suffer the bad end of the cinematic image to initiate a form of film history and criticism that is relevant and just to females and males. Aesthetic considerations have to evolve from this end. We cannot afford to indulge in illusions of art for art's sake.

While there is a long term struggle with these problems, the internal conflicts among women will be: discouragement, discomforts from being harassed, no immediate successes in sight, the inclination for women to withdraw into seclusion and personal problems, and the betrayals of other women in the media once personal success is in sight. But the awareness that supercedes and encourages women in all struggles is that we have nothing to lose.

We're so down we couldn't be downer.

Structurally we differ from the staff organization of other film magazines. We do not function in the usual editor/staff contributor relationship. Everyone participates in manuscript meetings to discuss and thrash out problems. Decisions are by consensus. A definite direction evolved as we

went along. Hopefully a collective will emerge. The process that went into the making of the magazine was a learning experience. The most difficult task was in trying to get women to write, to convince them they can and should contribute. The interest and enthusiasm were there but even in the most articulate of women there exist definite psychological obstacles in the way of reaching the goal. Finally, we are non-professionals who dare put a magazine together because there is a real need for an arena for debate and presentation of views especially from a feminist-marxist-anarchist direction. We encourage as many women as possible to write and also men who are on our side. We also invite criticism. For those who detest writing we need physical help as well as financial support.

In conclusion, we support the liberation of workers, blacks, third world people and children, and we hope they support us equally. No movement today is sufficiently radical unless women's liberation is on the list of priorities - for under every oppressed male/colored/worker there usually lies a woman. ■



# A ONE-SIDED STORY: WOMEN IN THE MOVIES

Christine Mohanna

It is not possible to discuss the roles women play in movies without first recognizing one inescapable fact: Most movies are made by men. Of course every rule has its exceptions, but how many people have heard of Dorothy Azner and who thinks of Ida Lupino as a director? Just about every major, influential picture made in the United States throughout the entire history of film has been directed, and most likely produced, by a man. Sometimes women have written the novels upon which the movies were based, and sometimes even the script (Five Easy Pieces, for example) but it is inevitably a male-dominated studio which chooses the book from which to make the movie, and edits the screenplay. And so, if we think of the evolution of film as a kind of mirror which reflects a changing society, we must concede that the mirror has always been limited in its reflection, and possibly distorted. Of course, a single film can never be, and is never intended to be, an accurate reflection of our lives and our roles. Films are made by intelligent men, moronic men, reactionary men, radical men and each sees it quite differently. But they all see it from a masculine viewpoint--this distortion, if it is one, has remained unvaried.

We have few clues to tell us whether a woman's viewpoint would result in a film substantially different from a man's, for we have so little basis of comparison. However, we do know that, although Harrold Robbins writes sexploitation novels, so does Jacqueline Susann. Our society conditions men and women to be very different in their goals and their behavior, but it could be that they both see male and female roles through the same distorted lens. For example, if the majority of men in a particular society agree that "a woman's place is in the

home," won't a majority of the women agree also? Because if they did not, they would cease to behave as if it were true, and, in time, it would cease to be true. In other words, if certain sexual stereotypes do exist, they exist because both men and women believe in them--though they do so in different ways and for different reasons. When the stereotypes fade, then perhaps more and more women will be accepted as serious filmmakers, and the reflection we see on the screen will be really transformed for the first time in film history.

In any case, movies, especially popular ones, tell us both directly and indirectly what it means to be a man or woman in our world. In the 70 odd years that the movies have been in existence, our ideal of masculine and feminine has changed in subtle ways. Without trying to, movies record these changes and, in proportion to their influence, make some small changes of their own. Life feeds the screen and is fed, in turn, by its own reflection on that screen.

In tracing the evolution of sex roles, we can begin with the first film story-teller--Melies the magician. His most famous work, A Trip to the Moon, is a satiric fantasy which pokes fun at scientific societies. However it also says something quite subtle about the roles of men and women at the turn of the century. A group of astronomers and scientists build a rocket ship which they ride into space. On their way to the moon, they pass bebies of reclining bathing beauties who represent the constellations, and smile and wink provocatively as the ship passes by. Quite innocently and inadvertently Melies is making a statement about men and women: Men are scientists and adventurers who aim for the moon and pass, on their way, women who are like

THE SCREEN REFLECTS LIFE, BUT IN SUCH CONCENTRATED MAGNITUDE THAT IT SEEMS MORE DESIRABLE THAN THE ORIGINAL. IT BECOMES FOR A WHILE, A MORE POTENT REALITY THAN LIFE ITSELF.

stars--stationary, winking temptations, not quite real and not quite attainable. Women, at the turn of the century, were thought of as pale, weak creatures, tempting in their defenselessness and somehow unattainable in their purity. Melies' film reflects perfectly the sexual stereotypes of his time.

The heroines in the films of D.W. Griffith are likewise fragile, though nevertheless capable of great courage. In Broken Blossoms Lillian Gish plays a poor girl who is cruelly beaten by her father--but he can never destroy the purity of her heart. In Griffith's Birth of a Nation womanhood is a precious flower that must be protected at all cost from rapacious black men (how often sexism and racism walk hand in hand!) This traditionally Southern weakness of woman gives the Klan a convenient excuse to murder their former slaves. In the same film, Flora is a typical Griffith girl--she twitters, giggles, jumps up and down with goodness and glee. The portrayal is so exaggerated that it becomes almost a caricature of the silly, young female.

Griffith's women were pale and beautiful, but almost never overtly sexual. When Clara Bow became the "It Girl" movies began to look upon women with a leering eye. They were no longer quite so pure, nor quite so vulnerable, but became instead, naughty little visions of sex who were always just beyond reach. "Thus Clara Bow might invade a bachelor's apartment, dance suggestively in front of him, and leap provocatively into his bedroom. But when the bachelor made the proper responses, she promptly ran home to mother." (The Liveliest Art, p. 113). But the "Imp Girl" and the "It Girl" were not inventions of the movies. They correspond exactly with the ideal "sexually emancipated" woman of the twenties--a "flaming" creature who was still, at heart, a prude,

but who could cut her hair, shorten her skirts, dance wildly and pretend she was not. Yet while the movies did not invent this new woman, they undoubtedly reinforced her image. How many sweet "Griffith girls" watching Clara Bow tempt men on the screen (and in the audience) went home, cut their hair and tried to be just like her? And how many men suddenly found themselves bored with good little girls and yearning for that tantalizing image on the screen? For the screen reflects life, but in such concentrated magnitude that it seems more desirable than the original. It becomes for a while, a more potent reality than life itself.

Hollywood learned its lesson fast: Sex, especially in the form of young female bodies, sells exceedingly well to men and women alike. Paramount advertised Robert Flaherty's Moana as "The Love Story of a South Seas Siren" and hired hula girls to gyrate at its premiere. The fact that Moana is not a love story at all, but a serious, beautifully photographed documentary about an entire way of life, made no difference at all.

However, not all silent films saw women as pale heroines or sex objects. In 1928 Carl Dreyer made The Passion of Joan of Arc, a film which is not only a work of art, but evokes an image of one woman which is so powerful that it escapes all sexual stereotypes. His Joan is a simple girl whose depth of commitment makes her male judges look like pompous fools. Her face is not conventionally pretty--she wears no make-up and her head is brutally shaved. But she is infinitely more substantial and truly beautiful than the heroine whose beauty is all she has. Dreyer's Joan cries "like a woman," is often afraid and unsure of herself, but how many aggressive, confident men could face death by

fire the way she did? She is powerful in her conviction, a quality so rare in the women films create, that she seems monumental.

In the same year that Dreyer made Joan, Von Sternberg made a silent film called Docks of New York. It tells the story of a blustering, super-male stoker from a tramp steamer who comes ashore for a night of fun. He saves a beautiful woman from drowning and then, to keep her from trying it again, marries her. But he marries her only out of pity, fully intending to ship out the next morning. She wakes up to find him gone, a pile of money on the end table making her no better than the prostitute she had probably been before. He comes back for a short while and we see how desperate she is to hold him--in small, traditionally feminine ways, like sewing a button on his shirt, she tries to convince him that he needs her too. But he is a man, by "nature" independent and eager for adventure. She is "only a woman" who must wait and wait, hoping he will return. She has only her young body and her implied promise of servitude to tempt him back. By avoiding the more refined relationships of middle class society, Von Sternberg has exposed the eternal pain of woman with painful clarity: The man has his life; the woman has only her man.

During this entire period, of course, the western bloomed, and the West was indisputably a man's world. Women entered as prostitutes or reformers, but always at their peril. A cowboy like William S. Hart might fall in love, but it was a temptation he tried to avoid. Often women were in westerns solely as vehicles to demonstrate the hero's courage--she's an "Eastern lady," there for him to rescue from evil gunmen or physical danger, but otherwise, only in the way.

In contrast to this masculine world, a few films were made specifically for and about women and their problems. One typical example, made in the 20's, is called Smouldering Fires. It tells of a cold, successful career woman who rediscovers her femininity when she falls in love with the much-younger foreman of her own garment firm. She marries him, and as she falls more deeply in love, she seems transformed into a kinder, softer person. When her husband falls for the woman's younger sister, she takes it bravely, pretending not to care. But it is obvious that her happiness is destroyed. She has now only an empty career to keep her warm. Such films, like the soap operas of today, had the effect of reinforcing the ideas women already had about femininity. The career woman was made to seem unnaturally aggressive--she was looked upon as a tyrant by her employees. When she finally falls in love and becomes a "real woman" it is too late because she is middle-aged and cannot hold a younger man. Careers are bad for women, the film is saying, a woman must find love and marriage while she is still young, or it will be too late. Of course, women thought this way already, and so they enjoyed films like this which simply reassured them that they were right.

When sound films came into their own, and with them the musical, woman was given a new role--that of glamour queen. This was a period in which films, rather than reflect reality, attempted to avoid it completely by inventing an artificial world of dazzling costumes and witty conversations. Housewives who wore the same dress day after day could sit entranced as the parades of expensive gowns worn by women whose only task was to remain beautiful, passed by on the

OFTEN WOMEN WERE IN WESTERNS SOLELY AS VEHICLES TO DEMONSTRATE THE HERO'S COURAGE-- SHE'S ON COURAGE-- SHE'S AN "EASTERN LADY," THERE FOR HIM TO RESCUE FROM EVIL GUNMEN OR PHYSICAL DANGER, BUT OTHERWISE, ONLY IN THE WAY.

screen. Busby Berkeley went even further and reduced each woman to a bit a glitter which, multiplied, made a magnificent shifting design. With so much beauty on the screen at once, each woman lost her unique value in a sea of abstract femininity.

At the same time, the super-male had not been forgotten. In the 30's, the underworld flourished like never before and gangster films suddenly became the rage. Here again, we see a man's world, but one more evil and sophisticated than the old West. This was a life of violence where women became mere fancy accessories on the arm of a "Scarface" or a "Little Caesar." In the musical, woman may have been an empty shell of glamour, but at least she was important--in the gangster film she meant no more than a glossy new car.

Whether women were queens or molls, they were always infused with a quality of helplessness--in dangerous situations they always needed a man for protection. But Mae West was a woman who could take care of herself. In the 30's she towered above her fragile sisters by creating for herself, almost single-handedly, a character who combined glamour and sexuality with a masculine ego and sense of assertion. Mae West was sexy, but she could never be called a sex object--rather, men became the objects of her desire. In her presence, an actor like Cary Grant seemed to shrink to the stature of a small boy. Men might gawk and whistle as she walked by, but their reaction always seemed more like admiration than exploitation. Here at last was a woman who could seduce a man, use up his money and his good looks, and then move on to the next. At times, despite her fur and diamonds, she seems almost a female parody of the stud who feeds his ego with a succession of

defenseless women. And, like the traditional hero, she could take care of herself physically as well. In My Little Chickadee she shoots it out with a war party of Indians, a six-shooter in each hand, while weak men cower. Fields might call her cheek "as soft as the fuzz on a baby's arm," but Mae West was never soft the way a woman was supposed to be. And her character was as rare and refreshing in life as it was on film.

World War II had a certain liberating effect on the American female. She was recruited into jobs that had formerly been male only, simply because there were no longer enough men to go around. More women received Ph.D's in the 40's than they had before or have since. An important job made a woman feel important (she was helping to win the war, too), and as a result, she became more independent. She even dressed in a more austere manner--dark colors and shoulder pads lent a masculine touch to her appearance. The films of the 40's reflected this changed woman. She was still sexy, but she sometimes smoked and chewed gum, and she knew how to sass back. In a film made in 1944 called A Man Named Joe a WAC saves her suicidal boyfriend from death on a dangerous mission by stealing his plane and completing the job herself. Women were portrayed as missionaries, factory workers, spies. When they were prostitutes, they were usually tough, and as girlfriends they were often gutsy companions. It is interesting that, only later, in the 50's and 60's, were films made like Catch 22 and Bridge on the River Kwai which emphasized the male-dominated, violent aspects of war. In these later films, female lieutenants never steal planes, they merely loll on beaches or stroll through barrages of wolf whistles. During

the war, women were needed by the economy and by the military. For their new tasks, they needed to be tough and self-sufficient and the country wanted them that way. So films were made which emphasized this independence, made it seem even more attractive, and so reinforced it. When the war ended and the men came back, women were once again a surplus job force and were pushed back into home and motherhood. Fewer women tried for Ph.D's. Their former toughness, being no longer useful, was forgotten. Hollywood began making war films about brave or sadistic or terrified men, leaving women with one-dimensional, sexual roles. In Catch 22 Paula Prentiss rises naked and gleaming from a raft in the ocean--she is there to distract men's minds from the dirty business of war.

It is difficult to look at the major films made in the last 20 years and find a single sexual stereotype for men or women. We can, however, trace a theme that began with Clara Bow and William S. Hart and continues to this day: The woman as sex goddess and the man as adventurer. In the 50's and 60's women like Marilyn Monroe and Jayne Mansfield became feminine ideals. Their popularity made it clear that a woman needn't be intelligent or independent to attract a man--she need merely be voluptuous. In films like The Seven Year Itch, Marilyn Monroe played a child-woman--her quality of innocent vulnerability, which destroyed her in life, was transformed on the screen into something so desirable that it became an obsession. A woman could sense her date's excitement as he watched a busty sex symbol move about, larger than life, in the darkened theater. She might begin to feel undesirable and he might reinforce this inferiority by ogling every real life goddess who passed him in the

street. Magazines like "Playboy" only reinforced her fears. Some women wore padded bras and tried to hide their intelligence. Some went even further and paid to have their breasts tightened or enlarged. A few committed suicide like the twin sisters who died together of carbon monoxide poisoning in the family car. Their father said that they had been despondent for months because their figures were less than voluptuous. They killed themselves because they were not Marilyn Monroe. How ironic that Marilyn herself died for the opposite reason.

The ideal of the super male, which began with the first westerns and can be traced through the gangster films of the 30's and the war films of the 50's and 60's, has taken on new trappings in the 70's. The heroes of Easy Rider and Five Easy Pieces may seem a far cry from Scarface or a brave marine, but deep down they partake of the same overblown male myth. Dennis Hopper rides a motorcycle instead of a flying tiger, but he is no less caught up in the role of adventurer and part-time lover. To such men, women are shallow, stationary creatures who provide sex, and with their contrasting weakness, help inflate the ego. Scarface buys his women, the soldier and the Hell's Angels rape theirs, the Easy Rider just "balls chicks." But it all comes down the same.

In the thousands of films made since the war, not all have looked upon women as sex symbols and men as pilot fighters. In 1953 Robert Wise made I Want to Live. Perhaps because this film is based on a real life character, she is far from a stereotype. Sheila Graham is a strong, quick-witted woman who is not easy to push around. She has a sense of loyalty to her underworld friends that is rarely attributed



Monroe in  
THE SEVEN  
YEAR ITCH

to women. She can be depended on, just like a "good joe." At the same time, she is traditionally female in her love for her child. In a word, she is complex, a quality women don't often have in movies. When she puts on lipstick and combs her hair before facing the lights and the cops, she does it, we feel, not from some silly "female" vanity, but out of pride for herself as a person--she does not want to be beaten, and so she is not. In the film *Red Desert*, by Antonioni, a woman's strange inner turmoil is an agony large enough to fill the screen for two hours. She suffers, not because of a man, but because of some tension growing in her own head which tells her she is basically at odds with her own civilization. Like Sheila Graham, she is defined not in romantic or sexual terms, but in her own terms. She is a person.

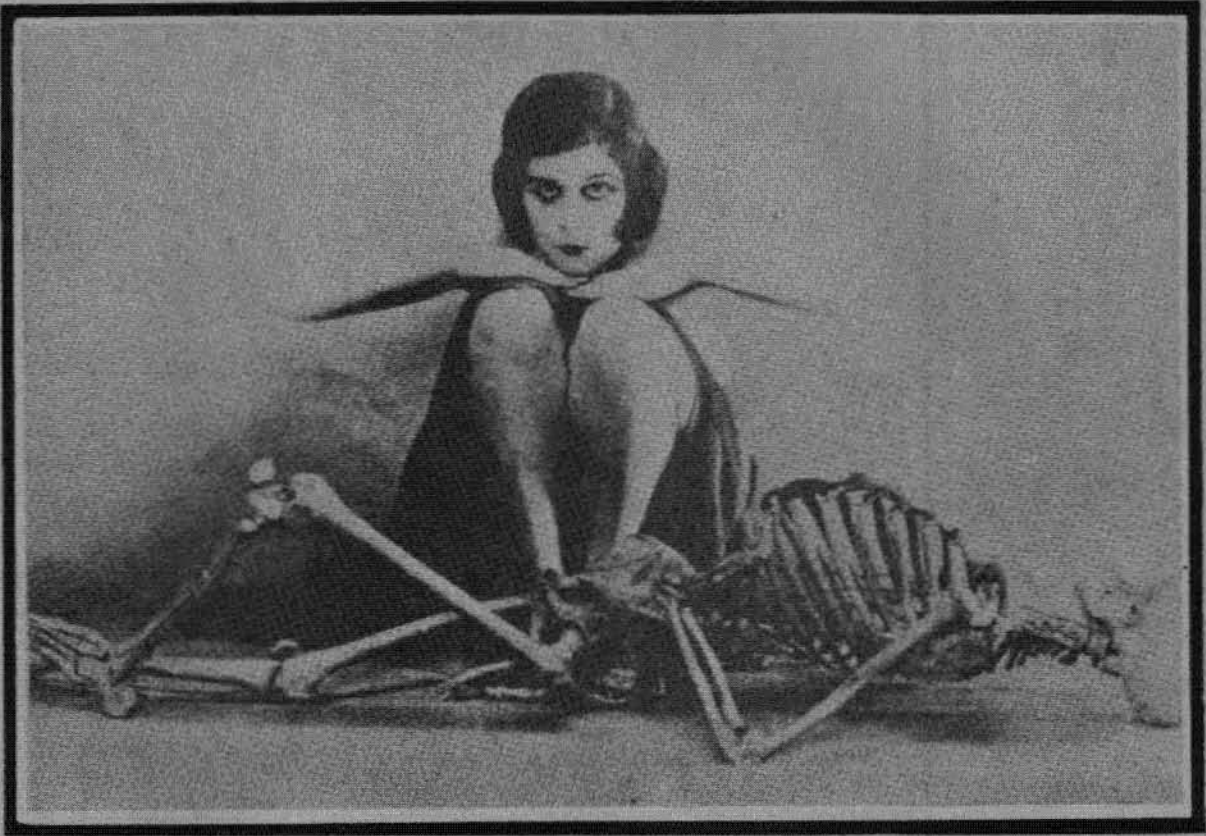
All in all, however, male and female roles remain almost as rigid in 1971 as they were at the turn of the century when movies began. Men are still defined in terms of their accomplishments, their faults, their potential, and women are still defined primarily in terms of their relationships with men. A recent film called *Performance* seems to point towards a new reality, one that may not be desirable, but is at least different. The film shows us two worlds and a man who leaves one to encounter the other. The first is the milieu of the professional killer, a world of sadistic men and masochistic women. James Fox plays Chas, a professional gangster who loves to kill, but who is shaken and changed by his encounter with a lifestyle which totally opposes his own. In the few days that he spends with Turner and the two women he discovers a world in which sexual identities blur, and grown men and women are like children, playing with each other's bodies without urgency

or shame. Because he thinks of himself as a super-male, Chas fears homosexuality. In bed, the woman makes fun of his fears and gives him a hint of bisexuality that leaves him confused. He finds this strange life evil, but compelling. Turner, with his long hair and sensuous lips, looks as much female as male. The young girl has a chest as flat and hair as short as a boy's. When Chas finally covers his close-cropped hair with a long wig, the transformation is complete. He has come from a hard world of rigid sexual identities to a soft, almost sexless one where men and women do not not fear each other because they are essentially the same. In a sense, Chas's world represents a masculine force in collision with Turner's, which is feminine. Yet both worlds remain, in the end, unsatisfactory. Both are filled with violence--Turner's world seems peaceful only because its violence is hidden. Each is filled with a different brand of unhappiness--one is cold, the other warm. But if only because it seems to offer an alternative, the film is important. It indicates that people may be changing, or at least beginning to want to change. Perhaps it means something too, that in the hip younger culture boys and girls are beginning to look, to talk and behave, more and more alike. They are rejecting aggressive, materialistic life styles and adapting gentler, more traditionally feminine values. Perhaps we are moving into a more loving, female age in which creation will supplant destruction. In any case, we can be sure that as more and more people become aware of the imprisoning walls of sexual stereotypes, there will be fewer and fewer people who will accept them blindly, both in real life and in the "real life" of the movies. ■

# THE IMAGE OF WOMEN IN FILM: SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Sharon Smith

THEDA BARA  
AS THE VAMP.  
FEMINISTS  
ARE CIRCULATING THIS  
WITH A NEW  
TITLE:  
HE ASKED  
ME TO EAT  
HIM - AND  
I DID!



Women, in any fully human form, have almost completely been left out of film. This is not surprising, since women were also left out of literature. That is, from its very beginning they were present, but not in characterizations any self-respecting person could identify with. Notable exceptions can be pointed to: A Room of One's Own, The Doll's House, etc., in literature, and a handful of films. Through history males have done almost all the writing and filmmaking, naturally from a male point of view. Of course that point of view has been molded or tempered by the culture each man lived in. However, in

modern times, through the sudden (historically speaking) sophistication of the media and their uses, there exists a very large possibility that media now shape cultural attitudes, as well as reflect them. The attitudes of the (traditionally male) filmmakers towards women, and the roles they typically give them in films, must be evaluated in this light.

The role of a woman in a film almost always revolves around her physical attraction and the mating games she plays with the male characters. On the other hand a man is not shown purely in relation to the female characters, but in a wide variety of roles - struggling against nature (The Old

Man and the Sea; Moby Dick; 2001: A Space Odyssey, or against militarism (Dr. Strangelove; Catch-22), or proving his manhood on the range (any John Wayne Western). Women provide trouble or sexual interludes for the male characters, or are not present at all. Even when a woman is the central character she is generally shown as confused, or helpless and in danger, or passive, or as a purely sexual being. It just seems odd that these few images, and others like them, are all we see of women in almost every film.

For example, take the films reviewed in the October 27, 1971 issue of weekly Variety:

Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde. Having Dr. Jekyll turn into a female Hyde provides opportunity for plenty of sexual adventures and misadventures. When the tale was purely male it was a complex story of the good and bad in all of us (or at least all men). The addition of a woman changes a serious story into a sex gag.

Fright. A woman is held hostage by a madman and must make love with him to delay being murdered. She is finally rescued by the police. A man being held hostage would either free himself or die trying (Un condamné à mort s'échappe), not simply "submit" to sex and be freed by the police. Someone in the film industry feels there's no excitement in dying like a woman!

Dagmar's Hotpants, Inc. "About a comely prostitute who decides to close up shop and marry her straight boyfriend." Woman as whore.

Blood From the Mummy's Tomb. A female Egyptian mummy is reincarnated in a quiet London suburb and embarks on a reign of terror. Classic woman-as-evil theme.

La cavale. This is a very promising idea, "an incursion into prison life as adapted from a book by a woman who has served time." A major topic, with prison riots in the news. But,

"this is not a crusading film about penal life." It is about the woman's love for a male inmate, their marriage and attempted escape. Variety calls the part, "a meaty role...a childlike but knowing girl who does not blame society for her state." Any chance for a broader theme is smothered by the necessity to define the woman entirely in terms of her sexual interest in a man. And the "childlike but knowing girl" is yet another stereotype.

1000 Convicts and a Woman. The daughter of a British prison governor arrives home from finishing school and "goes on the make for every man in sight." Woman as whore again - not even for money!

Boulevard du rhum. Brigitte Bardot is a silent film star who is loved by a boat skipper. The story is about the men who try to control her (and succeed), as the skipper's love is hindered by his boss and "her Hollywood chiefs", who finally kidnap her and leave the skipper "again looking at her screen image dreamily." Woman as object of male fantasies and power.

The films I have just listed don't promise to be particularly well-made films, and it could be argued that there is little depth to any of their characters, male or female. But my point is not that the films don't have deep characterization, or even that the characters they do describe in depth don't exist (somewhere in the world a prostitute may have been married this very minute). My concern is that the range of roles open to women is very strictly limited. This problem is found in moderately good and even excellent films.

For example, Puzzle of a Downfall Child is a study of one person's confused life. It is difficult to imagine a similar study of a male central character which would purposely lead only to a cloud of confusion and mystery. But the story is about a woman,

and by traditional male standards women are puzzles, confused and confusing creatures. Woman-as-mystery cliché.

The French Connection is an excellent film, very realistic in what it chooses to portray. But where are women in good films? One is the wife of a member of a dope ring, another is a flicker of skin in the hallway of the male central character's room.

The strongest female characters I can find are the female heavies discussed in Ian and Elizabeth Cameron's book, Dames. But even when female heavies do turn up, "they are often pushing wives of the Lady MacBeth type or are tormenting their menfolk, whether with infidelity, greed or lust for power." In one of Mari Blanchard's later epics, Machete, she was the wife of a man who ran a sugar plantation. Her future plans did not include her husband, which, "of course, meant by the accepted rules that she didn't have a future."<sup>2</sup> Or Gloria Grahame: in the famous coffee-throwing episode of The Big Heat one side of her face is disfigured by a jug of boiling coffee thrown by a man (Lee Marvin). When she gives him back in kind at the end, she ends up dying, "in the way of tarnished ladies who help movie heroes."<sup>3</sup> Think how rare it is, even among the female heavies, for a woman in a film to make a successful effort to protect herself, as Rhonda Fleming did in Slightly Scarlet when she plugged a gangster with his own harpoon gun. The film tradition of weak and confused women is so strong that in the same film Arlene Dahl is shown as definitely unbalanced, with no explanation offered. Since very few filmmakers have given much thought to their habits of sex-role stereotyping, even a film which has one strong female character will revert to cliché

motivations and actions for the rest.

That last point is a very important one. Filmmakers' minds must be changed, or this stereotyping will go on forever. When a film is being made the emphasis is usually on the main theme, whether the film is about a spy ring or gangsters in the 1930's. Questions of modernizing sex-role stereotypes are rarely on the filmmakers' minds, even when the story is about a woman and man in love. In their desire to make the plot clear and get the message across, writers and directors often use short-hand expressions of characterization. Does a science fiction movie need sparking up? Bring in a female scientist and have a love scene (The Forbin Project). A woman who "doesn't know her place" (that is, who has a career besides sex and motherhood) can bring a laugh and move the plot along. As John Simon put it, "today's American actresses fall mainly into two categories... those who in some way deflect, tragey, or blatantly overstate their womanliness and sensuality; and those who suppress it, or have nothing to suppress."<sup>4</sup> Can you imagine the male hero confined to two categories, those who overstate their sensuality and those who suppress it? Men in films are judged on courage in war, loyalty to friends, faith in themselves - a thousand things. Who cares whether or not the hero of The Confession would be a good lay? By the way, I fully realize that the image of males in films is often stereotyped as well as that of women but in most cases this is the cliché of the virile and virulent macho male, which, though potentially destructive, is at least a symbol of power and authority.

Industry heads, as well as new filmmakers, male and female, should be provoked to think twice before inserting a woman simply as a mechanism for action which hinges on

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the man - the woman who gets pregnant inopportunistically and forces the man to give up his career plans (Blue Denim). Or whose sacrifices help the man rise in his career while she lives, and be heartrendingly pained when she dies (Love Story). In both these cases, with the general theme of unplanned pregnancy or of death in mind, perhaps the people making the film might think: "let's make Blue Denim into a film about how a young woman feels who had hopes for a career but finds herself shunted into being a housewife, while the parents only worry about the young man's career plans."

Films express the fantasies and subconscious needs of their (mostly male) creators. How has the stereotype changed from the beginnings of film to the present? Here are some suggestions of the trend as I see it:

In the early 20th century, when women were just starting to have legal rights to money and possessions, Cecil B. DeMille produced The Cheat (1915), the story of a woman who has borrowed \$10,000 from a Japanese man and tries to pay him back in cash instead of paying in sex. She is branded on her shoulder as one of his possessions for daring to presume a female could use cash instead of sex in the world of men. This was "praised for the realism of its players"<sup>5</sup> in its day.

In the 1920's women were beginning to be employed in a number of fields. Men who confused business power with sexual potency were made insecure by the presence of women in jobs, even in jobs of an obviously servile nature. Clara Bow had such typical roles as manicurist, usherette, waitress, cigarette girl, taxi dancer, and lingerie saleswoman. All of these were roles in which a working woman's prime duties could be interpreted as flirting with the ever-changing male

clientele (yea, even for lingerie). As time went on and women took themselves more seriously in jobs, any film about a working woman was at first funny - The Lieutenant Wore Skirts - later sexy - The Stewardesses. The message? Why take yourself seriously when all you have to do is be young and pretty to succeed where it really counts - with a man!

Moving into the thirties - research desperately needs to be done about censorship and Mae West. Suddenly there was a woman who simply enjoyed sex, didn't use it to hurt men, didn't suffer about it herself. As Lewis Jacobs put it, "Mae West eyed a man from head to foot. All the time you knew she was evaluating him in terms of virility, as James Cagney eyed a woman."<sup>6</sup> Six months after the release of She Done Him Wrong the Episcopal Committee on Motion Pictures was formed (1933) heralding the age of censorship. Was it the sex in her films that frightened the censors? Motion pictures had always been able to show naked or semi-nude women, in guise of historical or Biblical stories. And Mae left her clothes on, down to the last diamond. Or was it the obvious fact that she enjoyed every moment of her conquests, she, a female!

As she says in her autobiography, "She Done Him Wrong changed the fashions of two continents... Women were trying to walk and talk like me... Women became more sex conscious, and this, for some men, was a big break; for others, a bother. Sex was out in the open, and amusing."<sup>7</sup> The film producers were getting enormous amounts of money from West's successful pictures, so they didn't try to stop her. But it would be very interesting to examine the motives of Will Hayes and the censors. Women expressing interest in sex was, for some men, "a bother"... It makes one wonder about the many films in which

the woman "naturally" is frigid and must be "brought around" by the man. Generally a woman who actively likes sex, but on her own terms, seems to be cast as a "castrating woman" by the men on whom she makes demands; or, like Betty Field in Of Mice and Men, her sexuality brings death and destruction to the males.

It would also be very interesting to see research about the changing film image of women before and after the war. During the war, women worked at "men's" jobs, went to college, supported themselves. Since the men were at war the women were naturally afraid they might never have love, homes and children. Then the GI's returned, and took back the jobs and the places in college. The fifties saw an enormous change as women immersed themselves in babies and housework. Was it partly the movies which made them feel that "the cold dimension of loneliness which the war had added to their lives was the necessary price they had to pay for any interest outside the home"?<sup>8</sup>

For example, The Star (1952): A movie actress's career starts a decline; she struggles against alcoholism and self-pity, even working as a shop assistant when her funds run low. At last, she gives up (it is a happy ending when a woman gives up) and marries a patient man who "had been waiting for her to get the stardust out of her system."<sup>9</sup> In Jeanne Eagels (1957), on the other hand, the woman pursues her goals - and dies. One of the few films of the 1950's which encouraged women (by example) to have a career was The Actress (1953). Written by a woman (Ruth Gordon) and based on her early life, it ended with the woman having her father's blessing for her career.

In serious dramas tragedy hits the career woman (or marriage does, for a happy ending). In 1950's sex comedies, the laughs are on her. She is

assumed to be frigid, and the plot rolls along on the tricks a man plays on her, with liquor or words - until the very end of the film, when he suddenly gives in and marries her. With very few films available which provide a strong female character to identify with, women have learned to masochistically enjoy seeing women ridiculed on film. They murmur, "of course, I would never be so foolish", or enjoy seeing a younger, more attractive woman "put in her place". And men have once more succeeded in dividing women's ranks.

It seems to me that the "sexualization" of women in films started slowly but has been increasing at a tremendous rate, especially in the last few years. Ninotchka (1939) merely made it clear that a female diplomat should not complete her mission to recover the jewels, but must make loving a man her mission. Current films, from Lolita to 1000 Convicts and a Woman, show not only the sexual awakening, but (in ever more explicit details) the many physical acts the woman performs.

Naturally, it is possible for a woman to enjoy watching films of explicit sex acts. But out of bed the sex-star's role will be the usual: bitch,



THE  
BURNES-JONES  
PAINTING  
WHICH  
SPARKED  
THE  
VAMP  
CRAZE



very ugly deaths. Women star in all films of international excitement or adventure.

Imagine that countless films show men as simple-minded little sex objects, and you despair of finding a strong role-model for your little boy (for whom you see other futures than slut, bitch or house-husband).

Imagine that the women in charge of the film industry use their power to ridicule the men's liberation movement, presenting them in films as a bunch of frustrated studs, deluded into thinking they can be women, burning their jockstraps and waving signs - but always ending up in the boudoir of a condescending woman, always giving up the struggle and being happily subservient to her.

Then imagine that if you complain you are given the biological expla-

nation: by design a female's genitals are compact and internal, protected by her body. A man's genitals are exposed and must be protected from attack. His vulnerability requires sheltering - thus, in films, men must not be shown in ungentlemanlike professions. Psychological films remind men of their childhood, when their sisters jeered at the primitive male genitals, which "flap around foolishly" while the sisters could ride, climb and run unencumbered. Men are passive, and must be shown that way in films, to reflect and protect reality. Anatomy is destiny.<sup>10</sup>

I hope by now it is obvious that women must be shown in a much wider variety of roles. Their characterizations must have heroism and human dignity - expressed in fields besides homemaking, loving a man, and bearing children. Women must be shown as active, not passive; strong women shouldn't constantly face ridicule and unhappy endings. Women should be shown in adventures which don't revolve around sexual attraction for a man; or working with other women without cattiness. Men will become more sensual in sex roles - how many films I have seen in which the hero somehow makes love without unzipping his fly! This does not mean that men and women's roles in films must be completely and irrevocably reversed. Women just want a chance to be heroes; a chance to be shown as humanly (not just femininely) frail; and a chance to see men in some of the ungainly situations in which women have so commonly been shown. When you think "in female" you will know that traditional themes, characterizations, and even, perhaps, standard approaches to tragedy and comedy, need to be translated "into female."

What sorts of themes would these be? An old college text suggests



Associated Press

This photo of a North Vietnamese militia woman and a captured U.S. airman is said in Hanoi to be the most popular photo in a war exhibit there. The photo was originally released by Hanoi in January, 1967.

A STRONG  
WOMAN:  
TO BE  
RIDICULED  
OR TAKEN  
SERIOUSLY?

























































































































