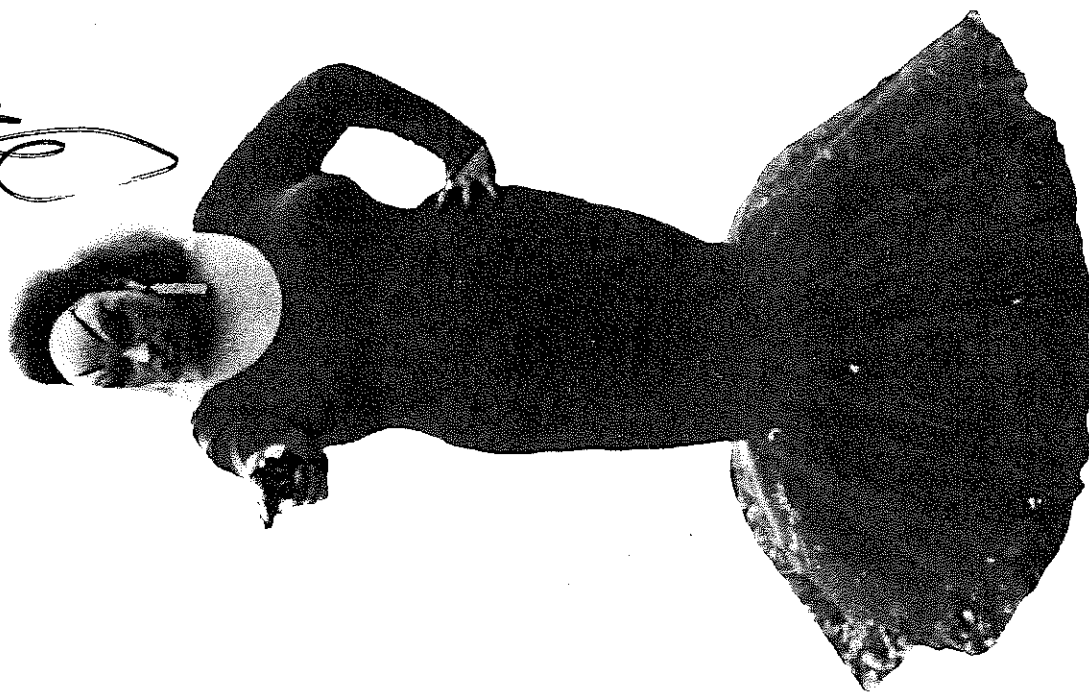


GENDER MEETS GENRE IN POSTWAR CINEMAS

EDITED BY CHRISTINE GLEDHILL

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For my Genre and Gender Class, New York University, 2005,
where this anthology began

CHAPTER 1

THE GENIUS OF GENRE AND THE INGENUITY OF WOMEN

JANE M. GAINES

Every reference to the cinema director as author carries the weight of several centuries of literary and art historical criticism. This very weight makes it difficult to argue against authorship in motion-picture industry history. Nevertheless, it is my contention that authorship has been taken up too uncritically. One cannot hope to completely discredit the authorial approach, but the critical ascendance of the author has been successfully challenged in a number of ways, for example, for its eclipse of the audience's contributions to meaning. In this essay, however, I begin by picking up a thread from my earlier argument about the work of silent cinema director-producer, Alice Guy Blaché, namely that auteur criticism gives short shrift not only to the audience but to other texts as sources of meaning. Here "other texts" references genre, the repetition with difference of popular forms. The author, I maintained, blocked the most important insights of the critically convulsive 1970s, most significantly, the poststructuralist assertion that we are constituted through language (Gaines 2002, 98). As Stephen Heath put it, "the author is constituted *at the expense of language*" (1973, 88; my emphasis).

Approaches to cinema-as-language and to genre converged and later diverged in the 1970s. Film genre theory was one of the first critical heirs of the more systematic approach to culture promised by semiotics and structuralism. Initially, the rule-governed operation of the linguistic sign system was analogized with the iconic sign system and refined into genre theory's understanding of rules or conventions in the relatively stable western and gangster genres. Cinema-as-language shared with genre criticism an understanding of cultural conventionality: culture as a readable system. However, with the stress on "representation" as ideological symptom, cinema-as-language became ascendant and genre was subsumed. Here Heath's reference to the tension between "author" and "language" recalls Raymond Williams's three-tiered understanding of consciousness:

To be a writer in English is to be already socially specified . . . at one level to an emphasis on socially inherited forms, in the generic sense; at another level to

an emphasis on socially inherited and still active notions and conventions; at a final level to an emphasis on a continuing process in which not only the forms but the contents of consciousness are socially produced. (Williams 1977: 193)

Here Williams challenges the individual creator as himself the source of cultural forms produced by his singular consciousness. Thus individual autonomy, so esteemed in notions of "the author," is negated.

It is this co-implication of authorship and genre that I want to revisit. Hence my title, which questions the location of genius, wants to force an earlier issue for feminists into the foreground. To be specific, when a woman director is said to "author" a melodrama, does she "transcend" the form in the way that the male auteur was said to have "transcended" industrially produced genre? One might assume that feminist film theory, new in the 1970s, would have taken up this question. Although feminist film theory was immediately interested in director Dorothy Arzner, her work was not considered in exactly auteurist terms, for feminist interest in film theory barely overlapped with early 1970s auteurism, anticipating, rather, later poststructuralist approaches. It is, then, a poststructuralist auteurism we find in Claire Johnston's well known analysis of the ending of Arzner's *Dance, Girl, Dance* (1940): "Towards the end of the film Arzner brings about her tour de force, cracking open the entire fabric of the film and exposing the workings of ideology in the construction of the stereotype of woman" (1973: 29). In 1973, this move was an exciting possibility for a nascent feminist film criticism. However, it was not a totally new approach but rather a variation on post-1968 French theoretical developments, echoing Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narbonne's 1971 theorization of the "category E" film, that exemplary popular work that was able to turn itself inside out so that it critiqued its own ideological scheme (see Klinger 1986). In retrospect, one wonders if the methodology of ideological critique, originally developed for popular genre films, was not in this moment gradually and imperceptibly moved into auteur criticism, where it remains today. We will return to the easy analogy between the author and the text that made such a move possible.

We find another indication of the proximity of authorship to genre in the way the discovery of Arzner was formulated. If Johnston attributes critique to Arzner, its object is the construction of "stereotype," a conceptualization straight from 1970s genre criticism. Furthermore, auteurism's consideration of an entire oeuvre is paralleled by genre's grouping of films, both the legacy of structuralism. Thus the approach to Arzner is both poststructuralist (uncovering ideological operations) and structuralist (uncovering authorial patterns).¹ Finally, it is important to recall that the new British feminist film theory did *not* then develop the auteur approach one might have expected following Johnston's attention to Arzner, but rather, pursuing richer developments in the broader field, concentrated on the function of women in film noir. Here, genre questions raised through ideologi-

cal analysis of the femme fatale in the dark 1940s gangster film would meet an emerging feminist concern with women and representation. In E. Ann Kaplan's foundational 1978 collection two different directions for feminist film theory were rehearsed, together raising the question of sexual representation as a function of genre. However, what became the burning issue for feminist film theory—women, body, ideology, or representation-as-language—would soon eclipse the consideration of film genre-as-language.²

To my knowledge, no feminist lamented the emphasis on representation at the expense of genre, perhaps because representation engulfed the parameters of genre theory at the time: conventions of narrative, iconography, and stereotype. However, feminist literary criticism was quick to notice that film theory's challenge to authorship coincided with the discovery of female writers, a move that effectively withdrew the possibility of individual critical acclaim before it could be conferred (Felski 2003: 58). This was less of a problem for feminist film theory since no large-scale claim had been staked for female auteur directors, although this is not to say that Dorothy Arzner, along with others such as Ida Lupino (Kuhn 1995) and Germaine Dulac (Flitterman-Lewis 1996) were not important theoretical points of departure.³

As I have argued before, however, every nomination of an auteur risks slipping back into prestructuralist discourse of the individual artist (Gaines 2002: 89). In this discourse, the elevation of the auteur director above the popular genre he uses invites the attribution of "genius." However, there was no established filmic discourse of either director or genius artist in the first decades of the new motion picture industry. Historically, the concerted move to treat mainstream motion picture directors as artists began with *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the 1950s, when unlikely studio director Howard Hawks was noticed by the French (Rivette 1953). Perhaps recent exposure of the relative arbitrariness of Hawks's elevation to the status of "genius" justifies a healthy skepticism about auteurism (Wollen 2002: 12). One objects to the elitism that attributes "genius" to one cultural worker to the exclusion of another. However, we would not abandon feminism's commitment to championing women innovators as a vehicle of historical restitution. While checking any tendency to look for "great women" on the analogy with "great men" in history, we do want to proclaim the genius of women found in unlikely places. Here, then, I officially proclaim the genius of women in general, exemplified by the particular genius of Alice Guy Blaché, whose achievements in silent-era motion picture production are unparalleled.⁴

Still, if we claim Alice Guy Blaché as auteur, we should acknowledge its antithesis—the conventional form she used as the locus of genius. Rather than commending the genius of the artist, we praise the ingenuity of the narrative and iconographic structure, a structure itself incorporating the director and her audience. So the alignment of "women" with "genius" in my title takes the term away from the Romantic notion of the individual by reaffirming the interchangeability

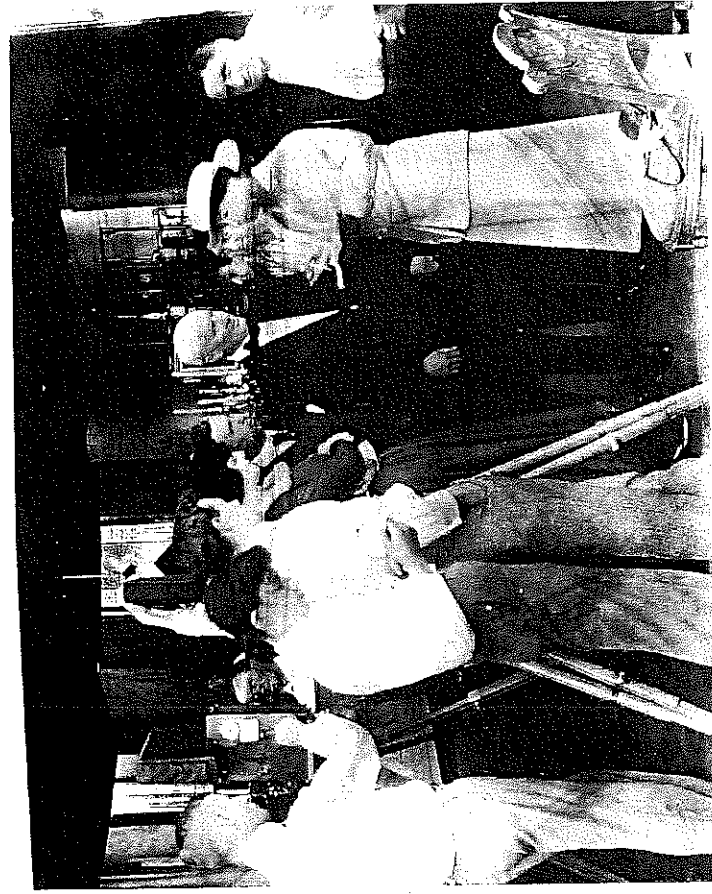


Fig. 1.1 Alice Guy Blaché directing *My Madonna* (1915). Courtesy: Ft. Lee Library, Ft. Lee, New Jersey.

of the critical categories “women” and “genre.” And yes, this means reasserting “women” as generic, which, after all, has been one of the great achievements of second-wave feminist theory. This allows us to pose the codification of emotional knowledge in genre as both receptacle for and testimony to a remarkable facility—no natural gift but rather a highly developed social expertise in the ways and means of feeling. Recent critical developments have established “emotional knowledge” as anything but a contradiction in terms, as seen, for instance, in Deidre Pribram’s study of *Crash* (2004) in this volume. From this historical vantage we look back to the genre theory of the 1970s with its important emphasis on formula but not yet accommodating the special problems of either emotion or visceral response. Now, most importantly, we are on the other side of foundational work on what have been termed the basic “body genres”: horror, pornography, and melodrama (Dyer 2007, 178–80; L. Williams 1991). And yet, the study of these bodily genres appears to have gone around rather than through genre theory.

The question of what I am calling emotional expertise is, of course, automatically gendered and simultaneously genred (Berlant 2008). But the current critical alignment of melodrama as the emotional genre with women is not a natural arrangement. Melodrama was not always associated with women, but was rather

a historical development, identified by David Grimsted in the nineteenth-century move that established feeling as source of moral value (1968, 11). Following Grimsted, Christine Gledhill argues the melodramatization of *both* male and female-gendered genres—the western and the woman’s film, for instance (1987, 34, 13)—and action films are now commonly understood as male melodramas (Mercer and Shingler 2004, 98–105). But just as the gendering of genres seems settled, another question arises, that of melodrama as an ur-genre, now seen as a trans-generic mode. So I would incorporate into the malleability of melodrama, the corollary ingenuity of genre.

Much is at stake in melodrama theory following Linda Williams’s assertion that melodrama is mainstream cinema’s “dominant form,” a direct challenge to classical narrative/realism as its founding, world-dominating form (2001, 23). In this vein Gledhill had earlier asked what it means for feminism to claim the critical capacity of melodrama when the rhetoric of *melos* now appears to be everywhere in classical narrative/realist films, the very films thought to be so uncritical and complicit (1987, 13). More recently she has conceived melodrama as a virtual “genre-producing machine,” a machine that “generates” further genres (Gledhill 2000, 227, 229). Pair this with Richard Dyer’s recent work on pastiche (2007), and we have a marked shift in genre theory. Dyer, awarding perhaps more to the spectator than any genre theory to date, understands our own historical selves as sources of genre knowledge as when viewing the pastiche of an earlier genre film we are able to feel as we once did all over again. In our recognition of the *noir* in *neo noir*, for instance, we acknowledge genre as having “generative powers,” powers the film uses “to create a certain kind of world and feeling” (Dyer 2007, 176). Memories of genres past are returns to familiar “structures of feeling”; the pastiche is where our past and our present are put in relief (180). Crucial to this generative “historicity of emotions,” and basic to my argument here, is that earlier critical moment when the social constructedness of everything was a new insight. Against individualization of feeling, Dyer argues that the history of feeling is not about the feelings we alone feel, but rather about shared feeling, or “living within the limits of cultural construction of thought and feeling” (180). Embracing these limits, Dyer helps us imagine a theory of genre in which viewers, you and me, are part of the same “structures of feeling,” part of an orchestration of historical feelings felt historically.⁵

It seems, however, limits can be good or bad. In the cultural construction of everything, the limit endorses the socially shared aspect, but genre theory, since the 1970s, took another view. Limits were understood as negative restrictions on artists whose expression was constrained by set conventions. Again, here is where auteur met genre—when the auteur was expected to “transcend” the formal dictates of the industrial genre. Soon, in the move from structuralism to poststructuralism, authorial rule-breaking acceded to the political possibilities of “violation,” “transgression,” and “subversion” of the form. So, in the last two

decades, we have seen a shift from genre as "containing" the possibilities of production and interpretation (Neale 1980, 53, 55), to genre as expansively generative, productive of more works. This supports the view of melodrama as larger than any one genre, as a modality generating many genres (Gledhill 2000). Here genre-as-limitation is reversed to genre as wonderfully and remarkably flexible ("protean") and highly productive ("machine-like") (L. Williams 2001, 12; Gledhill, 2000, 227).

Strangely, on this question of formal constraint, few asked how genres were policed. Genre, by definition, implies operative aesthetic laws and the possibility of their violation. But in his recent discussion of literary as well as popular film genres, John Frow asserts that the law of genre is effectively unenforceable. Genre law is, he says, "undermined by [its] lack of hold" over the individual works it appears to be regulating (Frow 2006, 26).⁶ The concept of limits-as-culture becomes the productive principle (as in Dyer) when we consider that, hold or no hold, genre works are as fascinatingly predictable as they are unpredictable, paradoxically, by virtue of their inevitable repetition in some innovative form of the form. So where Frow responds to Jacques Derrida's generic "limits" with genre's "lack of hold," I would respond to Frow with Deleuze's intriguing claim that repetition is "in every respect" a "transgression" because by virtue of its return and replay function, it "puts the law into question," inviting our skepticism (Deleuze 1994, 5). Rather than thinking of the rule-boundedness of genre, we are encouraged by this formulation to think of genre as rule-breaking. With transgression, especially after queer theory, increasingly seen as politically productive, we can thus understand genre rules as meant-to-be-broken and genre pleasures as shared historical refeeling, only enhanced by anticipation of echo and imitation. Here lies the very genius of genre to which my title refers.

A generous theory of popular film genres is now needed, not only accepting imitation but expecting the ingenuities of cultural recombination. With this goal, then, what should we retain from the history of genre theory? Two aspects are crucial: repetition and expectation. Genre "expectations," seen early by Andrew Tudor (1973, 143), and in Steve Neale's recent retheorization (2000, 158), preserve the audience as well as historical moments of reception. But perhaps more important, allowing us to explain the popularity of "low" film genres over "high" literary genres, is the inevitable return of genre works and their unlimited updatability. Robert Warshaw early observed that "form can keep its freshness through endless repetitions" arising from film's double mass character—both popular and reproducible (1974, 151). Finally, repetition is found in the genre history advocated by Altman (1999) and Neale (2000), and now developed by Dyer (2007). Combining these two principles, repetition and expectation, I see genre as produced and received expectations of "going with-against": for instance, the wonderfully paradoxical way repetition is understood by means, not of sameness

but by the very differences or changes it expects.⁷ But while my concern is to theorize the ingenuity of genre, in the 1970s a less generous paradigm organized our thought, to which I return in order to question how the author became analogized with the text.

According to Peter Hutchings (1995), the first model of 1970s genre criticism, Tom Ryall's artist/film/audience triangle (1975), was effectively uneven-sided, the audience remaining a mere placeholder. Since then, we have witnessed one position understood in terms of the other, and even an undecidability that defers or refers one to the other. But, in an attempt to resolve the source-of-meaning question, we have also seen analogy, most dramatically between film and author. For instance, looking back at the 1970s, Laura Mulvey recalls how structuralism's "discovery" of the auteur in the text paralleled the later psychoanalytic "discovery" of the "unspoken" in the film (Mulvey 1990, 69). Similarly, authorship was approximated to genre. Following celebration of Douglas Sirk as subversive director of melodrama scripts, Christine Gledhill noted that auteurism effectively brought melodrama as genre into critical existence (1987, 7). However, this implied less the sharper definition of the American family melodrama than a conceptual "slippage" between Sirk as "author" and "melodrama itself." Slippage—that incremental, imperceptible slide of one position into another—rested on the capacity of Sirk's elaborate cinematic style to "subvert" the ideological project of the genre. The family melodrama, after the slip, minus the cynical German émigré director, itself worked to undermine the American dream from inside its own household, where the dream had become a nightmare. Without our noticing, Gledhill says, the "subversion" attributed to Sirk, the Brechtian auteur, became "attached" to melodrama as genre (1987, 7).⁸

It is remarkable in retrospect that this slip did not seem a contradictory move. Seventies apparatus theory, challenging the primacy of the singular subject, was at odds with the agency of the singular subject that auteur theory advanced. Furthermore, the theoretical developments that underwrote melodrama theory, from gendered subject positioning to the ideological critique of capitalist patriarchy, did not accommodate empirical persons as either innovative artists or spectators. The constitution of the subject through language disallowed self-expression or artistic intervention. Colin MacCabe refers to the accommodation of auteur theory with poststructuralist Marxism and psychoanalysis as the "one massive contradiction" in film theory (2003, 40–41).

Since the auteur remained viable in the 1970s and was revitalized in the critical work on melodramas directed by Douglas Sirk and Vincente Minnelli, the concept was available for use in the new feminist work on melodrama in the 1980s (Nowell-Smith 1987; Mulvey 1987). Yet the confusion between the textual critique performed by the auteur and the so-called auto-critique performed by the film itself remained. In this regard, we could say that the slippage Gledhill notes (from

subversive auteur to subversive genre) had been rehearsed in reverse in Claire Johnston's attribution of the subversive "cracking open the entire fabric of the film" to Dorothy Arzner as auteur director (1973, 29). Feminist film theory never sorted out this confusion, and the tension between the 1950s auteur as opposed to the 1950s family melodrama has remained unproblematic, with the notable exception of Barbara Klinger's work (1994) on the production context of Douglas Sirk's films. Still, it is the in-theory availability of the auteur as explanation for subversion that concerns feminist theory, and to pursue this I return to E. Ann Kaplan's important 1987 essay on the maternal melodrama between 1910 and 1940. Here she rehearses the major feminist uses of the concept of "subversion" in the development of melodrama theory, as well as the companion critical concept of "resistance" as it became associated with genre as a measure of and ultimately for feminist politics. In her discussion of the literary tradition of nineteenth-century American "domestic feminism," aligned with Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), Kaplan intimates that the woman director (had there been at least one in cinema's first decades), *would have* taken this tradition further. What happened instead, she says, was that the "more heroic" aspects of mothering in women's maternal sacrifice melodrama (e.g., *East Lynne*, 1863) were taken over and returned to male-centered ends, notably by D. W. Griffith in films such as *His Mothering Heart* (1913) (118, 125).

Significantly, Kaplan leaves room for the hypothesis that women as scenario writers and directors working from 1910 to 1940 *might have* produced films to compare with literary fiction such as Olive Higgins Prouty's novel, *Stella Dallas* (1923). Drawn from this context, Kaplan argues, mothering itself could be "subversive" in the relatively "subversive" genre of the woman's film (1987, 133). "However," she concludes, "it is significant that there is in film no set of texts written and directed by women to parallel women's fiction. The woman's film was directed mainly by men (women may have written the script)" (125). The assumption that there were no women does not, of course, mean that had there been, they would have continued in the same tradition of women's literary fiction. Yet it is difficult not to take Kaplan's statement as a lament ("If only there had been more women").

However, films directed by men, especially those amenable to Sirkian reading, can, according to Kaplan, produce feminist "subversion," sometimes, as in the case of Griffith, explained by an address to the female spectator (1987, 125). The possibility of gendered reading arises from the separation of male and female spheres, along with the feminist assumption, crucial in the 1980s, that women's experience counts for something.⁹ Using *The Blot* (1921), directed by Lois Weber, Kaplan deploys close reading to feminist ends, focusing, for example, on close-up shots of the suitor's chair caught in the holes of the carpet and a scene in which the caring mother, Mrs. Griggs, distraught over her family's destitution, steals a neighbor's cooked chicken. Such attention to domestic detail becomes, in the

tradition of authorial reading, the signature of director Lois Weber, "reveal[ing] the female director's special sensitivity to the domestic sphere that could only come from inside knowledge" (126).

Possibly the female auteur director was never as fully developed as was the female writer in literary theory or the female painter in art historical discourse because at the time there were so few texts on which to work. Nevertheless, feminist film theory developed along other lines in the 1970s (Butler 2008). Today it intersects with feminist film historiography, which, appearing in response to archival discoveries unforeseen earlier, finds women's crucial contribution to silent motion picture production undisputable. We now know that a significant number of U.S. short and feature films *were* written, produced, and directed by women, particularly in the silent era (Gaines 2004; Mahar 2006). The question now is whether to continue investigation into the legacy of women's fiction, together with that of Sirkian textual progressivism, in order to identify the subversive female auteur director of film melodrama.¹⁰ In this regard Kaplan argues that in nineteenth-century woman's fiction the moral superiority of the mother is "subversive" in its reversal of the male as moral arbiter (1987, 118). However, applied to motion pictures this contention is complicated by Kaplan's more positive evaluation of the woman's film as against the maternal melodrama. This she considers too dependent upon the male oedipal drama, and therefore ensconced in patriarchal ideology. Sooner or later, however this distinction begins to crack. Can, for instance, the mother be subversive by virtue of her virtue if she also privileges her son? Besides reviving the tradition of morally central (and therefore subversive) mothering, Kaplan also argues that refusing traditional mothering is subversive, basing her case for understanding the film, *Stella Dallas* (1937) as *not* a maternal melodrama on Stella's "resistance" to this role (133).

To summarize the possibilities for subversion: the moral centrality of the mother is subversive (insofar as she is the measure of moral value); "heroic" aspects of mothering are subversive if characters reject traditional expectations; and the director, by virtue of her position as a woman, subverts gender values while also accruing the "resistance" of the character to mothering's requirements.

These positions represent different critical moves—the one based on the subordinate as an *alternative* to the dominant and the other on *refusal* of dominant expectations. The question remains how subversion can be both the mother returned and the refusal of mothering. Feminist theory, it would seem, gets to have its theoretical cake and eat it too. Subversion is both the mother returned and the refusal of mothering. But most remarkably, in offering the same but differently, again and again, the critical function of the auteur director here appears not unlike the function of genre. We are now in the position to argue that the interchangeability of genre and authorship allows us to see the real genius in the workings of genre.

THE NEW LOVE AND THE OLD (SOLAX, 1912)

To test the genius of genre over that of authorship, I turn to a recently rediscovered two-minute short film, *The New Love and the Old* (1912). This film is not only attributed to Alice Guy Blaché as director but as president of its production company, Solax. In its bare two minutes the film privileges the mother-son as opposed to the mother-daughter relationship, a privileging that Kaplan (1987) says defines the maternal melodrama genre (117, 126). It also features a love triangle, but a triangle with a narrative twist.

In the briefest screen time, *The New Love and the Old* sets up the generic narrative expectation of conflict between the mother and her future daughter-in-law. In the first frames, we see a close-up insert photograph of the mother alternated with the photograph of the younger woman, her potential replacement. The son is introduced in long shot as he kisses his mother's photograph. In the subsequent scene, he brings a haughty, fashionably dressed young woman to his mother's tea table. The diminutive white-haired mother appropriately fusses over the table linens and the tea service, but when the young woman is seated, the mother spills tea on her guest's voluminous skirt. The young woman stands, enraged. The mother attempts to ameliorate but her apology is refused. The young woman's angry response places the young man between the two women, needing to choose one over the other. He hesitates, then turns away from the insulted young woman. As the "new love" exits the frame he embraces "the old," his little mother.

One might argue that there is too little conflict in these minutes to produce the overload of emotionality that requires conversion to melos; there is little "discharge" or semiotic run-off to convert to other signs.¹¹ But that is the point. *The New Love and the Old* is historically early and highly condensed—all the better to study the evolution of the maternal melodrama genre and the mode that generates it, to think what is meant by expectation, repetition, convention, and, possibly, feminist subversion. Consider here one of the narrative conventions identified by feminist melodrama theory, associated with potential subversion—what might be called the "open up and shut down" narrative structure. Kaplan argues that characters who find independence from men or who work outside the home inhabit an opening narrative space understood as, in her words, the "attempt of the films to subvert" the oedipal drama (1987, 126). By the end of this drama, the "transgressing Mother" is made subordinate once again to the Father. Or, the text opens up and screams out against conventional marriage in the middle only to shut down at the end, confirming the patriarchal plan. Thus we could argue, following Kaplan, that *The New Love and the Old* is generically undecided in the middle but resolving at narrative closure into maternal melodrama. But does the ending give us the mother's traditional sacrifice for her son or, since he refuses to marry, does he sacrifice for her? Is the "mamma's boy" by definition subversive or not?

It would seem there are endless ways Kaplan's model can find subversion in this short film. The values associated with middle-class motherhood—self-sacrifice, self-effacement, deferential politeness, and fastidiousness—are rewarded and consequently elevated to the moral standard. And, again, the mere rescue of the mother from the subordinate position at the cultural margin and her elevated placement at the center of the fictional world is a subversive reversal. But recall the film's narrative twist. The opening set-up raises expectation that the future daughter-in-law will successfully pass the test of social class, by impressing and not offending the mother. This is reversed when the young woman, refusing to be amenable, behaves rudely toward the mother, consequently losing her future husband. One could argue that this narrative reversal subverts the expectation of heterosexual coupling through marriage. If so, subversion is achieved by re-turning the son to his mother. We might, then, see reuniting son and mother and reinstating the maternal oedipal *not* as reactionary, insofar as this rejects the heterosexual union. Putting two conventional options for women into conflict—wife as opposed to motherhood—*The New Love and the Old* generates both a reactionary and a subversive maternal narrative: two bad options from the point of view of feminism. For the son's choice of either wife or mother would make no difference given the generic, effectively ideological expectation that a 1912 film will shut down options for women, whether wives or mothers. Perhaps claiming subversion is so problematic because we read contemporary Western feminism back into the situation of women in earlier historical moments, not to mention the difficulties of our claim that the domestic world of women is *both* the realm of bourgeois ideology (to be subverted) and itself the subversive defense against dominant male culture.

My interest in elaborating the perhaps infinite possibilities for subversion in a two-minute film has, however, a different goal. The theory of melodramatic subversion, developed for the cynical subversion-seeking auteur Sirk, prepared genres for other auteurs to slot into. In her choice of subject matter, her woman's point of view on marriage and the family, and her presumed interest in domestic detail, Lois Weber becomes an ideal subverter of the melodrama text and its generic variations. She, in Kaplan's terms, has "inside knowledge" of the very bourgeois world feminists expect her to subvert. Similarly we expect to place Alice Guy Blaché, director and producer of *The New Love and the Old*, exactly where we had placed Douglas Sirk. How do we do this? We begin to attribute "artistic" choices to Guy Blaché, choices at the level of gesture and device—perhaps the insert photograph—and even the dramatic use of props such as the table cloth. In thus finding the "hand" of the auteur in aspects of the image on the silent screen, we begin to personalize the aesthetics of cinema. We perhaps note the superfluity of the tea spilled, a minor disaster turned into a textual "outburst"; we find an aesthetic turned against the play of bourgeois manners. We begin to say things like "Guy Blaché's placement of the tea service," her "woman's understanding of

the trauma of the ruined dress," and her "interest in motherhood," even "her" long-shot positioning of the camera and "decision to cut" to the mother and son alone in the frame at the end. But there is a world of difference between arguing that male director Sirk has mastered the mise-en-scène of the domestic interior all the better to subvert the ideology of the familial and arguing that a woman director has mastered this world because, historically, it has been her domain by virtue of her gender. If we say that a woman director's genius lies in the "woman's genius" of knowing the infinitesimal details of domesticity and seeing how to manipulate this world of brocade curtains, tea services, and familial claustrophobia, have we not given her a back-handed compliment?

Recall, however, that 1950s melodrama theory was based on a slippage between Sirk the auteur and melodrama form—in his case, the family melodrama—as it evolved critically. To return to my point of departure, let me ask again if we do not assert the author at the expense of generic language. Should we credit the maternal melodrama genre with the alternation of wife and motherhood, the emphasis on domestic detail (the throbbing object), and the tendency to revert to the patriarchal resolution confirming the mother-son oedipal relation? Or, conversely, should we credit the female auteur with the dramatic alternation, the melodramatization of the detail, and the narrative resolution that achieves closure? The ease with which the 1950s family melodrama genre assumed the subversive powers of the critical German auteur perhaps indicates the theoretical reversibility of two terms—"author" and "genre." Raymond Williams once posed the constitution of the author through the forms he or she "spoke" as a reversible relation. The older literary question, "What did this author do to this form?" became, "What did this form do to the author?" (1977, 192). This responds to the critical move against bourgeois individualism and its assumption that persons can and do make choices outside the social that continually forms them (194). Did feminism lose this socially constructed author in the reaction against the psychoanalytic gendered spectator, or is this author so taken for granted that the construct has effectively evaporated (see Mulvey 1975)? As an antidote to this forgetting, I suggest—against genre as cramping authorial style—that we start with the social over the individual and conceive innovation as anticipated and "contained within" the generic, that is, in the sense of already there, already-in-form.

We need to ask if what we have called "subversion" in the maternal melodrama genre is not the effect of paradoxical changes effected through repetition of so many historically conditioned motherings. In 1912 alone, numerous short films were produced in the United States with "mother" in the title. If "subversion" is basically the operative necessity of known form, its success is the result of its permutation. Consider how many times the structure of maternal self-sacrifice returned the son to the mother after threatened separation, beginning with all the versions of Mrs. Henry Wood's novel *East Lynne* (see Barefoot 2001), which would become the many versions of *Madame X* (1920, 1929, 1937, 1965). The genius of

genre lies in the enormity of its repertoire, its vast cultural storage, its knowledge of both itself and the socioemotional raw material of the cultures that sustain it. What do we gain by attributing the genius to genre and not to the auteur? While the former contains the latter, the latter only contains the former insofar as the auteur coincides with a genre. Here is Dyer's move from "autonomous" thought and feeling "out of the innermost imperatives of the self" to the social-ity of "genre's generative powers" (2007, 179, 176). Genre's powers are capacious; they can, in Dyer's words "create a certain kind of world and feeling" (176). In the silent era, then, let us say, the deep worlds of feeling are the wells of women's genius, elaborated and given play as the ingenuity of genre, and melodrama's genres are, in turn, reinvested in and through the emotional ingenuity of women, whether actress, audience member, auteur-director, or author-writer, all experts in the ways and means of feeling (see Berlant 2008, 4). Genre is generated by films produced, expected, remembered, and returned as genre generates more, reiterates more popular genre films.

Finally, the generosity of film genre is its assumption that all know and feel—no privileged auteur knows or feels more than an audience member or any of the other creative personnel on the motion picture production set. This acknowledges the repertory actors in the Solax stock company as well as the innovation of this company within the history of the very studio system that would develop into the industry. Thomas Schatz in *The Genius of the System* (1988) saw in Guy Blaché's remarkable studio the cradle of the genre system's ingenuity, in story structures that delivered expectations and pleasurable returns to known forms. As Janet Staiger has established, the industry's approach to popular moving picture production evolved into an exquisite balance between product standardization and differentiation (1985, 96–112). The director and the actors step into the genre which, like a ready-made, takes over and generates the work we have historically designated as "theirs." If genre is the locus of genius, however, is not "theirs" more properly "ours"?

EPILOGUE

Our feminist theory, also like a popular genre, comes with critical expectations about the device of the expectation. In this critical tradition, the writer is expected to challenge the reader's expectations of what he or she will say next. I must challenge your expectations, for instance, about the problem of "subversion." And here is a productive going with-against—to return to, repeat, and to reference the uses of the concept of "subversion" in feminist melodrama theory while making a change in it. Having said that *The New Love and the Old* will contain a narrative twist, I have set up an expectation in the reader of this essay that the twist will be explained. In the tradition within which I write and you read, however, the critic's burden is not only to explicate the twist in the film narrative, but to add to

that twist another—ideally, a feminist theoretical turnabout. If there is a feminist twist, it is that genre teaches us that the criticism that made “gender” also makes genres.¹² And if Rick Altman (1999, 72–7) is right in attributing to feminists the creation of the woman’s film (and I think he is), then even, and especially, feminist criticism has made genres. In the genre-making sense, feminist criticism belongs neither exactly or exclusively to authors. Feminist criticism is us.

Notes

1. See Andrew (1993, 77–79) on Wollen’s structuralist approach to the auteur (1972).
2. See Butler on the history of feminist film theory (2008).
3. See Mayne, “Female Authorship Considered” (in Mayne 1990), for a critical overview. See Gaines (2002 and 2004) for recent feminist work on women directors and discussion of feminism and authorship.
4. McMahan (2002) records Guy Blaché’s remarkably productive career at Gaumont, 1895–1907, as head of production and later as president of Solax, her own company, 1910–1914. She “controlled” art direction, script writing, and editing, in addition to directing the majority of titles (xxvii).
5. Dyer (2007) returns to a forgotten aspect of Williams’s concept that allows for continuous change. “Structure of feeling” is distinguished from both “ideology” and “world-view,” designating where and how meanings are “actively lived and felt” (R. Williams 1977, 132).
6. Frow responds to Derrida (1980, 224) on how norms become “interdictions”: “do” and “do not.” Moretti (1989) argues that “with modernity, it has become harder to fix genres,” his reason being that “social mobility” has made the “realm of cultural forms” more hazy. At this juncture, every new step implies a “weakening of genres, or a proliferation of subgenres” (160).
7. Deleuze (1994) describes the paradox of repetition: “One can speak of it only by virtue of the change or difference it introduces” (70).
8. For example, Mulvey (1987).
9. This notion was roundly critiqued. See de Lauretis (1986), who argues that what is at stake is the “relation of experience to discourse” (5).
10. See Ann Kaplan’s own development of her analysis in this volume.
11. Elsaesser (1987, 55) says that the “melos” given to “drama” is translated into aspects of mise-en-scène, while Nowell-Smith (1987, 73) argues melodrama’s ability to “siphon off” into such signs “undischarged” emotion that can’t be “accommodated” by ostensibly realist devices.
12. See Gayle Rubin’s 1975 formulation of the sex/gender system, when “gender” became the operative feminist term productively substituting for the problematic term “sex.”

CHAPTER 2

NO FIXED ADDRESS:

THE WOMEN’S PICTURE FROM OUTRAGE TO BLUE STEEL

PAM COOK

The women’s picture has played a major role in the development of feminist criticism, partly in response to a certain tendency in 1970s feminist film to prioritize the “male spectator,” and partly as a strategic move to reassess a devalued and neglected genre. This debate, which has centered on que female spectatorial pleasure and address, has produced some remarkable analyses and trenchant critiques of the ways in which classical Hollywood both represents and positions women, opening up issues such as narrative, masochism, and consumerism. Despite the revisionist impulse in much of this work, it has tended to locate itself within a more general inherited from 1970s film theory, which perceives classical Hollywood as inherently bourgeois and patriarchal, and therefore inimical to feminist intention. My article, “Melodrama and the Women’s Picture,” while attempting to offer the genre’s popular appeal, betrays a deep suspicion of the whole of the women’s picture.

One question insists: why does the women’s picture exist? There is no such as “the men’s picture,” specifically addressed to men; there is only “cinema,” the “women’s picture,” a sub-group or category specially for women, excluding men; a separate, private space designed for more than half the population, relegating them to the margins of cinema proper. The existence of the women’s picture both recognizes the importance of women, and marginalizes them by constructing this different space for women (Haskell’s “wet, wasted after” it performs a vital function in society’s ordering of sexual difference. (1975, 101).

There is more than a hint of conspiracy theory in this formulation, which implies that the category of the women’s picture exists in order to duplicitously position spectators into believing that they are important, while subtly marginalizing them.