

LEILA SUJIR

**W**e are living in a time period some theorists have termed "postfeminist" so that a question of gender itself engenders debates revolving around the subjects of feminism, the feminine, and women as subjects. In a recent issue of *Tessera* (Spring/Summer 1988) Jane Casey speaks of this post-feminist woman. "We don't know her personally, but she's everywhere—in commercials, in *Chatelaine*, on the cover of *Macleans*, and she has it 'all'. She, too, is a weapon; a symbol of economic and social privilege." Thus, Barbara Sternberg's question, "What is the relationship between feminist film/film theory and avant-garde film?" (*Cinema Canada* # 157) is a provocative one.

Teresa de Lauretis in her book *Technologies of Gender* addresses these questions of gender in relation to technologies in our culture which represent and inscribe gender. With her assertions, she keeps open the space for the feminist subject. She writes that "the need for feminist theory to continue its radical critique of dominant discourse on gender, such as these are, even as they attempt to do away with sexual difference altogether, is all the more pressing since the word *postfeminism* has been spoken, and not in vain. This kind of deconstruction of the subject is effectively a way to recount women in femininity (woman) and to reposition female subjectivity in the male subject...."

Similarly, Kaja Silverman, in *The Acoustic Mirror*, keeps open the space for the feminist subject by addressing the death of the author and the notion that the "author has also continued to haunt the edges of film theory, feminist cinema, political cinema and the avant-garde as the possibility of a resistant and oppositional agency, at times in a less masculine guise." Importantly too, she disputes the ways in which French feminists, in particular, have connected the female body and feminism, limiting the feminist subject to the feminine.

Discussing Akerman's film *Jeanne Dielman*, de Lauretis comments, "Call them (the two logics at work in the film) femininity and feminism; the one is made representable by the critical work of the other; the one is kept at a distance, constructed, 'framed', to be sure, and yet 'respected', 'loved', given space by the other." Again and again, these two books argue for differences within that space for the feminist subject, creating a space for "Other(s)".

These quotations reveal the way in which feminist theories often have to place themselves in opposition to a (patriarchal) culture much in the same way as the avant-garde film is often placed in opposition to Hollywood film; an image discourse, a public imaginary, which mirrors mainstream (patriarchal) culture.

To illustrate their work de Lauretis and Silverman cite a number of filmmakers including Chantal Akerman, Lizzie Borden, Valie Export, Bette Gordon, Patricia Gruben, Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, Sally Potter, and Yvonne Rainer. While this naming is helpful and is not intentionally exclusive, particularly since so much of the debate in film theory has focussed on mainstream (Hollywood) film, this list leaves so many (Canadians) unnamed and begins, with its continual reassertion, to become a canon, making many others absent.

Another absence from much of feminist theory results from the use of mainstream film as the model to oppose. The film theory often fails to articulate a language that addresses the movement of (experimental) moving pictures – the movement within the shot, along with the way one shot links to the next; a process which differs significantly from the language of mainstream moving pictures.

Interestingly, much of the process, the actual movement of moving (experimental) pictures, can be described in the terms Julia Kristeva refers to in *The Language of Desire* as the semiotic process, with its relationship to the *chora* and the body, in contrast to the symbolic process. Silverman, by the way, addresses in *The Acoustic Mirror* many of the problematic issues of gender in Kristeva's work (including Kristeva's gender reference to the artist as the male figure who speaks for the mother—see Silverman's chapter "The Fantasy of the Maternal Voice"). While these gender critiques are needed, I hope that Kristeva's articulation of the semiotic process doesn't disappear as a subject.

The displacement and replacement of authorities is the subject of Kay Armatage's essay, "Fashions in Feminist Film Theory" (*Descant* Summer '88), an incisive and witty commentary on the fashion-like trends in intellectual discourses over the last 17 years. Armatage notes the dismay which resulted when "Julia Kristeva, one of the truly international stars of theory... appeared for her talk at the Milwaukee Centre for Twentieth Century Studies in (what was described to me as) a Chanel suit with pearls." This uneasy relationship of fashion to theory is possibly a result of the ever constant process of authorizing, de-authorizing and re-authorizing the ground of the debate, re-establishing a space for a feminist subject and the avant-garde, a "space-off" from mainstream culture.

Along with theory, a form of (experimental) film criticism generated by the films is beginning to be addressed, most notably in Kay Armatage's film, *Artist on Fire*. This essay brings forth many of the qualities of Joyce Wieland's films through a commentary coming out of Wieland's film work itself. This extensive quotation of the films, along with layering devices, both visual and auditory, draws together many of Wieland's filmic and artistic concerns in a way which writing couldn't.

Armatage's film, I would argue, characterizes what much of contemporary theory has called for; it is a work which embodies a language of play, a work which is both feminist and feminine, a critical work which is itself an art work. The soundtrack, through its use of multiple voices which are not used as authorities but as commentaries, creates a filmic space for Wieland's work to exist in. *Artist on Fire* makes links, connections, weaves together a commentary which plays upon and makes meaning out of the very diverse work of Joyce Wieland. Armatage's film makes a place for an (other) kind of film criticism.



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