

Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
Introduction	1
1 'Frozen in Showcases': Feminist Film Theory and the Abstraction of Woman	8
2 The Camera as an Irigarayan Speculum	29
3 <i>In the Cut</i> : Self-Endangerment or Subjective Strength?	60
4 <i>Lost in Translation</i> : The Potential of Becoming	95
5 <i>Morvern Callar</i> : In a Sensory Wonderland	128
6 Architects of Beauty and the Crypts of Our Bodies: Implications for Filmmaking and Spectatorship	167
Concluding Remarks: The Object Is Speaking	202
<i>Notes</i>	206
<i>Bibliography</i>	209
<i>Filmography</i>	222
<i>Discography</i>	225
<i>Index</i>	227

Introduction

One of the main preoccupations of feminist film theory and criticism since the 1970s has been the objectification of women in mainstream Hollywood cinema. From the discussions surrounding the stereotypical images of women on-screen, through theories of spectacle and masquerade, to approaches stemming from queer theory and cultural studies, a vast body of work has accumulated which has sought new and challenging ways of viewing and interpreting women in film, reading films against the grain and theorizing the experience of the female spectator. This book explores how certain recent films move away from the traditional positioning of female characters in dominant Anglo-American cinema and represent them in more inclusive and engaging ways. These films feature lead female characters who are unusual in their occupation of screen space and time. The emphasis is not on the physical appearance of the women; rather it is on their interiority. As a group of films, they offer something new and original in terms of the representation of female consciousness, and suggest various ways of engaging responses on the part of the spectator. These films are *In the Cut* (Jane Campion, 2003), *Lost in Translation* (Sofia Coppola, 2003), and *Morvern Callar* (Lynne Ramsay, 2002).

This book compares these films with films that offer more standard – albeit provocative and interesting – treatments of female subjectivity: *Klute* (Alan J. Pakula, 1971), *The Seven Year Itch* (Billy Wilder, 1955), and *Marnie* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1964). Considering each of the older, well-known films alongside the recent, experimental film with which it resonates will illustrate how contemporary filmmaking techniques and critical practices can work together to create complex and provocative representations of on-screen female consciousness.

2 Film and Female Consciousness

Each female character is apparently going through a process of transition or transformation; each is engaged in a personal journey, albeit towards very different ends. Analysing this theme invites the cognizance of female subjectivity. The notion of cultivating self-knowledge led me to the writings of Luce Irigaray for philosophical understanding of these individual thinking women. Some feminist film writers, such as Annette Kuhn and Mary Ann Doane, have indicated that Irigaray offers potential for thinking about film. Others, such as Catherine Constable and Caroline Bainbridge, have explored this potential in relation to specific aspects of Irigaray's writings on the formation of subjectivity and femininity. From my reading of Irigaray's work, it seemed to me that she offered something more wide-ranging and inspirational for cinema than has previously been appreciated. Irigaray's notion of femininity, and the array of images and spheres of experience she draws upon in her writings, enable a different way of viewing women and their relationships. This seemed a very promising way of approaching the female protagonists with whom I was concerned, as I attempted to account for their cinematic subjective journeys.

As Margaret Whitford argues, Irigaray is a 'theorist of change' (1991: 15). Irigaray proposes not an explicit alternative, but a means by which women may try to bring about a different state of being. Women in patriarchal discourse, according to Irigaray, do not have the tools with which to conceive of themselves, or be conceived of by others, as another to men. Rather, they are confined to the parameters allowed to them as lesser men: 'the feminine [...] is now practically assimilated to the non-masculine. Being a woman is equated with not being a man' (Irigaray 1993b: 71). Irigaray calls for a state of genuine sexual difference, rather than a traditional male/female binarism that has negative connotations for the female. In order to achieve this state of fully realized alterity, Irigaray writes, women need a female imaginary and a female symbolic, including a female divine and recognition of the maternal genealogy:

The way for women to be liberated is not by 'becoming a man' or by envying what men have and their objects, but by female subjects once again valorizing the expression of their own sex and gender. (1993b: 71)

In suggesting symbolism and imagery for women to draw upon, Irigaray uses a morphological approach drawing on the realm of the body, female genitalia, and sexuality, to indicate a possible way for

women to think about themselves other than phallogratically. This focus of Irigaray's thought on ways for women to think and speak about themselves is consistent across her whole body of work, and is useful as a lens through which to view the films under consideration in this book. These films are doing something different with female subjectivity: they create space for the female characters to explore themselves and others, using language, the body, and consciousness, offering a vision of a possible alternative way of being for women in cinema. They invite the spectator into dialogue with the female characters and provide open, optimistic endings that enable the future explorations of the characters to be the abiding focus of the films. Irigaray also offers an invitation into dialogue as a means to engage in creating a situation of sexual difference. As Whitford writes, Irigaray is suggesting a means by which the status of the female in the symbolic realm might be altered (1991: 15).

This book argues that a similar attempt is made by *In the Cut*, *Lost in Translation*, and *Morvern Callar*, through an immersion in the sensory and sensual, and through a feminization of the language and space of the films – also through the acknowledgement of a woman's history, so that the life of a woman is more fully represented, rather than as a sketch or an abstraction. In this mode of filming it appears that the spectator is privy to the interiority of the female characters. I use the term 'female' to discuss the sexed body of women, and 'feminine' to refer to the symbolic codes and representations of what is considered to be female. Therefore I will talk about the ways in which femininity is represented as well as the consciousness of female characters, without intending to establish a way of talking about filmmaking or symbolism that displays inherent female-ness. I use the term 'consciousness' to refer to the characters' inner lives, their thoughts, desires, fears, and emotions, and the introspective contemplation of these. This is in order to avoid some of the political and cultural connotations associated with the word 'subjectivity', arising out of Althusser (1971) or Foucault (1991). I am not talking about consciousness-raising, or political, ideological consciousness (although Irigarayan sexual difference has profound ideological implications), but rather philosophically and psychologically, in terms of what Irigaray refers to as self-affectation, self-expression, and relational identity. When using the term 'subjectivity' I refer to the individual, mental perspective of a character, which can be represented by a point-of-view shot that is either literal or subjective.

It is perhaps initially perplexing to talk about the visual representation of something so ephemeral as consciousness. As Richard Dyer

4 *Film and Female Consciousness*

explains (1982: 106), although a novel may reveal ‘what is in the heart and mind of a character directly’, such access to a character’s interiority is traditionally considered closed to film. This is where Irigaray’s writings can complement and further film analysis. Irigaray’s thinking about cultivating a way of being, and a way of relating to the other as equal and transcendent, is written in the feminine. Her work is founded on the need for women to construct a femininity or alterity on the basis of female sensuality and sexuality, and its difference from the male. Irigaray’s notion of self-affection, however, albeit certainly a paradigm-shifting tool for women’s liberation, is not confined to the feminine, but is rather an enabling framework for thinking about the expression of individuality and self-expression, as well as relationships. This is why the films in this book work so well to bring to light the value of an Irigarayan approach to film, as they depict individuals grappling with matters of expressivity and subjectivity.

Irigaray is a controversial philosopher, accused of biological essentialism and of partaking in the binarisms that she so forcefully critiques (Moi 2003: 137). Irigaray’s use of female morphology and sexuality, however, deliberately draws attention to aspects of the feminine in a sense that challenges conventional modes of seeing women. As Diana Fuss explains, Irigaray uses the language of femininity strategically in order to expose the dominant metaphors and visual stereotypes in society. Fuss writes:

The point, for Irigaray, of defining women from an essentialist standpoint is not to imprison women within their bodies but to rescue them from enculturating definitions by men. (1989: 61)

Irigaray calls into question what it means to speak as a woman, and indeed to think as a woman – to conceive of oneself and to relate with the other. In order to enable or facilitate a woman’s creation and preservation of self-expression, Irigaray provides visual metaphors, physical gestures, and conceptual challenges. It is these strategic writings that provide hugely rich and suggestive material for creating and sharing the inner life of cinematic female characters.

The aim of this work, then, is to consider three recent films that focus on the self-expression of their unconventional heroines. More than this, the inner life or consciousness of these characters is the very motor of the films, inviting the spectator to share their points of view and observations (or attempt to). Because of this, the work of Irigaray on female subjectivity enriches and supplements the analysis of these

films, drawing out imagery and gestures that might otherwise pass unnoticed.

In the Cut, *Lost in Translation*, and *Morvern Callar* are all directed by women, but this has not been a deliberate factor in their selection, which is based upon their concentration on individual female consciousness as outlined above. It is, however, inevitable that the impact of the directors' gender will need to be considered, not least because the films that I have chosen by way of comparison are all directed by men. *Klute*, *The Seven Year Itch*, and *Marnie* are well-known and popular Hollywood films that feature interesting and complex female characters, and which can be seen to have challenged dominant cinematic practice in subversive and provocative ways. None of these Hollywood 'classics' can be seen as typical of the classical Hollywood style of the studio era, despite adhering to some of those narrative conventions. I also draw upon *Looking for Mr Goodbar* (Richard Brooks, 1977) as a counterpoint to *Klute*, which enriches the understanding of their generic codes. Each of these films from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, features a female lead character and is concerned with her relationships and experiences. The audience may be invited to wonder about the states of mind of these women, and perhaps their motivations or fears, but the women themselves display little self-understanding. They are enigmas: to the men in the film, the audience, and themselves. This book asks whether analysing these films from an Irigarayan perspective not only sheds light on their characters and narratives but also enables fuller accounts of the women in the films as more complicated and multi-layered than they have previously been perceived.

The book proceeds as follows. Chapter 1, "'Frozen in Showcases": Feminist Film Theory and the Abstraction of Woman', sets out the theoretical framework for my investigation, and examines the ways in which feminist film theory has approached the representation of women, identifying those areas of debate that this book attempts to address. Drawing on Mary Ann Doane's notion of 'the abstraction of women' (1990: 78), I will explore the attempts by critics and theorists to elaborate possibilities for enriching the cinematic experience for women and identify those who have signalled Irigaray as offering possibilities. How might an Irigarayan approach complement and add to the understanding of cinema's thinking women?

In Chapter 2, 'The Camera as an Irigarayan Speculum', I introduce the writings of Irigaray as a source of concepts and images that have potential for film analysis, demonstrating the overlapping areas of

interest with film theory and the ways in which Irigaray can enrich our understanding. Drawing out specific areas from her writings that I consider offer strategies and proposals for the representation of women on-screen as individuals who think and feel, I will explore Irigaray's analysis of the formation of subjectivity in relation to Freudian and Lacanian formulations, and consider her conceptualization of femininity in comparison with the theories of Riviere, Mulvey, and Doane. This process will clarify the basis for my Irigarayan approach to the films in the next three chapters.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 consist of close film analysis from an Irigarayan perspective. Each pair of films represents very different treatments of women in what appear to be three typical genres – film noir, romance, and crime (mixed with elements of the 'slasher', the buddy movie, and the road movie). There are some themes, such as space, silence, and gesture, which feature in all three chapters, and each chapter will also focus on a particular aspect of the intersection between Irigaray and film. Chapter 3, '*In the Cut: Self-Endangerment or Subjective Strength?*', focuses on the representation of sexual pleasure and the body. Through discussion of the cinematography, mise-en-scène, and dialogue, I explore the film's treatment of relationships and negotiation in terms of Irigaray's writing on 'the path towards the other' (2008b: 1). Chapter 4, '*Lost in Translation: The Potential of Becoming*', explores the Irigarayan notion of the crossroads, or the encounter, as a step in the becoming of a young woman who is trying to cultivate self-affection and self-expression. This chapter examines the way in which the film pays attention to the problems faced by men and women in marriage, and departs from expected generic conventions in order to convey the significance of the young woman's individuality. In Chapter 5, '*Morvern Callar: In a Sensory Wonderland*', I consider how the female protagonist tries to remember her lover through sensory, non-verbal means, which, Irigaray suggests, are a way to remember flesh. This forges another link between Irigaray and film, as her writings on touch resonate with the field of haptic or synaesthetic cinema, as explored by Vivian Sobchack (1992) and Laura Marks (2000; 2002).

These chapters will explore the foregrounding of the inner life of the female characters in each film, the positioning of the female point of view, and the invitation to share it. Through comparison with the respective earlier film with which it resonates, and through the philosophical outlook of Irigaray's writings on female subjectivity and sexual difference – in relation to film-theoretical perspectives such as genre, masquerade, and phenomenology – I hope to account for the privileging

of the woman's perspective in these films, whilst doing justice to the complexity and intricacy of the earlier works. In this way, I will attempt to create an overarching methodology or critical perspective that can account for these representations. The examination and analysis of these films will interrogate the structures and symbols inherent in each filmic text that contribute to the formation of these female characters, and will consider whether these films form the basis for an alternative filmmaking practice.

Chapter 6, 'Architects of Beauty and the Crypts of Our Bodies: Implications for Filmmaking and Spectatorship', considers the implications of my theoretical and practical approach for women's cinema, in both descriptive and prescriptive terms, and develops a way of approaching the cinema-going experience as a mediated, horizontal relationship rather than echoing the traditional view of it as a hierarchical apparatus. I will investigate the debates surrounding female authorship, and in so doing demonstrate Irigaray's poetic, philosophical, and spiritual writings as praxis, and enable the recognition of the work by Jane Campion, Sofia Coppola, and Lynne Ramsay as significant and subversive. This analysis will also consider whether, without making films that announce themselves overtly as feminist, it is possible to enunciate a female language. If so, who can make these films? Do they have to be made by women? Unfortunately, the implications of male directors' being at the helm of both historical and contemporary films are beyond the scope of this book, but one of the aims of this work is to examine the inclusiveness of an Irigarayan approach to film, which certainly incorporates a consideration of the possibilities for men.

The book therefore stages several encounters: between contemporary cinema and films from past decades; between Irigarayan philosophy and film analysis; and between cinematic thinking women and their audience. It also asks whether these films are indicative of a growing concern among filmmakers to find new ways to represent the perspectives and journeys of women in a frank yet contemplative style, and seeks to demonstrate how valuable the work of Irigaray can be for understanding these films and these women.

Index

- abstraction of women, 5, 10, 13, 23,
 31, 39, 102, 204
 adaptation, 180, 182, 183
 adultery, 103, 124
 affect, 41, 52, 63, 77, 94, 176, 184,
 185, 188, 199, 205
 Akerman, Chantal, 30, 173
 Alice, 150, 151, 152, 153–4, 162, 164,
 166
 Althusser, Louis, 3
 Antonioni, Michelangelo, 146, 147–8
 apparatus, 7, 9–10, 12–14, 23, 25, 27,
 129, 130, 194
 apparatus theory, 10, 12, 23
 Arnold, Andrea, 30, 204
 Arzner, Dorothy, 19, 173, 200
 Astruc, Alexandre, 180, 205
 auteur, 19, 167, 174, 177, 178–80, 185,
 187, 189–90, 194, 195
 authorship, 7, 19, 25, 167, 171, 173,
 179–80, 184, 189–91, 194–5
 autoeroticism, 45, 50
 avant-garde, 21, 26, 39, 171
- Babington, Bruce, 97, 99, 101, 102,
 103, 116, 124
 Bainbridge, Caroline, 2, 24, 57, 200
 beauty, 7, 29, 38, 39, 76, 96, 103, 106,
 169, 176, 191, 192, 198, 203
 Bellour, Raymond, 129, 131
 Bigelow, Kathryn, 175
 bisexuality, 17, 197
 body, 41, 42, 46, 77, 128, 148, 152–3,
 157–8, 188, 193, 196
 female, 2, 3, 6, 15, 23, 32, 34–5, 37,
 40, 43, 52–3, 60–1, 63, 65, 70,
 75, 77, 83, 86–7, 89–90, 94, 96,
 104, 107, 109, 115, 119, 129, 140,
 149–50, 155, 176–7, 181–2, 200
 Breillat, Catherine, 52
 Brill, Leslie, 130
 Brooks, Richard, 5, 61
 Brunson, Charlotte, 168, 169
- Bruzzi, Stella, 80, 186
 Burke, Carolyn, 150, 151, 152, 153
 Butler, Alison, 24, 168, 170, 171, 173,
 175
 Butler, Judith, 20, 46
- camera, 5, 10, 14, 15, 27, 29, 37, 39, 62,
 71, 73, 77, 78, 81, 85, 86, 98, 99,
 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 114,
 120, 129, 131, 138, 139, 140, 142,
 144, 147, 150, 154, 158, 159, 165,
 176, 179, 180, 187, 195, 200, 205
 caméra speculum, 195
la caméra stylo, 180, 195
 Campion, Jane, 1, 7, 38, 41, 60, 61, 62,
 67, 76, 79, 90, 92, 93, 167, 169–90,
 196, 199, 201, 204, 205
 Caputi, Jane, 65, 80
 Castration, 14, 18, 23, 31
 Caughie, John, 180
 Christie, Julie, 13
 cinematography, 6, 37, 57, 77, 93, 149,
 163, 178, 183, 190
 Cixous, Hélène, 195
 class, 41, 60, 131, 140, 148, 176, 199
 Clover, Carol, 23, 24, 80
 colour, 34, 44, 52, 77, 84, 87, 88, 93,
 99, 103, 110, 119, 137, 141, 163,
 185, 193–4, 195, 198
 flesh, *see* flesh colours
 red, 130, 136–7, 143, 144, 145, 153,
 155, 159, 163, 165, 205
 consciousness, definition, 3–5
 Constable, Catherine, 2, 18–19, 22,
 24, 35, 53, 81
 Cook, Pam, 14, 168, 169, 171–2, 189
 Cooper, Sarah, 28, 37–8, 41, 42, 47, 201
 Coppola, Sofia, 1, 7, 38, 95, 105, 106,
 108, 109, 125, 169–80, 184–5,
 188–9, 190, 191, 196, 205
 cosmetics, 39, 106, 111, 112, 119, 120,
 123, 176
 counter cinema, 14, 16, 19

- Creed, Barbara, 23–4, 43
 cultural studies, 1, 8, 20, 21
 cunnilingus, 88, 89
- Darke, Chris, 147, 150, 154
 Dash, Julie, 168, 171
 daughter, 42–3, 55–7, 82–3, 135
 De Lauretis, Teresa, 16–17, 40, 169,
 170, 199
 De Palma, Brian, 80
 death, 43–4, 68, 71, 82, 86, 91, 92,
 128, 143, 154, 166, 173, 179, 181,
 184
 Deleuze, Gilles, 18, 41, 146
 dialogue, 3, 6, 12, 35, 51, 57, 85, 86, 96,
 108, 109, 114, 156, 187, 188, 195
 Dietrich, Marlene, 18, 19, 20, 31
 Doane, Mary Ann, 2, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12–13,
 15–17, 18–19, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29,
 31, 37, 39, 82, 102, 168, 197
 Downing, Lisa, 53, 190
 Duras, Marguerite, 173
 Dyer, Richard, 3, 99, 101, 102, 106,
 117, 119
- enigma, woman as, 5, 18, 69, 80, 101,
 129, 149, 156, 157
 eroticism, 41, 51, 60, 61, 69, 80, 92,
 93, 125, 129, 150, 186
 Evans, Peter, 97, 99, 101, 102, 103,
 116, 124
 eyes, 36, 37, 41, 42, 100, 101, 105, 107,
 108, 113, 114, 120, 122, 131–2,
 138, 143, 145, 146, 147, 148,
 153–4, 158, 161, 162, 163,
 189, 196
- fellatio, 81, 85, 89, 90, 186
 female imaginary, *see* imaginary
 female language, *see* language
 female symbolic, *see* symbolic
 female voice, *see* voice
 feminine, the, 2, 3, 4, 13, 17, 18, 19,
 23, 24, 25, 26, 30, 32, 33, 36, 38,
 41, 42, 43, 47, 57, 66, 67, 83, 87,
 89, 90, 91, 100, 101, 102, 103, 117,
 119, 123, 161, 168–70, 173, 185,
 191, 193–5, 197, 199
 feminine text, 26
- femininity, 2, 4, 6, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19,
 22, 23, 25, 26, 28, 50, 80, 96, 99,
 101, 104, 105, 119–20, 122–3,
 131, 138, 146, 186, 190, 202
 feminism, 6, 14, 20, 21, 22, 24, 40, 52, 60,
 61, 74, 75, 79, 80, 85, 130, 175, 177,
 186, 189, 190, 191, 197, 199, 200, 202
 feminist film theory, 1, 2, 5, 8–28, 34,
 38, 67, 95, 168, 170–2, 173, 205
 femme fatale, 22, 66, 69–70, 74, 80, 81
 neo-noir, 80
 fetish, 9, 10, 15, 18, 30–1, 33, 84, 90,
 93, 98, 100, 103, 129, 132, 140,
 151, 176, 192, 194, 200
 film theory, 6, 24, 30, 34, 40, 49, 50,
 52, 184, 200
 filmmaking, 1, 3, 7, 8, 9, 14, 19, 20,
 23, 24, 28, 37, 38, 42, 48, 52, 54,
 59, 94, 167, 176, 178, 180, 185–6,
 187, 188, 191, 195, 196, 199, 201,
 203, 204, 205
Fish Tank, 30, 204
 flesh, 6, 31, 38–9, 41, 44, 77, 88, 90,
 103, 140, 148, 156–7, 159, 166,
 186, 193, 196
 colours, 77, 88, 163
 Flitterman, Sandy, 129
 fluids, 40, 47, 154, 166
 Fonda, Jane, 66, 74, 75
 Foster, Jodie, 21, 22
 Foucault, Michel, 3
 Fowler, Catherine, 206n
 Francke, Lizzie, 61, 62, 90, 92, 182
 Freud, Sigmund, 6, 10, 16, 17, 18, 23,
 24, 27, 32, 50, 66, 91, 122, 130,
 131, 143, 146
 Fuss, Diana, 4
- gaze, 12, 16, 18, 23, 30–1, 39, 40, 41,
 51, 80, 90, 100, 109, 122, 129,
 131, 138, 140, 151, 154, 169, 186,
 189, 196, 198, 200
 gender, 2, 5, 8–9, 10, 17, 19, 20–1, 23,
 32, 44, 56, 71, 74, 80, 88, 91, 103,
 116, 122, 125, 167, 190, 199, 205
 genitalia
 female, 2, 38, 40, 151
 male, 186
see also penis, vagina

- genre, 6, 9, 23, 27, 48, 49, 50, 80, 93,
169, 174–5, 181, 197
buddy movie, 6, 48, 80, 94, 170
erotic thriller, 61, 80, 93
film noir, 6, 9, 48, 69, 80, 93
horror, 23, 175, 206
road movie, 6, 162
romantic comedy, 111, 119, 125, 126
'slasher', 6, 67, 80, 201, 206
western, 169
women's films, 9, 15, 16, 27, 168,
171, 184
- gesture, 4, 5, 6, 34, 39, 42, 45, 52–3,
57, 82, 86–8, 109, 113, 115, 116,
125, 148, 156, 174, 189, 196, 198
- Gillett, Sue, 65, 76, 87, 92, 174, 199
- girls, 43, 55, 87, 108, 111, 134, 145,
148, 156, 160–1, 189
- Gledhill, Christine, 9, 69, 74
- goddess, 98, 100–1
Hestia, 55
- hamster, toy, 78
- Hansen, Miriam, 198
- haptic, 6, 35, 40, 41–2, 94, 157, 177, 198
- haptic visuality, 42, 76, 136, 205
- Harris, Thomas, 117
- Haskell, Molly, 11–12, 21–2, 101, 169,
208
- Haslem, Wendy, 97, 125
- Hatoum, Mona, 37
- Hedren, Tippi, 132
- hero, 9, 29, 81, 103, 172
anti-, 22, 147
female, 22, 23, 53, 54
- heroine, 4, 21, 22, 111, 128, 129, 131,
165, 166, 172, 186–7, 189, 204
- Hestia, *see* goddess
- heterosexuality, 45, 50, 199
- history, woman's, 3, 12, 66, 78, 82,
142, 147, 172, 177
- Hitchcock, Alfred, 1, 16, 23, 61, 128,
129–32, 134, 136, 137, 140, 141,
142, 146, 147, 148, 174
- Hollywood, 1, 5, 9, 11, 12, 18, 19, 21,
22, 25, 30, 76, 95, 106, 111, 116,
119, 131, 147, 172, 175, 197, 202
- Holmlund, Christine, 40, 138
- homosexuality, 45
- hooks, bell, 20, 206
- Hopgood, Fincina, 76, 187, 207
- horizon, 7, 30, 44, 45, 57, 90, 100,
194, 196, 200, 201
- hysteria, 15, 18, 44, 151, 194
- icon, 30–1, 76, 96, 103, 117, 194
- idol, 30–1, 98, 100, 103, 194
- imaginary, the, 25, 150
female, 2, 34, 45
male, 35, 36, 44, 94, 123, 176, 199
- impotence, 64–5, 91
- interiority, 1, 3–4, 11, 13, 23, 26, 29,
34, 36–7, 38, 51, 52, 54–6, 58, 63,
67, 76, 78, 86, 88, 93, 94, 171, 177,
187, 195, 202–5
- Iranian cinema, 171, 208
- Irigaray, Luce
art, 34, 39, 44, 46, 51, 53–4, 103,
122, 167, 191, 193–5
beauty, *see separate entry*
caress, 92, 140, 142, 148, 206n
culture of two, 36, 45, 56–9, 93,
108, 178, 199, 203
essentialism, charge of, 4, 11, 12,
40–1, 46
exchange of women, 55, 150, 178
fluids, *see separate entry*
gaps, 49–50, 131
'I love to you', 125
lips, *see separate entry*
masquerade, *see separate entry*
mimesis, *see separate entry*
morphology, *see separate entry*
parler femme, *see separate entry*
poetry, 167, 192
race, *see separate entry*
self-affection, 3, 4, 6, 87
speculum, *see separate entry*
utopian, *see* utopia
visual, 4, 117
- Japanese, the, 105, 108, 114, 176, 207
- Jay, Martin, 40, 151
- Jeffers McDonald, Tamar, 95
- Johansson, Scarlett, 96, 101, 106,
119–20, 176
- Johnston, Claire, 14–15, 17–18,
19, 173

- Kael, Pauline, 185
 Kaplan, E. Ann, 129, 147, 199
 karaoke, 113, 120, 124
 Keaton, Diane, 75
 kiss, 77, 86, 89, 95, 98, 114, 115, 117,
 140–1, 162
 Knapp, Lucretia, 131, 134, 137, 138,
 140, 142
 Kristeva, Julia, 26
 Kuchler, Alwyn, 149, 179
 Kuhn, Annette, 2, 9, 10, 11, 14, 20,
 24–6, 169–70, 187–8, 196–7
- Lacan, Jacques, 6, 10, 18, 23–4, 25, 27,
 32–3, 35, 36
 language, 3, 4, 10, 24, 25, 28, 31, 46,
 50–2, 57, 62, 63, 67, 79, 87, 92,
 114, 123, 125, 140, 150, 156, 166,
 170, 171, 183
 cinematic, 25, 169, 178, 183
 female, 7, 35, 42, 53, 100, 151, 190,
 194, 203, 204, 205, 206
 laughter, 53, 75, 87–8, 144, 161,
 169
 Lehman, Peter, 180
 lesbianism, 20, 74, 131, 138
 spectatorship, 20, 40, 200, 201
 lips, 25, 27, 37, 40, 52, 53, 55, 87, 96,
 100, 115, 116, 117, 119, 120, 140,
 155, 178, 205
 looking glass, the, 148, 150, 153, 154,
 166, 170
 love, 29, 38, 39, 63, 66, 71, 78, 91, 95,
 130, 140, 148, 165, 184, 186, 192,
 202
 maternal, 135, 145
 of other, 40
 of same, 191, 196
 of self, 30, 33, 38, 56, 100
 Luhr, William, 180
- MacCabe, Colin, 71
 make-up, *see* cosmetics
 Marantz Cohen, Paula, 130
Marie Antoinette, 179, 189
 Marks, Laura, 6, 42, 154, 157, 158
 marriage, 6, 66, 68, 92, 93, 97, 124,
 126, 130, 140, 142
 Martin, Angela, 184–5, 189, 195
- masculinity, 17, 18, 22, 64, 68, 98,
 103, 111–12, 119, 124, 134, 138,
 173, 186
 masochism, 15, 27, 60, 61, 67
 masquerade, 1, 6, 17, 18, 24, 27–8,
 38, 47, 81, 87, 95–6, 119–23, 129,
 137–8, 176, 194, 197
 masturbation, 81, 88, 89, 90, 92
 maternal, 52
 genealogy, 21, 31, 33, 42–3, 44, 57,
 145, 151, 177
 instinct, 52
 love, 130
 maternity, 29, 37, 53, 88, 101, 130,
 135
 Mayer, Sophie, 195, 206
 Mayne, Judith, 11, 40, 101, 170, 190,
 198, 200
 Mazierska, Ewa, 156, 162, 163, 166
 McElhaney, Joe, 135, 138, 139, 140,
 146, 147
 Mellencamp, Patricia, 169, 171, 172,
 174, 176
 memory, 12, 13, 31, 82, 100, 136,
 144–5, 148, 156–7, 158, 166, 169,
 193, 203
 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, 41, 153, 158
 Metz, Christian, 27, 35
 mid-life-crisis, male, 97–8, 112,
 113, 114
 mimesis, 42, 47–8, 49, 79, 87, 94, 96,
 119, 122
 mirror, 20, 27, 32, 35, 36–7, 39–43,
 86, 112, 120, 122, 123, 131, 151,
 152–4, 164, 176, 177, 200
 mise-en-scène, 6, 53, 79, 80, 204
 misogyny, 18, 22, 23, 61, 65, 67, 80,
 85, 86, 93, 199, 201
 Modleski, Tania, 23, 24, 131, 142, 171,
 174, 175
 Moi, Toril, 4, 41, 46
 Monroe, Marilyn, 11, 31, 96, 97,
 99–100, 101–3, 104, 106, 116–17,
 119, 120, 122
 Montrelay, Michèle, 138
 Moore, Susanna, 60, 75, 181–2,
 183
 morphology, 4, 37, 38, 42, 46, 53,
 100, 151, 177

- mother, 23, 33, 42–3, 44, 55, 56–7,
 64, 65, 79, 82–3, 100–1, 128–30,
 134–6, 144–7, 154, 156, 161, 162,
 165, 166, 169, 177–8, 188, 198
 mucus, 46
 Mulvey, Laura, 6, 9, 15, 17, 18, 25, 29,
 30, 31–5, 39, 77, 80, 93, 101, 102,
 103, 129, 197, 202, 203
 murder, 21, 60, 61, 64, 65, 67–8, 71,
 82, 86, 88, 90, 91, 92, 93, 181,
 182, 199
 Murray, Bill, 97, 104, 173
 music, 112, 113, 116, 132, 134, 141,
 148, 149, 154, 157, 158–9, 162,
 163, 165, 169, 177, 188, 189, 193,
 194, 195, 199

 Nair, Mira, 21
 narcissism, 18, 39, 45, 132
 nationality, 8, 108, 171, 172
 New York, 22, 61, 62, 83, 98,
 116, 172

 object, 1, 2, 9, 12, 16, 18, 19, 28, 29,
 30, 31, 33, 34, 37, 39, 40, 41, 42,
 47, 51, 52, 56, 57, 60, 69, 72, 74,
 76, 79, 81, 87, 96, 100, 101, 103,
 109, 117, 118, 122, 125, 129, 150,
 172, 176, 190, 193, 197, 198, 199,
 201, 202, 205
 Oedipal, 16, 66, 67, 129
 Oedipal, pre-, 17, 153
 Oedipus, 66, 175, 208n
 orgasm, 52, 88, 89
 Orr, John, 130, 136
 other, the, 4, 6, 16, 31, 33, 38–9, 41,
 45–6, 54, 55, 58, 86, 93, 108, 125,
 156–7, 166, 175, 192, 193, 194,
 196, 199, 200, 206n
 outlaw, 137, 142

 Pakula, Alan J., 1, 161, 207n
 paranoia, 15, 27
parler femme, 50, 57, 59, 173, 195
Passenger, The, 147–8
 patriarchy, 11, 18, 23, 27, 29, 32, 34,
 44, 66, 68, 73, 81, 166, 170, 175,
 196, 202
 peace, 142, 154, 158, 159, 164, 166

 penis, 27, 31, 32, 33, 40, 52, 89, 186
 phallus, 25, 33, 43, 66, 91, 153, 173
 phenomenology, 6, 148, 206n
 philosophy, 7, 24, 28, 31, 49, 104, 106,
 176, 199
Piano, The, 41, 61, 171, 175, 177, 185,
 186, 188
 Place, Janey, 9
 pleasure, viewing, 8, 9, 15, 16, 17, 18,
 25, 31, 33, 176, 200, 203
 poetry, 62, 77, 78, 84, 156, 167, 181,
 192
 Polan, Dana, 60–1, 67, 185–6
 Pomerance, Murray, 130, 131, 141,
 144, 146
 pornography, 52, 60, 89, 181
 post-colonial studies, 8, 20, 175
 Potter, Sally, 13, 30, 171, 172, 173,
 195, 200, 206n, 208n
 production, 8, 12, 14, 20, 22, 26, 49,
 57, 59, 95, 179, 180, 191, 195, 200,
 206n, 208n
 prostitution, 63, 66, 69, 74, 85, 207n
 psychoanalysis, 10, 12, 15, 17, 18, 20,
 23, 24, 31, 32, 43, 50, 57, 67, 69,
 70, 74, 110, 128, 129, 130, 143,
 145, 153, 167, 197, 200

 queer theory, 1, 8, 20, 28, 200

 race, 8, 20, 41, 199
 racism, 176, 207n
 Rainer, Yvonne, 173
 Ramanathan, Geetha, 176, 177, 190,
 198
 Ramsay, Lynne, 1, 7, 38, 128, 148,
 149, 156, 160, 166, 169, 170, 171,
 172, 173, 175, 177, 178, 179, 180,
 183–4, 185, 187–8, 189, 190, 191,
 196, 205
 Rascaroli, Laura, 156, 162, 163, 166
Ratcatcher, 179, 183, 187, 188, 197
 reader, 17, 26, 35, 36, 49, 57, 76, 170,
 180, 181, 183, 184, 195, 196
 real, the, 32, 50, 192
 reception, 14, 19, 51, 75, 206n,
 208n
 red, *see* colour
Red Road, 204

- reflection, 36, 39–40, 43, 51, 110, 120,
 131, 151, 154, 177, 195, 200
 return to other, 33
 return to self, 38, 56, 58, 84, 92, 125,
 145, 178, 198, 199, 200, 203
 Rich, B. Ruby, 14
 Richardson, Mark, 125
 Robinson, Hilary, 167, 192–3
 Rogers, Anna, 189
 romance, 5, 54, 61, 67, 71, 73, 74, 82,
 83, 86, 90, 91, 92, 98, 105, 111,
 114, 125, 186
 Rosen, Marjorie, 11, 169
 Ryan, Meg, 61, 75–6, 77, 111, 176, 207n
- sadism, 80
 Sarris, Andrew, 185
 scopophilia, 12, 15, 25, 32–3
 Scotland, 162, 165
Sex and the City, 67
 sexual difference, 2, 3, 6, 10, 15, 18,
 20, 45, 56, 58, 96, 153, 190, 200
 sexual pleasure, female, 6, 52, 76, 81,
 88–9, 91, 92, 94
 sexual slang, 63
 sexuality, 8, 19, 20, 32, 58, 117
 bisexuality, *see separate entry*
 female, 2, 4, 18, 27, 31, 32, 37, 40,
 43, 50, 51, 53, 61, 62, 66, 67, 69,
 70, 73, 74, 80, 89, 90, 96, 99, 101,
 117, 119, 120, 126, 151
 heterosexuality, *see separate entry*
 homosexuality, *see separate entry*
 male, 18, 30, 32
 silence, 6, 42, 51–2, 53, 76, 86, 87, 88,
 109, 120, 125, 128, 156, 158, 164,
 174, 177, 188, 194
 Silverman, Kaja, 129, 173, 196
 Sirk, Douglas, 9
 sister, 64, 66, 75, 82, 88, 90
 half-, 62, 63, 66, 76, 82, 84
 skin, 29, 38, 84, 90, 118, 181
 Smith, Paul Julian, 105–6, 110
 Sobchack, Vivian, 6, 41, 148
 sound, 19, 66, 70, 71, 77, 78, 79, 109,
 110, 135, 137, 158, 169, 177,
 187–8, 190, 193, 199, 204
 soundscape, 177
 soundtrack, 78, 115, 136, 153, 157,
 158, 162, 163, 165, 188
 space, 3, 6, 13, 24, 32, 38, 39–40, 41,
 48–9, 54, 77, 79, 83–5, 87, 88, 91,
 93, 94, 96, 111, 112, 116, 126, 147,
 150, 151, 154, 163, 168, 169, 175,
 177, 188, 189, 190, 192, 195, 197,
 198, 200, 203
 Spain, 1, 3, 4, 8, 10, 13, 17, 20, 23–4,
 26, 27, 36, 41–2, 49, 51, 62, 70,
 71, 73
 spectator, 1, 3, 4, 8, 10, 13, 17, 20,
 23–4, 26, 27, 36, 41–2, 49, 51, 62,
 70, 71, 73, 75–9, 81, 86, 87, 88,
 94, 96, 106, 107, 108, 109, 120,
 124, 126, 129, 131, 132, 134–7,
 139–41, 145, 147, 148, 151, 154,
 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 161, 162,
 163, 166, 167, 170, 176, 179–82,
 184, 191, 194, 195, 196–201, 205
 female, 1, 8, 15–19, 20, 28, 42, 101,
 168, 170
 male, 10, 12, 15, 16, 23
 speculum, 5, 29, 31, 35, 36–7, 40, 76,
 78, 93, 195, 205
 Stacey, Jackie, 197
 Staiger, Janet, 173, 180
 Studlar, Gaylyn, 18, 81, 138, 197
 subjectivity, 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 15, 16, 17, 19,
 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 34–5, 46, 49,
 51, 52, 54, 56, 58–9, 63, 66, 69, 76,
 81, 88, 92, 93, 94, 95, 103, 104,
 106, 125, 128, 129, 132, 139, 140,
 142, 148, 168, 170, 171, 174, 175,
 177, 178, 181, 188, 192, 196, 197,
 198, 199, 200, 202, 203, 205
 symbolic, the, 3, 14, 24, 25, 27, 31–2,
 35, 36, 43–4, 47, 96, 110, 129,
 150, 153, 178, 194, 196, 198
 female, 2, 33, 34–45, 48, 50, 57, 88,
 198, 199
- Tasker, Yvonne, 21–2, 69, 85
 Thornham, Sue, 67, 84, 198
 thunder, 130, 136, 140
To The Lighthouse, 79
 Tokyo, 97, 105, 108, 110, 114, 116,
 124, 176, 179, 189

- touch, 6, 13, 27, 28, 39, 40, 41–2, 50,
51–3, 56, 62, 100, 109, 115, 125,
135, 140, 144–9, 150–1, 155–8,
159, 161, 164, 166, 177, 178, 190,
192, 196, 198, 205
- utopia, 11, 40
- vagina, 25, 32, 37, 40, 52, 63
vagina dentata, 23, 43
Varda, Agnès, 195
Verhoeven, Deb, 183, 190
violence, 23, 60, 67, 80, 84, 181, 186
Virgin Mary, 57
virginity, 37, 44, 54–7, 63, 76
voice, 12, 44, 60, 70–4, 100, 117, 120,
129, 144–5, 155, 170, 171, 180, 181,
182, 183, 191, 193, 194, 198, 205
 female, 164, 172–8, 194–5, 200
voice-off, 77, 106, 108, 181, 193, 207n
voiceover, 13, 16, 81, 98, 181, 193,
207n
voyeurism, 10, 12, 15, 23, 25, 51, 73,
80, 86, 90, 129, 132, 186, 198, 200
- Warner, Alan, 148, 183
Watkins, Liz, 77
Whitford, Margaret, 2, 3, 35, 36, 153
Wilder, Billy, 1, 95
Williams, Linda Ruth, 80, 147, 148,
152, 156, 159, 160, 186
Wilson, Elizabeth, 116–17
womb, 23, 43, 46, 159
women's cinema, 7, 14–15, 16, 168–71
 see also genre
Wood, Robin, 130, 131, 134, 136, 144,
145, 147, 180
Woolf, Virginia, 79
writing, 26, 28, 62–3, 78, 86, 111,
152, 164, 167, 182, 186, 195

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