"CINEMA FOR WHERE YOU LIVE": SPECTATORSHIP, SUBJECTIVITY AND SPACE

by

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Abstract

Film theory's critical engagements with the spectator's relationships with the moving image have, over the last decade, reached something of a critical impasse. This impasse has crystallised around the inability of dominant psychoanalytic and ethnographic discourses to theorise "ways of seeing" and positions of desire that are neither completely hegemonic (structured by ideology) nor counter-hegemonic (fuelled by agency), but which fall into the space of contradiction and disjuncture that exists in-between their assumptions. In this thesis, I bring recent debates around subjectivity and geographical projects of "mapping the subject" to bear upon spectatorship. I explore the ways in which viewing spectatorship through this lens of space provides a critical language that interrogates the terrain of "in-betweenness" that marks spectatorship. I argue that, through its flexibility and inclusivity, a spatial approach to spectatorship allows us to theorise the notion of spectatorial hybridity, and conceive of alternative positions of desire in the cinema. In order to capture the multiple and mutable dynamics of spectatorship, this work contains two distinct but interrelated projects. First, it reveals and analyses the ways in which the language of space is already operative in film theory, uncovering the fabrics of spatiality that underlie existing theorisations of spectatorship. Second, it follows its own inquiry into the "spaces of spectatorship", measuring the validity of the project of "locating the spectator" against the real relations between played out between subjects, spaces and cinema in Vancouver.
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Chapter 1:

“Cinema for where you live”: Spectatorship, Subjectivity and Space

Last Friday night we swapped over-stuffed velour chairs for an itchy green blanket on the ground. We swapped walls for trees. We swapped conditioned air for the breeze. Aching necks propped up upon elbows planted in the dirt, we shifted restlessly for two hours, alternately stretching out our limbs, curling up to keep warm and trying to protect our ribs from stubborn stones and sticks beneath us. We imitated the bodily shapes of people directly in front of us to see past them to the screen that stood at the other end of the park, its blade-like edges glowing white against the dark outlines of its easel of trees. On the screen, Curtis and Jim mouthed words that competed with barking dogs, crying babies, voices from the ground. Ungluing my eyes from the screen for a moment, I became absorbed in everything else around us: the clouds; snapshots of the busy street illuminated briefly by car headlights and filtered through branches; people buzzing around the projector; the whirring reels; the cigarette smoke that danced in the beam of light before the screen, giving the breeze a temporarily visible form and finally drawing my eyes back to Curtis and Jim.

In one of these moments of distraction, I picked up a flyer that had blown onto our blanket and scrunched up my eyes to read “Street Level Film Festival, August 16-18, Grandview Park”. Then a subtitle intrigued me: “Cinema for where you live”. I began to think about what that meant for me, the different meanings “where you live” has for me.
Physical spaces first sprang to mind. I live in a house full of students, in an affluent neighbourhood dominated by lycra-clad bodies and European bakeries -- not in the East End neighbourhood in which I now lay sprawling, taking in this “Cinema for where you live”. I live in Vancouver, a city in which I do not feel ‘at home’. I live in a university environment. In a world filled with coffee shops and movies, Melrose Place, household melodramas revolving variously around school work, girlfriends, boyfriends -- far removed from the crack addiction and paranoid delusions unfolding as Curtis’ world on the screen. I live in the space of my body, physical again, yet I also live in the spaces of my gender and my class, each of which influence my access to other spaces, to the spaces I am able, or unable, to live in. Each space in which I live, in which I negotiate an identity for myself, offers its own degrees of freedom and imposes its own kinds of confinement, and I realised at this moment that for the other people lying in the park beside me, whose elbows, stretched limbs and cigarette smoke I was cautiously avoiding, these freedoms and confinements would be entirely different. For each of us, “Cinema for where you live” was something quite unique and personal. Our bodies may have taken on the same shapes, lying there distorted upon blankets in the park, watching a film called “Curtis’ Charm”, but we were all positioned quite differently in relation to Curtis’ story, this festival, and the space we occupied itself.

* * * * *

I begin this work with a description of Vancouver’s recent “Street Level” film festival and my own self-conscious engagement with the cinema in this context, because it
introduces the concerns of this thesis at a number of different levels. At a very simple level, the festival’s self-definition, “Cinema for where you live”, and the way that this inevitably takes on different meanings for different people, captures the broad theoretical trend within film studies over the last two and a half decades out of which this thesis emerges, that is: the interweaving of discourses of spectatorship with those of subjectivity. It reflects the way in which film theory’s preoccupation with spectatorship has revolved around an engagement with modes of seeing and telling, hearing and listening, not only in terms of how films are structured, but also in terms of how film-goers imagine themselves in relation to the cinema. Film theory is concerned with how we, as spectators, form relationships with film texts, how we interpret them, absorb and negotiate meanings and identities from them, and work these into our everyday lives.

Extending this reading further, “Cinema for where you live” also conjures up for me, film theorists’ recent engagements with personal histories and the materiality of everyday lives; their attempts to incorporate these issues into a more nuanced theorisation of spectatorship. It encourages us to recognise that we are both cinematic spectators and subjects who exist before and outside of the cinema, precariously positioned at the temporally shifting intersection of multiple subject-positions. We cannot check-in this cultural baggage at the movie theatre door or, indeed, at the edge of Grandview Park, but instead bring this range of subject-positions, identities and experiences to the cinema, into the realm of spectatorship. In this sense, our complex entanglement in these positions and identities (the social construction of reality) inevitably influences how we, as
spectators, imagine ourselves in relation to the cinema, in relation to filmic texts and the meanings they construct.

Interwoven with this more nuanced sense of subjectivity and constituting the main focus of this thesis, the “Street Level” festival is also interesting for its evocation of the way in which the relationship between subjectivity and the cinema (that is, the relationship that constitutes the horizon of spectatorship studies) is played out over a *multiplicity of spaces*. By articulating bodily surfaces, social and discursive outlines, and the fabric of very concrete, physical spaces, it draws our attention to the *spatiality* of both subjective processes and, it follows, cinematic spectatorship. Whilst the festival itself as a cultural product is inevitably *situated*, inseparable from the wider social and spatial relations of the city, the spectatorial relations which unfold within it are located within a number of spaces both ‘inside’ the cinema (discursive and physical spaces in which the identities of film exhibition venues, texts and film-goers are worked out) and ‘outside’ of the cinema (the personal experiences and histories which spectators themselves bring into the realm of meaning- and identity-negotiation within the cinema). “Cinema for where you live” thus evokes the multiple spatial dimensions -- physical, corporeal, discursive, social, psychic -- within which the spectator and spectatorship are constituted.

This work, then, is marked by my desire, as researcher, to unravel the spatiality of spectatorship. In her commentary on feminist film criticism, Tania Modleski argues that the analysis of spectatorship is always an analysis of one’s own fascination and passion,
and that unless this is acknowledged, we are left with a series of fuzzily defined “ideal spectators” in whom it is difficult to discern how much of their responses are actually displaced representations of the critic’s own.\(^1\) Whilst the purpose of this thesis is far removed from defining an “ideal spectator”, and instead aims to destabilise this notion, attributing spectatorship a more fluid, mutable and shifting quality, it is nonetheless a project that has been shaped by my personal engagements with a mass of academic literature in film theory, and my attempts to reconcile this work with not only the literature around subjectivity and space emerging in geography, but also with my own experiences as a film-goer. As much as this work is shaped by my academic entanglements, it also emerges out of a collision of my wishful notion that I am an “informed spectator” with the desperate “is that all there is to me?” kind of self-interrogation that I go through every time I find myself seduced by cheesy Hollywood fantasies. I begin this thesis from an autobiographical slant, then, also as an attempt to situate me, as researcher, and my personal engagements with the cinema (both academic and not) within this project. Indeed, in thinking through the issues that shape this research, I am tempted to locate it as a “journey of interpretation”, in line with Giuliana Bruno’s description of cultural theorists who, as flâneurs, stroll alongside other voyeurs and walkers to construct “travel stories”.\(^2\) Having spoken a little about the experiences that prompt this particular story of spectatorship, then, let me now turn to the theoretical issues that serve as a kind of “travel guide”.

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Locating the Spectator

Spectatorship studies bring into focus the relationship between subjectivity and the cinema, that is: the ways in which spectators imagine themselves in relation to the cinema, individual film texts and the meanings and identities they construct. Filmic discourses have, over the last two decades, carved out theoretical paths which roughly parallel the shifting ways in which the subject in modern societies has been understood. As a brief genealogy, during this period, theorisations of the subject have moved from post-Althusserian and post-Foucauldian notions of interpellation (in which 'subjects' could not be presumed to pre-exist any given form that discourse or ideology might attempt to make them assume), towards more subtle and supple articulations that attempt to capture the multiple and mutable dynamics of subjectivity. In interrogating this theoretical shift and attempting to draw together the many different ways in which contemporary theorists are thinking about the subject, cultural theorists such as Kathleen Kirby have recently focused upon the mutual implications of the production of subjectivities and the production of spatialities, and emphasised the increasing appeal of geography -- the conscientious exploration of a spatial thematic -- as a medium for inscribing subjectivity in all its complexity. In her *Indifferent Boundaries*, Kirby suggests that space would seem to provide the ideal material for linking the multiple dimensions of the subject that interest theorists, bringing together through its inclusivity “the physical space of bodies and their circulation in man-made terrains with the configuration of social categories and the shaping forces of representation”. In other

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words, space acts as a “slippery entity”, a medium that simultaneously reconnects the subject with the material whilst preserving a fluidity to subjective boundaries. In this sense, it is increasingly possible to describe contemporary theorisations of the subject in terms of a geographical project: a “locating” or “mapping” of the subject, or as Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift prefer, a process of “wayfinding” through the multiple differences, contradictions, tensions and hybrid formations that constitute subjectivity. In this introductory chapter, I argue that a critical impasse has been reached in film theory around theorising the spectator, and suggest that this impasse might be explained by the reluctance of film theorists to fully take up the problematics of space in their work. With this in mind, I also begin to sketch out a project of “locating the spectator”.

Given the mutual interests of discourses of subjectivity and spectatorship, early theories of the cinematic spectator in the 1970s drew heavily upon the structuralist pre-occupation with the interpellation of the subject. These “apparatus” theories, as they have become known, filtered Althusserian discourse through lenses of Freudian, and more specifically, Lacanian, psychoanalytic theory, suggesting that the spectator is inextricably bound to the cinematic apparatus (and therefore bound to interpellation) by the continual destabilisation and fixing of identity (the spectator’s ‘self’) around the cinema’s peculiar

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Pile, Steve & Thrift, Nigel (1995) “Introduction”, in eds. Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift Mapping the Subject: Geographies of Cultural Transformation, Routledge: London and New York. Although Pile and Thrift’s language of “wayfinding” perhaps articulates more self-consciously the tentativeness of this geographical project, I want to emphasise that Kirby’s “locating the subject” or “mapping the subject”, her identification of subjectivity as a spatial practice, similarly refuses the fixing or construction of a definitive path to the subject. Rather, for all three theorists, this approach involves simply thinking through the multiple and mobile co-ordinates of subjectivity, “...visiting in turn all, or most, of the positions one takes to constitute the field...[covering] descriptively as much of the terrain as possible, exploring it on foot rather than looking down at it from an airplane”, 1.
signs and symbols. The basis of this connection between psychoanalysis and the cinema was that cinema was seen to play precisely upon those unconscious structures of fantasy and desire central to psychoanalysis. Whilst I devote chapter 2 to a detailed reading of this approach, what I want to draw out here is the way in which these psychoanalytic or “apparatus theories” of spectatorship identified the spectator as totally and utterly the product of the cinema’s technology, its énoncé. The spectator did not pre-exist the cinema, and thus these theories took up a wholly external position on spectatorship, denying the spectator any position from which to react to the cinema’s attempts to shape or form it. It is precisely this refusal of agency that has fueled critiques of both this early approach to subjectivity and spectatorship.

In recent theorisations of subjectivity, there has been an almost reactionary reaffirmation of “the persistence of the subject”, of a personal history that “lies beneath and sometimes subverts the discursive overtones directed towards individuals”. Thus, in Paul Smith’s *Discerning the Subject* and, similarly, in Chantal Mouffe’s work, the subject emerges at a temporally shifting intersection of multiple interpellations which are negotiated alongside personal histories and experiences into a series of precarious and mutable personal subjective positions. The subject is located within an “overdetermination” of meanings, which are not reducible to a single apparatus, but rather emanate from multiple sites of

 Kirby, 2.
power or multiple spaces. To engage with subjectivity in all its complexity, this new approach demands that we take into account the diverse and frequently conflicting meanings that become attached to the subject through its interactions in “topological, geopolitical, corporeal, psychic, discursive, and social spaces”. This emphasis on the interweaving of discourses of subjectivity and spatiality -- the notion of “mapping the subject” -- allows us to come to a more rounded, nuanced conception of the subject by making it possible to theorise at once the mobile and multiple interpellations, experiences, histories, collisions, contradictions and shifts that constitute identity.

Furthermore, this post-structuralist discourse is heavily politicised in that it challenges the uni-dimensionality attributed to the subject by earlier Althusserian discourses to reclaim spaces of agency, “irrepressible moments of resistance”, in which dominant social formations or discourses are rendered arbitrary and unstable. For Kirby, this is where the new theoretical reliance upon space becomes critical:

“...[S]pace maintains a certain fluidity, a mobility, a revisability that appeals to the reformatory impulses of today. If we are speaking of space in the abstract, it is susceptible to folding, division, reshaping. A space persists only as long as the boundary creating it is deliberately maintained, and the spaces these boundaries encircle are subject to continual remodeling”.

Kirby, 11.

Whereas film theorists in the 1970s filtered Althusser through a Lacanian lens to show how the constant destabilisation and fixing of identity in the cinema inextricably bound the subject to ideological interpellation, post-structuralist theorists such as Paul Smith have highlighted that in fact this very destabilisation of identity inevitably results in the emergence of agency (the activation of desire). For a more in-depth discussion of how agency and resistance operate in Smith’s work, see Willems-Braun, Bruce (1991) Fringe Festivals, Cultural Politics, and the Negotiation of Subjectivity, M.A. thesis, Department of Geography, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C.

Kirby, 18.
It is precisely this spatial thematic — the possibility of a fluid or mobile “spatialisation of subjectivity” — that underlies Paul Smith’s *Discerning the Subject*, allowing him to refuse to fix either the subject or society, and instead conceive of them as relational and, hence, precarious.

These recent theorisations of the overdetermined nature of subjects and society have allowed film theorists to free their understanding of spectatorship, the subject’s relationship to the cinema, from the strict, singularly mechanistic production of meaning or interpellation processes embodied in 1970s psychoanalytic film theories, and begin to think instead aboutspectatorial agency or the alternative ‘uses’ spectators may make of film texts. Inspired by Stuart Hall’s work on the ‘encoding’ and ‘decoding’ of cultural products (the ways in which individuals interpret encoded ideologies based upon their own social positioning), film theorists throughout the 1980s were drawn towards more empirical and ethnographic approaches to spectatorship, critical and qualitative observations of how individuals actually respond to the cinema. These approaches were seen as a way of restoring complexity and contradiction to flesh-and-blood people, in contrast to the abstract and politically dismal pre-occupations of apparatus theories,

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which denied any possibility of spectatorial positions from which different, contrasting, or oppositional interpretations of cinematic texts might be produced.

What I find most critical about this change in the direction of spectatorship studies, however, is the way in which these ethnographic studies evacuate the force of the unconscious (which dominates apparatus theories, embodying the process of ideological interpellation) to posit “spectatorship” entirely within the realm of experience and personal history, and the “spectator” as always an active creator of meaning. This is the point at which post-structuralist theories of the spectator clearly become dislocated from those more recent nuanced conceptions of subjectivity proposed by theorists such as Smith and Mouffe. In other words, whilst post-structuralist theorists of the subject have attempted to inscribe subjectivity with the complex interactions between both personal histories and ideological interpellations (interactions between a multiplicity of spaces in which meanings are constructed), theories of the spectator have tended to effect a complete break with their psychoanalytic predecessors, bracketing the apparatus as a significant site of power altogether and, in some sense, “emptying” the spectator by abstracting a person’s lived history as subjectivity pure and simple, rather than conceiving of it as “a colligation of multifarious and multiform subject positions”.11 In effect, the unconscious has become synonymous with the dominant ideology contained

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11Smith, 34.
within any one film text, an entity against which the spectator, newly endowed with agency, is always resisting and always struggling.\textsuperscript{12}

Interestingly, as Judith Mayne points out, this concerted break with earlier psychoanalytic theories of spectatorship is reaffirmed in the language that these ethnographic studies adopt. Refuting both the terms “subject” and the more ambiguous “spectator”, these studies concern themselves with “viewers” or even “real viewers”.\textsuperscript{13} However, in identifying this “real viewer” as a pure site of agency, these theorisations of spectatorship tend to construct an image of the spectator which is just as monolithic and problematic as the interpellated “subject” of apparatus theories. Contextualised within the theoretical resurgence of interest in agency in the 1980s -- the redirection of critical attention towards the way in which “the people” resist mass culture’s manipulations -- the desire to name “real viewers” emerges as neither transparent nor innocent. Whilst “real viewers” might seem more “real” simply because they are referred to or cited, they remain, rather, always on the verge of becoming the embodiment of the researcher’s own political ideals. Thus, as Tania Modleski argues, in embracing such ethnographic and empirical approaches to theorise film spectatorship:

“...We are in danger of forgetting the crucial fact that, like everyone else, even the cultural analyst may sometimes be a “cultural dupe” -- which is, after all, only an ugly way of saying that we exist inside ideology, that we are all victims,

\textsuperscript{12}In some ways, the spectator in these studies is always “reading against the grain”. Thus, whilst Angela McRobbie’s conclusion that young girls’ attraction to films like Flashdance stems from their own desire for physical autonomy is intriguing, I am left wondering how this desire might interact or collide with the simple notion of acculturation to a patriarchal definition of feminine desirability that these films inevitably perpetuate.

down to the very depths of our psyches, of political and cultural domination (even though we are never only victims).”\textsuperscript{14}

“Spectatorship” has, then, become a site of critical impasse in film theory, a site of tension, inconsistency, conflict and confusion -- confusion in particular over whether theories of spectators refer to a construction or a real person, and whether the spectator is a cultural dupe or a resisting agent. We could say that “the spectator” is \textit{unlocated}, helplessly flailing between the “interpellated subject” of psychoanalytic film theories and the tendentious “real viewer” of ethnographic studies. Like Judith Mayne, I am less concerned to argue that this confusion is a mistake, and more concerned to read it as “symptomatic of unresolved and insufficiently theorised complications”.\textsuperscript{15} However, whilst Mayne believes that the root of these complications lies in film theorists’ own very complex relationships with the cinema, their fascination with the kinds of contradictory impulses that constitute pleasure, I attribute it also to their hesitation in fully taking up the \textit{problematics of space} in theorising spectatorship.

Following Kirby, I have suggested that bringing a geographical perspective, the lens of space, to questions of the subject allows us to theorise more fully its multiple and mutable dynamics. Space not only provides an ideal medium for bringing together different theoretical insights on the subject, but also allows us to theorise subjective contradictions, conflicts, collisions, tension and interactions, and it would appear that this flexibility and inclusivity is precisely what is needed to negotiate the current critical impasse in film

\textsuperscript{14}Modleski, 12.
\textsuperscript{15}Mayne, 35.
theory. What we need to be able to articulate more clearly is the notion of the spectator as a film viewer who is and is not the cinematic subject, and as a subject who is and is not a film viewer. At present, existing theories of spectatorship are unable to engage with this complexity, because in order to explore one side of each of these equations fully, they exclude a whole number of other (different or oppositional) sites of power or spaces of meaning-production -- put simply, psychoanalytic approaches deny the significance of spectatorial agency, whilst ethnographic approaches exclude ideology. Yet I propose that spectatorship is located at the point of tension between viewer and subject, the tension between different sites of power, and in this thesis, want to suggest that this tension can be better theorised by locating the spectator within a multiplicity of spaces.\(^\text{16}\)

\textbf{All that space}

"...[E]ven in texts without immediate spatial connotations, a deployment of or an underlying dependence on a spatial schematic is evident...the persistence of this theme, the reason for this critical recourse to it, has yet to be explored."\(^\text{17}\)

"It never ends, does it? All that space."
"So what now?"
"I think I want to go home."\(^\text{18}\)

What I hope to contribute to discourses of spectatorship is a capacity to view the spectator through the lens of space, and to see how this focus is already operative within

\(^{16}\text{Throughout this thesis I use the term “spectator” rather than either “subject” or “film viewer” to maintain this tension and ambiguity as the horizon of theories of spectatorship.}\)

\(^{17}\text{Kirby, 4-5.}\)

\(^{18}\text{Dialogue from The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert, Stephen Elliot 1994.}\)
film theory. The object of this encounter between geography and film is double-edged. First, I use it to attack the image of "the spectator" in film theory as total and unchanging. This attack signals neither an abandonment of the search for spectatorial identities, nor a desire to redefine "the spectator" (a definitive spectator), but rather provides a means of thinking about ways in which we can come to a more substantial concept of spectatorship by destabilising it and opening it up to a series of shifting positions. By uncovering and exploring the intricate spatial themes which underlie film theories of spectatorship themselves, I wish to reveal certain existing theoretical constructions of "the spectator" (and their implicit notions of cinematic pleasure and desire) as fragile and unstable entities. Second, the project of conscientiously bringing geography to film theory articulated in this thesis represents a conscious re-shuffling of geographers' theoretical concerns around film and space as they have been voiced in the body of geographic literature that has developed in this field over the last decade. Whilst much of this work usefully elaborates upon the notion of film as social text and considers the play of social relations of power at different moments in a film's history, these readings tend to reinforce the gulf between apparatus and empirical approaches to spectatorship, without actually acknowledging the problematic nature of the terrain upon which they have strayed. Geographers have not engaged with film theory's critical impasse around 

spectatorship so much as glossed over it. It seems to me that this “glossing over” of
critical issues -- the selective and misleading abstraction of material from the vast debates
within film theory -- constitutes an approach to research that is less about what geography
can contribute to current discussions in film theory and more about bringing fragments of
film theory to debates in geography. When D. B. Clarke proclaims that “…an
understanding of film is crucial to any contemporary theoretical concern with space”, I
find myself wanting to re-arrange his theoretical agenda, reversing his words to read:
“…contemporary theoretical concerns with space are crucial to the understanding of
film”. Replacing the question “what can film theory bring to geography?” with “what
can geography bring to debates in film theory?” is, then, central to this thesis. By shifting
the focus of geographic inquiry in this field, we not only avoid reproducing and
compounding the conflicts that clearly exist around spectatorship, but also more broadly,
open up new and interesting opportunities to explore how our work with “all that space”
might concretely make a difference to filmic discourses.

Class, Ideology and Space in Roger and Me”, Antipode, 25 (2), 140-58; Rose, Gillian (1994) “The Cultural
Politics of Place: Local Representations and Oppositional Discourse in Two Films”, Transactions of the
Institute of British Geographers, 19 (1), 46-60. On film’s role in the negotiation of identities, see: Aitken,
Stuart and Zonn, Leo (1993) “Wier(d) sex: representation of gender-environment relations in Peter Wier’s
Picnic at Hanging Rock and Gallipoli”, Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 11 (2), 191-212;
Aitken, Stuart and Zonn, Leo (1994) “Re-presenting the Place Pastiche” in: eds. Stuart Aitken and Leo
Zonn Place, Power, Situation and Spectacle, Rowman and Littlefield: Maryland, 5-26; Aitken, Stuart
Society and Space, 15 (1), 113-120. Despite their different emphases, these geographic studies for the
most part locate the production and consumption of filmic meanings within a fixed set of power relations
(in which either apparatus or viewer dominates), whilst crucially avoiding addressing the tendentiousness
of this fixity.

outlining geography’s recent engagements with film.
Indeed, one important area of inquiry to which this kind of explicitly spatial approach to spectatorship might usefully lend itself is the feminist project of locating positions of female pleasure and desire in the cinema. At a number of moments in this thesis, following Gillian Rose's assertion that the female subject of feminism "has to be vigilant about the consequences of different kinds of spatiality, and to keep dreaming of a space and a subjectivity which we cannot yet imagine", I unpack the various ways in which the uncovering and exploring of the spatiality of spectatorship might contribute to this project.\(^{21}\) Furthermore, by reclaiming the realm of the physical -- the immediate "stuffiness" of bodies and places -- as a significant dimension in the constitution of spectators and spectatorship, this thesis also speaks to the feminist project of recognising how critical the daily interactions of subjects in very material social spaces can be.\(^{22}\)

With each of these issues in mind, some of the questions I shall be addressing are: When I use the language of space to talk about spectatorship, what exactly do I mean? What has been the underlying spatiality of existing debates in spectatorship studies over the last two and a half decades, what have the implications of this been, and how has this changed? How can the notion of the "spatiality of spectatorship" begin to break down those limiting critical dualisms that continue to infuse the very language of film theory


\(^{22}\)See, for example, Kirby, who reminds us that subjects are always in part constituted "by virtue of being tied into particular material spaces, like bodies or countries, ghettos or suburbs, kitchens or boardrooms", 18.
today? What concrete relationship does this theoretical discussion have to real relations between subjects, spaces and cinema emerging in the spatial imaginaries of Vancouver’s organisers of alternative sites for film exhibition? I conclude this chapter by sketching out some tentative thoughts about the first of these questions, and tracing a skeletal outline of this thesis.

**The Multiple Spaces of the Spectator**

I would like to return briefly to the “Street Level” festival with which I began this chapter, and use it to unpack and expand upon the diverse spatial dimensions that constitute spectatorship and the spectator, namely: physical, corporeal, discursive, psychic and social.24

The first category of space that immediately springs to mind from the “Street Level” example is *physical space*, that is: the very material three-dimensional space that spectators occupy. The mediation of physical space upon the spectator’s relationship with the cinema can take place on a number of different scales. Geopolitically, we can consider the *space of the nation*, a trope that has, indeed, become a primary figure in debates around the politics of the subject. If “subjects vary widely depending upon the actual place we come from and the subsequent places we occupy”, then a spectator’s relationship with any one film text or the cinema more generally, is likely to be moulded

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23 I have already begun to address the stubborn dualism drawn up between “subject” and “real viewer”. In chapter 3, I also address issues of “complicit” and “oppositional” spectators, and “classical” and “alternative” cinema.

24 This spatial schema closely follows that proposed by Kirby in her “mapping of the subject”.

with reference to such geographically identifiable physical co-ordinates. It is of course entirely conceivable that a film-goer in Montréal, in which the “Street Level” film “Curtis’ Charm” was both set and produced, watching in the original language, may have a different experience or different reading of this text than myself, British woman, half catching subtitles, half translating dialogue, whilst trying to keep warm in Grandview Park in Vancouver. Moreover, this example in itself brings into play the ways in which physical space makes a difference on smaller scales. For example, our relationships (both as cinematic spectators and as subjects outside of the cinema) with the culturally and physically separate worlds of country, city, suburb, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ neighbourhoods may influence our experience of spectatorship. The physical location of the movie theatre, its “situatedness” in the wider social and spatial relations in the city (recall my sense of not belonging not only in Vancouver, but more immediately in the East End neighbourhood in which I saw “Curtis’ Charm”), its architecture, even the very seating positions we occupy and the people who surround us therein, are all examples of the ways in which physical space, and where we are in it, can shape our experience of spectatorship.

The multiple physical spaces we occupy also interact with another space: the space of the body. Kirby emphasises that our consciousness often mediates between these two dimensions, making decisions about the kinds of space it wants to enter and changing form to adapt to the situations in which it finds itself. Inscriptions on the body -- in

\[25\text{Ibid, 11.}\
\[26\text{Ibid, 12.}\]
particular gender and race -- filter our experiences of spectatorship, influencing not only the kinds of cinematic situations we might enter (had I been alone, I likely would not have ventured to travel to Grandview Park at 10 pm for an outdoor film festival), but also (due to our experiences of those inscriptions), our readings of particular texts. Moreover, the very embodiment of vision and hearing central to the film experience testifies to the importance of the physicality of the body to spectatorship.

A third dimension might be the abstract, but mappable, space of discursive terrains. Words work to shape and divide up both conceptual and social spaces, and hence, different discourses may construct meanings around different “types” of spectatorship. I was drawn to the “Street Level” festival, for example, because I was intrigued by the press’s framing of this instance of spectatorship in terms of both “alterity” and “community”. Such constructions in conceptual space may also operate materially -- the “alternative” label of the “Street Level” festival determining to some extent the final constitution of its audience.

Interacting with this semiotic shaping of spectatorial identities is the space of the psyche. Psychoanalysis has a long tradition of speaking of the psyche as a space. In film theorists’ readings of psychoanalysis which dominated the debates around the spectator throughout the 1970s, this spatiality determined the spectator’s relationship with the text. It bound the spectator to interpellation by the apparatus, conceiving of it as a coherent, demarcated space and fixing and orienting it within a stable environment. As I outline
more fully in chapter 3, however, more recent applications of psychoanalytic theory to spectatorship attempt to rub this psychic space up against social space and social interaction, introducing notions of mutual recognition and intersubjectivity to blur the boundaries between spectators’ disparate experiences. These instances of social interaction bring all of the above spatial dimensions of spectatorship together, revealing their interconnections and indivisibility.

It is clear from this brief discussion, that thinking about “the space of the spectator” or “the spatiality of spectatorship” isn’t, as Kirby writes, “going to settle anything”. But then this thesis demands no neat resolution. Rather, it is about attempting to capture the nature of our complex relationships with the cinema and, by harnessing the flexibility of space, theorising these nuances as the horizon of spectatorship studies.

* * * * *

This thesis contains two distinct but interrelated projects: one interpretative, and the other more concretely provocative. First, it seeks to reveal and analyse the fabric of spatiality that underlies existing theorisations of spectatorship. Second, through its empirical project, its follows its own inquiry into the “spaces of the spectatorship”, unraveling the spatial imaginaries of a group of people who organise independent, “alternative” film exhibitions, like the “Street Level” festival, in Vancouver. Briefly:

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27Ibid, 16.
In chapter 2, “Psychoanalytic Film Theory: Defining the Limits of Spectatorship”, I introduce some of the main conceptual moments in spectatorship studies, and unpack the unique ways in which early psychoanalytic film theories (or apparatus theories) conceive of the spectatorship spatially. I uncover and explore the fabric of spatiality that underlies two major theorists’ works, and then use these cartographies to challenge the tropes of rigidity and fixity which are often attributed to their models.

In chapter 3, “Spaces ‘In-between’ the Boundaries: Hybrid Ways of Seeing Film”, I begin to unravel the more nuanced spatial thematics -- geographies of in-betweenness and hybridity -- which locate the spectator in two recent feminist historiographies of film. I use these case studies to argue that applying the lens of space to spectatorship provides not only a route to a more substantial conception of the spectator, but also a means of challenging and blurring the boundaries (complicit/oppositional, subject/viewer, classical/alternative) that relentlessly divide up the conceptual space of spectatorship studies itself.

Chapter 4, “Cinema for Vancouver: Spatial Imaginaries of Spectatorship”, traces the outlines of spectatorial spaces and geographies that sporadically surface in the discourses and imaginaries of the organisers of Vancouver’s independent cinema spaces. I suggest that the ways in which space infiltrates (both intentionally and unintentionally) their attempts to intervene in the relationships between subjects, spaces and cinema in the city,
anticipate the complex geographies of spectatorship -- the entangled, contradictory and hybrid spectatorial identities -- that emerge from the discussion in the chapter 3.

Chapter 5, “Re-Shaping Spectatorship”, attempts to capture the multiple and mutable dynamics of spectatorship that emerge from the discussions in the previous chapters, and to recapitulate the ways in which a spatial approach to spectatorship intervenes in film theory’s current critical impasse around the spectator.
April 4th, 1984. Last night to the flicks. All war films. One very good one of a ship full of refugees being bombed somewhere in the Mediterranean. Audience much amused by shots of a great huge fat man trying to swim away with a helicopter after him. first you saw him wallowing along in the water like a porpoise, then you saw him through the helicopters gunsights, then he was full of holes and the sea round him turned pink and he sank as suddenly as though the holes had let in the water. audience shouting with laughter when he sank. then you saw a lifeboat full of children with a helicopter hovering above it...there was a wonderful shot of a child’s arm going up up up right up into the air a helicopter with a camera on its nose must have followed it up there and there was a lot of applause from the party seats but a woman down in the prole part of the house suddenly started kicking up a fuss and shouting that they didn’t oughter of showed it not in front of kids they didn’t it aint right not in front of kids it aint until the police turned her out

George Orwell, 1984.

With the “linguistic turn” of the twentieth century -- the intense theoretical preoccupation with the shaping importance of language in human life and thought -- semiotics as the study of signs, signification and signifying systems, has emerged as “almost a master discipline”.¹ The cinema, for its part, has hardly been immune to this

theoretical turn, although it was only with the advent of structural linguistics in the 1960s that the concept of film-language came to be explored in depth by European theorists like Umberto Eco, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Christian Metz, and that a resurgence of interest was prompted around the spectator's relationship with the filmic image. The science of “cine-semiotics” linked cinematic spectatorship and language in a metonymic relationship by identifying the cinema in terms of a complex system of codes or signs. Film became a discourse, Christian Metz argued, by organising itself as narrative and thus producing a body of signifying procedures.\(^2\)

The early 1970s, however, saw a significant shift in the way in which spectatorship was conceived. The body of work that constituted cine-semiotics was filtered through two lenses -- first, Althusserian discourse, then Lacanian psychoanalytic discourse -- which ‘refocussed’ this entire discursive terrain. Questions of linguistics were displaced (although not erased) by new theoretical concerns around processes of ideological interpellation and the figure of “the subject”.\(^3\) The shift to psychoanalytic film theory, then, expanded the study of spectatorship in two significant directions. First, it recognised the cinema as not only a signifying practice, but also a material or institutional

\(^2\)Metz, Christian (1974) *Language and the Cinema*, Mouton: The Hague. In this seminal text, Metz set out "The Grand Syntagmatique", an attempt to isolate the principal syntagmatic figures of narrative cinema. Its publication was followed by a deluge of semiotic analyses of films, many of which isolated a small number of codes and then traced their interweavings across the film. For examples, see: *Cahiers du Cinéma* (eds.) (1972) “John Ford’s Young Mister Lincoln”, *Screen* 13 (3), 5-94; Kuntzel, Thierry (1972) “M”, *Communications* 19, 17-29.

\(^3\)I use the term “displaced” rather than “replaced”, because the shift to psychoanalytic film theory was considered a development of cine-semiotics, rather than a departure from it. Metz himself asserted that “...both linguistic studies and psychoanalytic studies are sciences of the very fact of meaning, of signification”, cited in Stam et al, 123.
apparatus. Second, it posited that this apparatus itself creates an unconscious desiring spectator, and thus conceived of the cinematic subject as unfinished, but in fact constituted through spectatorship.

In tracing the conceptual framework for this theoretical refocussing within spectatorship studies, we must look towards two works, both published in 1970 in France: Louis Althusser’s essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Toward an Investigation)” and Roland Barthes’s S/Z. In both texts, the theorists insisted upon ideology as a representational system addressing subjects, and in so doing opened up a series of questions for film theorists revolving around how film-goers become subjects and how the devices of the cinema function to create ideological subjects (processes of interpellation). In brief, these works spoke to film theory by stressing the need not only to interrogate the nature of filmic language, but also to think about the ways in which “individuals respond to ideologies by recognising themselves as the subjects of ideology”. For film theory, Althusser’s assertion that “there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects” pointed to the necessity of analysing the roles of recognition and identification and, therefore, structures of address, in formulating the spectator’s relationship with the filmic image. Whilst the details of this analysis are not worked through in Althusser’s essay, film theorists found a literary model in Barthes’s S/Z, a

6 Althusser, Louis 170.
detailed textual analysis of Balzac’s *Sarrasine*, which highlights the ways in which the narrative seduces the reader through the interaction of a variety of codes or formalised vehicles of meaning.\(^7\)

In her reading of the history of film studies, Kaja Silverman argues that it was precisely the nexus of representation-subjectivity-ideology articulated in both Barthes’s and Althusser’s texts that established the frame of reference within which film theorists could begin to think about ways in which subjects are both implicated and constructed (although not exhausted) in the production of meaning in the cinema.\(^8\) That is to say, film discourses edged towards a reframing of spectatorship as a social practice in which subjects themselves are constructed by ideological formations which define positions of meaning and, at the same time, rework those positions into a personal, subjective construction. Thus, the cinematic spectator began to be *structured as a space*, not a flesh and blood individual, but rather a “construction, as the product of signifying activities which are both *culturally specific* and generally *unconscious*”[my italics].\(^9\)

The merging of psychoanalytic with semiotic discourses in film theory in the early 1970s, then, can be figured as an attempt to encapsulate the intersection of the social (culturally

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\(^7\)Indeed many film analyses from the early 1970s depart from the categories and assumptions of Metz’s *Grand Syntagmatique* and instead betray the influence of Barthes’ literary critical model. These studies unravel the microstructures of individual film texts along lines of the five main codes identified in *S/Z*: hermeneutic (the question to be pursued throughout the text and resolved at the ultimate moment); proairetic (the logic of actions as they are governed by the laws of narrative discourse); semic (affective or emotive connotation); cultural (which make explicit or implicit reference to conventional wisdom); and symbolic (which bear upon culturally determined antitheses).


\(^9\)Ibid, 130.
specific) and the psychic (unconscious) processes which newly framed the debate around cinematic spectatorship. As outlined earlier, this approach newly defined the cinema as an “institutional apparatus”. This refers to the totality of interdependent operations that constitute the viewing situation: the technical base (special effects produced by camera, lights, projector etc.); the conditions of film projection (darkened theatre, immobile spectator, screen in front and light beam projected from behind the spectator’s head); the film text itself (its devices which create the illusions of continuity and reality); and the ‘mental machinery’ of the spectator (conscious perceptual as well as unconscious processes). The psychoanalytic-semiotic model suggests that together, these operations mobilise structures of unconscious fantasy, identification and vision which, by continually destabilising and fixing identity (the spectator’s ‘self’) around the cinema’s peculiar signs and symbols, work to inextricably bind the spectator to interpellation (that is, alignment with modes of pleasure fully consonant with dominant ideology).

Two texts can be said to crystallise this approach: Christian Metz’s *The Imaginary Signifier* and the seminal feminist response to his work, Laura Mulvey’s essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”. In this chapter I examine both Metz’s and Mulvey’s work through the lens of space, uncovering and exploring the fabric of spatiality that underlies their theoretical assumptions. I begin by drawing out the unique ‘geographies

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10 Stam et al, 143.
of spectatorship' that are written into these early psychoanalytic models. I suggest that a specific geography of spectatorship characterised by apparently ineluctable boundaries, barricades and rigidities, is established by Metz to define the limits of spectatorship, and that this geography is both reproduced and reinforced in Mulvey’s critique of his work. I then bring a number of feminist critiques of apparatus theories to bear upon these geographies, in order to reveal their inherent weaknesses, fissures and contradictions, and finally suggest that it is precisely these areas of instability -- the inevitable fragility and tendentiousness of Metz’s and Mulvey’s cartographies -- that must be reclaimed and valued in the search for a more substantial conceptualisation of the spectator.

Before considering Metz’s and Mulvey’s work, however, I wish to bring to mind one of the main criticisms that has pursued apparatus theories over the last 20 years. Many film theorists (not just those engaged in the complex renegotiations of feminist film theory), have tended to ascribe psychoanalytic-semiotic models the status of a ‘master narrative’. The recognition and insistence that spectatorship is informed by deep and far-reaching structures that are simultaneously social and psychic, has meant that this body of work has largely been interpreted as a monolithic model of spectatorship, in which agency and resistance are denied as meaningful categories and alternative positions are difficult to conceptualise. When I began this research, I found myself caught up in this critical reproach, the models evoking for me amongst other things the Orwellian ‘telescreen’. However, in both the course of this work and in re-reading Winston’s

\[12\] See, for example, Judith Mayne, who stresses that: “the very notion of the subject implies ‘subject of’ as much as ‘subject to’”, 26.
journal in 1984, what I have found particularly intriguing are the ways in which introducing a spatial perspective to a reading of psychoanalytic film theory can begin to break down the language of domination and control that other critics have seen as inevitable and implicit.¹³

In the excerpt I have included at the start of this chapter, Winston and the rest of the audience are first clearly positioned by the cinematic apparatus, applauding and identifying with the look of the helicopter with the camera on its nose. Yet one woman resists this positioning, she “kicks up a fuss”, and although she is quickly removed from the cinema (so that order or control can be restored), this does not happen before she has brought Winston’s attention quite aggressively back to the physical space of the theatre itself, and to the existence of multiple discursive spaces therein, conceptual hierarchies which also operate materially by dividing the theatre into ‘party seats’ and ‘prole seats’. What this woman does, in effect, is to direct our attention towards the multiple spatial dimensions of spectatorship -- dimensions which persist even in the face of the so-called ‘master narrative’. In this chapter, I want to assume the role of this woman, and kick up a fuss to uncover and explore what always already lies beneath the surface of psychoanalytic models of spectatorship. In so doing, I hope to challenge what appear to be their inherent “limits of spectatorship” -- a project which might allow some of this mass of theory to be salvaged from the critics.

¹³Indeed, it almost seems to me that it could be the myth of the ‘master narrative’ itself that has paradoxically blinded theorists to those nuances in apparatus models that I suggest can be traced by unpacking their spatialities.
Searching for Hidden Geographies: Christian Metz’s *The Imaginary Signifier*

In “The Imaginary Signifier”, Metz outlines a psychoanalytic approach to spectatorship that acknowledges subjectivity as a construction in language, but articulates it in unconscious processes. Specifically, he locates the cinematic spectator within a complex circulation of desire -- that is, a circulation of unconscious wishes or fantasies (stories the subject recounts to itself) bound to our earliest forms of infantile satisfaction. He suggests that the cinematic signifier (the inscription of meanings and subject positions in the cinema) is only activated when the spectator is engaged in the unconscious production of fantasies, and reciprocally, it is precisely these fantasies which come to constitute the spectator via a “complex relay of processes of projection and identification.”¹⁴ For Metz, this circulation of desire is ignited by the unique capacity of the cinematic apparatus to reproduce the structure of dreams. In other words, in Metz’s schema, an affinity between dream and cinema is what initially encourages the cinematic spectator to indulge in a particular form of unconscious work which itself mobilises a set of desires, identifications and pleasures through which the cinematic signifier is activated and the spectator becomes constructed as the cinematic subject.

Implicit in Metz’s formulation of spectatorship, then, is a concept of the spectator organised or structured as a space that is simultaneously *productive* (the spectator produces unconscious fantasies like the dreamer), *constructed* (once the cinematic signifier is activated) and *empty* (since we all participate in unconscious processes,

¹⁴Stam et al, 123.
anyone is capable of occupying this space). In order to elaborate upon this skeletal organisation of the spectator, it is necessary to turn to the psychic processes upon which Metz's theory hinges and unravel the spatial stories that are woven into this circulation of unconscious desires.

"The desire to see always touches the desire to be seen" ¹⁵: Dream, Mirror, Cinema

In framing the roots of the spectator's unconscious participation in the cinema in terms of a slippage between spectator and dreamer, Metz draws upon an analogy between dream and film previously traced by Jean-Louis Baudry in his essay, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus". ¹⁶ This analogy emerges from Baudry's identification of certain conditions of film viewing as similar to those of dreaming (darkened room, motor activity reduced, visual perception heightened to compensate for lack of physical movement) which, he suggests, induce the spectator to enter a regime of belief like the condition of the dreamer where everything is accepted as real. ¹⁷ For Metz, as for Baudry, this regime of belief experienced as a confusion of perception and representation sparks off a fantasy of regression in the dreamer/spectator. This fantasy revolves around a re-staging of those infantile sensations associated with an earlier psychosexual stage, primitive narcissism, in which the self is supposedly not differentiated from the other, nor is perception differentiated from representation.

According to Metz, the fascination of the cinema stems not only from the revival of this

¹⁷See Stam et al for a detailed account of Baudry's film-dream analogy.
stage, but also from the fact that this revival generates a desire for coherence -- the identification of the self as a unified and stable entity -- which the cinema, by virtue of its interlocking systems of narrativity, continuity and point of view, is ultimately able to satisfy. This process, which Metz terms "primary cinematic identification", hinges upon the spectator's identification with the illusion of coherence created by this web of devices -- in other words, upon the spectator's taking up of the privileged vantage point they offer from which to understand what is happening on the screen.\(^{18}\)

In unravelling this identification process, Metz invokes the imaginary constitution of the self (the initial constitution of the ego) played out in the Lacanian mirror stage. In *The Imaginary Signifier*, Lacan's mirror stage operates in two intertwining senses: as a metaphor for primary cinematic identification, but also, in a more strictly psychoanalytic sense, as a stage that the subject yearns to continuously re-enact in different ways, to recapture the fantasy of totality, wholeness and unity.\(^{19}\) Metaphorically, Metz suggests that there are similarities between the infant in front of the 'mirror' and the spectator in front of the screen, in that both are fascinated by and identify with an imaged ideal. For Lacan, the subject is born 'in division' (conscious/unconscious) and marked by *lack* -- a series of losses defining the constitution of the self. The mirror stage is the first in a number of psychic scenarios in which these losses are activated, and takes place when the

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\(^{18}\)At precisely this moment of identification, or narrative absorption of the spectator, the cinematic signifier is activated, and the circulation of desire in the cinema completed.

\(^{19}\)As Stam et al stress, this also means that "...the fictional participation in this unfolding of events is only possible because...the viewer has already undergone the formative psychic process of this initial constitution of the ego", 151.
young infant comes to recognise an image in the mirror as its self. This image and the body it reflects, however, appear coherent and unified, and hence spatially organised in a radically different way to that in which the child experiences its own body, since its bodily co-ordination is as yet fragmented. In the mirror there appears to be a stable relationship between self and other, between the body and its setting, and this spatial constitution of the self intrigues the child in its ability to fix and cohere. Thus, the child identifies with the mirror image and unconsciously assimilates this spatial organisation, in order to achieve the satisfying unity that it cannot experience in its own body.

Significantly, however, the child’s recognition of itself in the mirror is always also a *misrecognition*, precisely because the image is not itself:

“The child’s ego is formed by identification with its like, and this in two senses simultaneously, metonymically and metaphorically: the other human being who is in the glass, the own reflection which is and is not the body, which it is like. The child identifies with itself as an object”.

Identified as an object, the mirror image has the potential to alienate or confront the subject, to reinscribe the mark of lack, precisely because it can reveal the coherence and plenitudinous transparency upon which the constitution of the ego depends as an illusion. To overcome this threat, then, the mirror stage also inevitably involves a separation and distancing of the subject from the image.

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21 Metz, (1975), 45.

22 Rose, 768.
For the cinematic spectator, it is not the image of its own body on the screen which presents the illusion of unity or superior spatial organisation with which to identify (to escape the site of lack — the sensation of the fragmentated self), but rather the organisation of multiple visual perspectives by cutting, editing and narrativity, into a coherent and meaningful look:

"The spectator is absent from the screen: contrary to the child in the mirror, he cannot identify with himself as an object, but only with objects that are there without him...At the cinema it is always the other who is on the screen; as for me, I am there to look at him. I take no part in the perceived, on the contrary, I am all-perceiving. All-perceiving as one says all-powerful (this is the famous gift of ‘ubiquity’ the film makes its spectators); all-perceiving, too, because I am entirely on the side of the perceiving instance: absent from the screen, but certainly present in the auditorium, a great eye and ear without which the perceived would have no one to perceive it...In other words, the spectator identifies with himself, with himself as pure act of perception (as wakefulness, alertness): as the condition of possibility of the perceived and hence as a kind of transcendental subject, which comes before every there is".  

Rather than identifying with its own image, then, the cinematic spectator identifies with the act of looking itself, with the gaze as the signified of the image and, as in the psychoanalytic model of voyeurism, embraces the sensation of mastery and pleasure that this powerful position triggers off. Primary cinematic identification is, then, a process which is both perceptual and unconscious (a fantasmatic re-enactment of the mirror stage)

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23 Metz, (1975), 48-49. 
24 Recall the audience’s identification with and pleasure in the mobile ‘look’ at the refugees (through the gunsights, from the nose of the helicopter) in the excerpt from “1984”, which granted them a superior point of view to the characters on the screen, and enabled them to follow a narrative structure inaccessible to those fictional characters.
and the spectator is at once constructed and directed by the look of the camera and its stand-in, the projector.

"...[A]s he identifies himself as look, the spectator can do no other than identify with the camera, too, which has looked before him at what he is now looking at and whose stationing (=framing) determines the vanishing point. During the projection this camera is absent, but it has another representative consisting of another apparatus, called precisely a ‘projector’. An apparatus that the spectator has behind him, at the back of his head, that is, precisely where phantasy locates the ‘focus’ of all vision".25

Whilst the camera/projector apparatus offer the spectator a hidden vantage point from which to wield the controlling and empowering gaze, Metz also suggests that themes of alienation and threat are played out in the cinema which correspond to those described for the mirror stage. There is a regime of absence and presence in the cinema -- in the sense of the absence of the spectator’s body on the screen, but presence in the auditorium -- which constantly evokes difference (the images as not self, object, lack) and is, it follows, potentially threatening to the spectator. Metz therefore locates another psychoanalytic process, fetishism, within the circulation of desire in the cinema which reifies the spectator’s mastery over the cinematic image by disavowing its difference -- avoiding the acknowledgement of its ‘otherness’. Like the mirror stage, then, primary cinematic identification involves a simultaneous identification with and separation of the spectator from the image, a delicate choreography of unconscious processes that holds the images on the screen at a ‘safe distance’.

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25Ibid, 49.
Metz concludes from this discussion, then, that cinema’s fascination is located in the fact that “while it allows for the temporary loss of ego (the film spectator ‘becomes’ someone else), it simultaneously reinforces ego (through invocation of the mirror phase). In a sense the film viewer both loses and refinds the ‘self’ over and over, by continually re-enacting the first fictive moment of identification and establishment of identity.”

Underlying this cycle, however, is a particular geography of spectatorship, a unique spatial configuration of the spectator and its surroundings, which, it seems to me, revolves around the fixing and constant maintenance of boundaries.

“A stronger break than any line of footlights”

When the spectator identifies with the powerful gaze or position offered by the cinema, it assimilates an ideal of coherent, unified subjective space in which strict boundaries separate self from other and delimit inside and outside. The spectator is only able to master that which is ‘outside’ (here, the image on the screen) and occupy a superior position to it, if a boundary is sketched in to distinguish between the two sites, not only enforcing their difference, but preventing admixture or diffusion of either entity. For Metz, the twin perversions of voyeurism and fetishism serve to reinforce this boundary, patterning it as a ‘barricade’. Underlying his notion of the circulation of unconscious desires, then, is a cartography in which the spectator is imagined as an ‘encapsulated space’. The spectator-subject is an enclosed circle; subjective processes are played out only inside the barricade and spectatorial identities formed purely within the delimited

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26 Stam et al, 152.
inner space of the psyche. Similarly, objects outside the circle are self-contained and
separate, and so, as Gillian Rose emphasises, the boundaries sketched in by
psychoanalytic film theory structure not only the ‘inner’ space of the spectator, but also
its relationship with its surrounding environment:

‘...[I]t is from this fixity, and the images that are thus produced, that the subject
is able to postulate objects of permanence and identity in the world...This
cohering space is both a mode of perceiving objects in the world, and a mode of
perceiving the self’.27

The geography of spectatorship upon which Metz’s model hinges, is clearly organised
through the lens of this cohering space. To the figure of the encapsulated, Cartesian
spectator, Metz adds the tropes of screen and projector, and thus maps out a triangulation
-- a psychic matrix -- of self-enclosed, autonomous spaces over which spectatorship is
played out. He posits a strict segregation between these spaces, which is only
transgressed when they become temporarily aligned at the moment of narrative
absorption of the spectator. In other words, the one moment at which the boundaries
around these three spaces become blurred is precisely the moment at which the spectator
identifies with the gaze. The gaze, then, paradoxically depends upon and reinforces the
separation of spaces (fixing the boundaries between self and other, and delimiting inside
and outside) and yet constitutes, for Metz, the one site of spatial transgression or fluidity
in cinematic spectatorship -- the one narrow corridor that fleetingly links the screen,
spectator and projector.

27Rose, 768.
It seems to me, however, that Metz is only able to perpetuate this coherent spatial organisation and, it follows, adorn the gaze with a powerful, transgressive quality, by continually remodeling the spaces his boundaries encircle. In other words, he crucially expels the possibility of other relations in the cinema that might be played out in the spaces in-between his triangulation of screen, spectator, projector, and which might themselves blur or destabilise the boundaries he so deliberately maintains. For example, this is quite clearly the case at the point in the text where Metz posits the screen (textual space of the film) and the material space of the theatre (auditorium), as two absolutely separate realms:

“...The ‘stage’ and the auditorium are no longer two areas set up in opposition to each other within a single space; the space of the film, represented by the screen, is utterly heterogeneous, it no longer communicates with that of the auditorium: one is real, the other perspective: a stronger break than any line of footlights.”

As the reference to the line of footlights suggests, Metz comes to the notion of a strictly segregated screen and movie theatre space by drawing out a comparison between cinematic spectatorship and the live theatrical spectacle. He outlines two main features of the cinematic experience, which, he suggests, serve to distinguish it from theatrical spectatorship and its more fluid relationships (blurred boundaries) between stage, audience and the material space of the auditorium. First, he suggests that film spectators become entrapped in solipsism due to their solitude and the enforced direction of their energy towards the screen, and that this renders the film audience more fragmented and

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28Metz, (1975), 64.
isolated than the ‘temporary collectivity’ experienced by audiences of live theatre.

Second, he points to the fact that because films represent absent people and objects, the cinema is “more radically ignorant of the spectator” than actors in the theatre, who can engage in a reciprocal relationship with their viewers (the spectator’s voyeurism is matched by the actor’s exhibitionism). Through these tendentious distinctions, Metz is able to distance the spatial organisation of cinematic spectatorship from the fluid organisation that he attributes to the live theatrical spectacle; and subsequently proposes a psychoanalytic analogy between the cinema and the primal scene as a way of thinking through the spatiality of cinematic spectatorship:

“For its spectator the films unfolds in that simultaneously very close and definitively inaccessible ‘elsewhere’ in which the child sees the amorous play of the parental couple, who are similarly ignorant of it and leave it alone, a pure onlooker whose participation is inconceivable. In this respect the cinematic signifier is not only ‘psychoanalytic’; it is more precisely Oedipal in type”.

This line of argument has two important effects. First, the invocation of the primal scene serves to further underscore the matrix of vision and desire that connects cinema viewing with unconscious activity, bringing into focus (again) the psychically inscribed boundaries between screen, spectator and projector, which only the gaze can transgress. Second, in his comparison of the film viewing situation and the live theatre situation, in which he locates the film spectator within a regime of solitude and solipsism, Metz effectively erases from the cinema those potential relationships which revolve around

\[29\text{Ibid, 64.}\]

\[30\text{Ibid, 64.}\]
audience members' multiple interactions with one another (in the material and social space of the movie theatre), as well as with what is going on on the screen. This erasure allows him to expel the possibility of modes of cinematic spectatorship which might cross the psychic matrix that he re-inscribes in the primal scene analogy -- that is, those relationships within spectatorship which do not necessarily preclude the work of the gaze and scopophilia, but which may traverse and intertwine with those pleasures.

It is clear from this example, that the geography of spectatorship that underpins the theoretical assumptions of *The Imaginary Signifier* is characterised as much by erasures as it is by enclosures -- the continual remodeling of the spaces encircled by Metz's boundaries being just as crucial as the construction of those boundaries themselves. In two short passages Metz both reifies the gaze as the site of all agency and dismisses the possibility of a whole set of vibrant spectatorial relationships which might otherwise reveal spectatorship's material and social dimensions to be just as significant as his tidy psychic triangulation. Instead, in Metz's formulation, these multiple spaces -- especially the physical space of the theatre -- are reduced to little more than a backdrop, a container, in which the self-enclosed psychic matrix of screen, spectator, and projector mysteriously

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I am thinking here about the intersubjective or collective work between audience members, through which complex negotiations of meanings and identities may take place. I elaborate upon this theme in chapter 3, with reference to the work of two theorists: Jessica Benjamin, who discusses how notions of mutual recognition (shared experiences) are played out not only at a social level, in the guise of social interaction, but also more complexly, at a psychic level; and Elspeth Probyn, who attempts to "pry desire away from Freud and his followers" and move from 'desiring identity' to 'belonging', in order to capture the ways in which people are caught within wanting to belong (be it to other people, places or modes of being) and wanting to become, a process that is fueled by yearning rather than the positing of identity as a stable state. Benjamin, Jessica (1988) *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis Feminism and the Problem of Domination*, Pantheon Books: New York; Probyn, Elspeth (1996) *Outside Belongings*, Routledge: London and New York.
Furthermore, like the two sides of a barricade, Metz’s erasures and enclosures work to structure and reinforce one another. For example, the erasure of the physical theatre space in Metz’s work is facilitated by the fact that his spectator has no concrete, material presence within that space. As I have already outlined, his spatial organisation of the spectator crucially depends upon a contraction of boundaries around the psyche, an inaccessible depth. Thus, Metz’s spectator is left without a palpable surface or skin, that is: the spectator crucially lacks a physicality that could conceivably take up space. His spectator is disembodied, a “great eye and ear”, and I think that without any sense of physicality, it is easy to lose sight of the ways in which we, even as spectators transfixed by images on a screen, experience our bodies as volumes, interact with other bodies, and very concretely occupy material spaces (chairs, rooms, buildings, streets, cities).

This brings me to the work of Laura Mulvey, who critiques Metz’s model of spectatorship on the grounds that his disembodied spectator is actually a specifically gendered entity. In the following pages, I argue that whilst Mulvey’s critique has unquestionably opened up important terrain for feminist film theorists, it does not problematise the essentially constricted geography of spectatorship that underlies The

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Moreover, there is no sense that this ‘container’ (and thus the spectatorial relations being played out within it) is in any way situated within wider social, cultural and spatial relations in the city, in which the identity of texts, spaces and subjects are already constituted. The situatedness of artistic production, representation and display is stressed by Rosalyn Deutsche (1991) “Alternate Space” in Dia Art Foundation If You Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory, and Social Activism, Bay Press: Seattle, 45-65.

33See Jonathan Crary for an exploration of this awareness of physicality or, as he terms it, the “carnal density of vision”. Crary, Jonathan (1992) Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts. Although this analysis of the corporeal space of spectatorship is limited by ignoring the inscriptions of gender, race and class on the body, Crary does usefully stress the idea that the body’s senses have the capacity to both misperceive and be affected by sensations not necessarily linked to an external referent.
Imaginary Signifier. In effect, Mulvey leaves the “limits of spectatorship” set out by
Metz unchallenged, and furthermore, consolidates the processes that work to erase those
spatial dimensions of spectatorship (like the corporeal) that may traverse and interact with
the work of the psyche.

Reinforcing the Boundaries of Spectatorship: Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and
Narrative Cinema”

“In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split
between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its
fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly.”

In her highly influential 1975 essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, Laura
Mulvey introduces the issue of gender into a central position in the debate around the
spectator’s relationships with and pleasure in the cinema. Despite forming the
cornerstone of psychoanalytic theory, the question of sexual difference, and specifically
the production of femininity (as the ‘other’ to masculinity) seems rather to linger in the
background of Metz’s formulation of psychoanalytic film theory, half-recognised and
even gestured towards, yet never fully acknowledged. Mulvey, however, aims to inflect
filmic discourse with this language, taking as her starting-point “the way film reflects,
reveals and even plays on the the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual
difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle.”

Whilst Metz’s identification of pleasure in the cinema revolves simply around locating a disembodied

\[34\text{Mulvey, (1989), 14.}\]
\[35\text{Ibid, 14.}\]
cinematic spectator within a circulation of unconscious desires, Mulvey stresses the phallocentric nature of these desires, depending as they do upon the crucial instance of castration. She thus draws attention to the ways in which the cinema replicates the subjective structures of patriarchy (as the unconscious is formed by the dominant order) and consequently, how its pleasures are predicated exclusively on a male or masculine subject. A large part of the essay focuses on the dynamics of this organisation of visual pleasure, but interestingly, as Gillian Rose points out, Mulvey also consciously explores the relations between this scopic regime and the organisation of spectatorial space. In the remainder of this chapter, I will address the ways in which Mulvey’s conception of visual pleasure in the cinema reproduces and, in some sense, solidifies the geography of spectatorship that emerges in Metz’s work. I will then unpack the ways in which the main feminist critiques of “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, which collectively foreground its ruptures and contradictions, might be mobilised as a challenge to that apparent solidity.

In her essay, Mulvey interrogates the processes which constitute Metz’s ‘circulation of unconscious desires’ in the cinema to reveal the ways in which cinematic operations enact different positions designated as masculine and feminine, which are fully consonant with the psychic formations within bourgeois patriarchal society. She argues that the image of the woman stands in this culture as the signifier of the male other, and that the cinema acts as a stage upon which the male subjectivity can “live out his fantasies and

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36 Rose, 762.
obsession through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of the woman still tied to her place as bearer and not maker of meanings". At the focus of Mulvey’s psychoanalytic interrogation are those unconscious cinematic processes associated with the gaze: identification, voyeurism and fetishism.

For Mulvey, the process of cinematic identification is played out in a slightly different form than that which appears in Metz’s *The Imaginary Signifier*. As I have already outlined, for Metz this process is understood as identification with a controlling and empowering gaze, a position created for the subject in which illusions of coherence and unity are activated. Mulvey’s interpretation, however, weaves an additional layer into this definition. This additional layering involves the unconscious association of the illusion of coherence with specific characters on the screen, and it is these characters who become the bearers of the look of the spectator in the process of cinematic identification.

For Mulvey, this process is coded by gender: the spectator simultaneously identifies with the main male protagonist as active bearer of the look, in control of the narrative, and distances and objectifies the female film star as passive spectacle. She suggests that this split between narrative and spectacle is the outcome of both the desire for reaffirmation of the self (as in the mirror stage) re-enacted in the cinema, and voyeuristic and fetishistic processes.

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Mulvey argues that the cinema solicits the spectator to identify with the male hero partly because the camera assumes his position when picturing the narrative, but also because he embodies the spectator-subject’s ideal mirror stage self-image:

“A male movie star’s glamorous characteristics are those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of a mirror. The character in the story can make things happen and control events better than the subject/spectator, just as the image in the mirror was more in control of motor-coordination...The active male figure (the ego ideal of the identification process) demands a three-dimensional space corresponding to that of the mirror recognition, in which the alienated subject internalised his own representation of his imaginary existence.”

Thus, the masculine figure is not himself subject to looking, but rather in taking an active, powerful role in the diegesis, constitutes the figure ‘to-be-identified-with’. Intricately tied into the spectator’s desire for this empowering illusion, she suggests, is also a desire for control over the image of the female star, precisely because “the active masculine look which can see itself seeing is also the look which during the castration complex sees the female genitalia as not just different, but lacking”. This feminine lack evokes anxieties of castration in the masculine subject, which thus attempts to both distinguish and distance itself from the threat embodied in the woman’s image. Thus, Mulvey identifies the staging of two psychoanalytic scenarios by the male unconscious in order to achieve a position of distancing mastery in the cinema: voyeuristic scopophilia and fetishistic disavowal. The first, voyeuristic scopophilia, connotes ‘pleasure in looking’ at two levels, because layered on top of the spectator’s own distancing, erotic look at the

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38Ibid, 20.
39Rose, 769.
woman's image on the screen ("the spectator in direct scopophilic contact with the female form displayed for his enjoyment"), is the look of the diegetically controlling male hero. By virtue of the process of cinematic identification as theorised by Mulvey, this male hero bears the look of the spectator, and thus has the unique ability to transfer the power of the spectator’s gaze behind the screen “to neutralise the extra-diegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle”. This defensive reaction to feminine lack has associations with sadism, since its pleasures ultimately lie in domination through narrative subjugation, in which the woman is investigated (her mystery demystified) and either ‘punished’ or ‘saved’. In contrast, the second reaction or ‘avenue of escape’, fetishistic disavowal, does not attempt to punish or correct the lack, but rather attempts to deny it. In this case, the image of the woman is transformed into a fetish, so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous, and thus is disavowed as a site of anxiety for the male subject. As symptomatic of this process, Mulvey points to the overvaluation of the female star, in which the physical beauty of the object, the figure of the woman, is built up and transformed into something satisfying in itself.

In “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, then, Mulvey enriches the relationships between Metz’s psychic triangulation of screen, spectator, projector by bringing into play the function of the cinema in representing sexual difference and locating spectatorship within the dynamics of phallocentric spatiality, visuality and subjectivity. In so doing, she does not challenge the essential spatial organisation of Metz’s model (coherent spaces

41Ibid, 20.
separated by the imposition of strict boundaries), but rather enhances it by reiterating a
language of depth and surface. As has emerged in the above discussion of her work,
Mulvey suggests that the feminine in the cinema is represented as surface, non-depth,
facade (which determines its ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’), whilst the masculine, with which
the phallocentric subject is drawn to identify, is represented as a powerful and coherent
depth. This surface/depth dichotomy has its roots in the dominant active masculine look
through space, which constitutes its other as a femininity which is lacking, and which:

“...[fetishises] the feminine other as a spectacle, to be looked at only as a surface
concealing a lack...The phallocentric (and heterocentric) subject thus organises
space through the depth of his self and the surface of his other.”

Thus, a phallocentric relation between same and other articulated visually and spatially as
a relation between depth and (deceptive) surface works in Mulvey’s essay to reinforce the
peculiar spatialisation of spectatorship that is sketched out in Metz’s work -- that is, it
replicates and solidifies a geography of spectatorship that hinges upon processes of
enclosure (coherence) and distancing.

Crucially, however, as with Metz’s model, Mulvey’s mapping of spectatorship again
depends upon the erasure of any possibility of instabilities, contradictions or ruptures
from this space. In other words, Mulvey’s geography of spectatorship is conveniently

42It is worth noting here, that this language of depth and surface does feature in The Imaginary Signifier,
although Metz does not entirely work this dichotomy through and certainly does not articulate it through
the lens of gender, which is at the centre of Mulvey’s project. For example, see my earlier discussion
around Metz’s mapping of the spectator as an inaccessible depth (the psyche), and simultaneous
effacement of the body until it becomes an inconsequential surface.

43Rose, Gillian 769.
purged of all signs of its fallibility. Yet I suggest that it is precisely the “weaknesses” inherent in this cartography (the very fissures that Mulvey attempts to efface) that provide the key to challenging the fabric of phallocentric spatiality that she suggests determines the spectator’s relationship with the cinema. Indeed, I now wish to think through three feminist critiques that read “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” through just this lens, reclaiming that which Mulvey erases in order to destabilise the apparently invincible spatial tropes of coherence, segregation and distancing that she (and, indeed, Metz) associates with spectatorship. These critiques fall into three interrelating areas: the question of the female spectator; the failures of voyeurism and fetishism in the cinema; and the possibility of mobile spectatorial identities.44

1. The scandal of the missing woman

As much as Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” has inspired a great deal of rich and vibrant work in the field of feminist film theory, it has also paradoxically signalled something of a critical impasse for those theorists. Since its publication, this essay has become a site of conflict and contestation for feminist theorists engaging with spectatorship studies (interrogating configurations of cinematic desire), in part because it theorises femininity as passive, but also, and more significantly, because it completely erases the female spectator from the discussion of the cinema. In effect, Mulvey removes Orwell’s figure of the troublesome woman from the theatre before she has the chance to

44 The first two parts of the following discussion are indebted to Gillian Rose, whose paper “Distance, surface, elsewhere: a feminist critique of the space of self/knowledge” (cited earlier), takes as its focus the way in which a phallocentric spatiality operates in Mulvey’s work.
kick up a fuss. Feminist theorists have taken this erasure to mean that women occupy an
“impossible position of desire” within her psychoanalytic framework, which by
foregrounding processes of self-denial and masochism, necessarily works to preclude
women’s pleasure in the cinema.45 To account for how women can assume positions of
desire in the cinema, however, these critics have attempted to ‘play with’ or strategically
rearticulate psychoanalytic discourses. Indeed, Mulvey herself addresses this issue in a
later article, stating that she strategically uses the male third person singular to stand in
for the spectator, because she is interested in revealing the ways in which visual pleasure
operates in the cinema to effect:

“...the ‘masculinisation’ of the spectator position, regardless of the actual sex (or
possible deviance) of any real live movie-goer. In-built patterns of pleasure and
identification impose masculinity as ‘point of view’; a point of view which is
also manifest in the general use of the masculine third person”.46

Thus, she asserts that she is not strictly implying that women cannot occupy a position of
desire in the cinema, but rather that the female spectator may occupy a position that is
masculinised, finding herself “secretly, unconsciously almost, enjoying the freedom of
action and control over the diegetic world that identification with a [male] hero

45I do not wish to reiterate here the vast body of critical literature which attempts to engage with the
problematic of the female spectator. Instead see: Doane, Mary Ann (1987) The Desire to Desire: The
Woman’s Film of the 1940s, Indiana University Press: Bloomington, in which she describes a process of
masochism whereby the female spectator identifies with her objectification and alienation in the image.
Also: Camera Obscura (1989) The Spectatrix, 20-21. This issue presents a survey of research on the
question of the female spectator in film and television by a variety of international feminist theorists.
Vidor’s Duel in the Sun (1946)”, in her Visual and Other Pleasures, Indiana University Press:
Bloomington, 29.
To explain how this identification is possible, Mulvey introduces Freud’s theorisation of female sexuality as an unstable, oscillating difference. For Freud, female sexual identity is structured at a young age by conflicting desires, in which the ‘correct road’, passive femininity, leads to increasing repression of ‘the active’, masculinity. Mulvey suggests that classical cinema, structured around male pleasure, offers an identification with the active point of view, and thus, the female spectator takes up this position as a rediscovery of a lost, though never fully repressed, aspect of her sexual identity (regressive masculinity). Mulvey, then, theorises the female spectator as “shifting restlessly in transvestite clothes”. Similarly, Mary Ann Doane has attempted to draw up a complex formulation of female desire in which the gaze remains “male”, but is assumed by the female spectator as a disguise, a form of “masquerade”, whilst other theorists have theorised textual “returns of the gaze” by female film characters. These strategies, however, remain unable to locate a position from which it is possible to engage with female desire on its own terms in the cinema, and I wish to suggest that this is because they remain resolutely within the bounds of a discourse which insists upon locating cinematic desire within an ineluctable patriarchal choreography of spatiality, visuality and subjectivity. By adhering to this fixed and restrictive geography of spectatorship, feminist film theorists’ articulations of female desire paradoxically work to

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48 Ibid, 33.
49 Doane, Mary Ann (1982) “Film and Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator”, Screen 23 (3-4), 74-87. For theorisations of textual ‘returns of the gaze’ see Mayne, Judith (1990) The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women’s Cinema, Indiana University Press: Bloomington. I should also mention here the textual strategies of ‘reading against the grain’, in which the female spectator is theorised as taking on and perhaps rejoicing in, her position outside (or on the margins of) patriarchal fantasy. It seems to me, however, that whilst counter-readings are important, there are obvious limitations to the designation of female spectatorship as that which falls through the cracks of patriarchal discourse.
reinscribe phallocentric configurations within the cinema. The notion of "returning the gaze" can be said to do so by reproducing, rather than challenging, its subordinate place in the sexual hierarchy of the look, whilst both transvestitism and masquerade "affirm dominant, phallocentric definitions of gender difference but naturalise them by assuming a real female body underneath male clothes".

This paradox captures precisely what Teresa de Lauretis gestures towards in *Alice Doesn't*, when she asserts that the contradiction of feminist theory itself is that it is at once excluded from discourse and imprisoned within it. Indeed, she draws attention to the way in which the spatial organisation of the cinema by psychoanalytic film discourse fixes and defines the female spectator only in relation to the male subject and hence:

"...the position of woman in cinema is one of non-coherence; she finds herself only in a void of meaning, the empty space between the signs -- the place of women spectators in the cinema is between the look of the camera and the image on the screen, a place not represented, not symbolised, and thus preempted to subject (or self) representation."

Just as I have demonstrated that Metz's work erases the physicalities of bodies and theatres, the underlying spatial fabric of Mulvey's model excludes the possibility of subjective spaces around which alternative (read female) modes of desire and pleasure in the cinema might crystallise. This explains why she theorises female spectators as

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50 Rose, 775.
spectating in a masculine manner, and is unable to conceive of them occupying a position of their own in the cinema.

It is clear, then, that if we are to engage critically with the question of the female spectator on her own terms -- if we are to reclaim Orwell's troublesome woman and strategically reinstate her in the 'prole seats' -- then we must attempt to locate spaces within Mulvey's framework in which femininities might be imagined as subject positions. It is for precisely this reason that Gillian Rose advocates bringing recent discussions in feminism around the 'shape' of female subjectivities (the work of Luce Irigaray and Elizabeth Grosz in particular) to bear upon Mulvey's geography of spectatorship. She suggests that this merging of discourses anticipates a radical departure from Mulvey's phallocentric spatiality, for it demands the expansion of her geography of spectatorship to incorporate performances of femininity that it was previously unable to understand (and thus reduced to transvestitism):

"This organisation would involve neither the separating distance through which the phallocentric subject organises his self/knowledge, nor the surficiality to which he condemns his other. It would not be structured by voyeurism or fetishism. It would, rather, be a different space which would also permit a different organisation of subjectivity. A space not structured through the phallocentric mirror, a space which would allow other subject positions to place themselves."\(^{52}\)

These discussions refuse a phallocentric and heterocentric structuring of subjectivity, and instead link subjectivity to social and spatial practices by theorising notions of

\(^{52}\)Rose, 776.
experience, intersubjectivity, and the materiality of everyday lives. By layering these discourses over Mulvey’s model of spectatorship, this critique draws out the multiplicity of spaces -- social, discursive, physical, corporeal -- within which the spectator might be constituted, and challenges Mulvey’s rigid geography of spectatorship by encouraging us to not only delve into the spaces in-between her psychic triangulation of screen, spectator, projector, but also outside of them and outside of the cinema.

2. The failures of voyeurism and fetishism

In this section, I wish to think through another critique levelled at Mulvey’s work by Gillian Rose. In her reading of “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, Rose asserts that Mulvey is only able to define spectatorship spatially along lines of rigidity and coherence by exaggerating phallocentric power. She suggests that by erasing the vulnerabilities of masculinities, Mulvey overlooks the inherent instabilities of the phallocentric space she identifies at work in the cinema. In her reading, then, Rose explicitly explores the failures of fetishism and voyeurism, and suggests that whilst these psychic processes contribute to the cohering and distancing phallocentric spatiality identified by Mulvey, they also inevitably work to disrupt and undermine it.

Rose’s first point is that Mulvey does, in fact, recognise the instability of a masculine viewing position located by fetishistic processes. This is because she identifies how this

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53 Indeed, this is a project also undertaken in two texts previously cited in this chapter: de Lauretis and Kirby.
54 Rose, 770.
mode of representing femininity as a surface recognises, as well as refuses, the possibility of castration (lack) because as an act of denial, fetishism necessarily taints the subject with a fear of that which it wants to evade. Thus, as Rose highlights, phallocentric space (both inside and outside the cinema) is always already fissured by the dynamics through which it defines its feminine other, acknowledging as it does "another space of femininity [that] lurks behind the surface, an incoherent and overwhelming space of castration, dissolution and death."55

Mulvey’s theorisation of voyeurism in the cinema, however, is without such contradictions, actively and successfully denying lack through a masterful and controlling sadism. Rose’s main critique, then, hinges upon modifying this description by articulating feminist discussion around the ways in which voyeurism fails to placate the masculine subject’s fears about castration. To explain this vulnerability, she refers not to Lacan’s mirror stage, but to his later work in The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, in which subjectivity occurs not only when the subject incorporates its own displaced image, but also when it is incorporated as an image by another.56 Lacan refers to this ‘look from outside’, which both precedes and constitutes the subject, as the ‘gaze’ -- his sense of the word working to destabilise the powerful mastery of the voyeuristic ‘gaze’ as it has appeared in film theory. For Rose, Lacan’s gaze determines the subject in that it speaks to the desire to be seen, yet at the same time it also invokes

55Ibid, 770.
anxieties in the subject, because it does not see the subject as a subject (which is what the subject wants: recognition), but rather, sees the subject as an object, and thus “sees only something like a mask” which is lacking. Thus, Rose concludes:

“If fetishism fails the phallocentric subject by offering him a veiled glimpse of what he does not want to see, then voyeurism fails him...by showing him from places he does not want to be seen”.

In this second critique, then, the twin processes of voyeurism and fetishism can be seen to disavow a feminine lack in ways which inevitably destabilise the phallocentric space that underlies Mulvey’s model of spectatorship. By drawing attention to the fallibilities of phallocentric space, Rose’s critique acknowledges the existence of voids and fissures in Mulvey’s geography of spectatorship. These ‘gaps’ are crucial, not only because they allow us to challenge the ‘master narrative’ character that has been assigned to this theoretical framework, but also because it may possible to glimpse through them other spectatorial spaces and positions organised around other modes of pleasure and desire.

3. The possibility of mobile spectatorial identities

At the beginning of this chapter, I spoke in a general way about the construction of spectators as the product of signifying activities which are both unconscious and culturally specific. For me, a final disruptive lens through which to view both Metz’s and Mulvey’s work revolves precisely around the interaction and intersection of these

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57Rose, 772.
58Ibid, 773.
different signifying activities. This critique emerges, then, from a post-structuralist 
"mapping of the subject", which articulates, in Chantal Mouffe’s words, the way in which 
"we are always multiple and contradictory subjects...precariously and temporarily sutured 
at the intersection of many different subject-positions". In the context of the cinema, 
the notion that subjects are constructed at a temporally shifting intersection of multiple 
interpellations (not cinematic interpellation alone) means that it is appropriate to talk 
about the spectator as ‘overdetermined’, where:

"...[O]verdetermination is the effect of a continual and continuing series of 
overlapping subject-positions which may or may not be present to consciousness 
at any given moment, but which in any case constitute a person’s history."

The cinematic apparatus, then, does not exhaust the possibilities for subjectivity -- for 
spectatorial identities -- but merely offers a position or number of positions, which 
intersect with multiple meanings and identities offered by other ideological formations, 
and which are together negotiated by subjects (with their own histories and experiences) 
into personal, subjective constructions. The shifting of these positions at different 
temporal junctures means that the spectator is constantly ‘in process’, and thus we can 
introduce a language of mobility and multiplicity, in the sense of the spectator’s constant 
motion between available and negotiated positions, into the discussion of spectatorship.

60 Smith, Paul (1988) Discerning the Subject, Theory and History of Literature, Vol 55, University of 
Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 32. 
61 Positionality is thus not the same as fixity; it is open to transgression, motion and temporaneity.
Outwardly, both Metz and Mulvey's texts theorise spectatorial positions within a language of fixity and singularity -- Metz's spectator constructed exactly at the moment of identification with the gaze and only by the gaze, and Mulvey's spectator determined solely by the same process of identification, but with the emphasis on the gaze's articulation of fantasies of sexual difference. At first glance, their spectators really do appear to be immobile 'empty spaces' before the film begins. However, a closer reading of both works reveals that they hold out a promise, though explicitly unexplored, of both multiple and mobile spectatorial identities. In this section, I first suggest that the approach that psychoanalytic models of spectatorship take to a) the structure of unconscious fantasy and b) narrativity, provide some insights into how we might break down the image of fixity and rigidity that first appears to characterise them. I then describe recent work by feminist film theorists which takes up precisely this challenge, and re-articulates psychoanalytic-semiotic frameworks through the lens of bisexual fantasy.

Implicit in both Metz's and Mulvey's theorisations of the structure of unconscious fantasy, is the possibility that the spectator might be involved in multiple character identifications. Whilst this is mediated by the phallocentric gaze in Mulvey's work, Metz envisages a whole range of "secondary cinematic identifications", that is: identifications with tertiary characters which "are taken as a whole in opposition to the simple identification of the spectator with his own look". What is intriguing about this

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62Metz (1975), 58.
theorisation is that whilst retaining the force of the unconscious, it hints at the possibility of the spectator’s discrete movements between identifications, and challenges the idea that the cinematic spectator assumes only a unified self-image, a motionless, stable subject position.

Furthermore, an in-depth reading of the narrative conventions of cinema adds to this language of mobility; a passage from Stephen Heath is particularly revealing:

“What moves in film, finally, is the spectator, immobile in front of the screen. Film is the regulation of movement, the individual as subject held in a shifting and placing of desire, energy, contradiction, in a perpetual retotalisation of the imaginary (the set scene of image and subject). This is the investment of film in narrativisation; and crucially for a coherent space, the unity of place for vision. Once again, however, the investment is in the process...A reverse shot folds over the shot it joins and is joined in turn by the reverse it positions; a shot of a person looking is succeeded by a shot of the object looked at which is succeeded in turn by a shot of the person looking to confirm the object as seen...The suturing operation is in the process, the give and take of absence and presence, the play of negativity and negation, flow and bind. Narrativisation, with its continuity, closes, is that movement of closure that shifts the spectator as subject in its terms: the spectator is the point of the film’s spatial relations -- the turn, say, of shot and reverse shot -- their subject-passage. Narrativisation is scene and movement, movement and scene, the reconstruction of the subject in the pleasure of that balance for homogeneity, containment.”[my italics]

Although Heath is here referring to the way in which narrativity sets in motion the dominant ‘look’ of the cinema (that which Metz argues the spectator assumes through the process of primary cinematic identification), by articulating a language of flow and passage, he maps out a more ‘fluid’ geography of spectatorship than Metz’s and

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Mulvey’s models outwardly suggest. What is important about this spatial reorganisation, then, is that it allows us to conceive of the ‘unfixed’ nature of spectatorial identities, and to think about the spectator as constantly shifting between subject positions (between character identifications) at different points in the narrative. As I suggested earlier, recent work by feminist film theorists in the area of bisexual fantasy takes this destabilisation of spectatorial identities as a point of departure.

Crucially, the discussions of theorists like Vicky Lebeau and Elizabeth Cowie create an awareness of the inherently unstable nature of unconscious processes in the cinema by emphasising the multiple possibilities of fantasy. In her work, for example, Cowie merges a reading of Freud’s theorising around bisexuality, in which he identifies the vacillation between masculine and feminine positions as a key component of sexual identity, with a framework developed by Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis which explores the variety of components of fantasy. Laplanche and Pontalis discuss two ‘original’ fantasies in addition to the fantasy of castration which psychoanalytic film theory hinges upon: the primal scene, which pictures the origin of the individual; and fantasies of seduction, related to the origin and upsurge of sexuality. They suggest that these additional two fantasies enable the subject to move across many different positions in which gender and address are not necessarily conflated, because they are “scenarios

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with multiple entries”. Cowie thus argues that unconscious fantasy works in the cinema at two levels: at one level it is involved in the mechanical, continual re-enactment of the mirror stage; at another (following both Freud’s postulation of bisexuality and Laplanche and Pontalis’s identification of its mise-en-scène of multiple desires) it works to *unfix* the spectator’s cinematic identifications from those boundaries of biological sex, cultural gender, and sexual preference upon which the construction of the ideal ego depends. In Cowie’s model, then, the cinematic spectator’s identifications are located within a mobile or shifting “construction of looks, ceaselessly varied through the organisation of the narrative and work of narration”. In this sense, positions of pleasure and desire in the cinema do not crystallise around the heterocentric organisation of space -- identification is not simply masculine or feminine -- but rather circulate in a mobile space *in-between* masculine and feminine identities. As Teresa de Lauretis writes:

“The analogy that links identification-with-the-look to masculinity and identification-with-the-image to femininity breaks down precisely when we think of a spectator alternating between the two.”

This psychoanalytic reformulation of spectatorial relations, then, refuses to fix both spectatorial identities and spatialities, and thus reveals the nuances that lie just out of

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66 Laplanche, Jean and Pontalis, Jean-Bertrand (1964) “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality” in eds. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan *Formations of Fantasy*, Methuen: New York, 5-34. For example, noting that ‘A father seduces a daughter’ is the skeletal version of the seduction fantasy, they suggest that “…nothing shows whether the subject will be immediately located as daughter; it can as well be fixed as father, or even in the term seduces.”, 23.


sight, just beneath the surface, of earlier psychoanalytic models of spectatorship.\textsuperscript{69} By inflecting spectatorship with a language of multiplicity and mobility, destabilising boundaries constructed around sexual difference and bringing into play the instabilities of unconscious processes, these discourses reveal the geographies of spectatorship that appear to underpin Metz’s and Mulvey’s models as fragile and unstable cartographies themselves. Moreover, they refuse to assume in advance the sexuality of film characters or spectators, and thus respond to the charge of heterocentrism that has frequently been levelled at feminist film theory.\textsuperscript{70}

\section*{Beyond the Master Narrative}

By uncovering and exploring the fabric of spatiality that underlies the work of Christian Metz and Laura Mulvey, I have been able to both reveal and challenge some of the theoretical assumptions upon which their models hinge. It seems to me, however, that what has proved most useful about this project is that it not only interrogates those spatial rigidities that are readily apparent in psychoanalytic models (the boundaries and barricades), but also reclaims the hidden vulnerabilities. Thus, bringing the lens of space to these models reveals the possibilities for coming to a more substantial conceptualisation of the spectator that \textit{already exist within psychoanalytic film discourse}.

\footnotetext{69}{It is probably wise, however, to keep sight of Jacqueline Rose’s warning that “while we undoubtedly need to recognise the instability of unconscious fantasy and the range of identities offered by any one spectator of film, this can easily lead to an idealisation of psychic processes and cinema at one and the same time (something for everyone both in the unconscious and on the screen)”. Rose, Jacqueline (1990) “Response” \textit{Camera Obscura} 20-1, 275.}

\footnotetext{70}{See Mayne (1990) and de Lauretis (1989).}
It persuades us that these models hold their own promises for resisting the totalising effects of the 'master narrative'.

However, despite finding more recent debates in psychoanalytic film theory -- like that around bisexual fantasy -- incredibly rich and stimulating, I still find myself situated in these models as a spectator floating around (now mobile rather than fixed) in some abstract 'deep space', cut off from the wider social, cultural and spatial relations in which the identity of texts, spaces and subjects are also constituted. Although these discourses are moving towards a geography of the spectator that is far more chaotic and seemingly mobile than the stable and rationalised ideal that outwardly characterises Metz’s and Mulvey’s work, they continue to privilege the space of the unconscious as the site of all spectatorial agency, and thus continue to locate the limits of spectatorship at the borders of the psyche. As I stressed in chapter 1, this thesis is about struggling to free spectatorship from these limits, and instead exploring the chaotic geography that extends well beyond the space of the psyche. Whilst I wish to retain the unconscious as a significant and complicated site of spectatorship, I also want to draw attention to what lies beyond this ‘deep’ space, that is: to the multiplicity of social, physical, corporeal and discursive spaces that constitute the spectator, that interact with the unconscious and with one another to define the film experience. In chapter 3, then, I unpack two feminist historiographies of film, which I suggest begin to dissolve the boundary that persists between the space of the unconscious and what lies ‘outside’, by interrogating the very gaps (fissures and contradictions) that I have identified in Metz’s and Mulvey’s models.
Chapter 3:
Spaces “In-between” the Boundaries: Hybrid Ways of Seeing Film

“Reading from a feminist viewpoint means to venture into that erotic geography that exists in-between filmic texts and the female spectator...” 1

“And I say to any man or woman, Let your soul stand cool and composed before a million universes.
Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself
I am large, I contain multitudes”.

Walt Whitman, Song of Myself

The collision of the rigidities associated with the psychoanalytic theories of spectatorship explored in the previous chapter with more recent ethnographic drives to qualitatively observe and document the actual experiences of different groups of spectators, has infused the language of film theory with a set of critical dualisms. Fueled by the myth of the master narrative on one hand, and the desire of ethnographic researchers for unproblematised agency on the other, the friction between interpellated “subjects” and resisting “viewers” has unfolded into further dichotomous abstractions. These additional dichotomies have, in the first instance, translated “subjects” into passive spectators (receivers of meaning), complicit with the cinema’s dominant ideology, and “viewers” into active spectators (creators of meaning), engaged in oppositional ways of seeing film. Furthermore, these abstractions have engendered a distinction between classical and

alternative cinema, with the former referring to those films exhibiting the narrative conventions associated with interpellation (and which are assumed, therefore, to demand passive spectatorship and, significantly, a masochistic female spectator), and the latter referring to those avant garde forms that destroy cinematic pleasure and return spectators to the material awareness of the medium. The limits of these dualisms -- subject/viewer, passive/active or complicit/oppositional spectatorship, and classical/alternative cinema -- have effectively sliced up the conceptual terrain of spectatorship studies, positing psychoanalytic and ethnographic approaches as extremes between which yawns a gap of tension and contradiction, a critical impasse. As I outlined in chapter 1, one of the aims of this thesis is to explore the ways in which approaching spectatorship through the lens of space might allow us to intervene in and begin to dismantle these dualisms, destabilising the conceptual boundaries to which film theory has become tethered to address this impasse directly. As a route into this project, this chapter addresses two recent feminist historiographies of film which delve into the gaps between film theory’s stubborn conceptual boundaries by approaching spectatorship and cinematic desire precisely through the lens of “in-betweenness”.

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Drawing out similar case studies of spectatorship amongst female immigrants in turn of the century New York, Giuliana Bruno’s *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map* and Miriam Hansen’s *Babel and Babylon* identify the cinema as a site through and against which
these women collectively negotiated the specific discrepancies of their experiences.²

Both theorists suggest that for these women, cinematic spectatorship entered into processes of social redefinition, providing a terrain of intersubjectivity for the imaginative renegotiation of female immigrant identities (resisting dominant social constructions of “otherness”) and the reorganisation of the spaces in the city across which those identities could be played out. In both texts, the intersubjective dimension of spectatorship is used to refer to those simultaneously psychic and social spaces that exist as interaction and recognition between spectators as well as interaction and recognition between spectators and the filmic text. Both Bruno and Hansen, then, consider early immigrant women’s pleasure in the cinema alongside the precariousness of their chaotic and shifting identities, subjectivities being worked and reworked at the intersection of a sense of loss (their experiences having been shaped more or less by traumatic forms of cultural and territorial displacement) and the new identities and daily itineraries thrust upon them by modern city life.

By framing their case studies in this way, both Bruno and Hansen organise their discussions of spectatorship around a set of explicitly spatial thematics. In order to inscribe immigrant women’s engagements with the cinema in all their complexity, both historiographies bring the materiality of everyday lives into the realm of spectatorship.

²Ibid; Hansen, Miriam (1991) Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film, Harvard University Press: Cambridge. Whilst this analysis defines the scope of Hansen’s study, for Bruno it forms part of her wider project to rewrite an Italian film microhistory which reclaims marginality and difference by revealing the suppressed knowledge of a strong women’s filmmaking tradition. The reading of Bruno’s text provided in this chapter is, then, a selective one, focusing upon her exploration of the identities of female spectators of early Neapolitan cinema and, in particular, the films of Elvira Notari.
By identifying this multitude of subjective formations, personal histories and social interactions as the "geography that exists in-between filmic texts and the female spectator", Bruno and Hansen draw attention to the play of the multiplicity of spaces within which the spectator is constituted (spaces through which the meanings and identities constructed in the cinema are mediated and negotiated) and thus consciously explore the ways in which the spectator and the spectator's engagements with the cinema might be "mapped". What I find most compelling about their work is that both theorists inflect these geographies of spectatorship with the language of "in-betweenness". I suggest that this overarching spatial theme reflects not only the tensions of a culture on (and of) the margins, but also the intricate and precarious entanglement of the diverse spaces across which spectatorship is played out.

In this chapter, I explore how Bruno's and Hansen's "geographies of in-betweenness" allow a conceptualisation of spectatorship that radically disrupts the dualisms of subject/viewer, complicit/oppositional and classical/alternative, and crystallises instead around hybrid ways of seeing in the cinema. I argue that these case studies attack the neatly bounded spaces of apparatus theories, re-molding in particular the image of the spectator as a stable and coherent entity. In place of this autonomous, unified spectatorial identity, both theorists envisage an entanglement of spectatorial spaces, in which interpellations and personal histories bleed into one another, giving rise to temporally shifting spaces of hybridity.
Central to my reading of both texts, then, is the notion that the ‘ways of seeing’ identified by Bruno and Hansen refuse the dualistic territory of “transparent same” (dominant discourse) and “invisible other” (savoirs mineurs), and converge instead with the recent emphasis on hybrid cultural forms emerging in the work of postcolonial critics such as Mary Louise Pratt and Homi Bhabha. Following these works, I wish to use Bruno’s and Hansen’s studies to think about a geography of spectatorship that crystallises around neither the “same” (hegemonic cultural forms) nor the “other” (counter-hegemonic), nor a synthesis between the two, but that is rather shaped by tensions and discontinuities. With this in mind, I unravel the ways in which Bruno’s and Hansen’s historiographies can be used to “re-map” and challenge existing theoretical constructions of the spectator and desire in the cinema. I begin by exploring the fabric of spatiality that underlies the notion of intersubjectivity (upon which both case studies hinge). I then elaborate upon this skeletal cartography by unraveling the dominant narrative that runs through both texts: women’s pleasure in the cinema as a conquest of the public sphere, and in film-going as a form of imaginative “flânerie”. In the final section of this chapter, I bring the insights of these geographies of “in-betweenness” and hybrid ways of seeing film to bear upon the dualistic conceptual terrain of spectatorship studies.

Intersubjectivity: Re-mapping Spectatorship and Desire

Both Bruno and Hansen begin their case studies by unpacking the physical spaces of early movie theatres in terms of their role as sites of interaction and sociability. They suggest that movie theatres were inevitably immersed in locally and culturally specific acts of reception due to the disjunctive, intertextual style of their exhibitions, in which meanings were dispersed across filmic and non-filmic texts. Thus, against the backdrop of a precarious “working out” of identities and meanings, Bruno and Hansen each identify the movie theatre (a form of collective spectacle and a leisure activity approved by society and family) as a touch-stone, a very concrete space of public recognition, interaction and collective negotiation for immigrant women in turn of the century New York. In this context, they theorise this group of women’s complex engagements with the cinema as crystallising around the simultaneously psychic and social terrain of intersubjectivity. I argue that introducing the psychic register of intersubjectivity into the circulation of desires in the cinema, serves to “map” the spectator in a different way than does the “unconscious work” recognised by Metz and Mulvey in their models of spectatorship (although it does not necessarily preclude this work), and, moreover, to re-

4 Hansen in particular explores the popular variety format of early cinema in some depth. She suggests that the alternation of short films with live performances, along with mediation of the filmic text by theatre personnel such as lecturers, sound effects specialists and musicians, generated an “aesthetics of disjuncture”. This disjuncture drew the audiences’ attention back and forth between the textual space of the screen and the materiality of the theatre space with its concrete social relations, as well drawing it outside of the theatre, to the other public realms and entertainments to which it referred. It is with this intertextuality in mind, that, in a later paper, Hansen refers to the “syncretistic dynamics” of early cinematic spectatorship, its inherent instabilities and “...potential for accidental collisions and opportunities, and for unpredictable conjunctures and aleatory developments”. Hansen, Miriam (1995) “Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Transformations in the Public Sphere” in ed. Linda Williams Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film, Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, N.J., 144.
orient desire along lines which allow the female spectator to occupy positions of pleasure in the cinema other than those designated by phallocentric fantasies of “lack”.

By theorising the intersubjective dimension of spectatorship, Bruno and Hansen draw on a concept that has its origins in the social theory of Jürgen Habermas. It was later brought to bear upon psychoanalytic discourses in the field of infant psychology to discuss crucial points in self development which had been identified as revolving around the infant’s ability to share subjective (especially emotional) experiences. Most recently, and underlining the importance of this theoretical thread to a “re-mapping” of the spectator, notions of intersubjectivity have been articulated at the intersection of psychoanalytic and feminist discourses, as a means of destabilising the former’s reliance upon a coherent, exclusively phallocentric conception of the subject. For Jessica Benjamin, what is crucial about the intersubjective approach for challenging existing psychoanalytic theories of the self, and hence, what is crucial about the application of this concept to theorising the spectator, is its attention to “mutual recognition”. As a feminist critique of psychoanalytic discourses of the subject, intersubjectivity draws attention to those capacities which emerge through the interaction between self and others and the way in which the individual grows in and through its relationship to others:

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"...[T]his perspective observes that the other whom the self meets is also a self, a subject in his or her own right. It assumes that we are able and need to recognise that other subject as different and yet alike, as an other who is capable of sharing similar mental experiences. Thus the idea of intersubjectivity reorients the conceptions of the psychic world from a subject’s relations with an object towards a subject meeting another subject". 

This need to recognise the other as a separate person who is like us yet distinct (rather than simply an external world or adjunct of the self’s own ego) is central to the psychic dimension of spectatorship that informs both Bruno’s and Hansen’s texts, and thus both case studies immediately complicate the spectatorial geographies that emerge in those earlier psychoanalytic film discourses discussed in chapter 2. As I outlined there, the intrapsychic formations (the inner world of unconscious fantasy and defence) articulated in both Metz’s and Mulvey’s texts revolve around the self’s need to find coherence and mirroring in the “other”, and consequently imagine the spectator as a unified “whole”, delimited and differentiated from its “other” by strict boundaries. The notion of intersubjectivity, however, blurs the very boundaries which separate “self” and “other”. In theorising the constitution of the self, this approach attributes all agency “neither to the subject with its innate capacities or impulses, nor to the object which stamps the blank slate of the psyche with its imprint”. Rather, it opens up a space of interaction and recognition in-between subject and object (read: in-between subjects), in which the latter plays an active part in the struggle of the individual to creatively assert the self. In

Streetwalking on a Ruined Map and Babel and Babylon, it is precisely the emergence of

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8Ibid, 45.
these spaces of interaction and mutuality — spaces of agency — both in-between members of the audience and in-between spectators and the filmic text that capture immigrant women’s spectatorship, their engagements with the cinema and the ways in which they imagined themselves in relation to the spectacles in the movie theatre. In other words, for Bruno and Hansen, immigrant women were able to articulate their own very specific needs, anxieties and fantasies within the realm of spectatorship precisely through the intersubjective sense of “self” and “other” that emerges with the consciousness that separate minds can share the same feelings and intentions:

“The cinema offered an horizon that made it possible to negotiate the historical experience of displacement in a new social form...The cinema provided for women...a space apart and a space in between...where individually processed experiences could be reappropriated by the experiencing subjects. It was a site for the imaginative negotiation of the gaps between family, school, and workplace, between traditional standards of behaviour and modern dreams”.9 [my italics]

The mobilisation of these intersubjective processes, then, betrays a geography of spectatorship that is both more expansive and more complex than that which outwardly characterises theories of the apparatus. Indeed, this geography can be said to depart from Metz’s and Mulvey’s cartographies on three levels. First, the boundaries that form a barricade between the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of the subject, that encircle the psyche and privilege the unconscious as the site of spectatorship pure and simple, are dissolved. The limits of spectatorship are extended beyond the rigid psychic triangulation of screen, spectator, projector to include both other spectators and meanings and identities

encountered outside of the movie theatre in everyday life. In effect, in their case studies of immigrant women’s ways of seeing film, Bruno and Hansen break down the distinction between the realm of the psyche and the multiplicity of social and spatial relations at work in the city.

Second, the spectatorial identities or ‘ways of seeing’ identified by Bruno and Hansen are crucially unfixed. Both theorists locate spectatorship at the temporally shifting intersection of multiple interpellations, personal histories and experiences. What is important about this approach to spectatorship is that it draws attention to the way in which the meanings attached to the cinema emanate not from a single apparatus, but rather from multiple sites of power. Thus, whilst the movie theatre may have existed in the imaginaries of immigrant women as a “space apart” (distanced from dominant culture by virtue of the possibility of intersubjective or local acts of reception, and, as a site of modernity, distanced from the pressures of family and traditional life), it was also always “in-between”, positioned on the threshold between modern and traditional cultures and between a culture produced by, and imposed upon, women. The geography of spectatorship that emerges in both Bruno’s and Hansen’s texts is, then, always precarious and always in a state of flux. The spectatorial identities they unravel are subject to constant shaping and re-shaping at moments when different meanings attached to the cinema collide and are either disturbed, absorbed or transformed. In both case studies, spectatorship appears as a site for preserving while re-configuring difference, its fragility and inherent “in-betweenness” marking it as a site of hybridity.
Third, this theme of hybridity can be seen as a step towards imagining a space in the cinema in which a position of female desire is, finally, possible. In theorising immigrant women’s pleasure in the cinema, both Bruno and Hansen locate the psychic register of intersubjectivity as a powerful female counterpart to the phallus. For example, in detailed readings of the films produced by Elvira Notari for export to the displaced Neapolitan population in New York, Giuliana Bruno suggests that the “narrativisation of an intersubjective experience” creates a position of desire that escapes the masochistic offerings of earlier psychoanalytic models of spectatorship. Reading Notari’s 'nfama films (which revolved around “women in search of desire, independent and engaged in a free sexuality”) as inhabiting “the edge of the paternal house...the very limits of patriarchal order: between acceptance and denial of its logic, between internalisation of its power and expression of deviance”, Bruno identifies the intertwining of two possible positions of desire. She argues that whilst the 'nfama, the strong-willed female protagonist, might be fetishistically caught up in masculinist fears of the femme fatale as a threatening and castrating figure, by virtue of the contradiction of this fetishism (the subject necessarily acknowledges what it fears in order to evade it) there was also a space of recognition in-between these characters and the female immigrant spectators who consumed their stories. For Bruno, the 'nfama films make possible a position of desire complicitous with patriarchal fantasies of sexual difference and a position of desire that elides identification with this masculinised way of seeing or collapse into phallocentric fantasy to crystallise instead around an intersubjective space of mutual recognition

\[10\text{Bruno, 281.}\]
between female protagonist (specifically her empowerment and desire to trespass upon public space) and female spectator. This re-orienting of cinematic desire is exciting for feminist film criticism, because whilst recognising that the bourgeois patriarchal alignments of "a culture imposed upon women" always lurk in the realm of spectatorship from which alternative positions of desire struggle to emerge, it untethers cinematic desire from the positing of identity as a stable state and thus does not depend upon the objectification of female spectators as "guardians of the lack constitutive of desire...man's other".\textsuperscript{11} Thus, whilst there is no happy ending yet to the saga of female pleasure:

"...the recognition of its complicitous and intersubjective itineraries is a step towards a desire of one’s own. Rather than addressing female pleasure in androgynous or transvestite clothes, the notion of intersubjectivity suggests the path to a transformation that affects both the theoretical and political terrain."\textsuperscript{12}

In the remainder of this chapter, I examine the ways in which both Bruno and Hansen delve into these simultaneously complicitous and intersubjective itineraries of female spectatorship by sketching out pleasures in the cinema relating to mobility.

**Spatial Tensions of Desire**

In both *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map* and *Babel and Babylon*, female spectatorship is identified in terms of a *spatial tension of desire*, crystallising in particular around the feminine desire to transgress and occupy public space. In this section, I explore the


\textsuperscript{12}Bruno, 283.
interweaving of this spatial theme, and think about how examples from Hansen’s and Bruno’s case studies allow us to ‘fill out’ the conceptual framework, the skeletal geography of spectatorship, outlined above.

Reflecting upon the role of the cinema in the construction and negotiation of definitions of publicity and privacy in the newly modern experiences of immigrant women, both Bruno and Hansen posit female spectatorship as a precarious bridge *in-between* these shifting realms. They argue that the fundamental separation of public and private spheres in turn of the century New York, intertwining with modernity’s strictly gendered daily itineraries, accentuated the feelings of displacement and shock experienced by these women. The strict spatial and gendered organisation of everyday life in the city jarred conspicuously with the lifestyles (movements, behaviour) they had lead in their home countries, in which the boundaries between public and private spheres, and, it follows, the spaces of femininity and masculinity designated by these boundaries, were often far more blurred and malleable. They assert, however, that in the face of this spatial incongruity, the movie theatre and film spectatorship provided female immigrants with an *imaginary binding* between public and private realms, constructed not only in the physical space of the theatre (as a site of sociability), but also in the mental geography of reception. I should like to think through these imaginary transgressions of the public/private divide in turn, first using Hansen’s case study, which focuses upon the aesthetic experience inside

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13 This is not to suggest that the women had free access to the public sphere in Italy, but rather that they had access to certain spaces ‘in-between’. Hansen, for example, cites the piazza, “the public domain of private passions”, in which the private emotional sphere was traditionally ‘publicly’ performed.
the theatre, and then Bruno’s, which locates the cinema’s pleasure as part of the mental space of the metropolis.

Underpinning Miriam Hansen’s discussion of female immigrant spectatorship is the notion that the specific aesthetic experience inside the early movie theatre ‘opened up’ the cinema’s processes of interpellation to moments of improvisation and reconfiguration. Hansen suggests that the “incompleteness of film as circulated commodity” (its overt reliance upon cultural intertexts such as popular stories and songs; the alternation of short films with live performances; audience participation in terms of singing and shouting) meant that local acts of reception were irrepessible.14 She insists that for immigrant women, such windows of improvisation allowed the intersubjective sharing and public recognition of private, individual experiences (needs, anxieties, memories, conflicts, fantasies), in other words: the imaginary, yet collective, reconciliation of the split between public and private realms.

Furthermore, Hansen argues that an equally important fictional bridging of the two spheres was enacted for these women in three popular film genres of the time. First, she suggests that the boundary separating public and private was thrown into question by melodramas, which effectively narrativised private realms of sexuality and sentiments for public display. Second, and perhaps more provocatively, she argues that by forcing

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14Hansen (1991), 147.
sexual dramas into both the public space of corridors and the invoked space of the theatre, films of the Peeping Tom genre enacted:

“...a practical critique of the historical demarcations of public and private...and the possibility of bringing hitherto unrepresented discussions of experience into the view of a radically inclusive heterosexual public sphere”. 15

Finally, Hansen suggests that the “fallen woman” genre -- whose female protagonists were intelligent, independent, aggressive, and even desiring -- solicited sympathy for the “new woman”, and established the cinema as a public arena in which the previously private questions of femininity and female sexuality could be debated.

Through this discussion, Miriam Hansen draws out a geography of spectatorship that moves towards capturing the chaotic and seemingly mobile nature of spectatorial identities. By exploring the ways in which cinematic spectatorship is intertextually constructed outside the theatre (for example, as an acceptable leisure activity for women and an arena for the collective renegotiation of immigrant femininities), she brings discursive spaces into play. Furthermore, she reclaims the sense in which the physicalities of bodies and theatres matter. Hansen’s spectators are bodies that see, that sing, that shout, that share experiences, bodies that fear, that fantasise, that remember. Her theatres are not just featureless containers for these bodies, but concrete spaces, complex architectures of screens, stages, musicians, lecturers, performers, bars, cloakrooms.

15Ibid, 41.
Hansen locates spectatorship, then, within a number of social, discursive, corporeal and physical spaces. It seems to me, however, that this geography of spectatorship remains problematic because of the smooth alignment of its spaces. In *Babel and Babylon*, the different 'spaces of spectatorship' identified by Hansen appear strangely centred, almost reconciled and bound together as a consistent unit, for whilst outlining in some depth the intersubjective itineraries of female spectatorship that are mobilised therein, Hansen crucially overlooks the existence of alternative or oppositional discourses. To demonstrate, I wish to explore two areas of her discussion more closely: her construction of movie theatre as a public site of recognition for immigrant women, and her emancipatory readings of the Peeping Tom and “fallen woman” genres.

In her study of the forced closure of New York’s nickelodeon theatres (ostensibly on behalf of “the public’s welfare”) in 1908, Janet Staiger draws attention to the proliferation of cultural tensions and reformist discourses which crystallised around the representation of female sexuality in early cinema.\(^\text{16}\) Reading Staiger’s study alongside Hansen’s work serves to remind us of the multiplicity of middle-class, patriarchal discourses centring around the family and sexuality (already well-established in the political arena), that struggled for control over the meanings assigned to women’s social experiences. In the cinema, these discourses insisted not only upon the containment of women’s desire textually (through narrative structures as well as mechanisms of censorship), but also attempted to control women’s access to and behaviour within the material space of the

\(^{16}\)Staiger, Janet (1995) *Bad Women*, University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis
movie theatre. In other words, working against immigrant women's construction of the movie theatre as a site of sociability and interaction, were powerful mechanisms attempting to either *re-masculinise* this space or *re-privatise* women's experiences within it.

Less drastic than the actual closing down of movie theatres, but just as effective in banishing women from this public space and re-asserting the gendered public/private divide, was the construction of these spaces by the popular press and reformist discourses as 'environments of fear'. As Lauren Rabinovitz notes, New York's nickelodeons, cabarets, dance halls and parks, were all targeted by authorities as sites in which women needed to pay attention to both their reputations and physical safety.\(^\text{17}\) Not only did female movie-goers risk moral charges of neglecting their families and homes, they also faced the hysterical overtones of a discourse that effectively *corporealised* the movie theatre's 'dangers'. Reformists' objections to the cinema on hygienic grounds, for instance, played upon "the uncontrollable mingling of people of different ages, classes and sex in dark, stuffy theatres" and suggested that in this environment, women's bodies were vulnerable to contagion, and even to prostitution.\(^\text{18}\) Ultimately, women who continued to haunt the public sphere, consuming commercialised entertainments, were


\(^{18}\)Staiger, 125. The image of the prostitute served as a kind of epithet for the cinema as a whole amongst early commentators. Later, Staiger argues, it was this attack on the "mere pleasure" of cinema that formed the basis for irrational fears that female film-goers "were taking a direct road to prostitution, having become aware of needs that they did not know they had", 125.
reprimanded for "going astray" and putting themselves in danger, that is: for trespassing upon a male domain.

The spectator's body -- the corporeal dimension of spectatorship -- became a contested site again with the emergence of middle-class discourses that attempted to control women's behaviour. In the cinema, this translated into attempts to re-define appropriate acts of reception for women, revolving largely around the imposition of regimes of silence and restraint of emotion. This disciplining of the female body would have effectively worked against the social, interactive and intersubjective dimensions of spectatorship that Hansen celebrates, steering the spectator's cinematic experience back towards isolation and solipsism. Indeed, as Judith Mayne highlights, if moral and social hygiene movements effected a re-masculinisation of movie theatres, for those women who remained in the cinema, these very discourses strove to effect a 're-privatisation' of spectator's experiences:

"Both novel and film have given the illusion of social participation to groups relegated, for one reason or another, to the margins of meaningful activity...[who] occupy a particularly delicate position in the split between public and private life. For women in industrialised society, the public sphere exists primarily as a magnification of the personal...Seated in a movie theatre, the immigrant is offered one kind of private space: screen images to be consumed, fantasies that allow for intense personal identification". 19 [original italics]

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19 Mayne, Judith (1988) Private Novels, Public Films, University of Georgia Press: London, 80-81. This experience resonates with Nancy Fraser's account of the historical struggle of patriarchal publics to re-privatise women's social experiences. Fraser, Nancy (1990) "Rethinking the Public Sphere", Social Text, 8 (3), 56-80.
What this discussion reveals, is that the issue of female spectatorship in turn of the century New York was a far more complicated and contested terrain than it appears in *Babel and Babylon*. The discursive, physical, social and corporeal dimensions of spectatorship identified by Hansen were each inhabited and molded not only by the desires of immigrant women, but also by more powerful patriarchal and bourgeois formations. Thus, this geography of spectatorship was shaped at different moments by the intersection or collision of meanings that each of these discourses assigned to the cinema. Female spectatorial identities, then, emerged out of a chaotic entanglement of spaces and meanings and, it follows, can be thought of as constantly shifting between images of, for example, the agent-negotiator of Hansen's study, the vulnerable woman, the neglectful mother, the prostitute and the star-gazer.20

Similarly, a reconsideration of the popular genres of early cinema throws into question Hansen's mapping of the psychic dimension of spectatorship and privileging of the register of intersubjectivity. Central to this critique is the question: What happens in *Babel and Babylon* to the inner world of fantasy, wish, anxiety and defence that dominates earlier psychoanalytic film theories? In other words, where are those unconscious processes of fantasy, voyeurism and fetishism that serve to reaffirm sexual difference in the cinema in alignment with the ideological demands of dominant patriarchal society? Quite simply, Hansen's failure to acknowledge the unconscious processes of voyeuristic scopophilia and fetishistic disavowal that Peeping Tom films,
above all other genres, so glaringly speak to, immediately problematises her emancipatory reading of them. Surely it is only by ignoring the question of who is the active observer in the corridor, legitimately and powerfully occupying public space, and who is the spectacle, tucked away in the private space on the other side of the keyhole, that Hansen is able to identify these films as potentially radical texts for women.\textsuperscript{21} Furthermore, Hansen's other claim that the "fallen woman" genre established sympathy for the 'new woman', also becomes somewhat precarious if we recall the sadistic pleasures that these films articulate through the narrative subjugation and punishment of the female figure who has 'gone astray' by 'trespassing' on the public space of leisure and work.\textsuperscript{22}

Clearly, what is lacking in Hansen's study is any sense of the way in which the psychic dimension of spectatorship might be shaped by the intersection of both intrapsychic and intersubjective processes. \textit{Babel and Babylon} presents exactly the skewed picture of the psyche that Jessica Benjamin warns against by arguing that intersubjective and intrapsychic theories should be treated as complementary (rather than oppositional) ways of understanding the psyche:

"Without the intrapsychic concept of the unconscious, intersubjective theory becomes one-dimensional, for it is only against the background of the mind's private space that the real other stands out in relief."\textsuperscript{23}


\textsuperscript{22}For an interrogation of this genre, see: Jacobs, Lea (1991) \textit{The Wages of Sin}, University of Wisconsin Press: Madison.

\textsuperscript{23}Benjamin, 21.
Re-reading Peeping Tom and “fallen woman” genres, then, further destabilises the geography of spectatorship that underlies Hansen’s work. Considering the inevitably masochistic pleasures of these genres for women alongside the intersubjective negotiation of their meanings complicates Hansen’s portrayal of the psyche, and points to the way in which both intersubjective and complicit itineraries work to shape spectatorship (the former does not preclude the latter and vice versa). Indeed, it is precisely this intertwining of intersubjective and complicit pleasures -- the inevitable hybridity of spectatorial identities -- that attracts me to the “mental geography of reception” drawn out by Giuliana Bruno.

In *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map*, Giuliana Bruno understands early cinema’s pleasure as part of the mental space of the metropolis, that is: part of a metropolitan discourse of circulation, transit and motion. She suggests that the attraction of the cinema for women was not only that it offered an accessible ‘point of entry’ into the public sphere of leisure and entertainment, but also that it articulated a specific mode of seeing -- a masterful, mobilised gaze -- that had been transposed to the screen from the city’s other “transgressive spaces”, namely the glass architecture of the arcade and railway and, later, the department store. Bruno traces the organisation of this gaze (and its pleasures in watching while traveling) from its origins in the panoptic, panoramic and dioramic visual devices of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, through its mobilisation in the figures of the traveler and the flâneur and eventual feminisation in the figure of the “leisure shopper”. She then argues that as the cinema was implanted within this mode of
seeing (the city’s dominant consumerist gaze), so this mode of seeing was implanted in
the cinema, where it offered women a form of imaginary flânerie:

“As film was implanted within the cityscape, the cityscape was implanted within
film...the ‘spectatrix’ could enter the world of the flâneur and derive its pleasures
through filmic motions. We may see film spectatorship as providing access to
the erotic darkness and (urban) wandering denied to the female subject.
Mobilising the gaze -- the ‘panoramic’ feature of the cinematic language --
implied the appropriation of territories and the freedom of ‘streetwalking’.
Textually and contextually, literally and figuratively, historically and
fantasmatically, the female subject’s encounter with the cinema constructs a new
geography, gives license to venturing”. 24

The conflation of consumerism and spectatorship also emerges in Anne Friedberg’s
recent historiography of the cinema and postmodern life, Window Shopping: Cinema and
the Postmodern.25 For Friedberg, the metaphor “window shopping” not only describes
pleasures in the cinema that she identifies as stemming from the opportunity it extends to
spectators to “try on” and discard new identities, but also, with its connotations of
leisurely wandering and contemplation, gestures towards the imaginary flânerie described
above by Bruno. However, whilst Friedberg underlines the cinema’s (and, indeed, the
shopping mall’s) ability to “offer a safe transit into other spaces, other times, other
imaginaries”26 and thus to contest and invert the gendered demarcations of public and
private, Bruno is more cautious. For Bruno, the new female geographies and urban
venturing made possible by the cinema’s imaginary flânerie are, as forms of

24Bruno, 51.
Berkeley.
26Ibid, 121.
consumerism, ultimately choreographed by capitalist ideals and thus organised according to patriarchal definitions of masculinity and femininity. As a function of the capitalist market place, of private property and acquisition relations (contemplation aside, window-shopping works precisely because of phallocentric fantasies of lack and loss), the commodification of the female spectator’s gaze also implies its policing. Indeed, this unpacking of patriarchal myths of publicity, and the dismantling of images of the flâneuse created by consumer capitalism has been a central project of feminist geographers.27

In Streetwalking on a Ruined Map, then, Bruno articulates more subtly the ways in which the intersubjective (the agency-inspired, oppositional) itineraries of spectatorship are inextricably bound to the complicit. Female spectatorship emerges as a hybrid cultural form, hybrid ways of seeing film, in-between these categories. She draws attention to the contradictory impulses that constitute pleasure, impulses that are not necessarily reconcilable or centred (as in Hansen’s case study), but that are deeply entangled and intertwined. Thus, in Bruno’s study, whilst female pleasure in the cinema emerged in part from the commodification of the mobilised and masterful gaze, it was not entirely complicit, for through spectatorship women gained access to “the range of erotic pleasures of the nomadic gaze” which triggered and participated in their conquest of the

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27See, for example: Dowling, Robyn (1991) Shopping and Femininity, M.A. thesis, Department of Geography, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. This thesis contrasts the glamorous images of femininity painted by 1950s consumerism with the actual consumer roles of shoppers and housewives into which women are still coerced.
sphere of spatial mobility as pleasure.\textsuperscript{28}

However, whilst clearly conveying the fragile and shifting geography that underlies spectatorship with which this thesis is concerned, Bruno’s study leaves me wary that in the dash from the psyche to the city, the spectator may once again ‘lose’ its body. In Streetwalking on a Ruined Map, the immediacy of bodies -- what Caroline Bynum calls the ‘stuffness’ of bodies -- is once more indeterminable.\textsuperscript{29} The body, thrown into the rhythm of the metropolis, the mode of seeing implanted in the cinema, disintegrates:

“...[A]s a result of the flow of impressions, the optical montage...the subject becomes a fragmented body in space, a ‘desiring machine’. When a nomadic dynamic prevails within a transitory space of traversing sites, one does not end where the body ends”.\textsuperscript{30}

Similarly, for Friedberg, rather than disintegrating, the spectator’s body figures as little more than a shell, abandoned upon entering the movie theatre for new identities which are then “worn” and “discarded”:

“As the mobilised gaze becomes more and more virtual, the physical body becomes a more and more fluid site; in this ‘virtual mobility’ the actual body -- gender-bound, race-bound, ethnicity-bound -- becomes a veritable depot for departure and return”.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{28}Bruno, 57.
\textsuperscript{29}Bynum, Caroline (1995) “Why all the fuss about the body?”, Critical Inquiry, 22 (1), 1-33. In this paper, Bynum wants to reclaim the immediacy of the body that persists in both theorisations which use the body to convey limit or placement (whether biological or social), and those which use the body to refer “precisely to lack of limits, that is, to desire, potentiality, fertility, sensuality/sexuality...or to a person or identity as a malleable construct”, 5.
\textsuperscript{30}Bruno, 56.
\textsuperscript{31}Friedberg, 110.
In these descriptions, the physical body is defined in terms of fluidity and malleability -- qualities that seem strangely at odds with the actual bodily positions of spectators, sitting practically immobile in the material spaces of movie theatres. Undertaking Bynum’s project of reclaiming the stuffness of the body, then, demands that we reveal the bodily truths that emerge in the differential between the virtual position (imaginary flânerie) and the real, and that we write these contradictions into our geographies of spectatorship.

After all, as Susan Bordo asks, “what sort of body is it that is free to change its shape and location at will, that can become anyone and travel anywhere?”.

Disrupting the Dualisms

In Streetwalking on a Ruined Map and Babel and Babylon, the constant reinvention of audience and textual identities not only works to drastically re-map the space of the spectator established by theories of the apparatus, but also anticipates a more fundamental re-mapping of spectatorship studies. Thinking beyond the moments of originary and initial subjectivities in which earlier psychoanalytic discourses locate the spectator, both Bruno and Hansen foreground the sense in which spectators are located within a constantly shifting overdetermination of meanings. By exploring the ways in which these identities (encountered outside of the cinema in everyday life) might intervene in and shape the cinema’s ‘ways of seeing’, they reintroduce into the discussion of spectatorship those areas of tension and contradiction that are erased from Metz’s and Mulvey’s models, namely: female positions of desire and the materiality of experience; the mobility

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of subjects across multiple subject-positions; and the instabilities of unconscious processes. Furthermore, both case studies draw attention to the positivity of this tension, specifically its ability to explode the neat boundaries of subject/viewer, complicit/oppositional, and classical/alternative cinema and to give rise to “something quite different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation”.

The gap of conflict and contradiction that yawns between psychoanalytic and ethnographic approaches to spectatorship, then, is no longer a site of critical impasse. Rather, through the lens of both Bruno’s and Hansen’s texts, it is marked as a site of spectatorial hybridity, productive of cultural forms that do not lend themselves easily to hegemonic and counter-hegemonic camps. Bruno especially captures the simultaneity of complicit and oppositional ‘ways of seeing’ in her descriptions of immigrant women’s spectatorship. Whilst recognising the force of the unconscious (the insistence that spectatorship is informed by deep and far-reaching structures that are simultaneously psychic and social), Streetwalking on a Ruined Map retains the possibilities for these unconscious desires to be intersubjectively recast, opening up other pleasures in film-going. It is through these windows of negotiation that for Bruno, the condition of woman as immigrant is transformed from a site of negativity (loss, lack) into a site of positivity (mobility, lack of boundaries, lack of confinement). Similarly, for Hansen, it is the in-betweenness of spectatorial identities and contradictions of unconscious fantasy that

33Bhabha (1990), 221.
render women's pleasure in the Peeping Tom genre ambiguous, rather than exclusively masochistic. In other words, rather than rejecting voyeuristic or fetishistic desires outright, these spectatorial positions simply recast them and put them to alternative uses.

In the next chapter, I consider the discourses of the organisers of Vancouver's independent cinema spaces through the lens of the precarious "spatiality of spectatorship" that has emerged so far in this thesis. I suggest that the multiplicity of spaces that constitute spectatorship surface sporadically in the spatial imaginaries of these exhibitors, and whilst I explore the ways in which they articulate their own, idiosyncratic notions of the "geography of spectatorship" in the city, I also think about the ways in which they participate in the blurring of boundaries discussed in this chapter.
Chapter 4:

Cinema for Vancouver: Spatial Imaginaries of Spectatorship

“Sometimes I think the application of film theory is what separates people from what they’re watching; it removes them from why they watch films in the first place. Sitting in a darkened room all by yourself, you can have the most amazing experience watching films -- with or without film theory” (Caroline, Cineworks).

The purpose of this chapter is to explore, through a contemporary case study, some of the spectatorial hybridities, ambiguities and contradictions unfolded by Bruno’s and Hansen’s geographical projects in the previous chapter. Drawing upon research consisting of in-depth unstructured interviews, I uncover the spatial themes that frame the discourses of the organisers of Vancouver’s independent film exhibition venues, and use these spatial imaginaries as windows onto some of the geographies of spectatorship being constructed in the city.

The organisers interviewed for this research are people who live and work in Vancouver, and through their involvement in the diverse activities of designing (the physical form, architecture), programming (of texts and events, such as lectures, discussions) and marketing (choosing advertising outlets, producing promotional materials and posters) film exhibition spaces, recognise that they are directly involved in the complex negotiation of not only the identities of individual filmic texts, but also the identities of

\[1\] The quotes used in the text from interviews are verbatim.
Vancouver’s audiences and cinema spaces.\(^2\) Identifying their projects and spaces primarily in terms of *difference* from other exhibition sites in the city, all of the organisers frame their involvement in this negotiation with over-arching themes of “alterity”. Yet even a brief outline of each of their practices reveals “alternative” to be an interpretative label, adopted to describe a whole range of (often unreconcilable) activities. Four overlapping interpretations are, however, discernible:

First, for some organisers, *difference* emerges in the aesthetic experience offered to the spectator and the programming of independent or experimental film forms. Operated by a local film school graduate and experimental film-maker, Alex, the Edison Electric presents experimental films in contexts that often involve live performances (by bands and performance artists), live manipulation of images by filmmakers and audience participation. Its storefront architecture, camped between a supermarket and a second-hand store, gives way to a single room auditorium in which films are projected onto various walls and the 60 unfixed seats are moved accordingly. Similarly, independent films dominate Ken’s and Caroline’s programmes at the artists’ access centres Video In and Cineworks respectively. Their screenings reflect not only their mandates to allow film-makers to maintain creative control of their work (at the moment of exhibition as well as during production and distribution), but also their twin commitments to promote awareness of certain independent films. For Cineworks, exhibiting at The Glass Slipper,

\(^2\)Whilst this project does not engage with the spatial imaginaries of the city’s larger, corporate-run movie theatres, this is not to suggest that they do not equally participate in these processes of negotiation. Rather, it highlights that these entities do not lend themselves easily to the case study, their architectural, programming and marketing functions being less site-specific, and more formulaic, fragmented and externally controlled.
a local bar and band venue, these are films produced by its co-op members. For Video In, which adapts a large cavernous space housed within its studios according to each individual screening, the commitment is specifically towards those film-makers who are underrepresented in the mainstream: critical feminist, gay and lesbian, and people of colour. Another organiser who foregrounds the specific aesthetic experience of his exhibitions is Paul, who works as both the assistant course director and exhibition programmer at the Vancouver Film School. Rather than using the specially designed, but rather conventional, auditorium at the downtown campus, Paul screens students' films at Popeye’s, a busy beachfront bar in Kitsilano, where he wants spectatorship to be played out alongside the usual forms of bar behaviour.

Second, difference is located by three organisers in what they term the “festival phenomenon”. The Vancouver International Film Festival, now in its fifteenth year, aims to “encourage understanding of other nations through the art of cinema and to foster the film industry in B.C. by bringing international cinema professionals together”. Its director-programmer, Alan, a film school graduate and ex-art house cinema owner, makes use of a number of venues around the city, mostly smaller neighbourhood theatres. However, Alan has also, in the past, chosen exhibition sites for their potential to enhance the aesthetic experience by creating particular resonances with individual films. For the revival of a 1928 film (a gateway sound film) in the 1995 festival, for example, he used

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3 Interestingly, The Edison Electric, Video Inn and Cinework’s screenings are all located in East Vancouver, which has a long tradition of housing the city’s counter-cultural artistic movement. See: Wallace, Keith (1991) “A Particular History: Artist-run Centres in Vancouver”, in ed. Stan Douglas Vancouver Anthology, Or Gallery Society: Vancouver.
the Vogue, an original downtown vaudeville site, to re-create the experience of how the first “talkies” would have worked in early theatres. Stuart, the organiser of the “Street Level” Festival, a series of films themed around gentrification and youth culture exhibited both outdoors and in community centres around the city, also unravels the idea of reviving an earlier cinematic experience. Drawing upon his own M.A. research interrogating the ‘publicity’ of the 1940’s National Film Board community hall distribution networks, the “Street Level” festival represents Stuart’s attempt to create an exhibition context that ignites political discussion around how certain films might speak to certain groups or communities. The third festival, “Something Old...Something New”, took place over three weeks in the summer of 1996 in a vacant lot in the downtown core. Inspired by a film exhibition on a Seattle beach, its programmers, Shira and Brian, filled the lot with sand and a well-blanketed audience, and projected classic Hollywood films against an exterior wall.

Third, “alterity” describes a radically different cinematic practice in the discourses of Pacific Cinémathèque, IDERA⁴ and Vancouver Women in Film, where it is the educational thrust of exhibitions that is seen to constitute difference. Pacific Cinémathèque, housed with Cineworks’ offices in a location downtown, is described by its programmer, Jim, as “a museum or gallery of cinema”. Whilst most of its exhibitions are pre-programmed for circulation between the North American Cinémathèques and generally package the canonical European film-making tradition as an educational

resource, Jim also attempts to introduce Vancouver audiences to the work of independent local or neglected artists. Sharing the Pacific Cinémathèque venue, IDERA uses film to promote awareness of global development issues. Through strategic programming and joint projects with local media literacy groups, IDERA's programmer, Stuart, specifically attempts to reveal perspectives excluded from the mainstream media. Vancouver Women in Film, a chapter of an international support organisation for professional women in the film industry, uses its exhibitions as vehicles for promoting not only the education and mentoring of its members, but also a more general awareness of local women's achievements in the industry.

Finally, both Ray and Tom, organisers of The Ridge and Fifth Avenue respectively, locate difference in their rhetoric of "neighbourhood cinema". Whilst the Ridge has occupied the same site for fifty years, and Fifth Avenue is less than a year old, both theatres are located in Kitsilano and exhibit largely second-run, art-house or popular foreign films. More significantly, both organisers distinguish their venues from the commercial enterprises downtown (which often exhibit the same films) by enshrouding their practices with nostalgic images of community and neighbourhood.

Despite this uncertain terrain of shifting definitions of alterity, the interviewees unravel a number of common themes in their 'mappings' of spectatorship that are worth exploring more closely in this chapter: the use of physical location and architecture to 'situate' spectatorship in the city; the collective 'working out' of identities of individual film texts
and genres; and the filtering of audience identities through lenses of ‘belonging’ and ‘community’. Furthermore, since the interviewees are all film graduates, I also draw out in these discussions the ways in which they have engaged with the debates in film theory, and how (if at all) these engagements inform their exhibition practices. It becomes clear that whilst some organisers are disdainful of film theory and reject the possibility of its connections to their concrete practices (recall the quote that introduces this chapter), others’ discourses salvage some of its insights or betray unacknowledged traces of its dualistic legacies. In conclusion, I explore the ways in which the language of space infiltrates the organisers’ depictions of spectatorship to ends that are not always intended or recognised, and that might, indeed, conflict with their stated aims.

From the Architecture of Fantasy to the Architecture of the City
Underlying the physical design and location of a number of Vancouver’s independent exhibition spaces is the insistence that film and film spectatorship do not take place in ‘a world apart’, a space and time irrevocably isolated from the city and the multiplicity of social and spatial relations that constitute everyday life therein. In its most immediate sense, this insistence translates into a rejection of the fantasmatic architecture that has become almost synonymous with the movie theatre since the end of the nickelodeon period. As a statement by 1930s architect Thomas Lamb highlights, the architecture of fantasy concretises the language of isolation and seclusion that characterises the spectator-subject of early psychoanalytic film theory:
“To make our audience receptive and interested, we must cut them off from the rest of the city life and take them into a rich and self-contained auditorium, where their minds are freed from their usual occupations and freed from their customary thoughts. In order to do this, it is necessary to present to their eyes a general scheme quite different from their daily environment, and a great deal more elaborate... The stairway, for example, must be designed as an ‘invitation to ascend’...it must establish the ‘otherworldiness’ of the cinema”.^5

Reciprocally, then, by insulating spectators from the everyday of city life, this architecture has done much to reinforce the myth of the psyche (the realm of fantasy and the unconscious) as the site of spectatorship, and thus to restrict the discussion of spectatorship exclusively to the processes at the centre of psychoanalytic theory.

Vancouver’s alternative exhibition spaces, however, both reject and critique this sense of removement and concealment by consciously framing their exhibitions instead within “the architecture of the city”.

“It’s a festival about the streets where we live and it’s set as close to these streets as city bylaws will allow us to get. All of the films have something interesting to say about these same streets, the people who walk, talk, cajole, protest and breathe here and where they might be going. The fact that they’re out there, amongst those people, almost on the street itself, gives them jar, life, excitement and resonance beyond what you’d otherwise get at a film screening. I want people to come away with a kind of nebulous sense that film can be a lot more, that the context of watching films can be a lot more important than they previously thought”. (Stuart, “Street Level” festival)

“We went out and did like these installations, projecting on walls all around the city. It was like liberating the images from the screen, but also liberating the audience, you know? People had all kinds of perspectives, they were mobile, they could be up close...I’m sure some of them were just passing by and stopped, thinking ‘What the hell..?’ . They’re walking around doing their own thing, and

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suddenly they stumble over these images on a side of a building or whatever”.
(Alex, Edison Electric).

Taking place outside in the city itself, these experiments restore the spectator’s ability to perceive the social and spatial relations within which all cultural interaction -- including film exhibition and spectatorship -- is embedded. In other words, they deliberately highlight precisely those relations that are hidden or severed by the conventional architecture of fantasy described by Lamb, and thus gesture towards a geography of spectatorship that extends beyond the narrow space of the psyche. Instead of removing film exhibition from its site, they celebrate its site and draw attention to the physicality of cinema spaces and spectators’ bodies. In Alex’s experiment, filmic images fleetingly became part of the city through their projection directly onto its fabric of surfaces. They were encountered by chance by people already circulating around Vancouver’s downtown core, already immersed in complex webs of subject positions and personal histories. At the “Street Level” festival, such encounters between bodies and images (and, hence, between spectatorship and its contexts) were politicised, that is: constructed as political moments in which local issues of gentrification and homelessness could occupy a new discursive arena.

“What I like about the focus on the unconscious of some psychoanalytic theory is that it gets to the point about the ways in which people work meanings into their lives...in other words, the unquantifiable spin-off effects of spectatorship. The idea behind the festival is to create a context where those spin-offs are simply more visible. It’s an attempt to use films to contribute to what is sometimes a very moribund or ghettoised political discussion...to use films to bring people out and create a very public dialogue” (Stuart, “Street Level” festival)
The outdoor festival (and subsequent screenings at community centres dispersed around the city) brought local audiences together with filmmakers, visual artists and community activists. The aims were twofold: to use the screenings as forums in which people were encouraged to be critical about the urban space in which they circulate; and to highlight the relationships of the exhibitions themselves to this urban space and to their spectators' everyday lives. Through the latter, "Street Level" wanted to make explicit the multitude of ways in which people relate to films or 'use' film in their lives, as well as to interrogate the kinds of referential systems that attempt to intervene in and structure those relationships. Rather than being relegated to the status of 'container' or 'backdrop', the initial park site was intended to be as important as the texts themselves in activating these relationships and negotiations of meanings. The festival's spectators were well aware that if they were in the cinema, they were also in the city. The city not only surrounded the exhibition, but extended into it, injecting the films with "life" and "resonance", and quite palpably providing the stimuli for very local acts of reception. In this mapping of spectatorship, the boundary between the psyche and the city is rendered ambiguous, and the isolated 'otherworldliness' of the cinema revealed as a fragile and constructed identity itself.

Whilst emphasising the 'situatedness' of spectatorship in order to reveal and intervene in the social and discursive relations that structure Vancouver's urban spaces and conflicts, "Street Level" also retained the sense in which the festival itself (as a cultural event) and the meanings it attached to spectatorship were ultimately embedded in and inseparable
from these relations. Just as “Street Level” encouraged and contextualised political
discussion around urban conflicts in Vancouver, its own identity and, hence, the
meanings it attached to spectatorship, were open to contestation and ‘shaping’ by other
discourses circulating in the city. For example, an institutional apparatus worked against
Stuart’s efforts to break down the separation of the exhibition and the city, instead
attempting to contain and re-conceal spectatorship:

“I also chose Grandview [park] because it’s also got these artificial boundaries
around it, which is important for closing off the area, because if it’s not closed
off, then in some ways the classification board gets all bent out of shape and all
that, so it’s got to be contained, closed off or whatever”. (Stuart, “Street Level”
festival).

Whilst other independent exhibition spaces in the Vancouver case study are more
conventionally ‘housed’, many are equally committed to foregrounding their
‘situatedness’ and locating spectatorship in a multiplicity of physical, social, corporeal,
and discursive (as well as psychic) spaces. Together, the design of their physical spaces
and removal of corporeal disciplines of silence and immobility, are intended to blur the
boundaries separating the ‘inside’ from the ‘outside’. To abolish the distinction of the
cinema as an isolated space apart, they attempt to incorporate a sense of the city’s
circulation and flow of bodies into the organisation of their spaces, in effect bringing the
aesthetics of the street into the cinema.

“At Popeye’s [beach-front bar where screenings take place] we’re trying to
create an open space. We want people off the street, off the beach, anyone just
to flow into it and flow out without creating that boundary around it. With a bar
people are always moving in and out, whereas if you have a theatre, they come
in, they watch a film and then they go out; with our screenings, it’s constantly
flowing”. (Paul, Vancouver Film School)
"The atmosphere's just kind of relaxed and casual. You don't have to behave any differently than you would outside and so people are doing things that they don't normally do at films. They're moving around, chatting to friends, they're going to the bar, they've got their feet up and they're having a drink or maybe smoking a cigarette...". (Caroline, Cineworks)

For the organiser of The Edison Electric, figure 1, this architecture of the city also challenges the traces of elitism and claims to purity which (as a legacy of the conceptual dualism of alternative/classical cinema) have become associated with "alternative" or "avant garde" films. More palpably, for Alex, the sense of motion and corporeality in the Edison's design, serves to reject the labels of 'inaccessible Art sanctuary' or 'zone of aestheticism' that frequently become attached to art house or independent cinema spaces.

"The storefront's so accessible -- that's what I like about this place. It's sort of like 'Hey! Here's something to see' and you can just walk in. It's like I want to say 'Hey, it's okay, you can sit here and not feel like you're in some white-walled, hard-wood floor museum space that makes you feel a certain way...makes you feel you have to whisper". (Alex, Edison Electric)

This theme of bodies circulating in spaces is reiterated in some of the organisers' descriptions of lobbies and foyers, which rather than falling back into modest latency in relation to the awaited cinematic spectacle, are foregrounded as an autonomous experience in which the city and the cinema communicate.

"We have a kind of café-style lobby...there are space problems down there, but the general idea was that it was kind of open for wandering, for encountering people. More like a space out on the street, rather than a space to wait, you know? A place where people could hang out, and we could be selling film magazines, or you know, people could be reading film magazines and drinking cappuccinos...I think ideally we would like it to be more like that". (Jim, Pacific Cinémathèque)
Figure 1 The Edison Electric Storefront: laundromat, dollar store or movie theatre?

Figure 2 Video In Studios and exhibition space: a “space apart” within the city.
In addition to their architectural rejection of closure, these café/foyer spaces also work to free the experience of spectatorship and the bodies of spectators from the conventional temporal vacuum of the cinema. To enter the cinema is no longer to withdraw into privacy, away from the everyday of the city:

“When I first started this place, I had a café at the front. It began with the romantic idealism of ‘Hey, we’re all gonna sit around and have coffee and talk about film...’, and that was nice when it did happen. But just the fact that people were there during the day, that they met up there, that they hung out in the space for more than the two hour slots of the film, I think that made a difference to the way they saw this place...it seemed less divorced from the rest of the Drive”. (Alex, Edison Electric)

“One of the things I appreciate about the Glass Slipper [exhibition venue] is that after the screening it’s not like a traditional movie theatre -- you can stay there if you want to and continue drinking, talking with your friends, and hopefully talking about the films, or going up and speaking to one of the filmmakers who’s there. You’re not expected to rush out so the next gang can rush in. It’s a way to make our screenings not so separate from the other things people might do on an evening out, you know...bring it closer to people...that’s the idea”. (Caroline, Cineworks)

In the case of Video In, figure 2, an artists’ access centre, where exhibitions are co-ordinated alongside production and distribution, this geography of spectatorship, its ‘situatedness’ in the city, takes on a further layer of significance in the physical organisation of theatre space. Focusing its exhibitions particularly upon the experiences of both immigrants and gays and lesbians in Vancouver, the centre speaks primarily to those who are underrepresented in the mainstream. For the programmer, Ken, what critically organises these exhibitions is not only the insistence that spectatorship is implanted in the social and spatial relations that constitute the city, but also the
recognition that these relations might be alienating and even dangerous for certain groups to occupy. Thus, whilst Video In’s exhibitions unpack and critique these oppressive and abusive elements of the city, Ken simultaneously inscribes their physical site with a sense of removement from these relations:

“Our screenings give people a chance to see stuff that they wouldn’t normally get to see, not just in terms of the subject matter, but also how it’s dealt with. So, for example, we give people the chance to see not a kind of overly-romantic queer love story, but one that asks questions or is a lot more radical or challenging that what’s shown downtown. And to be able to do that, we have to make this place kind of intimate and safe, you know a place where people can discuss stuff after, project their experiences onto what they’ve just seen... Yeah, the effort is to make it kind of intimate, and often there’ll be food there, there’s usually a bar. It’s kind of anything to encourage people to hang out in that space”. (Ken, Video In)

This removal, however, is hardly a fantasmatic isolation of spectatorship from everyday life, for the city’s social, spatial and temporal relations provide the context and, often, the raison d’être for the exhibitions. Rather, spectatorship at Video In takes place in a ‘space apart’ within the city, in other words, a “space open to difference” that is consciously more protective and defensive of difference than are other spaces in the city. Video In’s exhibitions are thus ‘spaces apart’ only in the sense that their audiences feel able to talk about their experiences and participate in the social production of meanings in ways which might not be possible (without fear of retribution) ‘outside’ or elsewhere in the city.

6This recognition echoes, for example, Gill Valentine’s discussion of the ways in which everyday spaces are organised and appropriated by heterosexuals, and the way in which heterosexual hegemony is expressed in space through antigay discrimination and violence. Valentine, Gill (1993) “(Hetero)sexing space: lesbian perceptions and experiences of everyday spaces”, Society and Space, 11, 395-413.
Of course, recalling the classification board's demands upon the "Street Level" festival, attempts to situate spectatorship in the city are not always unproblematic. The organiser of Vancouver Film School's weekly screenings, for example, chose a Kitsilano beachfront bar as the exhibition site, precisely because he hoped it would actively challenge the ideal of the isolated, passive spectator and encourage spectators to latch onto alternative 'ways of seeing' films:

"In a bar, one is expected to be pro-active and talkative, and to be sort of creative, socially creative, whereas there's this idea that when you're watching films, you're supposed to passive. So when you put a film inside a bar, then there's immediately this tension...so initially that's what I was interested in creating, you know, to see what would come out of it". (Paul, Vancouver Film School)

This tension, however, has become a persistent theme, with some spectators aggressively resisting Paul's attempts to re-define spectatorship, and amongst themselves, reverting to the solipsism that the experiment is intended to dissolve:

"Some people complain that they can't concentrate, that there are people in the way, walking in the way, that sort of thing. And indeed there are problems sometimes...instead of breaking down the differences between bar behaviour and watching films, they end up being two conflicting things in the same space...it can whip up trouble". (Paul, Vancouver Film School)

The 'ways of seeing' emerging in the bar experiment are, then, neither hegemonic nor counter-hegemonic, but hybrid, shaped by the complex geographies (collisions of meanings, disjunctures and discontinuities) that exist in-between these two sites of power. In this case, the ways in which individuals have been acculturated to respond to the cinema through its conventional architecture of fantasy, jar with the bar setting's
architecture of the city, but are not necessarily destabilised or subverted by it. Rather, some spectators are so deeply entrenched in this fantasy, that they have come to understand isolation and separation as intrinsic attributes of spectatorship rather than a constructed relationship of exclusion, and are thus unable to reconcile Paul's experiment with their expectations of the cinema.

Moments of 'Improvisation': Negotiating the Identities of Texts

As part of the project of situating spectatorship in the wider social and spatial relations of the city, a number of the Vancouver case studies attempt to frame their exhibitions as social and intersubjective sites. Encouraging spectators to voice their responses to films and discuss the ways in which they can or cannot relate to what they've just seen, the organisers of these cinema spaces bring into focus two issues: first, the complex negotiations through which meanings become attached to both individual films and to spectatorship itself; and second, the active and constructive positions that spectators themselves occupy in this social production of meanings. At both the "Street Level" festival and Video In, for example, spectators are encouraged to dissect and rework filmic codes and narratives by filtering them through their own experiences and responses, that is: to reappropriate the process of representation and use it in the struggle against personal and social alienation:

"In all the exhibitions we at least encourage people to talk about their responses to the work, especially if their own experiences intersect with it in some way. Besides, often with video there's physically so little on the screen, that you literally have to do that anyway...start projecting stuff up there from your own life before it starts to make sense. Usually what I try to make happen is for an audience to get more active, for an audience to be critical about the work that
they’re watching and to try to break down sort of ‘star models’ and ‘star roles’
(Ken, Video In)

“The Carnegie Centre [community centre] down on Main and Hastings have
chosen to screen this British film called *Empire State*. It’s about the
development of Canary Wharfe in London, and about two worlds coming
together -- the world of this vulnerable eastend neighbourhood and the world of
the developers. I’m so happy they chose that one, because it’s totally like what’s
going on on the eastside...and hopefully people at the centre will be able to relate
to the film, and to add to it their fears...but whatever, at least they’ll realise they
can do with it what they will”. (Stuart, “Street Level”)

By activating personal experiences, histories, and fears encountered outside the movie
theatre in everyday life, these exhibitions reiterate the geography of spectatorship that
extends beyond the psyche into the social, discursive, physical and corporeal spaces
inhabited by spectators on a daily basis. Yet it should also be recognised that the
organisers of these exhibitions are themselves often powerful actors in the shaping of this
geography. As programmers or curators, they mobilise, legitimate and privilege certain
‘ways of seeing’ and ‘ways of knowing’, whilst neglecting or ignoring others. Standing
as a subjective presence in-between spectators and in-between spectators and texts, they
first decide (within limits of budgets and availability) which texts their audiences come
into contact with. They then contextualise, historicise, describe and frame these texts in
their brochures and posters, and even in their choices, for example, of guest speakers.
Whilst these ‘transparent’ functions do much to position films before the exhibition, what
is less commonly acknowledged is that they might also (perhaps unwittingly)
‘choreograph’ the ways in which spectators then reflect upon the texts. In other words,
though they may not be recognised as such, programming and curating represent
powerful mechanisms that may shape the intersubjective terrain of spectatorship and seize
hold of its ‘moments of improvisation’. This emerges most clearly in the Vancouver case study with those cinema spaces that label their activities as ‘educational’.

Pedagogic discourses feature strongly in the mandates of IDERA and Pacific Cinémathèque, which aim to promote awareness of development issues and knowledge of cinema as “an art form and means of cross-cultural communication” respectively. In both cases, programmers weave narratives and construct meanings around the trope of “nation”, by selecting for their exhibitions only those films that they identify as representative of “national cinemas”. In other words, under the educational mandate of the societies, programmers become ethnographers, exhibitions are transformed into ethnographic projects, and individual filmic texts come to function as historical documents or cultural objects, understood to reflect national inclinations, consciousness, landscapes and imaginaries. Whilst these problematic identities and narratives might be ‘opened up’ to collective negotiation or contestation by audiences at the screenings, it is often the case that a particular pedagogic agenda has been pre-arranged to direct these audience ‘improvisations’, paradoxically ‘fixing’ interpretations and allowing programmers to exert a form of control or authority over these processes of negotiation. In the case of IDERA, for example, this agenda is established in the questionnaires that the programmer, Stuart, routinely hands out to audiences before the screenings,

Film Impact Assessment

Gito: the Ungrateful (Leonce Ngabo, 1992)
IDERA Films presents two realities of Africa -- one presented by the media and the other presented in Burundi filmmaker Leonce Ngabo’s film Gito: the Ungrateful. Which is more accurate?

A. Impressions of Africa

Were your impressions of Burundi and Africa changed by the film?  (circle one)

Not at all  1  2  3  4  5  Significantly

What was the most striking or memorable image that changed your impression?

In your opinion are the people of Africa more or less able to cope with their own situation than you thought?

Less able  1  2  3  4  5  More able

Is there one image which demonstrates this that stands out in your mind?

B. Impressions of the Media

After viewing the film and listening to the media presentation, how accurate would you say the recent press reports are which portray these countries as war-torn zones, rife with tribal conflict?

Accurate  1  2  3  4  5  Inaccurate

Have your impressions of the role which the media plays in shaping people’s opinions been changed by the film and the presentation?

No change  1  2  3  4  5  Significantly

At what point in the film or presentation did this occur most strongly?

After the presentation, do you feel that you are more or less able to identify, analyze and deconstruct negative media images?

Less able  1  2  3  4  5  More able  □ No change

Figure 3 Questionnaire handed out to audiences during IDERA’s “Vues d’Afrique” series, screened at the Pacific Cinémathèque, May 1996.
effectively setting out the issues around which he wants discussion to crystallise (figure 3), and in his strategic selection and contextualisation of films:

"With the African series, I tried to highlight how different Africa is from most people's expectations... First we screened newsreel to point out that that's where people get most of their images of Africa. I mean, they lead us to believe that it's maybe completely war-torn or, you know, savages running around the jungle. So for the exhibition, we had mainly African feature films that showed normal cities and countryside, that were humorous, had no fighting...we avoided films that involved African mysticism, because although they're popular in African cinema, an audience over here just wouldn't be able to relate to them".

(Stuart, IDERA)

By screening newsreel against the context of feature films that he had selected to stand (in) for both African cinema and African society itself, Stuart encouraged his audience to approach critically those images they had built up of Africa from the media -- and it was to this exercise that he wanted to restrict his audiences' creative role in the exhibition. But in taking this authoritative stance towards his audiences' interpretations, he also legitimised a very particular 'way of knowing' African cinema and, indeed, Africa. This production of knowledge not only solved the problem of foreignness by overcoming difference, but also involved an unacknowledged loss, most obviously in the erasure of significant traditions of story-telling (mysticism) popular in African cinema.

Interestingly, in the case study it is precisely this kind of project that is most often identified as an area of contention and contradiction between the organisers themselves.

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*The questionnaire comments for this series reveal that what struck audiences most about the screenings was that they could actually identify with the films' images of "city life and city people".*
Some of the interviewees are highly critical of the invisible power relations that direct these ‘organised’ negotiations of meanings:

“It sounds like in some places they lock the door and say ‘Okay, now we will discuss this...’ It sounds terrible to begin with and I think really inappropriate. I mean if people do get into the films and want to talk about them amongst themselves, the content, whatever...then great, but I’d never push that. The good thing about the bar space is that it’s flexible. I mean, you go to a theatre and you can’t move your seats around, so your friends might be down at the other end of the aisle. Here, you can move the tables around to create your own little groups, you can be facing your friends and that’s enough in itself to encourage people to talk and think about the films”. (Paul, Vancouver Film School)

“Of course I want people to discuss the films, that’s important, but I really want them to come to their own conclusions. The way I like to view films is just to watch them and then go away and I’ll think about them and I’ll talk with my friends, or I won’t talk with my friends...that’s just less ‘forced’, you know?” (Caroline, Cineworks)

“I don’t want to force-feed people with some preordained agenda...I like people to come up with their own ideas about the work, but typically that’s something that goes on outside the cinema, based on the individuals and how much they want to talk about it amongst themselves. It’s less common that I’ll actually initiate something, and I think it’s probably a more natural process to let people do what they want with it. In a way I think it’s more productive and real and honest if it isn’t incorporated into the screening”. (Alex, Edison Electric)

Whilst some organisers feel these creative relationships are more productive or natural when played out outside the cinema, others have struggled with the dualistic identities of “active” and “passive” that are often attributed to spectatorship through these projects. Alan, for example, has attempted to self-critically interrogate those categories:

“I have to confess that there have been times when I’ve looked at the ballots that we ask people to fill in after a screening and it’s been a really depressing exercise...I’ve sat there and thought ‘Oh my God, is the audience that stupid, that passive?’ But you know, that’s something that you live with for a few
years and then you realise that it’s not true at all. You realise that you can’t
endow your audience with any great theoretical inroad, and that it’s a fallacy and
a really dangerous fallacy to think that just watching a film and then leaving is
passive viewing. Personally, I now give a lot of credit to what happens inside
the head; what’s happening neurologically in terms of language processing itself
is much more sophisticated than that. The whole idea of critical as opposed to
passive engagements with film turns out to be just too simple to be of any use”.
(Alan, International Film Festival)

**Negotiating Audience Identities and The Boundaries of Belonging**

“When you work inside of an event like this, you realise that it explodes those
types of neat boundaries that we sometimes like to draw around our audiences
and around groups of people in the city. The more you work with film festivals,
the more you realise they mean many different things to many different people”.
(Alan, Vancouver Film Festival)

By situating spectatorship within a multitude of social, spatial and intersubjective
relations, the organisers of Vancouver’s independent film venues explore not only the
malleability of textual identities, but also the instability of audience identities. By
mobilising spectators’ personal experiences and histories alongside the referential
systems of film texts, they highlight the multiplicity of interpellations and shifting
subjective formations within which audiences are already constituted *outside of the
cinema*. Furthermore, through the different ways in which their exhibitions and
experiments address and engage spectators, the organisers themselves participate in this
constant reinvention of audience identities. Indeed, a prominent theme emerging from
the interviewees’ discourses revolves around their attempts to use film exhibition to
establish new and dynamic relationships between groups and communities. For Ken at
Video In, for example, one of the most important aspects of programming is “to find and
then link together the different communities who might be interested in a particular screening”. Similarly, Alan, the director of the Vancouver Film Festival, argues that its screenings and events create opportunities for spectators to pursue alternative conceptions of community. Through the strategic promotion of individual screenings, the festival’s organisers consciously ignite connections between otherwise disparate (and even ghettoised) communities. They venture to stretch the boundaries of belonging by constructing exhibitions as vehicles of exchange and mutual respect and individual film texts as routes to exploring cultural difference and similarities:

“If we have a film that’s set in India, we’ll promote it to the Indian community...and then find out if there’s any relationship between the film and other groups in the city. So if it’s about a political struggle at a hydroelectric dam, then we’ll talk to environmental groups, and if it has a female director, then we’ll talk to Women in Film. We try to bring different groups together as a kind of dialogic practice...we end up with this really interesting cultural mix and can really draw out their differences and similarities...and, you know, we’ll bring in volunteers to speak to those language groups and they also become involved in piecing together those connections”. (Alan, Vancouver Film Festival)

These attempts to create opportunities for spectators’ to explore new relations of proximity and mutuality, resonate with Elspeth Probyn’s recent re-theorisation of “desire”.9 In Outside Belongings, Probyn challenges psychoanalytic theory’s hold on desire by moving away from the notion of ‘desiring identity’ and seizing instead upon the trope of ‘belonging’. She argues that the latter captures more accurately:

“...the desire for some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places or modes of being, and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fuelled by yearning... If

we live within a grid or network of different points, we live through the desire to make them connect differently". 10

Of course, this recasting of desire in the cinema is mobilised with different intentions by the various organisers in the case study, with the terms “community” and “belonging” opening up to shifting and multiple interpretations. For both Caroline and Mary, for example, “community” represents the longed-for, but elusive, connections between those involved in the film industry in the city:

“The industry’s so very fragmented in Vancouver that I think our members are desperate to feel some sense of community. We try to create a space where that feeling might emerge...where members can celebrate eachother’s work, learn from eachother’s work and experiences, and you know, feed off that”. (Mary, Vancouver Women in Film)

“Part of what I try to do by getting up and thanking people for coming or introducing filmmakers who might be there, is to bring people together and encourage them to strike up relationships. Although that might be a bit too much to expect, it is a step towards tracing some lines of community around those people involved in independent film locally”. (Caroline, Cineworks)

Whilst the interviewees clearly applaud one anothers’ attempts to shape audience identities into patterns of belonging, the exclusionary nature of these relationships should not be overlooked. Inevitably, the language of community and the connective aesthetics it is used to describe, work to ‘code’ events or cinema spaces so that certain people are more likely to participate than others. Alan, for example, recognises that the film festival requires a kind of “insider knowledge”, so that only “those who attend regularly or who are directly targeted and those who are really culturally plugged in...the young, hip, urban

10Ibid, 19.
crowd” are likely to have access to its full range of events. Other organisers, however, remain less critical of these relationships:

“I think one of the things that attracts people to this place is that there’s this sense of community...I mean, although it’s a members-only organisation, anyone can join; but still there’s a sense of ‘clubiness’ about the space, and loyalty to it...there’s a very loyal, devoted following who come here, many of whom volunteer to work in the theatre in the evenings”. (Jim, Pacific Cinémathèque)

Finally, images of community infuse other organisers’ discourses in more subtle ways, weaving nostalgic narratives of ‘family’ and ‘neighbourhood’ around their audiences and cinema spaces:

“It wasn’t that long ago that going out to a movie was a real community event and that’s what we want it to be again. The festival will have a sense of community spirit or civic pride about it. It’s a family event”. (Brian, Something Old...Something New)

“Before the advent of multiplexes, every little section of town had their local cinema, and the local cinema was just that: it took part in its neighbourhood and was an important component in the neighbourhood feeling and togetherness. That’s kind of gone now, but we still try to retain a sense of it...in the way people talk about this place, and you know The Ridge’s history...and it’s been the same way since 1950”. (Ray, The Ridge)

These images not only seem strangely at odds with the organisers’ counter-cultural claims to alterity, but also trace patterns of (not) belonging that are consonant with the discourses of property developers in the city, and the imaginaries that are being woven around the city’s exclusive, newly affluent, gentrified neighbourhoods. The organisers of the newly opened Fifth Avenue Cinema, for example, use precisely this nostalgic community
rhetoric whilst describing the cinema’s role in the ‘redevelopment’ of the Burrard Slopes district:

“Our neighbourhood cinemas really support the community, whether it’s soccer, T-ball or the rape crisis centre. These theatres are closer to the community; they relate to the community. And the community relates back...we had a great deal of support from the Kitsilano residents’ association when we first decided to develop this centre”. (Tom, Fifth Avenue Cinema)

Interestingly, it is noticeably this particular narrative of community that most often captures the imagination of the local press in reporting on independent film exhibitions in the city; a final point that reiterates that the relations that are played out between film audiences, exhibitions and texts are constantly open to shaping and (re)negotiation in a multitude of spaces which we might otherwise consider ‘outside’ of the cinema.\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{Space for Contradictions...}

Viewing the exhibitors’ discourses about spectatorship through the lens of space not only draws attention to the complex ways in which they ‘locate’ spectators or ‘map’ the relationships between subjects, spaces and cinema, but also highlights the discontinuities and contradictions that \textit{destabilise} these relationships. With this in mind, I should like to conclude by outlining an example in which one interviewee’s use of spatial themes works to paradoxically destabilise, and even subvert, what he identifies as the principal aim of his exhibitions.

\textsuperscript{11}The \textit{Vancouver Sun}, for example, ran a series of articles after the closure of four of Vancouver’s independent repertory cinemas in 1989, all playing on images of “community theatres” which provided “refuges” from the city and endowed their neighbourhoods with “village atmospheres”. See, for example: Aird, Elizabeth (1990) “Fade to Black”, \textit{Vancouver Sun}, June 14.
Alex first opened the Edison Electric two years' ago to provide an exhibition venue in Vancouver for experimental films, which he felt were being pushed to the fringes by other exhibitors in the city. He argues that before the Edison, experimental films not only received little screen-time, but were also screened in contexts which increased resistance amongst audiences and endorsed preconceptions of their 'inaccessibility':

"Experimental works would be presented sporadically and without any kind of follow-through -- like 'Here's the film, here's the theatre and you forget about the space, the context'. It just kinda annoys the hell out of me that this stuff doesn't get shown more and I don't believe for a second that it's not watchable. I think it's very watchable; it's just that we haven't been trained or educated in a way that allows this stuff to be watched. We generally stop and just say 'Uuuh, I don't get it, so I guess it's art' and leave it at that."

The Edison, then, represents Alex's attempts to break down this resistance by presenting experimental works in ways which have "something to do with tactility, tangibility, touchy-feely..." and thus, rather than alienating audiences, give them "something that they can get their hands dirty with". What this philosophy effectively translates into is the presentation of experimental works in contexts which provide spectators with multiple ways of reflecting upon them, and which underline audiences' creative relationships with the texts. Presented with live bands, with dance, with filmmakers, with wacky 1950s industrial films, the films themselves are transformed from something distant and indigestible into something that audiences can describe, make humorous, subvert, criticise, historicise or add irony to. Alex also attempts to encourage these relationships in the physical space of the Edison, which is intended to create what he terms "a kind of comfort zone". Beyond the accessibility of the storefront described
earlier, the Edison has moveable seating that can be rearranged by spectators and a large projection room window, through which the impenetrable and ‘invisible’ apparatus becomes part of the exhibition, and the live manipulation of images by filmmakers creates new ‘ways of seeing’:

“I consciously thought I wanted this to be flexible, comfortable... an unpretentious, intimate space, ‘homey’ in a way... like I hate to use the word ‘funky’, but you what I mean? In a way I feel like I’m putting on shows in a kind of giant living room and inviting people over”.

For Alex, then, the discourse of ‘home’ inscribes his space with ideals of accessibility, comfort, intimacy and inclusion. But significantly, given the aim of Alex’s exhibitions, this description -- what Angelika Bammer calls the “mythification of ‘home’ as an almost universal site of utopian (be)longing”\(^\text{12}\) -- overlooks an important set of feminist arguments that focus upon the exclusionary and territorialising resonances of ‘home’. These arguments underline that whilst we often retain ‘home’ as a utopian ideal of shelter and safety, its ideology derives much of its meaning from identification with heteropatriarchal formations, and its space is frequently experienced as a site of alienation, oppression and violence, by women and children especially.\(^\text{13}\) These traces of vulnerability and danger, though unacknowledged and unintended, infiltrate Alex’s construction of the Edison, and work against his aims for accessibility and comfort, to remind us that some people might be deterred by an invitation into his “giant living room”.


Chapter 5:
Re-Shaping Spectatorship

At the very start of this work, I reflected upon the multiple resonances of “Cinema for where you live”. I began with a self-reflexive project, unravelling the spaces that I traverse and occupy, and viewing my relationships with the cinema through multiple lenses of the different identities I live and the experiences and meanings I encounter on a daily basis. “Cinema for where you live”, then, invoked theoretical projects of mapping the subject and by bringing these geographies to bear upon “ways of seeing” film, established space as a terrain for exploring the interactions and connections between spectatorship and subjectivity. Significantly, in the course of this thesis, whilst these connections or “geographies of spectatorship” provide a dense and descriptive means of conceptualising the spectator, they also emerge as equally unstable and untenable. Even as I write this conclusion, the meanings of where I live have drastically changed (most immediately in terms of my location in geographic space, but also in more subtle ways) from those I identified several months ago in chapter 1. “Cinema for where you live”, then, emerges as an interpretative category, malleable and constantly open to reformation, and it is precisely this elasticity that differentiates its spatial approach to spectatorship from the psychoanalytic and ethnographic models that dominate existing debates within film theory. The project of mapping spectatorship both challenges the otherworldliness and isolation of the cinema and, by bringing the “overdetermination of spectators” into view (the ways in which spectators are energetically entangled in a continuing series of overlapping subject-positions and, it follows, ways of seeing film, before and outside of
the cinema) allows us to bridge the psychic and the political, the space of the unconscious and the materiality of everyday lives. Viewing spectatorship through the lens of space reveals that film theory’s critical impasse (in which psychoanalytic and ethnographic approaches are becoming increasingly polarised) is the result of insufficiently theorised complications, in other words: the persistence of “ways of seeing” that fall as hybrid forms in-between the assumptions of the two approaches. Moreover, as the historiographies discussed in chapter 3 demonstrate, the flexibility and inclusivity of a spatial approach make it possible to address these hybrid ways of seeing and to express and explore the tensions, disjunctures and contradictions that mark spectatorship as a site of in-betweenness.

By revealing the ways in which the language of space is already operative in film theory, one thing I hope to have accomplished in this thesis is the extrication of psychoanalytic theories of spectatorship from charges of domination and control, and labels of “master narrative”. Tracing and exploring the fabrics of spatiality that underlie Christian Metz’s and Laura Mulvey’s models, reveals their constructions of spectators as encapsulated and coherent spaces as fragile identities and makes it clear that the spectatorial positions they anticipate are actually less fixed and rigid than they first appear (without being, however, totally fluid). Viewing their texts through the lens of space usefully draws attention to the gaps, erasures and weaknesses that infuse both theorists’ discourses of spectatorship - - vulnerabilities that they paradoxically highlight through their attempts to conceal and fix them. I have suggested, however, that it is the persistence of these gaps and
vulnerabilities (specifically, feminist critics’ re-articulations of these weaknesses) that allows us to salvage some of the theoretical insights of apparatus theories, and maintain that there is still “something to be learned from the moving image and its apparatus about the spectators who gaze at it, look at it, glance at it, or avert their eyes from it”.

Significantly, however, whilst the project of mapping the spectator reclaims the unconscious as an important site of spectatorship, it also foregrounds the sense in which the psyche is only one of a multiplicity of spaces in which meanings become attached to spectatorship. The trope of ‘boundary’ has emerged as a recurrent theme in this work, referring to boundaries that delimit the subject, boundaries that designate hegemonic and counter-hegemonic ways of seeing, and even boundaries sketched in as traces of belonging by film exhibitors in Vancouver. Crucially, however, viewed through the lens of the elasticity and revisability of space, these boundaries and the spaces they encircle, are subject to constant reinvention: stretching, shaping, and even dissolution. Possibly the most important consequence of this has emerged as the dissolution of the boundary that separates the psyche and the city, allowing the recognition that spectatorial identities are in a constant process of re-creation in social, physical, corporeal and discursive, as well as psychic, spaces.

By locating spectatorial identities within the complex and often contradictory entanglements of these different “spaces of spectatorship”, the approach mobilised in this

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thesis also opens up opportunities for feminist theorists to explore the possibilities of new desiring identities -- alternative female positions of desire -- in the cinema. Its insistence that spectatorial identities do not divide up neatly into hegemonic and counter-hegemonic camps and, hence, emphasis upon spectatorial hybridities, demands a recognition of those simultaneously complicit and intersubjective itineraries of spectatorship that are identified by Giuliana Bruno as "a step toward a desire of one’s own". By incorporating the theorisation of realms of experience, mutual recognition and the materiality of everyday lives, a spatial approach to spectatorship introduces into the cinema subjective formations which are not shaped by the phallocentric mirror. Whilst these formations inhabit the cinema, the apparatus cannot prerogate a masochistic response from female spectators. Instead, the cinema is mapped as a space where identification with heteropatriarchal forms might be resisted, or where masochistic positions of desire might be recast to open up other (female) pleasures in film-going. Finally, this encounter between geography and film not only sheds light upon the ways in which women’s relationships with the cinema might be unpacked in new and exciting ways, but also, by foregrounding the inevitability of hybrid ways of seeing, eases the utopian burden that is often placed upon feminist filmmakers attempting to develop an emphatically "alternative" cinematic practice.

Space, then, would appear to bring together the different dimensions of spectatorship that interest critics. Through its inclusivity and reformative impulses, the notion of the spaces

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of spectatorship is able to address film theory's critical impasse around the spectator. Uncovering the disparate geographies of spectatorship that already exist within film theory, this spatial approach bridges the gap between psychoanalytic and ethnographic approaches and, from this position of in-betweenness and instability, provides new routes to theorising the spectator and cinematic desire.
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