Directed by Manmohan Desai, the classic Bachchan vehicles of the '70s and '80s delight in endlessly recapitulating the same set of heroic conventions, centered around an unbelievably resourceful and yet plain-folksy and substandard-Hindi-spouting protagonist (who is actually, in most cases, the lost, abandoned, or the separated son of an industrialist)—a sort of proletarian James Bond. This hero, clad in the 'slums-eye-view' of killer couture, makes impassioned speeches denouncing the hypocrisy of the rich and their abuse of the poor, while moving with ease in their corrupt society, eventually regaining his own rightful place in it (as well as a beautiful, rich bride who is, however, generally fairly peripheral to the plot).

At the same time, this angry young hero remains a staunch upholder of the patriarchal family, a heartfelt champion of the unitary nation, and (usually, and despite outbursts against the hypocrisy of priests and mullahs and occasionally against God himself) a pious believer in divine intervention and in the essential fairness of fate. He is also generally his own comic sidekick (though he may have one or more additional ones in his orbit), alternating slapstick routines and ludicrous disguises with all-out fistfights and car chases, and impassioned and tear-stained declamations. Within these well-worn conventions, each successful Bachchan film attempts to introduce some new twist and to find innovative ways of exploiting the possibilities of the actor's lanky physique, which anchors virtually every scene.

Here, Bachchan is Hira ("diamond"), the product of a pre-marital affair between a famous singer, Vidya (Rakhee Gulzar), and a playboy, prince-turned-businessman Ranvir Singh (Amjad Khan). He moves on to greener pastures when Vidya announces her pregnancy and deserts her. Vidya dies at childbirth and the baby is given away by her guardian to Vidya's alcoholic chauffeur Gangu, who then, relentlessly exploits and abuses the child who
appears, as usual, in a series of vignettes played by Bachchan-resembling child actors of ascending age. Despite all vicissitudes, *Hira* grows from strength to self-made strength—even his name is self-chosen, taken from a stray dog that befriended him as a child. Although his plucky self-confidence is always edged with anguished self-pity for the countless wrongs he has suffered, he grows up to be strong man both in the physical sense and in the worldly ways. Eventually he discovers that he is not *Gangu’s* son (though the drunkard refuses to tell him who his real parents were), but a *laawaris*: an “orphan,” but also a term used for property that is “unwanted” or “unclaimed.”

After a brief stint of factory work (which he performs dressed in a skin-tight zippered jump suit that alludes to laborers’ garb while looking suitably in the designer mould), *Hira* displays his considerable talents in a brothel brawl, accompanied by the comic disco song *Aapka kya hoga* (“What will become of you my lord”?), earning the grudging admiration of his nemesis, the dissolute playboy *Mahinder* (Ranjeet), whose wardrobe also outlines his bourgeois status, in a period that Hindi films showcased the class conflicts in almost all their narratives. It turns out that *Mahinder* runs a timber empire in Kashmir for his own father, who has hence retired from the business world in order to devote his life to charitable service, especially to the welfare of abandoned and illegitimate children—and who is, of course, none other than the reformed *Ranvir*, *Hira’s* own real father, now tormented by guilt for his past misdeeds. *Mahinder* puts *Hira* in charge of his most obstreperous mill hands (among whom *Hira* quickly establishes himself as the alpha male) and also gives him special assignments like demolishing hutments and a *Hanuman* temple to make way for a “five star hotel.” *Hira* spares the temple and leads the homeless poor to the mansion of *Mahinder*’s girlfriend, where he contrives to have them accommodated while compelling *Mahinder* to build a “model town” for them. Eventually he runs afoul of *Mahinder* and earns the affection of the pious *Ranvir*, who disapproves of *Mahinder*’s misdeeds but, naturally, does nothing to check them. *Hira* himself develops a love-hate relationship with *Ranvir*, to whom he is strangely attracted.

His love interest comes in the form of *Mohini* (Zeenat Aman), a spoiled vixen he quickly tames, who is also (unbeknownst to him), the daughter of the very lawyer who disposed of him as an infant. He also champions the cause of a potter whose sister *Mahinder* tried to ravish, and when the poor potter loses his arms (echoing *Mother India* and *Sholay*), *Hira* even does a stint of expertly shaping clay on the wheel (reminding all of the admiring comment a ditzy New York matron is supposed to have made), on hearing the rumour that conductor and composer Leonard Bernstein was bisexual: “Is there anything that man can’t do?”

Hindi commercial cinema usually considers the escapist
fare- a view that has strengthened prejudices against the genre to the point
where it has been neglected not only by the intellectuals, who deem it trivial,
but also by serious film critics. Implicit in such a view is the belief that these
films are not only kitsch, devoid of any aesthetic value, but that they fully
divorced from reality, existing in a fantasy land created by themselves. “They
are at best exotic products of another world, patronized by people of inferior
intellectual capabilities.”

Such vignettes of the hyper-sufficient Bachchan hero (e.g., his
knowledge of numerous Indian languages and the characteristic mannerisms
of their speakers) are the real highlights as the film winds its circuitous but
predictable course toward father-son reconciliation. The pièce-de-resistance in
this respect is unquestionably the folkish spoof song Mere angane mein (“In
my courtyard”), the film’s standout hit, improbably sung in the opening
segment by Vidya as a restaurant number (and ostensibly, a popular tune
that became a heart-lifting inspiration to her abandoned son throughout his
troubled childhood), and then brilliantly reprised near the climax by Hira
himself (with Bachchan providing his own singing voice), and featuring a
series of drop-dead drag impersonations, accompanying crudely comic verses
(ed, unfortunately, as are all the film’s songs) about the merits of various sorts
of wives. The translated version of the song goes something like this:

The fellow whose wife is too tall, he too is well known. Just prop her
against the wall and who needs a ladder! The fellow whose wife is too
fat, he too is well known. Just lay her down on the bedding and who
needs a mattress! The fellow whose wife is too dark, he too is well
known. Just gaze at her long enough and who needs eye shadow! The
fellow whose wife is too fair, he too is well known. Just sit her down in a
room. And who needs electricity! The fellow whose wife is too small, he
too is well known. Just take her in your lap and who needs a kid!

The song became a massive hit, thoroughly enjoyed by men and women
alike. Unfortunately many overlooked the derogatory remarks about the
various means to make use of women, and that too of the wives. The song
went on to prove that imperfect wives can be otherwise made use and how!!
Bachchan’s rendition of the song somehow seems more sexist and crude
because he carelessly cross dresses, behaving like a woman and yet maintains
his masculinity. “Men have cross-dressed for what have been considered
erotic reasons deriving from psychopathological drives.”

In most western societies being a man and demonstrating masculinity
is more highly prized than being a woman and displaying femininity. “Some
non-Western societies however are more tolerant and even encourage men to behave like women and women to act like men. Laawaris literally means "Without an Heir" but it can also signify "Orphaned" more generally, somebody who has not been claimed by anybody, somebody whose parents do not want to acknowledge or accept. Somebody, in short, that society rejects. The movie Laawaris tells the story of one such boy.

The films of Bachchan of this period "brush aside all questions of morality and ethics and present revenge as a primeval value. The discourse is limited to issues of power and survival, violence is projected as a necessary instrument of achieving both." Laawaris is a humdinger of a class conflict movie. It is about redemptive pathos Bollywood-style where cultural and class centrisms are unproblematically gendered. Corruption, poverty and unemployment, the popular issues dealt with in, films leave all the female protagonists unaffected, they remain as simple fillers; the campaign against all evil has to be led by the man, who therefore becomes the cause and the trigger off factor for all social revolutions. In all such films, the hero, though he belongs to a subordinate class, rises to equal his tormentors. His image is of one who can give justice to his class when the state machinery cannot. "He protects them from official tyrannies like the demolition of their hutments (consider the innumerable scenes where the demolition of slums is stopped by the hero in the nick of time) and he functions as a private adjudicator dispensing instant justice which the official-legal system fails to deliver."

Women remain exploited but never get a chance to agitate. In fact the corruption and poverty portrayed in the film are representations of an unreal poverty whose parameters "are not sharply observed social comment, nor a deep identification with the human dimensions of hardship, lack of opportunity, the struggle to survive; they are simple shallow stereotypes, a plasterboard issue for picaresque set dressing."

The revolt in this film is "not directed against the nature and structure of institutions fulfilling specific social roles according to the demands of the larger social system, but against the character disorders of the personnel manning these institutions, who actually are themselves victims of the system." Hira's first meeting with Mahinder affirms his status as a morally defunct man. Though Hira too frequents the brothel, he is not a customer just a local goon extracting the loot from the madam of the brothel. "The givens of the system are never brought under question; they are not even raised, "contraction between detached stability into explosive force and back into self-enclosure". A device employed by other Hollywood hero figures such as Clint Eastwood but in Bombay cinema it has become a distinctive marker of
Amitabh Bachchan. It is this behavior coupled with a distinct physical appearance that has been “harnessed by Bachchan and the film makers in a series of roles that have inscribed him into contemporary Indian culture as a disruptive modern force that cannot be ignored.” While Amitabh Bachchan catapulted to celestial status with the portrayal of the angry young man, disillusioned by the state and corruption in the society, the female protagonists in the film continued to essay the same stereotypical roles in the movies to come. Bachchan was the avenger par excellence and his films often used violence as the as the necessary instrument for the gain of power and survival. Here's an example from the narrative of the film to showcase the aggression that the hero of the masses portrayed in their roles in films.

Amitabh: (in an aloof, rough voice) So where do I work?

Factory Supervisor: You will work in that area of the factory. Hey, why are you speaking so angrily? Soften up.

Amitabh: This is my soft style, if I use my hard style, you will be quaking in your feet.

Factory Supervisor: Ok, Ok, just do your work.

*You belong to the garbage, rich people's garbage. These rich people eat and throw their leftovers in the garbage. You are that leftover.* This paradigmatic scene in the film throws Hira's already embittered life completely off balance. It is paradigmatic in a number of ways. First, it brings to a close the basic premise of the film—that society only values those who belong. Hira does not belong at birth; he does not belong to his drunken father; he does not belong to the workplace where he works. He only begins to belong when he is acknowledged by the class structure that he fights against. Specifically, the film seems to be saying that the vehicles, which establish his new identity, are those of class excess (those of the rich man's son's repeating the sexual/moral compromise of the father) but equally those of upper class magnanimity. The fact that Hira's salvation comes at the hands of the rich man's daughter speaks of the inherent displacement of a lower class person like Hira who can only be rehabilitated financially through the son and humanistically through the fictive bonds of brotherhood bestowed by the daughter and the blessings of an unacknowledged paternity.

Other cultural points that may puzzle the novice foreign viewer include Ranvir's unwillingness, despite his tormenting guilt, to acknowledge Hira as his son even after he knows his identity—a weakness that is supposed to reflect Ranvir's helplessness before the “standards of society” which he dare not challenge. Then there is the fact that even heinous crimes like murder and
rape, when committed by a son, can be summarily pardoned if the culprit
utters a self-abasing "maaf karna!" ("Forgive me!") before his father, whose
honour, it seems, is the only thing that can ever really be seriously injured in
this moral universe. Upholding this is the constant preoccupation even of a
superhero like Hira, who abruptly and tellingly shifts from his usual cocky
and assertive mode (when dealing with women and other men) to one of
cowering obsequiousness in the presence of the patriarch. And though
glamorous women abound, it is the physical proximity of males, affirming
their indissoluble blood bond that provides the film's devoutly desired
consummation.

Janet Todd, author of Women and Film, states that, "Women do not
exist in American film. Instead we find another creation, made by men,
growing out of their ideological imperatives." The depiction of women in
Bollywood cinema is especially significant to an understanding of the
contrasting images presented in film noir, since both bodies of films express
their attitudes toward the family largely through the female characters.
Women in films of the 1950s, and '60s seldom ventured outside of their
socially prescribed roles as sweethearts, wives, or mothers to the male hero.
By providing a romantic interest for the hero, the woman served the function
traditionally assigned to her gender (particularly in films) while allowing the
male character to play out his own pre-ordained role. Women in some films
were allowed to be heroic only within the boundaries of their proper sphere.

Meanwhile, by far the most common image of women in classical
Bollywood cinema was the wife or mother who was not the heroine, but merely
a supporting character for the film's star. Although they may tend to
temporarily resist the hero's advances or oppose his wishes, traditional
women seldom are depicted as threatening to or incompatible with the hero,
the nuclear family, or the status quo. Instead, they promote the ideal of the
traditional family by giving up all resistance to the hero, submitting to male
authority, and embracing their proper place in the nuclear family.

The Ideal of Motherhood: Images of Feminity and Maternal purity in
films.

Mothers in Hindi films have for long led iconic lives on the silver screen
representing piety and family values. Hollywood in turn has portrayed single
mothers as prominent characters since the era of silent film, says Lisa Barry,
a gender and film scholar at Albion College in Michigan, who specialises in the
cinematic depiction of single mothers. "But for almost as long as they have
been portrayed, they have been characterised as socially deviant or at least
responsible for their kids' troubles."\(^\text{13}\) But like all other films of this era the women who portray the characters are feeble, and unwilling to take risks against the norms of society.

“There is a huge hierarchy within single motherhood,” says Brophy. “It’s far more acceptable if you’ve gone through divorce or been widowed because at least you’ve had children in wedlock and conformed to social norms. You get more sympathy if you’ve been widowed because it’s not your fault. There’s a sliding scale and single mothers who choose to be single mothers are the lowest of the low.”\(^\text{14}\) Bollywood cinema invariably chooses to focus on the mother-child relationship, wrenching tears and emotions out of the "Mother India" and "Deewaar" formula of filial fulfillment.

From Mehboob Khan’s "Mother India" to Farah Khan’s "Main Hoon Na..." mothers tend to let their sons consume their existence as though their wretched lives depended on them. Fathers are mere fixtures and not a genuine presence in their children’s lives. The formulaic portrayal of mothers took shape in 1957 with the film "Mother India." The mother in that film became a national symbol, says Bhattacharya (1990), symbolizing India itself as well as the mother as martyr and all things pure. As in real life, movie mothers come in many varieties. But certain archetypes are repeated throughout film history. Epitomized as the 'Maternal Paragon', these are movie mothers at their most idealized form. Full of love and wise counsel, they hold the family together through good times and often bad. Then there are these, torn Mothers, those who deal with the choice between motherhood and a career. Sometimes they choose both, with variable results. Sacrificing Mothers are the ones who sacrifice their own happiness for that of their children. In many cases, this entails distancing themselves from the child’s life to overcome the stigma of illegitimacy or lower class roots. The image of mothers on film is mirrored in human development. Many of the ideas we have about mothers are infantile fantasies that get translated into social stereotypes.

When a child’s initial fantasy of their mother’s total devotion to her or him is shattered by conflicting needs, two images develop in the child’s mind. One is of the angelic Madonna type, who is asexual and totally devoted to the child’s needs. The other is a lewd monstrous cruel mother who either ignores or dominates them. Hira’s notion of his mother is quite similar since he was abandoned and punished for something that he was not responsible for. The portrayals of women in this era too were of the same mould that we have today. Women characters who were most favorably portrayed were either courting a husband or in a family role. We are at the same juncture even after decades of post-feminism. A basic theme that Bollywood films have churned out over and over again is that women are fundamentally different from men.
They are these manipulative yet submissive creatures. Yet it's their vulnerability that Bollywood has cashed in, portraying their sexuality or their role in the family.

The representations of films in India often offer a stereotypically prosaic image: a huddled mass cramped, in a dingy hall, transfixed by jammed between articles of everyday living. Women's images are unfortunately something close to that. "Family relationships, their ramifications and consequences are central to the plot." Most often, the figure of the woman is cast as posing a threat to the unity of the family and the narrative movement pivots on the restoration of the family order. Like Vidya, who is a commoner and is a nightclub singer, a profession that disallows women to get married in good families even to this day. They could be kept as playthings or mistress of spoilt rich men but were seldom allowed to procreate and even if they did, the children borne out of such a relationship never got the family name or the rights of the biological father. Rosie Thomas offers an excellent and sensitive account of the manner in which the female figure is deployed in the blockbuster Mother India.

These narratives use the family as a metaphor for nation. This rhetorical turn recasts an imagined community into an organic construct. In turn, such a formulation, presents women's roles within it as biologically determined rather than as ideological constructs. "The clarification of cultural and national identity in such narratives helps reassert gender difference deployed in the blockbuster Mother India." In Bollywood films, female characters are often sketched into a very limited binary form of good and bad. The good woman is characteristically depicted as chaste, virtuous, faithful, and self-sacrificing. She is the perfect blend of modernity and tradition, doting on all members of the extended family. The bad woman is not just the contrary she is also seen as 'westernized,' "a trait that is signaled through her clothes, her lifestyle choices, her sexual promiscuity, and often her rejection of the institution of marriage."

The conflict between tradition and modernity is also repeatedly invoked in Bollywood narratives. "The binary modernity/tradition, whether it is employed to indicate conflict or complementarity, amounts to an explanation, 'a conceptual or belief system' which regulates thinking about the modern Indian social formation." Invariably this conflict is resolved through a disavowal of modernity and recuperation of "Indian tradition."

Significantly, the meanings about Indian culture and the tradition/modernity conflict are materialized on the bodies of the good and
bad Indian women described above. In Bollywood narratives, (the good) woman is a signifier of a pure authentic India. She is a repository of cultural values and has to be shored against threats from evil forces, of external origin and increasingly from within the borders of the nation-state. This problematic construction of a gendered cultural nationalism is not a new phenomenon. As Christopher Pinney, in *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs* (1997) has asserted, throughout India’s collision with colonialism, woman as a figure has been continually reinvented as a repository of an interior, purer and more valuable tradition that stood opposed to the moral compromises and degradation of rule by foreigners. Nor is this invocation of the female figure as representative of the nation unique to Indian popular culture. Indeed, it has been an abiding concern for feminists in different countries. For instance, Susan Friedman theorizes that the relation between gender and nation is fraught with contradictions and ambivalences. Women are often “caught between identification of national aspirations and the recognition of men’s special privilege within most state formations. The use of the female figure to iconize the nation … often obscures or even embodies the inequities of gender relations within the nation.”

Within the Indian context this symbolic function, however, assumes greater salience from the colonial past. As David Morley in *“Home, Exile, Homeland : Film, Media and the Politics of Place”*,(1999), has pointed out, boundary maintenance and boundary transgression are key acts in definitions of home and homelessness. This narrative adheres closely to earlier Bollywood conventions of decorum and representations of desire. Sexual attraction and intimacy are signified when a couple holds hands, there are no kisses or any other steamy scenes characteristic of our movies of today. In his interview with the *New York Times* correspondent Hali and his associate list these characteristics as one of Hindi cinemas intrinsic achievements, the absence of even a single kiss. The film’s characterization of the female characters adheres closely to the Bollywood repertoire.

Like the “good” women of early Bollywood narratives, *Vidya* does not define the desirable Indian woman as one who shuns all signs of ‘westernization.’ She is not chaste, yet virtuous, patient, long-suffering and defined only by her relationship to the family/ through Ranbir’s unborn child. *Vidya* crudely portrays these women within the limited grammar made available by the Bollywood vamp. They are sexually submissive, and/or promiscuous. The threat they pose to the stability of the Indian family can be eliminated only through the presence of the “good” Indian woman. Therefore when Ranvir learns of her pregnancy, she loses her physical presence in the narrative. If one is to analyze the narrative in the film after the announcement
of the undesired pregnancy, it is quite evident that Vidya would have to end her dreams of being alleviated from her present class into a respectable family and being a wife or a mother.

Ranvir Singh: Who is this third person? Who is coming between us?

Vidya: The third person is no stranger. He is yours, a sign of our love.

Ranvir Singh: Don’t say such disgusting things, such evil things. One’s youth is meant for having fun, not for having kids. And there are so many people who want you. Don’t tell me you are trying to pass this kid off as mine when there are so many others in your life.

Vidya slaps him.

Ranvir Singh: Today is India’s Independence Day, so go announce it from the Red Fort, go announce it on the radio, go and sing the song of my humiliation. And if you are not satisfied, then go somewhere else where you will not have to reveal the father’s name.

Effectively, the narrative asserts that while men in power could romance women form the working class, they could only have children from a legitimate marriage. Specifically, Indian women are enjoined to remain traditional within the domestic and public realms to ensure the maintenance of Indian cultural identity. Vidya’s rejection by her lover and her subsequent death are a celebration of “traditional” values and thus offers an object lesson for audiences; it provides an unambiguous definition of what it women should be and the values by which all must live. Within the transnational optic, the family emerges as the moral, ethical and political horizon of national and cultural interest. It is produced as a site of vulnerability symbolizing the danger the culture faces. Family is the primary location from which individuals can feel their affiliation with one another as part of a cultural nation and negotiate their (long-distance) relation to it.

Significantly, anxieties about the loss of cultural identity in the diaspora are displaced on to woman’s conduct. Although Indian masculinity is depicted as vulnerable to the predations of the West, it is woman not man whose behavior comes under scrutiny and regulation. Partha Chatterjee, in Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse? (1986) has theorized that the anti-colonial nationalist movement of the nineteenth century rhetorically and strategically sealed out the domestic arena and the space of the home from the influences of colonialism. Within such a configuration woman not only became the bearer of Indian culture, she was also the site of past freedom and future nationhood. Within the diaspora the
family and domestic sphere are conceptualized in a manner akin to the colonial era; external threats to the stability of the family are countered by recuperating the “traditional” Indian woman, one who will help sustain and maintain a cultural imaginary. “Vidya articulates the affective experience of dislocation and displacement; it gives voice to the experience of social marginality.”

This also outlines just how nostalgic and anachronistic such an image is when juxtaposed with narratives that address audiences. The image of women confirms to our contemporary prime time narratives have reverted to formulaic depictions, which some commentators have characterized as constituting a “backlash.” Independent women are presented as those requiring regulation and by narrative’s end revert to being doormats or shadows. Ironically, some claim that the material lives of rural women have improved with the spread of satellite and cable channels. In his ethnographic study of television use in rural Maharashtra, Kirk Johnson (2000) documents the different ways in which the presence of the television apparatus has altered interpersonal relations between men and women. Most notably, men have started helping women with their domestic tasks to accommodate their viewing preferences.

The “traditional” Indian woman whose activities center on and are limited to the domestic realm is celebrated in these narratives. The ‘New Indian Woman’ configured in these melodramas is modern, western and cosmopolitan in her lifestyle yet remains true to her “Indian” values. She is a “dramatic and polished breed”, integrating and yet quite distinct from the mythological archetypes that have been celebrated and upon which most entertainment narratives were based. Her presence allows the narratives to deal with the anxieties surrounding globalization processes but in a manner that reconfigures the global within the space of the nation and not vice versa. Woman becomes the terrain for the articulation of a cultural critique of globalization.

These narratives reveal the complex ways in which global cultural products and a globalized material culture has suffused the Indian socius. The transnational optic facilitated by such criss-crossing and interpenetrating vectors of the global and the local necessitates that Indian characters mark their place in the world through “Western” clothes, music, and food but not allow these material goods to contaminate their Indian values. This film too like the others of its period, thus reconciles the interests of a market-driven consumer economy with the dictates of “tradition.” Narratives are Bollywood’s representational grammar but because they add reference to a different
archive, their depiction of female characters is significantly different. As in contemporary cinematic narratives the features dividing the good and bad woman have become increasingly blurred and paradoxically reinforced by displacing goodness onto the terrain of the domestic sphere. The heroine maybe a cabaret dancer but within the home she is doubly submissive and virtuous. It finds laughable the notion that women should undergo a sacrifice without return. Women, it says, did not jump into the arms of man in some originary moment, but have been jumping into the arms of men, repeatedly, for centuries. And yes, this is important, the recognition of the repeatedness of this arabesque gesture. It means that the image has not been given for once and all, but is constructed again and again. Only realizing this, can any intervention be made, and some identification can be set up among women that are not eternal and incarnate, but produced as a symbolic system.

In the film, the instability of the family is caused not by the West or an external threat but from within. Being the modern independent woman Vidya is, compatible with the West and she shores up the nation by warding off internal threats. Therefore she decides to give birth to her love child. Significantly, the most potent threat is offered by other Indian women, who are either too modern or too traditional. Therefore Ranvir marries the loud, aggressive but well bred, Kamini later in the film, who is the mother of his heir.

Ravi Vasudevan, Tejeswani Niranjana and other film scholars have noted the manner in which Hindi cinema reconciles anxieties produced by globalization with their espousal of a market-driven economy. Significantly, the binaries propelling the melodramatic narratives shift axis to produce an evil from within the nation-state rather than the west.

Looking at Women in Films: Pseudocentre of filmic discourse.

Shabana Azmi, whose role in Saaaz was that of a woman who falls in love with the same man her daughter loves, says a mother is not allowed to have a sexual identity in Hindi films. Marcia Landy's, Feminist folkloristics and women's cinema: Towards a methodology (1999) refers to David Lean's film version of Nodl Coward's, Brief Encounter, and notes: "the film does not appear to be talking to or about women .... it seems to be an example of a phenomenon described by Claire Johnston of making it appear that the subject is female when in fact the woman is the 'pseudocenter of the filmic discourse." Landy goes on to describe how this particular film constructs woman as pseudocenter: "she is another instance of the woman whose words never get public expression except through the male text." Landy misreads
Johnston, however: Johnston's "pseudocenter of the filmic discourse" refers to a denial of woman as subject in favor of a "non-male"/other distinction." Landy takes a radical stand even further than Johnston's: that the text, if controlled by a man, becomes a male text. Conversely, perhaps Johnston is that radical: Hollywood narrative codes are inherently masculine, and for a woman's voice to be heard requires a radical shift of narrative coding and form. It is not enough to discuss the oppression of women within the text of the film; the language of the cinema/the depiction of reality must also be interrogated, so that a break between ideology and text is effected.

An attempt has been made to see the portrayal of the mother in this film through the the Second Feminist Wave, obviously in the West where the theorization of women in society was newly taken up. This conceptualizing of woman was done in order to reveal how the patriarchal ideology was thought to work and to show how masculinity within this ideology is attempting to put up an air of being the universal, whereas femininity is used as its mere projection. A major pioneering work on this field was for instance Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex (1949). Later on several other feminist scholars, like Kate Millett, took up De Beauvoir’s ideas. As Rosi Braidotti "Sexual Difference as a Nomadic Political Project" (1994) lucidly points out in her book Nomadic Subjects, that this description of the difference between men and women resulted in a dichotomy were 'normal subjectivity' is masculine subjectivity which is then phallogocentric, universal, rational, capable of transcendence, self-regulating, conscious and denying bodily origins, whereas the female is then conceived as the lack, the other-than-the-subject (which is then seen as an automatical devaluation), irrational, uncontrolled, immanent and identified with the body. De Beauvoir thus thought that the best feminist political and theoretical thing to do for women was to gain the same entitlement to subjectivity as men. Women thus had to go for transcendence and rationality in order to bring their existence, which De Beauvoir thought as being yet unrepresented, into representation. In short, in her scheme Woman is seen as minus-Man or Woman as the Other. Braidotti calls this working scheme sexual difference level one. This brings us to briefly discuss Marxist model of power as connected with the images of women in the media.

This idea of Woman as lack is closely connected to the model of power, as developed by Marx and which was also taken over by various feminist scholars in order to describe the oppression of women in a patriarchal society and the feminist answer to this. In Marx' view power consisted of the binary 'oppressors versus oppressed'. The oppressors are then the group who have something (power, that is) and the oppressed group are the mere victims of the oppressors and the subsequently lack something. This model of power
then was being connected with the humanist idea of each individual having a 'true self', an inner core that builds the identity and character of the person.

Mary Eagleton, *Working with Feminist Criticism* (1996) points out how this humanistic view of the individual results in a theory of alienation from it's 'true self' of that same individual under oppression; a person has a authentic identity which under oppression is no longer able to 'express' itself fully. Feminist theorists were taking up this idea and together with Freud's ideas on sexuality (the whole of the idea is called Freudo-Marxism) constructed a theory of sexual repression: women were disconnected from their 'true sexual self' under male dominance and thus sexual liberation for women is the main possible goal. When patriarchy would be overcome, women would be free and able to express their true feminine sexual feelings.

Out of the above described idea of a monolithic system of ideology followed for feminists directly that at the very point when a woman becomes aware of her being oppressed, she automatically would gain a feminist position. In other words, if you didn't exactly fit in the dominant branch of this monolithic ideology you were making a political statement automatically. This resulted in several 'consciousness raising' groups for women during the seventies in order to make them able to act out their feminist position inherent to their being women. Individual experience as a woman was the starting point and "the personal is the political" thus became an important and logic slogan in those times.

The storyline though represents a significant modification of the trite women-are-each-other's-worst-enemies storyline. The mother-in-law figure is a crucial node of narrative and discursive significance. Though Bindu's role as Ranbir's legally wed wife is not that of a mother-in-law, but has to seen as Hira's step- mother who is vindictive and apathetic to the work of her husband. Therefore the hatred for Hira; and also because the audiences realize that Hira is actually her stepson born out of wedlock through another woman. Repeatedly the older woman is cast in a negative light for being too demanding, for being too faithful to the anachronistic joint family system and archaic lifestyles. Indeed, her strict adherence to "tradition" is presented as not just alienating but as causing the instability of the Indian family. And thus her behavior is cast as being un-Indian.31 Sevanti Ninan characterizes these trends as "regression dressed up in tradition."32 Media critics and the sponsors of these programs concur that these storylines are unrealistic and are the products of the "NRI" imagination in which "the consumption-oriented global market with its neon signs is married to a kind of nostalgia for the good, old but lost traditional ways of life."33
Through the negative characterization of the mother-in-law, these narratives make subtle claims about women's proper role within the family and limit the ideals of femininity. The mother-in-law figure is depicted as a powerful un-feminine figure who has wrested some power away from the men in her family. This is the threat to the family. Such a hierarchization and valuation of women's access to male power inevitably pits women against each other and not against men. Such storylines set up the cliché Manichean division of the modern and tradition. But this binary is rarely presented as a generational conflict instead it is presented as representative of competing definitions of womanhood, indigenous and those that are foreign-born. These storylines also articulate women's sexuality with the nation in a very provocative manner. Negative characterizations of the mother-in-law, the scheming stepmother and the older menopausal woman, are also suggestive about the ways in which ideas of fertility are closely linked with that of the future of the nation. The biological body of the woman is collapsed onto that of the nation. The stepmother is inimical to the nation and has to learn to cede her place within the family and of the nation to the (putatively) fertile, younger and modern woman who in film, is already dead. The film in a way politicizes the domestic domain and the role women occupy within this space is configured as central to the maintenance of the cultural nation.

But the subcontinental and diasporic versions espouse different understandings of the Indian nation. Nor do they produce a homogeneous or uniform definition of Indian womanhood. Rather, they enable a plurality of understandings, multilayered definitions that intertwine the global and the local in different proportions. Indeed in “these narratives that ultimately center on different definitions of tradition, the global and the local acquire a palimpsest quality.”

Difference is no longer conjugated as taxonomic but is presented as volatile, negotiated, and constantly shifting. In both locales, televisual space deploys the vocabulary of identity, culture, and heritage deliberately and strategically. The sepulchral figure of the woman functions to produce a sense of the local that is shot through with the dynamics of the global. Together, the diasporic and subcontinental versions of ‘good’ Indian womanhood present a complex repertoire of images, narratives and representational practices in which the world of commodities, the world of news, and politics are profoundly mixed. In the transnational optic, the family is linked with a global public sphere; issues pertaining to the stability of the family come to define the urgencies of the present. In the diasporic imagination, the Indian family and women's roles within it are depicted as representing a pure, “traditional” space, the ground zero of an Indian culture that must remain untainted by
the outside world, the geographic space the family inhabits. In the subcontinental version, the family and Indian values are seen as constantly evolving. The static model of tradition espoused by diasporic population indeed comes in for special criticism.

Thus, the family and the domestic sphere are transfigured from "private" concerns into the fulcrum on which debates about what "India" stands for, and appropriate conducts for citizens are worked through. Through the amorphous trope of tradition the zone of the family is transformed into the locale for articulating the nation's virtues and values. The space of the family is revealed repeatedly to be shot through with the influences of global flows. Both sets of narratives expand the horizons of domesticity, adding politicized dimensions to femininity, but a dimension that specifically erases concerns with social and gender justice to foreground the interests of a unitary family. These narratives contest modern secularism; they offer 'traditional' notions of community obligations and mutuality as liberatory.

The paradox of partial legibility structures these narratives – the family is both made visible and yet its complex workings and the operations of power within it are underdescribed. These narratives set up the intimacy of the domestic sphere as providing the core context for national identity. Both sets of narratives produce what McKenzie Wark, *Virtual Geography: Living with Global Media Events* (1994) identifies as telesthesia, perception at a distance, geographies of experience enabled by a range of intercrossing media such as the telephone, television, and telecommunications that together double, trouble and permeate our experience of the space we experience firsthand. The transnational optic endows these narratives with a specular mobility; they permit a journey to an imagined nation. Their invocation of a mythical tradition and Indian nationhood remains always beyond grasp, out of reach and unattainable; it is a virtual reality. Nevertheless this utopian nation must be vigilantly monitored since the globalized economy has increased dramatically the possibilities of cultural miscegenation. Both diasporic and subcontinental programs emphasize the need for purification rituals to guard their version of tradition. These programs require a double consciousness; they speak in two different languages, that of the nation and the transnational, and translate between them as definitions of individual and group identities are carved out. This doubling is the product of the transnational optic. They reveal the manner in which the category of tradition is not just invented and imagined but is buffeted constantly by global and local pressures.
“Entertainment forms come to have the emotional significance they do: that is, by acquiring their signification in relation to the complex of meanings in the social-cultural situation in which they are produced.”

This opens up two directions for inquiry into the question of sexual difference in castration. The first is the examination of how symbolic castration is articulated in female sexuality. Can women be fetishists? What is the little girl’s relation to the Oedipal instance and what is her 'negative' entry into subjectivity? Eugénie Lemoine-Luccioni’s (1983) writings work through this direction. The second direction is to reread any specific case of scopophilia (in the cinema for example) taking into account the other elements involved; once we have shifted the object of the scopophilic drive from being the phallus alone to being the primal scene (as mythic instance), we can reconsider the importance of movement, sexual activity.

Kristeva reevaluates the element of movement, of activity as a central constituent of visual pleasure, especially in film. Within her semiotic reading of the perceptual register, Kristeva reclassifies the proping of the sexual on the instinctual by reintroducing the term "lektonic traces," originally from pre-Socratic philosophy. These are said to exist in the image in excess of its denotative functions. Thus there is a difference between the legibility of an image and its potential fascination, which could constitute the specifically sexual pleasure involved in viewing over and above that pleasure, afforded the epistemological drive by the legibility of the image.

Both the legibility and the fascination of the image, the two gazes identified earlier, are combined in an act of identification. This turns upon Lacan’s description of the mirror phase as the earliest instance of recognition of the image, binding Kristeva’s argument to the rigid definition of the image in the mirror stage. She questions the literalization of the mirror apparatus in order to broach the complex process of identification, to give the act a meaning outside of clinical ontological development, but nevertheless does not question the Lacanian assumption that the mirror moment is somehow a first moment, a founding moment from which there will be subsequent repetitions that constitute symbolic identification.

Once again this raises the problem of how this initiation into the double, the self/other logic of Imaginary division, comes to be a passage into full symbolic subjectivity. Michèle Montrelay (1977) suggests that this passage is over-determined as feminine due to women’s sexuality being organized in narcissistic modes, and argues that the mirror moment itself must not be seen as a founding moment but as a recurrence of an earlier loss that begins to construct the ego. In L’Ombre et le Nom (The Shadow and the Name)
Noun]), she redefines the process of the visual register in identification in the following way: The mirror stage is the reflection of, and veil over, the trace of the separation from the Other, the mother. Lacan's analyses show that the specular image only functions as a reference point when it is a signifier that is one element of the chain where the desire of the other is articulated. For Montrelay the mirror image, then, repeats and conceals this first trace. "What can we know of this trace? Nothing as long as reality — that constructs of the Imaginary — screens the Real: The first trace continues to exist, to insist. It is repeated: the unconscious which is substantially measured by this trace can only be so in a traumatic mode."³⁷

Which is why Freud's concern for a long time was to trace repetition in order to conquer it. Montrelay's suggestion that the mirror stage is itself a repetition of an earlier experience of differentiation between self and other, and the importance of repetition of the identification act itself in order to bring it into significance, bears several references to Freud: the play of recognition in the fort/da game, and more specific to the image, the formulation in the essay, On Negation (1925): All images, representation (Vorstellung) originate from perceptions and are repetitions of them. So that originally the mere existence of the image serves as a guarantee of the reality of what is imagined. The contrast between what is subjective and what is objective does not exist from the outset.³⁸ It only arises from the faculty which thought possesses for reviving a thing that has once been perceived by reproducing it as an image. This formulation "works" within Freud's 1917 model of the conscious, pre-conscious, unconscious topological system which is, in turn, taken up by Laplanche in his dissent from the Lacanian unconscious understood as being entirely the effects of speech. While agreeing that the unconscious is composed of signifiers, Laplanche goes on to say: These signifiers do not however have the status of our verbal language and are reduced to the dimension of the Imaginary — notably the visual imaginary. These are imagos.³⁹

It seems that a necessary precondition of any work on imagistic representation that might displace the present structural linguistic hegemony is a historical account of the transformations of Freud's formulation of the unconscious — from the neurological to the mechanistic, through to the topographical and with this, their equivalent forms of representation (in the way that Laplanche traces the transformations of the formulation of the ego). As they stand, these various isomorphic models do not superimpose. In this way, without conceptualizing the register of the visual as a homogenous field, we might discover how, as a montage, the imagos are positioned in relation to the drives: the gaze as object 'a' of the scopic drive. If we abandon the dream
of integral lucidity as being also a flight into the opacity of the Imaginary, we begin to encounter the Real problems. The paradigmatic accounts of subjectivity produced in psychoanalytic theory are ahistorical. That is both politically paralyzing and inherently phallocentric, as they take existing language structures as the givens of the inquiry. Lemoine-Luccioni is trying to redefine the formalizations of the subject's passage into full symbolic activity by tracing the trajectories of female sexuality through its insufficient theorization in existing clinical analysis. The underlying thesis of her book *Le Partage des Femmes* is that woman "lives according to an order of Imaginary partition (separation) — which precipitates her into a convalescent narcissism."40 First of all to explain the content of this notion of partition/separation, we have to locate it as an organization from which the subject passes into symbolic castration through identification; an identification which has no effect until, as Montrelay pointed out, a symbolic division has intervened via a process of symbolization that is inherently female, right from the mirror stage.41 A number of instances are sufficient to establish the feminine Imaginary from this model of separation: the woman has two sexual organs, not alike, the vagina and the clitoris; and she is of the same gender as the parent that gives birth to her.

This doubling, this order of the double, is underscored by the instances of pregnancy and childbirth. The woman in becoming a mother is no longer one but two. From her point of view it is she that doubles and redoubles, not the father. These givens are as much imaginary as real, but will always confound the arithmetic of identification constituted of an oscillation between zero and one. Imaginary partition is organized around the transition from the double to the loss — and from this to the loss of the phallus. But symbolic castration in the ontogenesis of femininity must be seen in terms of the overlooked and yet fundamental events of a woman's organic or physiological life: first her periods (called *pertes* or losses in French) and second, chronologically, childbirth or the separation from that part of herself that had imaginarily come to complete her during pregnancy, when her menstrual loss, her periods had themselves stopped (loss of periods being the first signs of pregnancy). When she falls pregnant this part of herself is no longer periodically visible. These events, and all the losses in a woman's life, although not constituted as a category capable of scientific use, are sufficient to circumscribe a phenomenon of the Imaginary partition as the psychic organization that is properly female. Woman lives in fear of losing part of herself. A husband may come to be that half that is always lost, and although this fear of losing might be explained as an inverted aggressivity or anxiety, Lemoine-Luccioni doesn't intend to explain it. It is important, simply, to stress that she lives the slightest, most legitimate absence as a definitive separation.
it’s absurd, she says, but I can’t help it.” Rather than castration anxiety women, we maintain, experience the anxiety of division, of partition.

To repeat, the loss of part of herself is not to be assimilated into the fear of losing the penis in a man — the loss of an organ — a loss which will never actually happen, and the loss of a very specific organ as it is the sexual organ. Even when she says that if her husband were to leave her she would feel amputated, she would in any case be amputated of an organ that is not hers. So can we use the term castration when it comes to women? The question is formulated by the term itself which posits that the lacking thing, the fundamental lack, must be taken on by the sexual organ and its signification, without which we cannot, properly speaking, use the term castration. If we try to analyse the precedents, we remember that in order for there to be a symbolic chain there must be a lack which engenders a demand. For the woman there is a real loss, or imaginarily experienced division as part of herself, herself insofar as she is one. Her demand is to be given back to herself. In coitus, the detumescence and the withdrawal of the penis are inevitably significant and take on (prior to childbirth) all of these other losses. They are marked retroactively from the sign and the phallus.

What remains clear is that in coitus that part from which she is separated and which will always conceal or reveal an earlier loss has never been part of her. She passes then from the real loss of an imaginary half of herself to the imaginary loss of an organ, which comes to be superimposed onto her partial losses. Later, at the moment of childbirth, the real deprivation of part of herself will become Imaginary frustration, in re-evoking the older loss of that other part of herself, her mother, from a fantasized wholeness. This can also become symbolic castration if it enters into a symbolic chain of signification. “The woman, herself, lacks nothing, in the sense that no organ can come to be missing from her. On the contrary it seems that she has an organ too many, the clitoris; how then does she come to see herself as lacking a penis”? (Leaving aside, for a minute, the fact that men experience her as lacking, and transmit, or in Irigaray’s terms, project, this feeling to her, although this fact is far from negligible.

Lemoine-Luccioni argues that the expulsion of the baby during childbirth and the withdrawal of the penis during coitus constitute real separations. These are also informed by the scotomization of the anal drive, inasmuch as being a partial drive it is directed towards the Other from whom she waits for a reply. The woman separates herself from something in exchange for something else; she asks of the other, the man, to be taken — she gives herself — but as always in this exchange of gifts it is hard to tell
whose gain it is: As a child the girl wanted a baby from her father, as a gift, as
a consolation of some sort after acknowledging that her mother was occupied
elsewhere: with the father again. "If the woman lacks nothing, what is the
object of her demand? And how does she pass from imaginary partition to
symbolic castration? And how does she move from narcissism to an objectal
libido"?:

The passage, according to Lemoine-Luccioni, is effected through an act
of identification. There is the problem of the dilemma in the choice of
identification: whether to identify with a man as the alternative to
identification with a woman, or the female (to be seen) position which, given
the existing structures of signification, would result in masochism.
But the choice is never posited as either/or and the woman is always to some
extent a hysterical. In identifying with the man, the woman imagines herself to
be lacking a penis (while none is lacking in the male on the empirical level)
and in this way she makes symbolic the lack that all the phenomena of
partition, loss, have constituted. She passes from the imaginary loss of part of
herself to the imaginary loss of the male sexual organ, and then to the
symbolizable loss of a sexual organ, the phallus, which might be any number
of things. In the other alternative, that of feminine identification, the woman
takes herself as lost object (mother), and the symbol of the lost unity would be
the body as complete, without gaps.

To explain the way in which the mirror image can only be either an
opening onto the symbolic (male identification) or else a narcissistic
containment (female identification) for the woman, we have to go back to the
scopic drive and examine the way in which it also is marked as privileged in
the construction of female subjectivity. With the mirror image, the girl who is
already divided, not simply the hommelette of Lacan — scrambled — but who
is divided, would hesitate to risk a new schism, one which would project the
ego into a distance.:47 For the girl, this distancing is a difficult experience. She
tends to oscillate in the image that she believes to guarantee her the equally
containing; limiting gaze of her mother, originally, and that comes to be the
omniscient gaze of the father. She prefers to believe in this image and believes
it to be herself. She confuses herself with this complete figure, without gaps,
which would conserve the limitations and security of parental power. So the
object of the fort/da game, the mother, is replaced in this reenactment of
separation by her own persona, represented by her body as it is in the mirror
image.

An evocation or provocation which is addressed to the look of the Other
can only come about if the look of the same, the mother's gaze, has failed the
child, so that the look of the Other can occupy that space. It is in this space that the symbolic articulation is introduced. In order to follow the symbolic articulation of the gaze as objet petit 'a,' Lemoine-Luccioni uses one of Lacan's schemas.

In the theorization of the cinema, the term "identification" has consistently been used to indicate a blockage of any active work of deciphering on the part of the spectator. Identification as a mechanism is conceptualized as reducing the gap between film and spectator, masking the absence upon which the cinematic representation is founded. Image and sound, reconfirming each other's depth, proffer to the viewer a lived space inhabited by bodies similar to his or her own. Nevertheless, although the film's task may appear to be that of drawing the spectator in, of obliterating a distance, it must not be too successful — as indicated by the anxiety elicited by incidents, which seem to act as witnesses to the completion of identification.

Regardless of the validity of the lawyers' theory of determination, the various incidents description evokes the horror of a representation which fails to "keep its distance," a representation which appears to break down and merge with the real. Cinematic identification can operate "properly" only on condition that a limit is acknowledged and a distance maintained. Rather than effecting a complete collapse of spectator onto character (or film), identification presupposes the security of the modality "as if." Nevertheless, the vague reference to a certain closeness or adherence of spectator to film appears to be the only characteristic which the various usages of the term identification hold in common. The concept disperses itself across a number of different registers and has been used to indicate a variety of relationships from emotional bonding to epistemological mastery. At least three different instances of identification in the cinema can be readily isolated: identification with the representation of a person — the spectator is given double access to this represented person, through the concepts of character and star, the identification of particular objects, persons or actions as particular objects, persons or actions. Identification here is a form of classification or categorization and involves the replay of what is already known. The type of identification which Metz refers to as "primary" is called so because it is the "condition of possibility of the perceived."48

Here, the spectator identifies with "himself" as "look" — as pure capacity for seeing. It is the very institution of the cinema, which, by positioning its spectator as punctual source of a unified image, posits simultaneously the coherency of subject and scene. The spectator becomes the unified ground of knowledge, of the knowable. Hence, for Metz, this is the
fundamental form of identification in the cinema — the form that makes all other types of identification possible and throws the cinema ineluctably onto the side of the imaginary. While the three types of identification just outlined may appear to be drawn from entirely different and alien problematics, they are inextricably linked.

It is the first form of identification — that involving character and star — which is, perhaps, not only the most familiar but also the least clearly defined. Dependent as it is on the notion of the integral person filmed, this "secondary" (in Metz's classification) mode of identification presupposes a disavowal of the two-dimensionality of the image and an investment in the reality-status of the diegesis. For, the connection established between spectator and character is vaguely one of empathy, sympathy or even, if the identification is truly successful, substitutability — not "I am like the character" but "I am the same as the character... in this respect at least." More accurately, perhaps, it is a position with respect to narrative actions and depicted experiences, which becomes exchangeable and it is this very exchangeability which tends to break down the boundary between spectator and scene. The mechanism of identification with a character in the cinema pivots on the representation of the body. Narrative is a mise-en-scène of bodies and while images without bodies are perfectly acceptable within its limits, it is the character's body, which acts as the perceptual lure for and the anchor of identification. In psychoanalytical theory, the ego is the site of identity, conceivable only in terms of the form or limit offered by the bodily envelope. The tendency toward unification which is characteristic of the ego is strongly linked to an image — that of the body. This is the case not only in the Lacanian description of the mirror phase but in Freud's somewhat enigmatic formula in The Ego and the Id: "The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface."

In this sense, it is not only the protagonist of a film who initiates the mechanisms of identification, but any represented body on the screen offering, by means of its recognizable form, a reconfirmation of the spectator's own position and identity. Overlaying and inseparable from identification with the character is identification of and with the star — where the codification relating body and identity is particularly strong. Grounded in the pleasure of tautology, this kind of identification relies on the pure recognition of the star as star. In the words of Stephen Heath, "the star is exactly the conversion of the body, of the person, into, the luminous sense of its film image. "The star, as 'a piece of 'pure cinema,' reasserts the power of that cinema, its hold on the imaginary of the spectator."

The presence of the star insures that I do not identify with the character as "real person" but as super-person, as "bigger
than life," as part of a spectacle performed for me. What is involved here is less of an identification with a person than an identification with a moment of cinema. The scene where Vidya breaks the news of her pregnancy is exemplary in this respect. Ranvir's denial to be the father of her child and her inconsequential slap is immediately followed by an empty frame whose function is simply the establishment and holding of a space. The affective value of that moment, strengthened by both lighting and the movement into the frame, is tied to the spectacle of the recognizable face — the very ability of the cinema to manufacture the pleasure of recognition. The film itself prepares the gap which Vidya's sorrow fills. And the fact that there always appears to be more of the spectacle, and hence more of the cinema, in the representation of the woman is not without ideological implications. Vidya moves into immobility; the woman is given all at once in the totalization of the fetish. This type of identification is taken for granted, given the potential for iconicity which the narrative film necessarily exploits. In fact, it is this type of identification which can most accurately be said to situate the cinema in the realm of the imaginary — perpetuating as it does the idea of a one-to-one correspondence between sign and referent.

Metz, in "Le perçu et le nommé," goes so far as to suggest that even in the case of the abstract or avant-garde film, there is a kind of drive to recognize on the part of the spectator, to translate visual forms and sounds, into the familiar. To recognize is to trace back to something already known and the cinema perpetually exploits what Freud isolated as the compulsion to repeat. The condition of recognizability is not the accretion of metonymic detail which would add up to a realism but, as Metz points out, the reference to the "pertinent traits" which are coded as defining the object, so that in caricature, for instance, a particular stroke of ink is capable of evoking the recognition of a famous nose. The narrative cinema relies heavily on the economy offered by such a system as well as the potential fascination contained in its dialectic of concealing and revealing. Nevertheless, despite the extent of the contribution of sound to the cinema as we know it, the third type of identification outlined above is founded on a visual analogy — that of the mirror. Metz claims that it is "primary." Metz attempts to demonstrate how the positioning of the spectator in the cinema is analogous with the positioning by the mirror in the Lacanian schema. The mirror phase of the imaginary order reveals that there is a fundamental lack of reality in the image which constitutes the child's first identification. That image is only a reflection (and a virtual one) and although it reassures the subject that he is indeed unified, that reassurance is a misleading one and has no knowledge value.
Similarly, the cinema presents us with more to perceive (when compared with the other arts), but it is characterized by a founding absence — what is there to be seen is not really there. The unique position of the cinema lies in this dual character of its signifier: unaccustomed perceptual wealth, but unusually profoundly stamped with unreality, from its very beginning. More than the other arts, or in a more unique way, the cinema involves us in the imaginary: it drums up all perception, but to switch it immediately over into its own absence, which is nonetheless the only signifier present. Since the mirror phase can be understood as the primary identification of the subject, it would seem that it could valuably be used as a model for the understanding of cinematic identification. And this is precisely what Metz does.

However, there is an essential difference between the mirror phase and the situation of the cinema. Anything may be "reflected" on the screen except the spectator's own body. Since the spectator cannot identify with his own image, Metz poses the question, "With what does the spectator identify?" Metz briefly considers the possibility of identification with a character, but rejects it because character identification can only take place in the case of the narrative-representational film. Since Metz is interested in the "psychoanalytic constitution of the signifier of the cinema as such," these identifications, when they occur, must be secondary. But in the viewing of any kind of film, the spectator understands that he can simply close his eyes in order for the film to disappear — that he is, in a sense, the condition of the possibility of the film. The projector behind him and the camera before it are also recognized as conditions of the possibility of the film and the "looks" of all three coincide (they all face in the same direction). Metz concludes that the primary cinematic identification is the spectator's identification with his own look and, consequently, an identification with the camera. This is, most importantly, an identification of the viewing subject as a "pure act of perception."

Metz's description of primary cinematic identification here rejoins contemporary film theory's obsession with assigning the spectator a position — a project which brings to bear on its object such Freudian concepts as scopophilia/exhibitionism, fetishism, and the metapsychology of dreaming. The spectatorial position described by film theorists is not a geographical but an epistemological position, one, which dictates a particular relationship between subject and object. Coherency of vision insures a controlling knowledge, which, in its turn, is a guarantee of the untroubled centrality and unity of the subject.
All of these concepts utilized, by the discourse of positionality in film theory rest upon the assumption, that the spectator's investment in the film is based upon the activity of misrecognition. The spectator mistakenly identifies discourse as history, representation as perception, fiction as reality. And the film is described as promoting this misrecognition, exploiting its pleasurable effects. For the pleasure of misrecognition ultimately lies in its confirmation of the subject's mastery over the signifier, its guarantee of a unified and coherent ego capable of controlling the effects of the unconscious. This is, essentially, a guarantee of the subject's identity. Thus, there is a sense in which the concepts of scopophilia/exhibitionism, fetishism, and the dreamer/spectator are subsumed beneath that of primary cinematic identification. Primary cinematic identification entails not only the spectator's identification with the camera but his identification of himself as the condition of the possibility of what is perceived on the screen. The film viewer, according to Metz, is positioned by the entire cinematic apparatus as the site of an organization — the viewer lends coherence to the image and is simultaneously posited as a coherent entity. It has been argued elsewhere that there are difficulties with Metz's use of the mirror analogy — most acutely in his obsession with locating a primal scene for the cinema, an original grounding event which would accurately define or delineate spectatorship. A corollary of this difficulty concerns the conceptualization of identification as instantaneous — a conceptualization which presupposes an undialectical notion of temporality in the film viewing process.

Metz upholds the priority of a before/after distinction — the look of the spectator is the originary moment within his system. Finally, identification cannot be located solely in the axis of the look. Yet, Metz's emphasis upon primary identification isolates the image as the determinant cinematic unit and bestows upon perception the quality of immediacy. It is this immediacy imputed to the process of identification which needs to be questioned along with the strict separation effected between primary and secondary identification.

Nevertheless, it seems that the strength of Metz's analogy between the cinema and the mirror phase makes it resistant, in some way to these objections — gives it a truth whose form might be compared with that accorded by Freud to the neurotic obsession. For the model of the screen as a mirror holds a certain fascination — not only "outside" the cinema, in its theorization, but within it as well. The idea of the mirror and its force in the imaginary of film theory — despite the fact that it privileges the visual signifier over the auditory, the moment over temporality — can be linked to the notion of visual captivation by an image, facilitated in the cinema by the darkness of
the surrounding auditorium and the immobility of the spectator. The very brilliance of the screen draws the eye. Identification, from this perspective, is inseparable from narcissism or the drama of the ego which the mirror implies. In its primary form identification is quite simply, as Lacan points out, the process of assuming an image: We have only to understand the mirror stage as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image — whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term imago.54

The transformation effected in the mirror phase is that from a fragmented body-image to an image of totality, unity, coherency. Hence, it is not so much tied to the empirical event of seeing oneself reflected in a mirror as to the ability to conceptualize the body as a limited form. As Laplanche points out, the earliest identification is “an identification with a form conceived of as a limit, or a sack: a sack of skin.”55 Freud's description of narcissism rests on a reference to the treatment of one's own body as a sexual object. Furthermore, incorporation and introjection are seen by Freud as prototypes of identification when “the mental process is experienced and symbolised as a bodily one (ingesting, devouring, keeping something inside oneself, etc.).”56

Primary identification, then, involves the very constitution of the ego and hence acts as the precondition for the attachment between subject and object, which we think of as secondary identification. The history of the subject's secondary identifications is the history of its positioning in an intersubjective economy which, in Freud, is dominated by the Oedipal complex. Identification with the father, the support of the super-ego, becomes the model for all secondary identifications. (Thus, in the classic schema, the woman's super-ego is necessarily weaker than the man's.) Metz follows the lines of this argument in distinguishing between primary and secondary cinematic identification and therefore assumes a strict division between a primary identification which is founding and secondary identifications with characters. Laura Mulvey, on the other hand, in “Visual Pleasure,” leaves room for the possibility of articulating a common space within which both primary and secondary identification operate. In fact, in her argument primary identification is from the beginning inflected by, overlaid by secondary identification.

Instead of specifying the misrecognition of the mirror phase as the misrecognition of an image as a reality, an absence as a presence, Mulvey links it to the posited superiority of the ego ideal. The mirror phase occurs at a
time when the child's physical ambitions outstrip his motor capacity, with the result that his recognition of himself is joyous in that he imagines his mirror image to be more complete, more perfect than he experiences his own body. Recognition is thus overlaid with mis-recognition: the image recognised is conceived as the reflected body of the self, but its misrecognition as superior projects this body outside itself as an ideal ego, the alienated subject, which, re-introjected as an ego ideal, gives rise to the future generation of identification with others.\footnote{57}

In this description, the first secondary identification can be traced to the "primary" identification of the mirror phase and the opposition between primary and secondary is collapsed. Furthermore, in all of the discussions, which abolish the necessity of the (empirically verifiable) mirror and substitute for it the existence of a recognizable human form (e.g. the mother), primary and secondary identification appear to merge. For, secondary identification is dependent upon positing the existence of an object "outside" the subject — an object with a recognizable, more perfect and complete form — an object which can be incorporated, introjected, mimicked. Yet, the thrust of Mulvey's argument is that, in patriarchal society, this kind of misrecognition and this kind of identity are, quite simply, not available to the woman. Her discussion deals only with the male spectator (as articulated in the use of the pronoun "he") and, by implication, situates female spectatorship as the locus of an impossibility. Mulvey's division of the classical text into two components, spectacle and narrative, and her correlation of these tendencies with the psychical mechanisms of scopophilia and identification with an ego ideal, support her analysis of the cinematic representation of woman as a form of reassurance of male mastery. Built into the mode of seeing legalized by the classical text is the exclusion of the feminine.

It is necessary to relate the problematic of identification outlined above to that of sexual difference and its inscription in the cinema in the terms of its address. Secondary identification, in its classical description, is clearly compatible with, fully implicated in the mechanisms of patriarchal society. In Freudian terms it is articulated with the father, the super-ego, and the Oedipal complex and in Mulvey's discussion it represents a bond established between the spectator and the male protagonist, a bond authorizing a shared power over the image of the woman. Primary identification, on the other hand, is more difficult — situated as it is in most discourses on the nether side of sexual difference, before language, the symbolic order, the Law of the Father. Does it really define a moment which is neuter, which pre-dates the establishment of sexual difference? Can anyone look into the mirror? The answer to his question necessarily has serious repercussions for the entire
discussion of spectatorship and sexual difference in the cinema. The work of Luce Irigaray suggests that the woman does not have the same access to the mirror-definition as the man. For Irigaray, the woman is relegated to the side of negativity. Because she is situated as lack, non-male, non-one; because her sexuality has only been conceptualized within masculine parameters (the clitoris understood as the "little penis"), she has no separate unity which could ground an identity. In other words, she has no autonomous symbolic representation. This is exactly what Vidya's image in the film conforms to.

But most importantly, and related to this failure with respect to identification, she cannot share the relationship of the man to the mirror. The male alone has access to the privileged specular process of the mirror's identification. And it is the confirmation of the self offered by the plain-mirror which, according to Irigaray, is "most adequate for the mastery of the image, of representation, and of self-representation."

The term "identification" can only provisionally describe the woman's object relations — for the case of the woman "cannot concern either identity or non-identity." The fact that narcissism and the mirror are violently yoked to the figure of the woman (in the cinema, in psychoanalysis, and in the codifications of common sense) can only be a decoy — concealing the fact that she is the mirror for the male and hence has no access to the identity it proffers. Such an analysis, however, which forces an adherence of the cinema to the apparatus of the mirror, would seem to be totalizing — permitting no possibility for the development of an alternative filmmaking practice. This is precisely why it is necessary to emphasize that the mirror-effect is not present as a precondition for the understanding of the image, as Metz implies in his description of primary cinematic identification, but as the after-effect of a particular mode of discourse which as been historically dominant but will not always be so. In terms of the aesthetic practices with which we are faced however, as Silvia Bovenschen points out, traditional patterns of representation have allowed the woman two options, equally restrictive: ...identification on the part of women could take place only via complicated process of transference. The woman could either betray her sex or identify with the masculine point of view, or, in a state of accepted passivity, she could be masochistic/narcissistic and identify with the object of the masculine representation.

In the realm of artistic practice, identification on the part of the female reader or spectator cannot be, as it is for the male, a mechanism by means of which mastery is assured. On the contrary, if identification is even "provisionally" linked with the woman (as Irigaray does), it can only be seen as...
reinforcing her submission. From this perspective, is it accidental that Freud's description of identification with respect to the woman frequently hinges on the specific example of pain, suffering, aggression turned round against the self, in short, masochism? Freud claims — Identification is a highly important factor in the mechanism of hysterical symptoms. It enables patients to express in their symptoms not only their own experiences but those of a large number of other people; it enables them, as it were, to suffer on behalf of a whole crowd of people and to act all the parts in a play single-handed.62

In his subsequent reference to the contagion of a hysterical spasm by all the members of a hospital ward, it becomes even clearer that, for Freud, the sign written on the body of the female hyster is a pivot for the exchange of masochistic identifications. While this is a relatively early account of identification, aligned with the first topography of psychoanalysis and preceding the description of the ego as a veritable sedimentation or history of object choices, later attempts to rethink identification in the context of the second topography and the intersubjective economy of the Oedipal complex retain this link between the woman and masochism. The chapter entitled "Identification" in Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego begins with a delineation of the little boy's identification with his father as an ideal — a "typically masculine" process — and its relation to the Oedipal complex. The little girl's case is put differently however. As Freud notes, the mechanism of identification seems peculiarly resistant to a metapsychological definition and it is as though Freud's text can only traverse and re-traverse a number of scenarios.

While these instances in no way exhaust Freud's conceptualization of identification, they do indicate a difficulty in the theorization of feminine identification which is rearticulated in film theory. Contemporary film theory delineates certain structures of seeing — scopophilia or voyeurism, fetishism, primary identification — which align themselves with the psychoanalysis of the male. The woman is nowhere a spectator in the proper sense of the term. In this regard, it would be interesting to note the contours, the different registers which define the specificity of those discourses which purportedly assume the woman as addressee. The excesses of the maternal, paranoia, and suffering, would seem to substantiate the claim that identification for the female spectator can only be simultaneous with a masochistic position. This type of text defines the woman's pleasure as indistinguishable from her pain. Nevertheless, this description can only circumscribe the specificity of feminine spectatorship within patriarchy. There are also the inevitable contradictions of a discourse which appeals to voyeurism, fetishism, and "primary" identification while simultaneously claiming the woman as addressee. It is the
mapping of these contradictions which is essential. To speak of identification and the cinema, therefore, is not to pinpoint a mechanism which is ideologically neutral, which resides outside of sexual definitions. It is rather to trace another way in which the woman is inscribed as absent, lacking, a gap, both on the level of cinematic representation and on the level of its theorization. As long as it is a question of mastery of the image, of representation and self-representation, identification must be considered in relation to its place in the problematic of sexual difference.

So what is it about women, then? Logically, that is according to the laws of logic; nobody can say anything about the class of women. For we are continuously caught in a vicious cycle paradox. Self-membered of our class, we cannot make any new statements about it. Boxed in by this abstract definition of herself, a woman speaks as a woman, her voice box producing a box voice — an epiphenomenon of her class, and as that class is defined by her physiology, of her body. Women, in short, are trapped by box logic. It will be objected that men too fall prey to this paradox of logic: the return of the same, identity, is both the object and the obstacle of logical thought. We insist, however, that "women" are caught up in an additional logical snare whereby they are defined and fail by analogy with "men." It is this ana-logocentricism which attains knowledge by misrecognizing difference which is attached and unraveled by "deconstructive" criticism but which remains, in certain quarters, resistent and intact.

For what is at stake in the undoing of a system based on the notion of truth as self-identity is, of course, identity-itself/oneself. Where identify may be termed the stake of the logical system, identification has been termed, by Paul Ricoeur, "the thorn in the side of psychoanalysis."63

The concept has had a long and very difficult history and has never been adequately or uncontrovertedly defined. As it has been articulated by film theory, it has inherited some of these difficulties and has intensified them. Briefly, proleptically in order to telescope the argument, it may be suggested that film theory has itself telescoped the psychoanalytic concept of identification. It has dealt with its inherited difficulties by attempting to overlook them. We must once more entangle, intrigue the concept before we can disentangle it. Film theory's privileging of the visible has lost the opportunity of analyzing the way auditory perceptions, or precepts and authorial prohibitions precipitate identifications. It has neglected the subtlety of the Freudian discovery that "the installation of the superego can be described as a successful instance of identification with the parental agency."64 "Agency", that is, and precisely not parental figure, for "a child's
superego is in fact constructed on the model not of its parents, but of its parents’ superego." Film theory has, by setting up the film and the spectator as the totalized terms of its analysis, unwittingly perhaps, insisted on the simple and uncontested dichotomy of inside and outside which in turn supports a reality/fiction opposition.

The breakdown of the exclusiveness of these oppositions is accomplished in psychoanalytic theory through the analysis of the relationship which identification instantiates between the object and the superego. Finally, the attention to the spectator-film relationship has reduced the dynamics of identification to a singular relationship and has distorted the outlines of the actual viewing situation. The entire cinematographic apparatus is aimed at provoking... a subject-effect and not a reality-effect. J.L. Baudry (1976) returns to the question of identification in the cinema, which used to be one of the main concerns of mass-media studies in the '40s and '50s, with a symptomatic ambivalence. American social psychologists like Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites — indebted to Siegfried Kracauer and, at one remove, the Institute for Social Research — represented the very type of approach from which film theory dissociated itself in order to establish a "theory of the visible." And yet, by a completely different route, Baudry and Metz seem to confirm a fundamental insight of media-psychology: the cinema as an institution confines the spectator in an illusory identity, by a play of self-images, but whereas media-psychology sees these self-images as social roles, for Baudry they are structures of cognition.

Two kinds of determinism seem to be implied in the perspectives opened up by Baudry's description of the 'apparatus': a historical one, where the development of optics and the technology of mechanical reproduction produce the cinema, as a specific visual organization of the subject, and an ontogenetic one, where the cinema imitates the very structure of the human psyche and the formation of the ego. The 'apparatus' seems to be locked into a kind of teleology, in which the illusionist cinema, the viewing situation and the spectator's psyche combine in the concrete realization of a fantasy that characterizes 'Western man' and his philosophical efforts towards self-cognition. While in Baudry's writing, one can still make out a historical argument which, however remotely, underpins his ideas about the condition of a contemporary epistemology, Metz has used Baudry in The Imaginary Signifier in order to establish a classification system rather than an ambivalently evolutionary ontology. With this, the historical determinants seem to be entirely displaced towards other parts of the 'institution-cinema,' and the question of identification — in the concept of primary identification — is recast significantly, so as to make as clear a distinction as possible between
his work and work concerned with role definition, stereotyping and role-projection.

Metz' and Baudry's arguments have several important implications for film-studies. For instance, part of the aim of auteur — or genre-studies and close textual analysis has been to identify levels of coherence in a film or a body of films. In the light of The Imaginary Signifier one might be better advised to speak of a 'coherence-effect,' and to call the very attempt to establish coherence a displaced subject-effect. The task of analysis or interpretation comes to an end at precisely the point where the spectator-critic has objectified his or her subjectivity, by fantasmatizing an author, a genre, or any other category, to act as a substitute for the 'transcendental subject' that Baudry talks about. The perversity of this conclusion can only be mitigated, it seems, if one reminds oneself that Metz' distinction between primary and secondary identification is a procedural one, defining a certain logic operation. Or as Alan Williams put it: "The first and most fundamental level of meaning in cinema is (...)that of the coherence of each film's overall surrogate 'subject."

This leaves open the possibility that the surrogate subject is differently constituted from film to film. The more immediately apparent consequence of accepting Metz' position affects independent or avant-garde film-making practice. Baudry's argument implicitly and explicitly designates the cinema as 'idealistic' in the philosophical sense, not because of a specific historical or ideological practice, such as Hollywood classical narrative, but by its "basic cinematographic apparatus." An unbridgeable subject/object division renders the object forever unknowable, and consciousness grasps the outer world only in terms of its own unconscious/linguistic structure. The cinema, in this respect, is an apparatus constructed by a Kantian epistemologist. Metz' distinction of primary identification amplifies this point. The filmic signifier is an imaginary one because perception in the cinema always involves between spectator and image the presence of a third term which is hidden: the camera. It is the repression of this absence and deferment in the act of perception that turns the subject/object relation into an imaginary one. Primary identification designates the unperceived and unrecognized mirroring effect that such a constellation produces for the viewer, with the consequence that all possible identifications with the characters in particular are modelled on and circumscribed by a structure of narcissism which inflects the viewer-screen relationship at any given moment. Perception in the cinema is voyeuristic not because of any particular kinds of representations or points of view. It is not the implied hidden spectator which a scene sometimes addresses, but the always hidden camera which the scene cannot exist without that turns all
object-relations in the cinema into fetishistic ones. They hold the subject in a position of miscognition or self-estrangement, regardless of whether the film in question is representational or not, avant-garde or narrative-illusionist. A film either fetishizes the characters or it fetishizes the apparatus. According to Metz, there is no escape from this closed circle.

In this respect, the cinema is indeed an “invention without a future” because it systematically ties the spectator to a regressive state, in an endless circuit of substitution and fetishization. Such pessimism has been questioned, not least because it seems to invalidate the political and cognitive aims of radical avant-garde filmmaking. Suspecting a logical flaw, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith has challenged Metz’ distinction, by arguing that it is difficult to see how one can talk about primary and secondary identification, if one means by this an anteriority, in a process that is essentially simultaneous and dynamic. Consequently, Nowell-Smith wants to argue that “pure specularity,” the transformation of Freud’s secondary narcissism into the imaginary reintegration of the subject’s self-image, is an abstraction, and no more than a misleading theoretical construct. In any concrete act of viewing, the spectator is involved in identifications which are ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ at the same time (if only by the metonymization of shots), and every fragmentation, be it montage, point of view shots or any other principle of alternation breaks down primary identification. The very fact that something is posited as primary should make us instantly suspicious. To say something is primary is simply to locate it further back in the psychic apparatus. It does not, or should not, invite any conclusions about its efficacy. One would argue, therefore, that the so-called secondary identifications do tend to break down the pure specularity of the screen/spectator relation in itself and to displace it onto relations which are more properly intra-textual, relations to the spectator posited from within the image and in the movement from shot to shot.

Metz might well reply that he is not talking about a perceptual anteriority, but a conceptual a priori, and that he is not interested in concrete acts of viewing as much as in a classification of distinct categories. However, much of Metz’ argument is buttressed by Baudry’s essays, whose Platonic ontology of the cinema is historicized only at the price of turning it into a negative teleology. At times, it appears that Metz accepts or is indifferent to the suggestion that the cinema is inescapably idealist. Confronted with the question whether ‘primary identification’ is coextensive with the cinematic apparatus as analyzed by Baudry and to that extent, unaffected by textual or historical production, Metz conceded, without much enthusiasm or conviction that conceivably, if the nature of the family were to change radically, so might the cinematic apparatus.
Film Studies has responded to these problems not only by a renewed interest in theory. Equally significant is the attention given to alternative or deviating practices in the history of cinema regarding the relationship of spectator to film, and the kind of 'materialism' or 'specularization' which it undergoes. One probably needs to argue that these positions contradict each other only insofar as they see audience-getting and audience-frustrating as opposite aspects of a basically unproblematic category, namely the spectator. The audience does not recruit itself through box-office mechanisms but via diverse cultural and institutional mediations. And yet, film-makers want to create an audience for themselves, not only by being active in restructuring the distribution and exhibition machine of cinema, but also by trying to bind potential audiences to the pleasure and habit of "going to the cinema."

Paradoxically, however, the most common form of binding in popular cinema is through character identification. It is a cinema in which all possible subject matter seems to suffer the movement between fascination and exhibitionism, of who controls, contains, places whom through the gaze or the willingness to become the object of the gaze. It is as if all secondary identifications were collapsed into primary identification, and the act of seeing itself the center of the narrative. Faithful to a persistent age-old tradition, Indian directors seem to be preoccupied with questions of identity, subjectivity, estrangement. Foundlings, orphans, abandoned children, social and sexual outsiders wherever one looks. Yet narrativization of these quests for identity are almost never coded in the classical tradition of conflict, enigma, complication, resolution. Instead of (Oedipal) drama, there is discontinuity, tableau, apparent randomness and fortuity in the sequence of events. The sociological name for this imaginary is conformism. The melodramas seem to offer a social critique of pressures to conform and the narrow roles that prejudice tolerates. But what if conformism was merely the moral abstraction applied to certain object-relations under the regime of the gaze? An example from the film....... Only the spectator, however, can read it as such, because the mirror inscribes the audience as another — this time, "knowing" gaze.

It is a configuration strongly reminiscent of Petra von Kant. As the drama of double and Other unfolds between Petra and Karin, the spectator becomes ever more aware of Marlene as his/her double within the film. Instead of adopting the classical narrative system of delegating, circulating and exchanging the spectator's look, via camera position, characters' points of view and glance-off. Fassbinder here 'embodies' the spectator's gaze and thus locates it, fixes it. Marlene's shadowy presence in the background seems
to give her secret knowledge and powers of mastery. Yet this other character virtually outside or at the edge of the fiction is offered to the spectator not as a figure of projection, merely as an increasingly uncanny awareness of a double. But to perceive this means also to perceive that Marlene only appears to be the puppeteer who holds the strings to the mechanism called *Petra von Kant*. As soon as we recognize our double, we become aware of the camera, and in an attempt to gain control over the film, fantasmatically an author, a coherent point of view, a transcendental subject. We are plunged into the abyss of the *en abîme* construction: Marlene is inscribed in another structure, that of the camera and its point of view, which in turn stands apart from the structure in which the spectator tries to find an imaginary identity. *Petra von Kant* is dedicated to “him who here becomes Marlene”: who, among the audience, realizing that the dedication addresses them, would want to become Marlene? Fassbinder’s characters endlessly try to place themselves or arrange others in a configuration that allows them to re-experience the mirror-phase, but precisely because the characters enact this ritual of miscognition and displacement, the spectator is not permitted to participate in it. Explicitly, this is the subject of *Despair*, in which the central character, attempting to escape from a particular sexual, economic and political identity, chooses as his double a perfect stranger, projecting on him the idealized nonself, the Other he wishes to be. When this surrogate structure collapses, the hero addresses the audience by a look into the camera, saying: “don’t look at the camera — I am coming out.”

If in Metz' term, the screen becomes a mirror without reflection, in Fassbinder’s films we see characters act before a mirror, but this mirror is not the screen, except insofar as it coincides with the place where the camera once was. A dimension of time, of delay and absence is inscribed, in such an insistent way as to make it impossible for the spectators to use the screen as the mirror of primary cinematic identification. Instead, one constantly tries to imagine as filled the absence that provokes the characters’ self-display. This is the paradox which one sees in *Laawaris* as also in Fassbinder’s films, the protagonists’ exhibitionism is only partly motivated by the action, however theatrical, and does not mesh with the spectators’ voyeurism, because another, more urgent gaze is already negatively present in the film. Another Fassbinder film, in which this absent gaze is both named and erased is *The Marriage of Maria Braun*. Hermann, Maria’s husband, has a role similar to that of Marlene in *Petra von Kant*. His disappearance, coinciding with the fall of Hitler, becomes a necessary condition for the fiction to continue. The idée fixe of true love, on which Maria bases her career, is only disturbed by the periodic return of the husband, from the war, from prison, from making his fortune in Canada. It is for him that she does what she does, but only on
condition that his place remains empty — reduced to the sign where someone once was. Absence turns her object-choice into an infatuation, which — expelled and fatasmatized into an idée fixe, becomes a transcendental but alienated self-image. Maria represses the return of the source of idealization, thereby also repressing the knowledge of the source of her economic wealth. Her life and identity appear under the sign of a marriage whose consummation is forever postponed and deferred. The apparent perfunctoriness and lack of plausibility that strikes one so disagreeably about motive and motivation in characters like Maria or the hero of Despair render palpable that not only is the visual space centered elsewhere, but so is the narrative. The characters, motivated by attracting a confirming gaze and simultaneously repressing it, display a symptomatically 'paranoid' behaviour.

An ambiguity arises from the fact that the split corresponds to a repressed desire, where the anxiety of knowing oneself to be observed or under surveillance is overlaid by the pleasure of knowing oneself looked at and looked after: Fassbinder's cinema focuses on the pleasure of exhibitionism, not voyeurism. Increasingly, and explicitly, this exhibitionism is identified with German fascism. In Despair, for instance, Nazism appears as both the reverse side and the complementary aspect of the protagonist's dilemma: to escape the sexual and social demands made on him, Hermann's personality splits — into a paranoid and a narcissistic self, and he dresses up in someone else's clothes. Meanwhile, in the subplot, the personality split is metonymically related to economics, the change from small-enterprise capitalism to monopoly capitalism, and the proletarianization of the middle classes, who believe in the world-Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy as a way of relieving anxiety about the future. The white-collar supervisor Muller, who works in Hermann's family firm, resolves his identity crisis also by dressing up: What becomes problematic for Fassbinder is ultimately the question of sexual and social roles, and the impossibility of deriving stable role-models from a 'normal' Oedipal development. In the absence of constructing identity within the family (Fassbinder always demonstrates the violence and double binds that families impose on their members), the need to be perceived, to be confirmed, becomes paramount as the structure that regulates and at the same time disturbs the articulations of subjectivity. This means that the cinema, spectacle, the street, as places where the look is symbolically traded, become privileged spaces that actually structure identity outside the family, and in effect replace the family as an identity-generating institution.

A film like this on one level depicts a socialization process that enforces identity not through Oedipal conflict, substituting an object choice to escape the threat of castration, but through a structure modelled on the reaction
formation to the loss of a particularly extreme substitution of the ego by an object. And under these conditions, the individual's most satisfying experience of subjectivity may be paradoxically as an exhibitionist, a conformist, in the experience of the self as object, not for anyone in particular, but under the gaze of the Other — be it history, destiny, the moral imperative, the community, peer-groups: anyone who can be imagined as a spectator. What may once have been the place of the Father, the Law, Authority and its castrating gaze, here manifests itself as the desire to identify with a lost object, the benevolent eye of the 'mother' as we know it from the mirror-phase. It would therefore be wrong to say that the palpable absence of the camera marks necessarily the place of the Father.

Conformism used to be the big subject of American schools of sociology and ego-psychology. David Riesman's idea of 'inner-directed — other directed' (The Lonely Crowd), Erik Erikson's "approval/disapproval by a significant other," Melanie Klein's "good/bad object" in various ways all used Freud's papers on narcissism or his Mass Psychology and the Ego to conceptualize changes in social behavior in the face of a weakening family structure. In Germany, two books by the director of the Sigmund Freud Institute in Frankfurt, Alexander Mitscherlich, discuss the social psychology of German fascism and the post-WW II reconstruction period. In Society without the Father, for instance, Mitscherlich argues that fascism, in its appeal to Germans of all classes, represents a regressive solution to the "fatherlessness (...) in a world in which the division of labour has been extended to the exercise of authority." Instead of assuming that Hitler figured as the Father, one has to imagine him fulfilling the role of a substitute for the primary love-object: (The mass leader), surprising as it may seem, (...) is much more like the image of a primitive mother-goddess. He acts as if he were superior to conscience, and demands a regressive obedience and the begging behaviour that belongs to the behaviour pattern of a child in the pre-Oedipal stage. (...)The ties to the Fuhrer, in spite of all the protestations of eternal loyalty, never reached the level (i.e. Oedipal) so rich in conflict, where the conscience is formed and ties with it are established. In The Inability to Mourn he writes: Thus, the choice of Hitler as the love object took place on a narcissistic basis; that is to say, on a basis of self-love (...) the possibility of any dissociation from the object is lost; the person is in the truest sense of the term "under alien control." After this symbiotic state has been dissolved, the millions of subjects released from its spell will remember it all the less clearly because they never assimilated the leader into their ego as one does the model of an admired teacher, for instance but instead surrendered their own ego in favour of the object. Thus, the inability to mourn was preceded by a way of loving that was less intent on sharing in the feelings of the other person than on
confirming one's own self-esteem. In parabolic fashion, this is the story of Vidya whose ambiguous strength lies precisely in her "inability to mourn."

Hira's hunger for power and belongingness can be best seen through understanding the Oedipus complex which as Freud says, at the root of our formation as subjects. "It derives from the process by which libidinal desires of the pre-subject are controlled via the threat of castration, and the subject formed as an individual, gendered subject". Therefore Hira perceives his (desire for) unity with the mother to have been disturbed by the presence of the father, who is perceived as a rival for the mother's love attention. The child's sexual desire for the mother is thus outlawed by the exercise of the Law of the Father. The phallus signifies this power. The fact that the mother lacks a phallus, for the child, comes to signify a lack of power - the power differentials of gender thus revolve around the presence of the phallus, the 'transcendental signifier.'

And going by Freud, Hira, the unwanted who hates his father, therefore counters by a 'castration anxiety' which stems from his awareness of the mother's lack of phallus, or power or by her absence in his life. This awareness apparently leads Hira to see his own father as the masculine power he has to contend with. The repudiation of love for the mother is subsequently channeled out into love for other women as Hira does in the film perpetuate the values of patriarchal society passive roles of victims. Bollywood cinema time and again chooses to focus on the mother-child relationship, and doing it best by mutilating the progressive role of the mother.

Hira's notion of his mother is quite similar to the types of screen mothers discussed earlier here. His anger gets directed to his mother whose unwed status brought about his subsequent abandonment and was being punished for something that he was not responsible for.

Taming Women: Romantic Traditions in Films.

Zeenat Aman is the glamorous love interest of Hira in the film, the shrew waiting to be tamed by him. A spoilt rich young woman who breathes money into everything, turns a new leaf after a series of chanced encounters with hero. Her role is that of a stand by wife-in-waiting, the beautiful object in a song featuring the love that both have for each other. In fact one can see Patterns of Sadomasochism and Fashion-fetishism in the film. Michel Foucault, in an interview for Advocate, had this to say about Sadomasochism and Fashion-fetishism:

The idea that S&M is related to a deep violence, that S&M practice is a way of liberating this violence, this aggression, is stupid. We know very
well that what all those people are doing is not aggressive; they are inventing new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of their body - through the eroticisation of the body. I think it's a kind of creation, a creative enterprise, which has as one of its main features what I call the desexualisation of pleasure ... The possibility of using our bodies as a possible source of very numerous pleasures is something that is important. For instance, if you look at the traditional constructions of pleasure, you see that bodily pleasure, or pleasures of the flesh, are always drinking, eating and engaging in sexual encounters... And that seems to be the limit of our understanding of our body, our pleasures.

One can say that S&M is the eroticisation of power, the eroticisation of strategic relations ... the S&M game is very interesting because it is a strategic relation, because it is always fluid. Of course there are roles, but everyone knows very well that those roles can be reversed. Sometimes the scene begins with the master and slave, and at the end the slave has become the master. Or, even when the roles are stabilised, you know very well that it is always a game; either the rules are transgressed, or there is an agreement, either explicit or tacit, that makes them aware of certain boundaries. This strategic game as a source of bodily pleasure is very interesting.

The film provides the main female character with options about her role as submissive in the kind of coupling that expands the boundaries of self-knowledge rather than closing them off. This side-steps the issue of categorising the film as a farce rather than the popular potboiler of this period in order to account for its unacceptable elements - the argument being that since farce has more to do with the mechanics of staging and the exploitation of social types rather than with development of character, the issue of misogyny is irrelevant. Heilman's reasons for adopting this viewpoint are entirely antithetical to the argument of this essay. He tries to persuade us that "If we can see The Taming in this way, we can have it untamed, freed from the artifices of a critical falconry that endeavors to domesticate it within the confines of recent sensibility: and we can have a return of the shrew without turning Kate into only a shrew". And finally an in-depth reading helps to offset the problem of construing Mohini as the victim in the final 'submission' scene and thus provides an alternative to some feminists' objections to the film, "Kate is tamed by serious confusion, fear, isolation, deprivation and capricious authority" as well as an alternative to subsequent attempts to deal with these objections by rather tortuously rendering this speech as ironic, insincere, tongue-in-cheek.

Mohini is quite like the shrew, who, the hero tames, inevitable for the romantic narrative in the film. Feminists have for long analyzed this role
through Shakespeare’s play, *The Taming of the Shrew*. One way of interpreting *Mohini’s* character could as well be the ones feminists have argued. One strand of feminist criticism continues along the line, of assuming for *Mohini* the position of victim and thus read the movement of the film as a downward spiral from single-status outspokenness to marital submission and forfeiture of the right to protest. *Mohini’s* decline is thus measured in what has been seen as successive degrees of surrender to male domination through isolation, coercion, confusion, deprivation and public humiliation. Marilyn French for example sees the play as a depressing but uncomplicated demonstration of the way in which the male principle (represented by violence, will to succeed and power to destroy) is pitted against the female principle (which stands for such life-forces as the power of generation and the provision of sustenance and care. 85

Another strand of feminist criticism, however, moves away from this bleak polarisation. Lisa Jardine examines the question of male/female sexuality and relations rather in the interconnection between real social conditions and the various ways in which they are translated onto the stage. Thus she locates the female protagonist’s ‘forwardness’ in traditional representations of the scolding woman as the embodiment of all that is beyond reason to control... In all of these representations, garrulity makes a woman ‘provocative and threatening’. When Jardine says that her ‘moist humours, which make her lascivious, also loosen her tongue,’86 help to explain *Hira’s* behavior as a way of demonstrating the importance of ‘mutuality’ in this, and other films that have a married couple or the ones in a romantic arrangement, as the pivotal relationship. *Hira* extinguishes *Mohini’s* aggression (tames her) by initiating and finally involving her in a series of games. In the course of the film, he threatens her father with the same treatment that he got from him as a helpless child. He tells him ‘what if an unwanted child is born in your house too?’ The motive is revenge and though the audience knows that *Hira’s* intentions are bona fide in nature, it just reveals how a relationship with a woman can be used against her to further a need. However, this element of play which results in final harmony between the two is achieved only within the confines of a patriarchal system that assumes the absolute authority of man over woman - be it father over daughter, brother over sister or husband over wife. The changes effected in *Mohini’s* behaviour are thus never presented as a challenge to the existing social order, but are “rather invariably accomplished within it,”87 an important and logical slogan in those times.

Mulvey’s seminal article maintains that cinema determines the formal aesthetical function of woman. In other words, cinematic narrative form determines the ‘way’ in which we perceive women. This part of the thesis
attempts to analyze the beauty and pleasure given through the lenspiece of cinema to the point of destruction ... “in order to conceive a new language of desire”. It is argued, with respect to the phallocentric hierarchy, that woman is traditionally placed in a mere supportive role to the male protagonist. Her lack emphasizes his stature and heroism. The question is whether this point of view actually has any currency today. There is a short reference to the fact that there “...are films with a woman as main protagonist of course”. However, the writer sweeps this aside by saying, “To analyze this phenomenon seriously here would take me too far afield.” The justification for this dismissal is that “the strength of this female protagonist is more apparent than real.”
Notes and References.

1. Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990), American composer and conductor.
3. From the soundtrack of Laawaris.
5. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p.140.
8. Ibid., p.52.
9. Ibid., p.141.
10. Ibid.
14. Fiona Brophy, Ibid.
17. Ibid.
21. Quoted in Ashley Dunn, "As the World and Soap Operas Turn: Blondes, Brain Tumors and Buckets of Tears on Hindi TV," New York Times (September 26, 1995).
22. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
29. Ibid., p.215.
Some regional language soaps have included over 500 episodes. Also see Soutik Biswas, "Swimming in Lather," Outlook India (June 21, 1999): http://outlookindia.com/full.asp?fname=features6&fodname=19990621&sid=1


Ibid., p.50.

Ibid., pp.80-81.

Ibid., p.81.

Ibid., p.82.


It was necessary to presuppose the audience's familiarity with three essays that discuss (primary/secondary) identification, the 'apparatus' and 'subject-effect': Jean Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus", Film Quarterly 28, no. 2 (Winter 1974-75); Christian Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," Screen vol. 16, no. 2 (1975); Jean Louis Baudry, "The Apparatus," Camera Obscura vol. 1, no. 1 (1976).


Ibid.

Ibid.


See Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1977), pp. 23-32. One should be aware of the danger of essentialism in Irigaray's work — of her tendency to refer to femininity as an essential entity defined by inherent characteristics. Nevertheless, her work also, unlike many feminist theories which do not risk essentialism, avoids the simple re-articulation of patriarchal definitions of woman (even if they are re-articulated only in order to act as the object of a critique a process which can be seen as a never ending cycle of recuperation), The question — too complex to be dealt with in the context of this article — is whether an attempt to provide the woman with an autonomous symbolic representation is synonymous with essentialism.


Ibid. This conceptualization of the woman's relation/non-relation to identity and hence the process of identification necessarily problematizes certain feminists' demands for "stronger female characters" or role models.


65 Ibid., p.67.
68 Alan Williams, Max Ophuls and the Cinema of Desire (New York: Pantheon, 1980).
72 Ibid., p.31.
73 Interview, Discourse, no. 1, (1979).
78 Ibid., p. 63.
79 Freud, p.63-4.
82 MLQ 27, p.161.
88 Mulvey, p.16.
89 Mulvey, p.20.
90 Ibid., p.21.