Chapter Two
THEORIES OF GENDER, REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AND FILM-STUDIES

It is evident from the introductory chapter that our research study does not belong exclusively to the domain of Film-Studies, neither it is exhaustively amenable to the theories of Media Research. The cultural construction of femininity by a particular section of society as an object of study, for the present, relies on cinematic portrayals/representations as primary source of 'data'. Such intended and conscious representations as experienced and realised by both the makers and cinema-viewers articulate the 'sociality' of culture, which marks out cultural specifics.¹

Such a study hinges on the theories and themes of Gender, Media as well as Film-Studies. Here we consider outlining a brief review of the existing theories and themes which would serve as crucial entry points to our proposed study. Our research grow at the interface of the project of feminist theory, the feminist interventions in media studies and the scope of film-studies. We shall be dealing with the gender theories and the models of subordination as theorised in gender–studies. Then we shall indulge in exploring the theoretical debates involved on the question of media representation of women. Finally, we shall check the modalities of film-studies.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory is the philosophical analysis of the concept of gender and the meaning of sexual difference. Generally, feminist analysis depends on the premise that gender is a socially constructed, historically

¹ Carrithers, M., Why Humans Have Culture: Explaining Anthropology and Social Diversity (New York, Oxford University Press, 1992.)
changing reality. It is not determined directly by biology. The central project of feminist theory is fourfold:

1. to evaluate critically the claim that gender is determined directly by biology;

2. to explore the ways that sexist assumptions have distorted the meaning of gender so that women's experience either have been rendered invisible or have been undervalued;

3. to challenge the claims to truth of science and the humanities on the grounds that their meta-theoretical foundations are sexist; and,

4. to propose an alternative, more inclusive epistemological framework.

Feminist theory claims that to acknowledge the gender bias of traditional theory is to transform radically the structure of our knowledge of reality. Since thinking is a human activity engaged in by sex-gendered beings, whose specific historical identity influences their perceptual capacity, then knowledge—the product of that activity—is always bounded by this fact.

Contemporary feminist theory has developed though several stages of inquiry. It began with the project of exploring the origins of women's oppression. Early work during this stage concentrated on considering the ways that women's reproductive biology and women's roles in the family were used throughout history to segregate women as a group (class) and to isolate them from the full range of human activity. The concept of patriarchy was introduced to this debate about the root causes of the exploitation of women and became a central category of analysis. Early work in anthropology, demonstrated how the development of surplus

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production contributed to the institutionalization of patriarchal property systems. Since kinship and property system were structured through male lines, women’s position in these exchange systems became defined by their position in relation to the male-dominated family/property nexus. Although women’s activity was important to the daily life of the community, both economically and socially, women appeared to wield little power, being absent from most position of recognised leadership. Theorists in social science fields continue to debate the question of women’s relative powerlessness. Some opine that anthropological fieldwork focuses on male experiences and interprets social reality from a masculinist perspective, thus obscuring or distorting the significance of women’s roles.

During the earlier stage of theory building, major disputes developed among liberal, socialist, vatical, and lesbian feminists, with each school claiming to have identified the basic cause of patriarchy. For liberals, it was the lack of equal rights and opportunities to participate in mainstream activities that led to the exploitation of women.

Socialists saw relations of property under capitalism as the motor of patriarchal ideas and practices in the modern era.

Radical feminists argued that women’s biology was the root cause of patriarchy.

Lesbian feminists challenged compulsory heterosexuality as the mainstay of patriarchal relations.

Later, the feminist focus is not on the origin, that but on the condition/process of patriarchy. Feminist historians reviewed existing records and discovered new archival materials to substantiate their

argument that women had made important political and economic contributions. Since women had been "hidden from history" by distorted models of social change that privileged male-dominated activities, these theorists contended that reinserting women into the historical record altered substantially both the way that history would be written and the image of women as a silent and inactive oppressed group.

Theoretical Understanding of Gender

Although the distinction between female and male is common to all known human cultures, the ways in which male and female bodies are distinguished, the role each is seen as playing in reproduction, local understandings of the biological basis of difference, cultural attributes assigned to the masculine and the feminine, and the importance attached to these differences, all vary enormously from culture to culture.

In modern anthropological work, 'sex' is generally taken to refer to the anatomical, biological and physical characteristics of female and male bodies, and 'gender' to be culturally specific symbolic articulation and elaboration of these differences. The concept of gender came into popular use in the theoretical and ethnographic writings of social and cultural anthropologist in the early 1980s. As a term which addressed both the female and the male, the cultural construction of these categories, and the relationship between them, it offered an alternative to the emphasis on the 'problem of women' which had dominated feminist anthropology for the previous decade and had itself become increasingly problematic.

The feminist anthropology of the 1970s grew out of a general theoretical reappraisal in the social sciences, itself an aftermath of the widespread political unrest of the late 1960s. Social scientists went back to Marxist theory in their search for tools to understand political and
economic inequality, and to reassess issues of development and undevelopment. A similar search for the roots of women’s position as the ‘second sex’ (in Simone de Beauvoir’s term) led western feminists to look to anthropology for ways of understanding women’s situation in different social political and economic orders, and simultaneously fed into anthropology a variety of question concerned with the possibility of egalitarian social order, the roots of female subordination, and the general roles of women in different cultures and economies.

A major aim of the feminist project of the 1970s was to establish ‘an ‘anthropology of women’, which would fill the gaps in the anthropological literature resulting from male bias: first it was argued that professional anthropologists tended to rely on male informants during fieldwork, and therefore replicate the indigenous male view.

The ‘anthropology of women’ focussed on what women said and did, and gave equal or greater weight to female domains and sphere of activity and to the symbolic representation of the categories female and male.

Two quite different lines of argument were development during this period. One maintained that neither female oppression nor exclusive male power was universal, while the other grew out of an assumption of universal male dominance and female subordination.

Anthropologists who drew on Engel’s theories, maintained that female oppression was an historically specific phenomenon, linked to relation of production, pvt. property and either colonialism or capitalist economic relations. Thus they assumed the existence of a prior egalitarian social order, in which men and women did different tasks but were equally

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valued. Other anthropologists also rejected a straightforward model of female subordination, but stressed individual transactions and interpersonal relations rather than wider economic and political determinants. Such anthropologists as E. Friedl, and L. Lamphere, for instance, argued that although women appeared to be denied formal power and authority in the public or political sphere, they were not without individual power. Foreshadowing to some extent the problematic relationship between individual action or agency and encompassing social structure which was to become a major concern in the late 1980s, they emphasised the domestic power of women, manifested in individually negotiated relations based in the domestic sphere but influencing and even determining male activity in the public sphere. In terms of these agreements, gender difference was assumed, as was an apparently natural division between domestic/female and public/male domains, but the differences did not automatically result in female subordination. Subordination and inequality rather arose as a result of specific economic and political conditions. Other feminist anthropologists of this period, however, did assume a universal subordination of women, and sought to explain its origins and perpetuation in sociological, cultural or symbolic, or material terms. Each of these explanations rested upon a major dichotomy:

1. Rosaldo argued that the roots of female oppression cross-culturally lay in the division between the public and the domestic spheres, and the systematic undervaluing of the domestic, which was defined as those

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8 Rosaldo, M 'Woman, Culture and Society: A Theoretical overview', in M. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere eds. Ibid.
roles and activities revolving around women and children. The extent to which women were subordinate in a given society depended on the degree of division between the public and domestic spheres. In hunting and gathering societies, for instance, when the two domains were least likely to be highly differentiated, relations between women and men were likely to be most egalitarian.

2. S.B. Ortner in the same volume as Rosaldo, re-examined the binary opposition between nature and culture which the French structural anthropologist Levi-Strauss had posited as a universal dichotomy, and argued that cross-culturally women were represented as closer to nature because of their role in child bearing, lactation, and socialization of children. She was careful to stress that this identification of women with nature because of their role in child bearing and men with culture was not 'natural' but was culturally constructed; in other words women were not in fact any closer to nature than men, but were universally perceived as being so. She argued further that women to some extent mediated between nature and culture, by transforming the 'raw' child (natural) into the 'cooked' social person (cultural). In this structural/symbolic analysis, the roots of female subordination were to be found in the cultural explications of biological difference.

3. Marian analysis holds that the subordination of women resulted from their association with reproduction within the household, and their exclusion from relation of production and exchange in the public sphere.9

Within the framework of social evolutionism, it was suggested that the association of women with the household and reproduction and men

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with the wider political economy and production was a 'natural' division because of child bearing and child rearing; the oppression of women, however, only arose with the development of sedentary agriculture, monogamous marriage and private property relation; at which point, as male productive labour and property become the source of value, the 'natural' division of labour ceased to be egalitarian. Some of these ideas were removed from their rather problematic evolutionist context and elaborated upon in comparisons of contemporary societies.

Edholm et al questioned the idea that an association between women and reproduction and men and production was 'natural', but looked at the ways in which production and reproduction were related in different types of economies. They suggested that in hunting and gathering societies, where concepts of private property were not highly developed, there was little distinction between women's productive and reproductive activities, and hence little undervaluing of women. The socio-economic centrality of the male-headed household on the unit of production, consumption; property and exchange in 'peasant' societies, on the other hand, led to an undervaluing of women's role in production and an emphasis on their role in reproduction. In this Marxist Feminist analysis, the position of women was inextricably linked to economic relations of production and reproduction.

Each of these three theoretical approaches located the source of women's oppression in culture and social structure, rather than in biology, and stressed the idea that women's biology placed them closer to nature, outside production, on within the domestic sphere, was not a natural fact, but a cultural elaboration on biological difference. And yet each ended up

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caght in conundrum of exactly the type it was trying to avoid: regardless of sociological, cultural or material explanation. The origin of women's universal subordination seemed to lie in the biological 'facts' of reproduction. The role of biology and by extension essentialism remained unresolved problems in the feminist writings of the 1970s. The way out of this seemed to lie on the one hand in the separation of gender from biological sex, and an the other in a wider understanding of the diversity of local concepts of gender themselves.

Theorizing Beyond Gender Dichotomies

By the late 1970s emphasis on the universal nature of women's subordination was being challenged by Third World academics and political activists, generally influenced by post-modern theories. Increasingly throughout the 1980s 'gender' replaced 'women' as a focus of academic enquiry and as the subject of courses, workshops and conferences. The 'universal' dichotomies were rejected as reflections of dominant western discourse, historically situated and socially and culturally specific.

To some extent, with the usage of the concept of gender the biological referents of difference and inequality is debunked. It was argued that it cannot be assumed that all cultures represent difference in the same way, or give sexual difference the same emphasis. The 1980s discussions of gender raised more complex issues of cross-cultural translation, universality, and the relationship between thought systems, and ideology and material conditions.
The contributors to MacCormack and Strathern's edited volume were among the first to point out the ways in which western political philosophy, located in specific historical periods, had taken a dominant position of assumed and unquestioned university. For example, the nature/culture dichotomy was a creation of European philosophical discourse. Nature and culture, and the associated linking between nature and female, and culture and male, were shown not to be universal dichotomies at all, but rather culturally and historically specific ones which were developed and elaborated in Europe by philosophers such as Rousseau during the Enlightenment. The location of these dichotomies in their proper historical and cultural context undermined assumptions about the universal subordination of women and dominance of men, and called for recognition of gender as a component of far more complex system of thought.

"The belief in the universal secondary status of women assumes a model of society where there are unambiguous, rigid hierarchies, and so clear criteria for assigning their rank to any individual. Even if we clearly separate issues of value (bad/good) from those of control (sub/superordinate), there are no simple scales on which men and women can be ranged. Women are deemed both good and bad, and both evaluations may be represented as stemming from their naturalness. Similarly, they may be subordinate in some areas of life (eg, legal rights) and superordinate in others (eg, control of the house) and both descriptions could be based on their putative natural qualities."

Using ethnographic materials of the Laymi, rural cultivators in the Bolivian Andes, Olivia Harris questioned not only the association between female and nature, and male and culture, but also implicitly the dichotomy of domestic/female and public/male in terms of the cultural constructs of the people. Men and women were not pre-given, eternal

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13 Harris, O. in Mac Cormack and Strathern (eds.) ibid.
categories but change their relationship to the symbolic in the course of their lives. We see that in non-European cultures, the application of simple domestic/public or nature/culture dichotomies of gender analysis is of little use. Same is even true with Europe, eq. Particularly Southern Europe. The domestic and the public may be recognised as separate domains, but neither is exclusively linked to either the male or the female; rather, both women and men have a culturally appropriate part or parts to play in each domain.

It emerges that gender as one symbolic system which, in combination with others, talks about or provides metaphors for the ordering of social persons in relations to each other and to the social system as a whole. As such it should be seen as a differentiating system, ascribing ideal attributes rather than determining or speaking to individual behaviour. It is also important to distinguish symbolic systems and cultural meanings from the range and diversity of things which individual people actually do. Symbolic systems provide cultural metaphors for roles, statuses and behaviour; they do not dictate what individual men and women actually do.

Deconstructing Difference

Post-modern theory and deconstruction have had a profound influence on the study of gender. Since the late 1980s, bringing into even finer focus the problems of translation and of the dominance of western models, and above all stressing difference and diversity...

The Post-modernist insistence of using indigenous categories as the basis of interpretation has been criticised for failing to take into account

power or recognize ways in which ideology marks exploitation and inequality. This argument is not only restricted to the study of gender, but to the interpretation of social acts and structure generally.

**Cultural Feminism**

Cultural feminist is the feminist theory that stresses the differences between women and men and the superiority of the feminine. Basically non-political, it concentrates on developing a separate lifestyle, a 'Women–Culture’. The name was taken up by non-political women within radical feminism, some of whom were coming in at that time from the counterculture. Cultural feminism does not concern itself with political action to attain equal rights or to ameliorate women’s class oppression, but concentrates on individual self-realization through the creation of an alternative life-style. According to them, women are more nurturing, move peace-loving, less violent—because they are women. Eschewing biological determinism, then look to women’s traditional culture as the source of their superior values and believe that by recreating that culture they can transform society, replacing the aggressive values of patriarchy with the nurturing values of women, hence their interest in matriarchy and goddess worship, in developing woman’s religion, art, and literature.

One can trace the roots of contemporary cultural feminism to the influences of romanticism and evolutionary theory of 19th century feminist thought.¹⁶

**Representation of Women and Media Theories**

Especially after 1960s and 1970, and obviously as a result of strong feminist movements, there has been a proliferation of feminist media

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research. Studies in the West looked at the images and portrayals of women in various media and observed that media promotes stereo types of gender relations shaped by patriarchal values.\textsuperscript{17}

Gender socialization and its accompanying social values get reflected in the media – this has been the predominate conclusion in media research.\textsuperscript{18} Most of the western scholars draw heavily from the Marxian concept of ideology and at times supplement/ revise it with the Gramscian concept of hegemony or the Altuserian concept of ‘ideological state apparitions’. Thereby, media is posted as a socialising agent.\textsuperscript{19}

The contemporary world is saturated by images of women—in advertisement, magazines, on televisions, films and in the press. The women are almost invariably non-identified or those whose personal identity is irrelevant. Either they do nothing, or they do domestic things (e.g. caring, nurturing etc.). Although these women are often alone, they are seldom self-sufficiently alone, independent or autonomous. The images, then, depict absence and lack, through the presence of an absent, the significant other - the person she is supremely conscious of, by whom she is completed; the man.

Men are seldom just presented as this. They are almost always represented because of who they are or what they are doing. They are seen as authorities, as having power over persons or objects, as active, autonomous, independent and in control. They convey the characteristics of being alert, strong and looking outwards. There is no search for, or

\textsuperscript{17} Cantor, M.G. ‘Feminism and the Media’ in Society, July/August, No: 76-81, 1988.


awareness of, the other. The man is not seen as needing an Other for completion.

**Feminist Engagement with Media Film –studies**

Initially feminists were drawn towards media-studies as a part of a general concern with the under-representation and or misrepresentation of women in media. The practical aim of this concern/research was to redress the situation by drawing attention to women’s absence and calling for increased women’s role/participation at all levels of the media industry. There was little concern with the nature of representation itself and none with the contribution of the culture industries to situating women and constructing their subjectivity.

Such a concern was attended to by feminist film criticism as an outcome of the *Women’s Event* at the 1972 Edinburg film Festival. From the event arose the publication, *Notes on Women’s Cinema*, including the important article ‘Women’s Cinema as Counter Cinema’ by one of the organizers. In 1975 another organizer, Laura Mulvey, published one of most influential articles on film-criticism. The major concern of Mulvey has been the gaze, or the look. The idea of ‘the gaze’ overlaps and intermeshes with the literary concept of ‘point of view’.

Mulvey used Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to argue that mainstream Hollywood Cinema constructed the spectator as male and legitimized his fetishistic looking at the women displayed on the screen by directing his ‘gaze’ at them through the intermediary of the cinema or of some ‘looking’ male figure within the film.

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The implication is that, women could only view such film from a 'male' position. This has been much debated within film-studies and has been used in a number of other contexts. Perhaps as a result of the contestation, little of Mulrey's original formulation remains. Yet it has focussed attention on the gendered character of looking and being looked at. This was in keeping with early women's movement activity disputing the presentation of women as 'sex-objects'.

Feminist activities, artists and critics have all worked at changing this asymmetry and with some success. Considerable attention is paid these days to the female spectator. The increasing presence of men as spectacle, however, probably owes as much to the growth of consumer culture and the usefulness of men's as well as women's bodies in advertising, as to feminism. Mulvey explicitly attempted to destroy the spectator's pleasure in narrative cinema, by exposing how dependent it was on patriarchal ideology. The emphasis on the need to challenge the pleasures offered by narrative cinema because of their role in maintaining patriarchal ideologies and social formations continued, though in a modified film.

"The project of feminist cinema therefore is not as much to make visible the invisible, as the saying goes, or to destroy vision altogether, as to construct another (object of) vision and the conditions of visibility for a different social subject."  

From the mid-1970s, most feminist film theory and criticism was involved with psychoanalytic theory. So was mainstream film theory; the distinction between it and feminist work is less severe than in the case in more traditional disciplinary areas – perhaps because the area is a recent one for academic study.

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22 Such as implication was later modified by Mulvey herself.
The ideological analysis of the late 1970s and early 1980s, influenced by post-structuralism and cine-psychoanalysis, had rejected mainstream cinema for its production of patriarchal/bourgeois spectatorship and simultaneous repression of femininity. Other approaches, developing in parallel, (and sometimes in opposition to psychoanalytic theories) argued for socio-culturally differentiated modes of meaning production and reading. A frequent aim of this enterprise, which relates commonly derided popular forms to the conditions of their consumption in the lives of socio-historically constituted audiences, is to elucidate women’s cultural forms, and thereby to challenge the male canon of cultural worth.24

According to cine-psychoanalysis, classic, narrative cinema reproduces psycho-linguistic and ideological structures, offering the surface illusion of unity, plenitude and identity as compensation for the underlying realities of separation and difference.25

The subject of mainstream narrative is the patriarchal bourgeois individual: that unified, centred point from which the world is organised and given meaning. Narrative organization hierarchizes the different aesthetic, and the ideological discourses which intersect in the process of the text, to produce a unifying, authoritative voice or viewpoint. This is the position – constructed outside the processes of contradiction, difference and meaning production – which the spectator must occupy in order to participate in the pleasure and meaning of the text.26

25 The film-journal, Screen, took the lead in dissemination of semiotic analysis of cinema during 1970s. in a special issue of spring/summer 1973, Screen, vol. 14, No. 1/2 the psychoanalytic underpinnings of classic narrative cinema were elaborated. Also, in vol. 16, no. 2 it brought out the translated version of Christian Metz’s ‘The Imaginary Signifier’ – dealing with psychoanalysis and cinema.
In this argument narrative organisation is patriarchal, the spectator constructed by the text is masculine. Pleasure is largely organized to flatter or console the patriarchal ego, and its unconscious. In particular the 'look' of the camera – mediated through the 'gaze' of a generally male hero – has been identified as male. This theorization may attract feminist position initially, however, a closer scrutiny reveals that they offer largely a passive role to female viewership, as if they have a colonized and alienated position of identification. Thereby, the feminine has been theorized in terms of 'lack', 'absense' and 'otherness'.

Recent initiatives in feminist film-theory, drawing on the work of feminist psychoanalysts and social–psychologist such as Luce Irigaray,\textsuperscript{27} Julia Kristeva,\textsuperscript{28} Nancy Chodorow\textsuperscript{29} et al have made possible considerable revisions to the cine-psychoanalytic construction of the classic narrative text, facilitating attempts to take account of the 'female spectator'. This work, however, draws on theoretically divergent analytical approaches. 'Female spectatorship' elides conceptually district notions: the 'feminine spectator', constructed by the text, and the female audience, constructed by the socio-historical categories of gender, class, race and so on.\textsuperscript{30} The question now confronting feminist theory is how to conceive their relationship.

One approach to the problem of their elision is to question the identification of mainstream narrative structures with patriarchal/bourgeois

\textsuperscript{27} Iragaray, Luce \textit{Speculum of the Other Women}, Gillian Gill trans, (Ithaca, New York; Cornell University Press, 1985).

\textsuperscript{28} Kristeva, Julia \textit{The Kristeva Reader}, Tori Mori, trans and ed. (New York, Macmillan, 1986).

\textsuperscript{29} Chodorow, Nancy \textit{Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory} (New Have, Yale University Press, 1990).

ideology on which it based. Recent work suggests that the textual possibilities of resistant or de-constructive reading exist in the processes of the mainstream text. To pursue this avenue, we require a theory of texts which can also accommodate the historical existence of social audiences. For 'femininity' is not simply an abstract textual problem; and what women's history tells us about femininity lived as a socio-culturally, as well as psychically determined category, must have consequences for our understanding of the formation of feminine subjectivity, of the feminine textual spectator and the viewing/reading of female audiences.

**Negotiation**

Arguments which support the notion of a specific, socio-historically constructed female cultural space came from diverse intellectual contexts and traditions and do not yet form a coherent theory. A range of concepts have been drawn on, including sub-cultural reading, cultural competence, decoding position and so on. A notion frequently deployed in various contexts is that of 'negotiation'.\(^{31}\) The value of the notion lies in its avoidance of an overtly deterministic view of cultural production. For the term 'negotiation' implies the holding together of opposite sides in an ongoing process of give-and-take.

'Negotiation' is a particularly useful tool for feminist textual analysis since it notes the instability of identity of those reading and also the unfixed meanings of texts, while acknowledging the political need to seek a certain amount of consistency.\(^{32}\) In place of 'dominant ideology' — with its suggestion either of conspiratorial imposition or of unconscious

\(^{31}\) Hall, Stuart: 'Encoding and Decoding' in *Culture, Media, Language* (London, Hutchinson, 1980).

\(^{32}\) Gledhill, Christine ibid.
interpellation – the concept 'hegemony', as developed by Antonio Gramsci, underpins the model of negotiation.\footnote{Gramsci, Antonio Selections from the Prison Notebooks, trans. and ed. by Hoare, Q. and Nowell-Smith, G. (London, Laurence and Wishart, 1971).}

According to Gramsci, since ideological power in bourgeois society is as much a matter of persuasion as of force, it is never secured once and for all but has continually to be re-established in a constant to and fro between contesting groups. ‘Hegemony’ describes the ever shifting, ever negotiating play of ideological, social and political forces through which power is maintained and contested.

According to Gledhill,\footnote{Gledhill, Christine ibid.} such ‘negotiation’ can take place or can be located at three levels – institutional negotiations, textual negotiations and reception as negotiation. For our research purpose, beyond the institutional and aesthetic vagaries of production, the third level of media analysis reception is crucial.

The viewing or reading situation affects the meanings and pleasure of a work by introducing, potentially resistant or contradictory, arising from the differential social and cultural constitution of readers or viewers. This is potentially the most radical moment of negotiation, because the most variable and unpredictable. Viewing and reading is a social process, which audiences derive from cultural products. such an understanding takes us beyond textual analysis to the field of anthropological and ethnographic work with ‘real’ audiences.

**Problem of Feminist Film Analysis**

From a specific political position feminist film analysis tries to distinguish ‘progressive’ from ‘reactionary’ texts. Such attempt to fix
meaning is illusory. We ought to refrain from defining the ideological status of any text – because such judgement would foreclose prematurely on critical and textual negotiation.

Writing in the mid-1980s for *Signs*, Judith Mayne noted two possible directions for feminist film-criticism:

(1) Encouraging film-makers to formulate another kind of cinema with a feminist perspective, or

(2) Encouraging film-viewers to understand cinema as symptomatic of women’s contradictory investments in patriarchal society.

Instead of this either/or situation, we can note that both these aspects are integral for our research purpose. To see how/what is the “another kind of cinema” with a feminist perspective and also, understand how film-viewers have responded/negotiated with such efforts to invest feminist perspective in film-making.

**Themes from Film-Studies**

As a coherent body of work we cannot adduce to any film-theory. Over the years the academic study of film has metamorphosed enormously. Yet many of the same issues that preoccupied and stimulated writers from the very beginning of film theory and criticism are still valid for later generations. The basic concerns are: is the filmed world realistic a artificial? Is film a language? How is the film-world best expressed?

Many of these questions were first formulated in critical language indebted to the methods and terminology of such humanistic disciplines as literacy criticism, art history, and aesthetics. Later on theories of media-

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35 *Signs* is the most prestigious contemporary journal on the subject of gender studies.
research, enriched by semiotics, sociology and psychoanalysis were incorporated in film-studies. Audience study came to play a very vital role in film-studies simultaneously. But early on, theorists began to emphasize the obligation to appreciate what was different, even unique, about film in comparison with the other arts: its formal qualities and its relation to a mass audience.

Into three somewhat overlapping phases, we can trace the development of film-studies. The first phase was formalist - it generally corresponds to the silent period. From about 1916 to the mid – 1930s, theorists such as Hugo Munsterberg, Rudolf Arnheim, and Sergei Eisenstein attempted to demonstrate that film was indeed an art, not just a direct recording of nature. The coming of synchronized sound then brought on a realist reaction to the formalist argument. Siegfried Kracauer and Andre Bazin among others argued that film was not an art in contrast to nature but an art of nature.

The second phase starts from 1960s and 1970s, when the formalist position was being challenged by writers responding both to historical conditions (the Vietnam War, the campus student revolts in the west) and to new developments in the academic conception of “Knowledge”, as understood in humanities and social sciences. These writes questioned the confidence with which classical film theory had used such terms as art, nature, society, reality, illusion, self, performance, author, work, and the artist – and in the process claimed to unearth hidden assumptions about

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36 Braudy, Leo and Cohen, Marshal (eds.) ibid.
race, class, gender, and language itself that could be best addressed through an analysis of film.39

In the 1970s an advent of new interpretive approaches derived from a broad range of disciplines began to have a tremendous influence on humanistic studies generally and – in part because of the relative youth of the field – on film-study in particular. One powerful early inspiration came from linguistics. Here, drawing upon the work of C.S.Pierce, Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson, Louis Hjelmslev, and Noam Chomsky, film theorists and critics explored the system of meaning that allow communication of all kinds to exist.40 A formal consideration of the meaning of individual films, or the special nature of film among the arts, became a less significant question than the place of both in more general system of communication and meaning. This was perhaps the richest period in film-studies. Interpretation now drew inspiration from semiotic and structuralist models. The structural anthropology of Claude Levi-Strauss41 as well as the demystified cultural history of Michel Foucault42 were holding the centre – stage of explanation. This was further sophisticated with Marxist historical and Freudian psychoanalytic analysis. Somewhat later came the influence of Jacques Lacan’s43 revisionary view of Freud, the feminst interrogation of the power structures of vision, and the deconstructive views of Jacques Derrida44 (where efforts to dig down the surface of the text and discover its “contradictions” often employed Marxist and psychoanalytic tools.

39 Brandy, Leo and Cohen, Marshal (eds.) ibid.
41 Levi-Strauss, Claude Structural Anthropology (Garden City, New York; Anchor, 1967).
These innovative attempts and approaches were not without controversy. Each in its own way has contributed to such classical issues of film theory as the relation of film to reality and how film may (or may not) be considered a language. Also, they have introduced such fresh considerations as the way that films reveal the underlying social attitudes and ideologies of the cultures that produce them, the ways film manipulate audience beliefs, and the ways they raise, exploit, and seek to satisfy audience desires.

In the 1990s, film study still maintained its earliest concerns with exploring the general terms and assumptions required for understanding film. However, since the mid-1980s, we have entered a more eclectic period. Significantly this phase seeks to merge insights owed to history, psychology, and linguistics into larger perspectives suitable for understanding individual films as well as film in general. These approaches sometimes, draw upon feminism, neoformalism, cognitive psychology, empiricism, or phenomenology. They may assert the shaping activity of the audience on film meaning (as opposed to the passive audience usually postulated in earlier approaches). Or they may emphasize the resistance of the performer, especially the star, to the meaning imposed by the film narrative; the ability of the independent filmmaker to construct a personal statement despite the supposedly totalitarian necessities of the medium; or the web of financial, political, and artistic decision that constitute film production.

**Movie Languages/Language film**

What the film say, and the way they say it, is crucial. Culture is about meaning. This affirmation leads us to the question of content analysis. Content analysis has focussed on cognitive content at the expense
of other forms. We can notice broadly, the difficulties associated with content analysis.

(1) It is often being claimed that content analysis responds to the need for systematic and objective determination of various types of communication significance. Then our 'objective' assessment of message content independent of the 'subjective' claims of communicator or audience, claims that the analyst's view is objective. Whereas that of other's are false. Modern sociology is too embroiled in issues of value and meaning to pursue such a simplistic/misleading 'solution'.

(2) The content of communication is often being understood as the sum total of warranted inferences that can be made about relationships involved in the communication process. Actually, whether it is a string of words or a dramatic scene we try to make sense of it, to give it meaning, by interpretation. Out of the combination of communication event and audience predispositions comes the 'meaning'. Now, this leads to the problem of relativism. It understanding is inferential, then there are as many contents as there are audiences. There is always some pattern, some common agreement on the meaning of a range of communication events. That is, there is a shared language in which the communication is cast.

So the knowledge of the language is fundamental. Language of film is much more than written or spoken words. Content analysis of film

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45 This happens if we are concerned with information carried by formal techniques. This includes the full range of elements: speech, sound, music and image. See, Gerbner, G. Holsti, O.R. et al eds. *The analysis of Communication Content* (London, Wiley, 1969).

remains understandably speculative if we do not know the detail of the medium – language (our case film – language).

Human beings imbue everything with meaning. At every level they try to make sense of the barrage of information with which they are faced. “Movie experience” is exactly the same as “meaningful experience”, and the range of potential “meaning – elements” in a movie is vast indeed.

Our images of film language are enmeshed in a number of aesthetic disputes. Traditional film aesthetics saw the distinctive mark of cinema in montage.47 It is widely held that juxtaposition lies at the heart of filmic communication is problematic, because it does not explain films which display little in the way of juxtapositional techniques. Also it does not allow involvement in the narrative situation of a fiction–film.

Under the influence of structural linguistics, semiology, and structuralism, contemporary film–theorist have tried to sort out the various ways in which films communicate. At the extreme, this may lead to a taxonomic nightmare. Traditional approaches to the ‘language’ of films have focused on forms at the expense of content. That is, they have taken an analytic distinction, claimed it as real, and tried to single out from the matrix in which it is embedded. The ‘language’ of the film is thus limited to the ways in which formal characteristics convey certain sorts of meanings, meanings derived from substance, from content, from the combination of the various elements of film, these all remain outside the scope of such analyses.

47 This is the well-worked area of the classic theorists. The theory of montage focusses above all the formal capacity of the medium to communicate expressive meanings. By combinations of editing tempo, composition, music, and the vest, this element of film reaches directly for the emotions of the spectator. See, Eisentein, Sergei ‘From Film Form’ in Brandy and Cohen (eds.) ibid.
At this point, we should not deny the analytical distinction between form and content (which had been a tendency as a reaction to the orthodox understanding); also we need to recognise that form is not identical with structure, and content with meaning.

Film is a highly complex medium, its communication many-levelled, its language multifaceted. Films have a ‘reality’ in which narrative develops. Contrary to some aesthetic approaches there is no absolute reality which the cinema perfectly reflects.48 There are multiple realities which film itself makes plausible, and which we may (to some extent) accept or reject according to an predispositions. We learn to recognise the various realities in which we spend our lives. Most of the time films offer us worlds outside our direct field of experience. They may make sense to us because we have read about them or seen photographs; because they live up to the images we have build up over the years; because we have seen many other films sit in the same world; basically because they are recognisable in some perspective or other that we bring to the cinema with us.

This ‘film-reality’ or ‘human content’ is invoked through a series of audio-visual elements. With the help of the various such elements the basic spectrum of meaning in which the film is founded is provided to us. It may be successful in projecting a ‘reality’ – which may be simple or complex, or even may be far from our own stone of realities or it may fail to do so due to improper usage of the audio-visual elements.

48 The major representatives of this view are Kracauer and Bazin. See Kracauer, S. ibid; also Bazin, A ibid.
We study this ‘human content’ through the domain of Iconography and Iconology. For Iconography, we understand a description and classification of images, while Iconology is Iconography turned interpretive.

An important contribution to film-studies has been made by Andrew Tudor⁴⁹ from a sociological angle. Accordingly, once the film-world is defined, the potentialities for interences multiply. Having invoked a particular reality in the minds of his/her audience, the film-maker can try to direct, constrain, and influence the specific meanings communicated. Nevertheless, the major communicative weapon lies in the narrative and thematic structure of the movie. This area has a rich potential for elaborate inference. Majority of fiction-films rely on the audience’s participation within their narrative as a basis for communication. Through this participation the spectator ‘receives the message’. S/he does not necessarily build explicit interpretive accounts of her/his understanding of the film, though s/he may do so. Certainly, the analyst must do so if he is to reconstruct the range of meanings embedded in any particular narrative structure. Further it is being claimed that film are meaningful wholes which cannot be simply reduced to plot analyses. Neither the recognition of available meanings non-problematic. So, film-analysis cannot simply rest on a qualitative assessment of the distribution of such meanings. It is being suggested since film-language is extraordinarily complex, the basic

meaning is not given. It demands promoting qualitative analysis which involves the selection and rational organization of such categories as to condense the substantive meanings of the given text, with a view to testing certain pertinent assumptions and hypotheses. This entails "disciplined subjectivity".