Luce Irigaray's authoritative, difficult, and provocative early essays, *Speculum de l'autre femme* (*Speculum of the Other Woman*) (1974) and *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (*This Sex Which Is Not One*) (1977), have frequently been invoked by feminist literary and film critics in the debates around subjectivity, sexual difference, and representation. Despite the volume of response to Irigaray's work, however, critical reception has been ambivalent. As a theorist, Irigaray is both revered and reviled, categorized if not always dismissed, as essentialist, Utopian, or both. For the most part the second half of her project - the articulation of a 'feminine' specificity and the possibility of an 'écriture feminine' - has been emphasized, and the first - her deconstructions of, and debts to, Freud - ignored. Paradoxically, though the density of her writing is designed to focus attention on the nuances of her arguments, it easily lends itself to misreading and sloganeering. This article is concerned with an assessment of the value her work may have for cinema studies; yet such an assessment is complicated, since her theory has most often been associated with avant-garde film practice. To my knowledge it has never been used to analyse mainstream film texts, let alone to examine audience responses to such texts.

The more I read of Irigaray, the more convinced I am that she has much to offer feminist critics working on both mainstream and avant-garde cinema. In what follows, therefore, I have returned to her deconstructions of what she calls Freud's sexual 'indifference' in order to re-evaluate her proposals for another model based on sexual 'difference'. I have chosen the figure of the lesbian as the nodal point from which to approach Irigaray's analyses of femininity, mimesis, and masquerade, because the lesbian indicates a route out of what Teresa de Lauretis calls 'the male-centered frame of reference in which gender and sexuality are (re)produced by the discourse of male sexuality'. Freud categorizes the lesbian as a man, and thereby, Irigaray charges, exposes his inability to conceptualize femininity outside reproduction or a male exchange of women. Further, his justification for this view of femininity is always, ultimately, located in a mimesis between anatomy and psyche. In Freudian scenarios, 'Woman', whether gay or straight, mother, wife, or daughter, is only, can only, masquerade. For Irigaray, in contrast, the lesbian suggests the possibility of a specifically feminine desire and an exchange between, not of, women, outside the realm of masquerade and myth, and concretely located in history and culture.
In a second part of this article I explore how Irigaray’s critiques and rewritings of Freud may be used to de- and re-construct popular Hollywood films and to illuminate the polarized audience responses surrounding the more controversial of them. Since Irigaray writes in *This Sex Which Is Not One* that she found ‘it was necessary to destroy, but, as Rene Char wrote, with nuptial tools’, then adds, ‘The option left to me was to have a fling with the philosophers’; it seems only appropriate that my main text here be *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1987). By analysing this film and its reception, using Irigaray’s theories, I hope to show how the questions she asks and the partial answers she gives can be used not just to interpret avant-garde texts but also to challenge and extend feminist and/or psychoanalytic readings of mainstream movies.

Finally, in the light of my discussions of Irigaray’s theory and its applicability to mainstream cinema, I return to the contradictions and complicities I find between Irigaray’s and Freud’s analyses of the lesbian, mimesis, and masquerade. In some ways, I argue, Irigaray’s relationship to Freud may itself be a fatal attraction, for at times her critiques replicate or even exacerbate the weaknesses of his analyses. At other times they boil the rabbit/baby in the bath-water, so to speak, because they ignore the processes of disavowal and jettison the unconscious. Nonetheless, as I hope to show, both Irigaray’s critiques and her Utopian visions have much to offer feminist film theory. Which is why I love Luce.

Throughout *Speculum de l’autre femme* and *Ce Sexe qui n’en est pas un* Irigaray argues that lesbianism exceeds or escapes Freud. What to make, she asks, of the woman who loves women? Does she look and act ‘like a man’, as Freud says? Indeed, is it possible for any woman *not* to look, and act, ‘like a man’? In his writings on female sexuality Freud pays relatively little attention to the lesbian, tending to equate her with the male homosexual. Only one case study, ‘The psychogenesis of a case of homosexuality in a woman’, is devoted exclusively to lesbianism. Irigaray summarizes Freud’s analysis there as follows: ‘Only as a man can a female homosexual desire a woman who reminds her of a man’ (*Sex*, 194).

Because, like the little girl, Freud’s lesbian is always a man, Irigaray charges that a ‘logic of the same’ underpins his psychoanalytic theory, causing it in the final analysis to promote sexual *indifference* rather than sexual *difference*. In fairness to Freud it should be noted that in this essay, as elsewhere in his discussions of female homosexuality, Freud emphasizes the underlying bisexuality of both men and women, and suggests a variety of reasons why a woman would choose another woman as her love object. None the less Irigaray is right to say that in ‘Psychogenesis’ Freud consistently describes his female patient’s physique, intellect, and behaviour as ‘masculine’. The conclusion of the essay even returns to biology: Freud refers to an operation which might ‘cure’ his young patient by replacing her ‘probably hermaphroditic ovaries’, then adds that she probably would not choose to undergo such
surgery because it would permanently ruin all 'hope of motherhood'.

Irigaray finds these final remarks particularly telling, because they so virulently echo other references to the body and motherhood in Freud's analyses of femininity. Though she readily admits that Freudian psychoanalysis describes 'an actual state of affairs' and repeatedly credits Freud with laying the groundwork 'needed to upset the philosophic order of discourse' (Sex, 70, 72), she maintains that his theory is predicated on a mimesis between body and mind which, as in the passage above, permits anatomy repeatedly to impose its model on psychological behaviour. She suggests it is by no means coincidental that the biological reference in 'Psychogenesis' is to the ovaries for, in Freud's model, motherhood, and particularly the mothering of a male child, is the most satisfactory replacement and compensation a girl can find for her missing penis.

As a result, Irigaray argues, in Freud's phallocentric discourse female mimesis and feminine pleasure become unrepresentable, and must 'remain inarticulate ... if [they are] not to threaten the underpinnings of logical operations' (Sex, 77). In patriarchal societies, all desire, all pleasure, are by definition masculine: 'Woman exists only as an occasion for mediation, transaction, transition, transference, between man and his fellow man, indeed between man and himself (Sex, 193). All economic organization, all exchange, are thus, figuratively at least, homosexual. Heterosexuality is a sham, a mere division of labour operating to the profit of men, not women. Direct exchange between women, like female mimesis and feminine pleasure, does not exist other than, perhaps, as the exchange of children/penis substitutes between mothers.

Yet because the lesbian makes love to another woman outside the confines of reproductive sex, she stands as the supreme threat to Freud's system. Her existence jeopardizes his conflation of femininity and motherhood. While male homosexuals are ostracized for finding pleasure in 'openly interpret[ing] the law [of symbolic homosexual exchange] according to which society operates' (Sex, 193), lesbians, Freud himself admits, are 'ignored by the law [and] ... neglected by psychoanalytic research,' because, again in Irigaray's words, they expose 'all femininity as, precisely, a masquerade imposed on women by male systems of representation' (Sex, 84).

While Lacan also speaks of femininity, and masculinity as well, as masquerade, he maintains that ideology and power are not at issue in the roles played by the phallus in the unconscious because he wishes to focus on the phallus as pure signifier. Irigaray, in contrast, is always concerned with the political implications of psychoanalytic theory, which means she is always attentive to the slippages between signifier and signified, to the non-arbitrary, culturally located, nature of language. Somewhat similarly, Joan Riviere plays with the gaps between 'woman' and women in 'Womanliness as masquerade', claiming that woman not only chooses to masquerade, she is masquerade. In the case of the happily married, professionally successful female academic Riviere analyses, each of the woman's public performances is followed by obsessive flirtations with a man or men in an attempt 'to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it'.

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Riviere continues: 'The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the "masquerade". My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference . . . they are the same thing.'

Ultimately, however, Riviere's definition again subsumes 'woman' within patriarchal discourse, insisting on the academic woman's need for male approval, and asserting once again the primacy of the penis. That the woman controls the masquerade and the resulting power relations with the men she approaches - significant facts from the point of view of feminist criticism - Riviere acknowledges only in passing.

Irigaray takes a different theoretical tack, maintaining that, at a point prior to the masquerade of femininity, 'woman' can indeed be found. For her, there is a danger in the collapse of femininity into masquerade and vice versa. As she says in 'The power of Discourse', 'in this masquerade of femininity, the woman loses herself, and loses herself by playing on her femininity' (Sex, 84). In Irigaray's framework, sexual difference thus predates the processes of sexual indifference set in motion, according to Freud, by the sight of the mother's and girl's visible 'lack' of a penis. Specularization and speculation are linked, and women's masquerade as 'woman' guarantees their exchange by men: 'Femininity is caught in a vicious circle; because she doesn't have "it" she must wish to have "it" since "it" is the guarantor of sexual exchange, but she doesn't have "it" so as to drive up, through her envy, "its" market rating as "general" equivalent.'

In Irigaray's version of femininity a la Freud, the question of whether a woman is born or becomes a woman thus both is and is not at issue. There is no doubt that Irigaray regards 'woman' as a linguistic, psychic, and social construction. Under certain circumstances, she would certainly agree with Simone de Beauvoir's famous assertion that 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.' None the less, in order to ask questions about this construction of women as 'woman', she also finds it necessary to posit 'woman' as a place outside the vicious circle of patriarchal discourse. At times, therefore, she will express surprise that, in Freud's system, 'it should be necessary to become a woman - and a "normal" woman to boot - and that this evolution should be "more difficult and more complicated" than becoming a man' (Spec, 22). In her analyses, she balances 'to be' (‘woman’) and ‘to become’ (a woman) against each other, drawing on the flux in meaning of the 'same' and 'other' in 70s and 80s French philosophical thought. As Claire Duchen explains, within this theoretical framework the ‘other’ is defined in relation to the speaking subject, while 'otherness' becomes that which is outside a dominant conceptual system.

Irigaray uses the lesbian as a kind of double other: as a woman, she is the other to man's subjectivity and economy; as a homosexual, she is the other to heterosexual relations formulated around reproduction. But perhaps even more crucial to Irigaray's system is the definition of the lesbian as 'otherness'. Through their 'otherness', lesbian sexual practices call attention to the characteristics of female sexuality Freud neglected or redefined in terms of a masculine model. Though the 'feminine' may still be elusive, inarticulate,
and/or repressed in contemporary western societies, female sexuality does exist and can be described.20

In counterpoint to Freud, then, Irigaray envisions a new, female mimesis of anatomy and psyche. She paints this other order poetically through metaphors which, in Mary Ann Doane's words, 'foreground the mimesis by which language reproduces the body'.21 Allusions to touch, hearing, and smell supplement Freud's emphasis on sight, and women's multiple sexual organs become the basis for a plural sexuality, no longer collapsible into dichotomies such as masculine/feminine, active/passive, subject/object, or heterosexual/homosexual.22

The goal of all this fancy footwork, as Irigaray insists time and again, is not simply to reverse the present patriarchal order of things. Even if this could be done, it would merely replicate the same old problems. Explorations of lesbianism are a necessary stage, not the ultimate answer; a way of illuminating female sexuality and, still more crucially, of acknowledging relations between women, including relations between mothers and daughters. For at their most radical, Irigaray's analyses of lesbianism point the way towards not just another kind of exchange, opposed to what she calls male 'hom/m/osexual' exchange, but towards exchange itself, the goal being, as she puts it in *Ethique de la difference sexuelle*, the 'evolution or transformation of forms, of relationships matter-form and of the interval between' in such a way as to leave behind altogether oppositions and hierarchies.23

The figure of the lesbian thus serves multiple purposes within Irigaray's philosophical framework. By her existence, she exposes 'femininity' and motherhood as masks imposed on 'woman' (*Spec*, 117). At the same time, through her relationships with other women, the lesbian suggests that different economies of desire, including relationships with men, are possible for all women.

As the supreme anomaly in Freud's system, the lesbian thus becomes the symbol and the sounding board for women in general and for all female outsiders. This analysis has particular resonance for female academics and feminists. As Irigaray notes, Freud's writings are peppered with asides which position his feminist opponents and female colleagues as masculine. The essay 'Femininity', for example, begins with a typically backhanded compliment to the female psychoanalysts in Freud's fictional audience: 'This doesn't apply to you. You're the exception; on this point you're more masculine than feminine',24 In 'Psychogenesis' the 'masculine' lesbian patient is characterized, in passing, as a feminist: 'She was in fact a feminist; she felt it unjust that girls should not enjoy the same freedom as boys, and rebelled against the lot of woman in general'.25

Joan Riviere, too, links the female intellectual, the female homosexual, and masquerade. She notes with surprise of the woman she studies: 'It is striking that she had had no homosexual experiences (since before puberty with a younger sister); but it appeared during analysis that this lack was compensated for by frequent homosexual dreams with intense orgasm'.26 Significantly, however, unlike Irigaray, Riviere's analysis contains intimations that class, race, and region, not just gender and sexuality, might also be factors to
consider. Thus her client, a wealthy southerner, dreamed as a child of being raped by a black man and 'defending' herself by seducing him, then of disguising herself as a domestic to cover up her fantasies of killing mother and father and inheriting from both. Yet despite the wealth of detail Riviere provides in her descriptions of the case, in the end all these references to class, race, and region are ignored. Gender is, ultimately, the only category considered: the black man becomes 'the man', the wealthy southern woman merely 'this woman'.

Both Freud's and Riviere's accounts of feminists, lesbians, and intellectual women are framed by a more general understanding of women having difficulty in finding a place in the outside world. As Freud puts it, 'women have made few contributions to the discoveries and inventions in the history of civilization'. Both, in other words, tend ultimately to view the separation between public and private spheres occasioned by the advent of the patriarchal family and monogamy as transhistorical and transcultural phenomena. Irigaray's response, in contrast, is to examine the historical boundaries of Freudian discourse, to ask 'what might become of psychoanalytic notions in a culture that did not repress the feminine' (Sex, 73). For while women's options under patriarchal logic may all too often be limited to silence, mimicry, or hysteria, Irigaray draws on deconstructive philosophy and the theory and practice of the 70s and 80s women's movements to find a place on the margins of patriarchal discourse from which to ask questions and engage in dialogue with male philosophers. Crucially, this place on the margins is concretely located in contemporary western society, found in love and relations between women - as mothers, daughters, sisters, lovers - which Irigaray describes as 'a sometimes silent, sometimes turbulent underground of our history. A very lively underground, but whose contours, forms are ill-defined, chaotic, or blurred'. Crucially, also, this underground of femininity is not, as so many critics of Irigaray assert, reducible to metaphors of a silent/silenced body. Time and again, Irigaray insists that women can and must appropriate, create and re-create culture, language, a symbolic order, between and with each other.

As Irigaray's own participation in feminist causes and her theoretical writings attest, the female academic, the independent woman, the feminist, and the lesbian can and do contest the repression of the feminine by playing within and against patriarchal discourse. Mimesis and masquerade are foregrounded as conscious strategies; spectacle and speech are flaunted, interpreted, reinterpreted; an alternative kind of exchange is envisioned by drawing on existing forms of exchange between women. Throughout, Irigaray's proposals rely on the ambiguities and echoes between 'woman' and women, and among representation, sexual difference, gender, and power. The politics she advocates flout order and logic, weave in and out of the holes in patriarchal ideology. There is room for, indeed need of, both criticism and fiction, as imagining relays imaging.
But what does all this mean for film theory? Are Irigaray's insistence on riddles and ellipses and her advocacy of the overthrow of syntax to be associated solely with an 'écriture feminine', translated into cinematic terms as avant-garde film? What connections can, should, we draw between cinematic representations of 'woman', the feminine, and women?

As I indicated earlier, I believe Irigaray's analyses can fruitfully be applied not just to avant-garde film but also to mainstream cinema. Gayatri Spivak puts it well: the kind of deconstructive reading at which Irigaray excels is 'productively conflictual when used to expose the ruling discourse'.

Irigaray's critiques of Freud's sexual 'indifference', her proposals for a psychoanalysis predicated on sexual 'difference', and her reworkings of lesbianism, mimesis, and masquerade can be used to ask questions of Hollywood narratives from the margins of hegemonic heterosexual, patriarchal discourses. Freudian- or Lacanian-inspired film criticism often misses these particular points of entry for two reasons: 1) 'Woman' can only be thought in relation to man as an 'empty sign' and 2) 'Woman' as sign and women in history are easily conflated, with the extreme result in feminist film criticism being the rejection of a particular representation as false because not reflective of a 'real' woman. In such analyses the hints of a different construction of gender and sexuality present in films like Fatal Attraction are overlooked, and textual analysis takes precedence over or is simply equated with contextual analysis. In either case it becomes very tempting to dismiss mainstream films as merely manipulative, formulaic trash.

But if we are ever to appreciate and understand the vehement reactions for and against films like Fatal Attraction we need to be able to trace the gaps and overlaps between what Teresa de Lauretis calls 'the experience of gender' and the various 'technologies of gender' such as cinema, narrative, and theory. Irigaray's sensitivity to the historical boundaries of her own and Freud's theoretical discourses, her recognition that women's experiences are diverse while 'Woman' is not, and her insistence on lesbianism as process and possibility, can help us distinguish between 'Woman' as essence, 'women' as historical subjects and (again the terms are de Lauretis') the subject of feminism as a quasi-Utopian theoretical construct. Because Irigaray creates a space for female experience and the feminine on the margins of patriarchal discourse, in the interstices of texts and their contexts, it becomes possible to explain why men, women, and especially feminists become so caught up in yet often feel so manipulated by Fatal Attraction's glitzy conflations of extra-marital sex, female masochism, and murder.

At first sight Fatal Attraction would seem to be merely another example of sexual 'indifference' at work. What Irigaray refers to as a mimesis between body and psyche is ominously omnipresent in the film's logic. All the women are defined in relation to men and motherhood, and their psychic well-being is equated with reproduction and marriage. Beth Gallagher (Anne Archer), the wife in the triangle, is the most blatant example. She does not work, but instead stays home with her adorable 6-year-old daughter, cooking and
decorating the house. Indeed, she is almost always shown in a house, either her own, or her parents', or in the quintessential American extension of house, the family station wagon. On those rare occasions when she does go out she is escorted by her husband, Dan Gallagher (Michael Douglas). Her identity is as wife and mother, and she is so good at the masquerade of femininity that she manages to be simultaneously sexy and sexless; in her underwear she is the ultimate tease, yet she never makes love to her husband. The artificiality and shallowness of her characterization is accentuated in many sequences by film techniques reminiscent of advertising: rapid editing, soft lighting, careful framing and slow pans and close-ups on Beth's thighs, ass and breasts echo perfume and lingerie commercials. As Irigaray says of woman as wife: 'She must renounce her feelings, the singularity of her desire. . . . It is without desire that woman becomes wife and mother'.

Beth's nemesis, Alex Forrest (Glenn Close), is, in contrast, not married. Yet even though she is a career woman, on her own, she too is identified through her relations to men and motherhood. While neither literally a lesbian nor a female academic (she is a book editor), she is coded as a competitive intellectual woman and, like Freud's lesbian and Riviere's academic, assigned masculine traits: she has a masculine name; lighting and make-up emphasize her angular features; she wears phallic clothing (padded shoulders, boots, and a black leather coat); and in key sequences she wields a large knife. Because she masquerades as a man she has greater access to the outside world: she prowls freely in and out of offices, streets, restaurants, discos, and amusement parks. None the less, despite her relative autonomy and freedom, she desperately desires a relationship with a man, and a home and family of her own. As a failed, 'masculine' woman, however, she is doomed to be an outsider without a family: her father is dead, and in the film's logic she seems never to have had a mother. Without home, family, or male escort, she is, ultimately, an object of horror and hatred. In psychoanalytic terms, she is 'condemned to "psychosis"' or at best "hysteria"' (Spec, 55).

By comparison with Beth, Alex is far more complicated and far more contradictory a character. Like the lesbian in Irigaray's analysis, Alex is threatening because her positioning as 'other' works on multiple levels. She challenges the Law/the lawyer, Dan Gallagher, and she figures the possibility of sexual difference, not just of sexual indifference. From the start of their relationship, Dan's relative weakness and passivity are apparent. He is incapable of articulating his own desires: in response to Alex's initial question, 'Are you discreet?', Dan can only reply, 'I definitely think it's going to be up to you.' Nevertheless Dan avails himself of the good time Alex offers him with all the gusto of an 18-year-old boy. As a result, for the first half of the film especially, Alex's arguments that Dan is selfish, cowardly, and irresponsible are quite compelling. 'You've had your fun. Now you just want a quiet life', she says. Her refusal to leave him alone - in Dan's words, to 'play by the rules' - exposes Dan's own tenuous relationship to patriarchal law. Despite constant close-ups on his wedding ring and the family photos in his office, Dan's connection to his family is a shaky one: he runs away from his wife as much as he does from Alex. His confession to Alex that he once told his own mother
Dan finds Alex visiting his wife Beth.

'I don't practise family law' assumes an ironic dimension indeed.

But especially because *Fatal Attraction* is a derivative genre film mixing formulas from both melodrama and horror, it cannot tolerate or sustain two discourses, one male, one female, indefinitely. The crucial narrative shift occurs midway through the film, when Alex goes to Dan's apartment for a tete-a-tete with Beth. To Dan, the prospect of an exchange of information, money, and trust between two women poses the ultimate threat. Alone, Alex may, like Irigaray's lesbian, be multiply 'other', wilfully different, but she is still alluring. In tandem with Beth, however, she becomes unbearable. Thus although her intrusion into Dan's personal space and her welcome by Beth in broad daylight is reminiscent of his night-time break into her apartment two sequences earlier, the film codes it far more ominously.

The sequence is shot from Dan's point of view. In true paranoid fashion, he hears his wife and Alex discussing Alex's purchase of the family apartment before he sees them. A shaky hand-held camera translates his fear as he approaches the two women, then a series of shot/reverse shots on him, in close-up, and on the two women, either individually or together, in medium shot, contrast his silence with the two women's amicable chatter. In the background, bass string instruments ominously play descending then ascending scales.

From this point on, the tone of the film shifts radically, and illogically. After Alex's visit to his apartment Dan is largely absolved of guilt, while Alex is transformed from masochistic victim to sadistic villain. She becomes more and more crazed. Her attacks on Dan and his family escalate from midnight phone calls, to the destruction of Dan's car, to the boiling of the pet family rabbit, to

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the kidnapping of the 6-year-old daughter. In the terms laid down by Irigaray's reading of Freud, direct exchange between women is now limited to the exchange - in this case, the forced exchange - of children between 'mothers'. Not until the final sequence do the two women meet again face to face. Then, as in their very first encounter at the party celebrating publication of a samurai self-help book, costuming and hair-style briefly suggest their doubling, if not their connection. By now Alex has become the ultimate bitch and Beth the perfect angel, and the only possible solution to the triangle is for Alex to die. Though Dan manfully tries to drown the bitch/witch, it is Beth who finally shoots her through the heart. Nonetheless, Dan, not Beth, gets the credit for the kill when a policeman appears to shake his hand.

Yet Dan's final paternal hug of Beth and the last freeze frame on still another photo of the happy nuclear family ring false: throughout the film Dan has been too passive, too irresponsible. Even in its most deadly, most grotesquely caricatural form, exchange between women continues to disturb the order of patriarchal logic: the ending is too pat; dead or alive, the women are too strong. Audiences may be united against Alex, but they don't particularly believe or care whether Beth and Dan live happily ever after.

Despite the implausibility of the ending and despite what Pauline Kael calls the 'mechanical characters shoved into formula', the film has been and is wildly popular, grossing more in the first week-end of its release than any other film in history except Crocodile Dundee, running successfully for nine months in movie theatres and, a year after its release on video, still selling well. Arguably, Fatal Attraction is most interesting as a sociological phenomenon: though most people, not just film critics or feminists, describe it as manipulative, almost everyone has intense emotional reactions to it.
Audiences have mapped their own experiences on to it to such a degree that the film has become coextensive with daily life. During the theatrical run, a plethora of TV talk shows and pulp newspaper articles, filled with quotes from eminent psychologists, fuelled viewers' morbid fascination with the film. For months supermarkets stocked stories like 'Fatal Attraction obsession is really a disease', 'Her Fatal Attraction will terrify every woman who cares about her man', 'Every man's nightmare', and 'Real life fatal attractions: it's not just a movie'. (The last contains my favourite cautionary tale: a story of a woman from Racine, Wisconsin, who stabbed her lover's newly-wed bride ninety-seven times, as People needlessly adds, 'killing her'.41) Tidbits about Glenn Close's personal life (she divorced during the film and had a child by someone else out of wedlock) and details of the film's production history (the changed ending and the switch from an initially more feminist script) have blurred the lines between fact and fiction still further.42

Significantly, few of these articles or talk shows take a wife's point of view. The husband's position gets more attention and sympathy, but Dan is almost universally regarded as a wimp for failing to accept responsibility vis-a-vis either of the two women with whom he is involved. Most of the controversy and emotional effect centre on Alex.

That audience reactions take up so vehemently the confused logic of the film itself raises questions about the connections between the experience of gender and 'technologies of gender . . . with power to control the social field of meaning'.43 If not just half of all married men but also one-third of all married women have extra-marital affairs, why does the single career woman character in Fatal Attraction, who represents a far smaller percentage of women, generate the most heated interest and receive most of the blame? And why do feminists and career women themselves react so strongly yet with such mixed feelings of guilt and resentment to Alex and the film?

Amy Taubin's description of the uncontrollable jumble of representation and reality she felt while watching Fatal Attraction is typical of the confused, but negative, reactions the film provokes in feminists: 'My immediate response to the film was not so much to identify with Alex as to be terrified that others might spot a resemblance between us'.44 Only those critics like Ellen Willis and Karen Durbin who championed Alex as avenging angel and revelled in Dan's discomfiture, working within and against the film's logic as I have done above, found pleasure in the film as feminists.45 An informal survey of my women friends in North Carolina, New York, Wisconsin, Tennessee, Colorado, and Washington DC, betrayed, on the whole, similar responses: while some felt the film was effective and/or exciting, and others found it almost unbearably cliched, all felt manipulated, and all found it to be anti-feminist, if not entirely misogynist.

Irigaray's analysis of the threat to hom/m/osexual exchange and phalloggocentrism posed by the lesbian and the independent woman helps explain the majority of reactions to the film. It makes sense that the woman who masquerades as a man would be the target of fear and ridicule by men and women who are or want to be in traditional heterosexual relationships. Barbara Ehrenreich's 1983 study, The Hearts of Men, corroborates Irigaray's theory by
providing extensive documentation of how justifications have been elaborated since the 1950s to excuse men's ever-increasing desertion of their wives. Ehrenreich also indicates why women would want to forgive their husbands and deny their own infidelity by projecting everything on to the other woman: as women, and especially as wives and mothers, they are increasingly economically and emotionally vulnerable.\textsuperscript{46} Today of course the situation is further complicated by the right-wing rhetoric around AIDS which paints all extra-marital sexual activity as morally and socially diseased.

But why are feminist reactions so mixed and so intense? After all, it should be obvious to us that \textit{Fatal Attraction} is a movie, not reality. In Irigaray's terms, however, the confusion within patriarchal discourses of 'woman' as constructed sign and 'women' as historical reality necessarily affects everyone - even feminists alienated by such discourse. And because, as I have argued, \textit{Fatal Attraction}'s representation of Alex is so contradictory, it provokes feminist rage against her and against her positioning as a villain while inviting feminists who do identify with her or with the possibility of another kind of desire and exchange she initially embodies to feel masochistically culpable themselves.\textsuperscript{47} As Lydia Sargent says in a satirical article entitled 'Kill the bitch', when Alex boils the pet rabbit, 'even the most hard-hearted women in the audience . . . turn on her. After all, killing men is okay but nobody boils a bunny rabbit and gets away with it'.\textsuperscript{48}

Only by insisting on Irigaray's distinctions between 'woman' and 'women' and by clinging to a concept of feminism as a discursive position, not equivalent to either 'woman' or 'women', can feminists disengage from our own fatal attractions to \textit{Fatal Attraction} without denying our emotional involvement in and against it. Other experiences of desire and exchange do, after all, exist, outside, inside, beside the models proposed to us and/or imposed on us by patriarchal technologies and institutions. But shifting gears back and forth between biology, psyche, and society as Irigaray and Freud do, and adding still a fourth term, cinema, as I have done, is inevitably awkward and necessarily problematic. In conclusion, therefore, I want to indicate where the risks may be located in Irigaray's rereadings of Freud and in their application to film texts.

Because Irigaray as well as Freud argues by analogy and grounds her theories in a mimesis between body and psyche, Jane Gallop suggests that Freud may have seduced Irigaray, that psychoanalysis may have won over feminism.\textsuperscript{49} Is this true? Is theirs a fatal attraction? Should feminists want to join with the Ecole Freudiennne in shouting 'kill the essentialist bitch'? Or is the reverse true, that Irigaray has so radically undermined Freud's system that we have no alternative but to discard it, to boil it with the bunny?

It is, I think, true that Irigaray's analyses at times collapse biology, culture, and psyche, though the fragmentary and lyrical nature of much of her writing makes it difficult to say with certainty when and where this occurs. Most feminist opponents of Irigaray read her too literally and thereby misread her.\textsuperscript{50}
Jacqueline Rose's critique is the most telling: while she recognizes the strength of Irigaray's arguments, she maintains that Irigaray ignores Freud's emphasis on the processes of disavowal at work in the construction of sexual difference. For Rose, when Irigaray writes 'Nothing to be seen equals having nothing', the visual is reduced to perception and the unconscious disappears. Irigaray ignores Freud's insistence on the failures of vision, the problems of seeing, replacing them instead by her hypothesis of two distinct sexes. The substitution might well be characterized as another instance of disavowal of woman's lack through a fetishization of difference.

Irigaray is not, however, unaware of the dangers she runs. As she writes in *Ce Sexe*, 'To put certain questions to psychoanalysis, to challenge it in some way, is always to risk being misunderstood, and thus to encourage a precritical attitude toward analytic theory' (*Sex*, 63). She by no means advocates simply dumping Freud. On the contrary, she repeatedly refers to the historical paradox within which Freudian psychoanalysis finds itself: 'Freud is in fact indicating a way off the historico-transcendental stage, at the very moment when his theory and his practice are perpetuating...that very same stage' (*Spec*, 139). She may wonder whether for Freud the unconscious and the feminine are one and the same, and militate against a conception of the unconscious as universal, transcultural, and transhistorical, but she nonetheless retains the unconscious for feminism. Indeed, in *Misere de la psychanalyse* she criticizes Lacan and his followers because they 'love knowledge more than the unconscious'. Freud's snide dismissal of his feminist critics in a footnote to 'Female sexuality' - 'The use of analysis as a weapon of controversy obviously leads to no decision' - would no doubt provoke a similar response from Irigaray. For decisions are precisely not what is at issue in her project. For her, it is not a question of 'making woman the subject or the object of a theory' (*Sex*, 156), but rather of simultaneously playing with equality and difference, of using difference to evoke 'the possibility of different perceptions and creations'.

In Irigaray's rereadings and rewritings of Freud, and in my rereadings and rewritings of Irigaray, the lesbian is thus not always a real lesbian, and certainly not only a sexual identity to be asserted as an 'issue of personality and personal identity'. Irigaray does not romanticize lesbians, but instead warns that 'One of the dangers of love between women is the confusion of identity between them, the non-respect or non-perception of differences'. None the less she quickly adds: 'For women seeking to find themselves, to discover themselves', love between women represents an 'indispensable historical moment'. The figure of the lesbian today, like the mimesis of body and psyche and the masquerade of femininity, are discursive positions around 'woman' and 'women', which may be taken up by feminists as needed and reworked as political strategies.

For feminist film critics interested in returning to Irigaray's texts, the stance she adopts vis-a-vis Freud and the questions she asks are more important than the partial answers she gives, for all answers must be adopted and adapted in and over time. Like Irigaray and, though differently, Freud, we can undermine monolithic constructions of masculinity, deconstructing texts by
insisting on absences, repetitions, and exaggerations, all the while trying to avoid creating new monopolies in the name of femininity. We can use Irigaray's analyses of the lesbian, mimesis, and masquerade and draw on her hypotheses and observations regarding the existence of sexual difference and feminine sexuality to open up mainstream as well as avant-garde film texts, without refusing sight and the look as 'masculine' while promoting sound and the voice as 'feminine'.

To return to Fatal Attraction, we can take comfort in the knowledge that the film does not toll the death-knell of feminism; it does not mean we are all psychotic; and it does not, to quote Lydia Sargent's pastiche once again, prove that 'the only positive heroine to come out of Hollywood since Doris Day is Miss Piggy'. We do have other options than to be Snow White and 'lie in the woods in a coma waiting for the right man to come along'.

For the visual is not simply perceptual; the image is never only unreal; and the spectator is never solely duped or manipulated by mass media. To argue as much would merely exacerbate the rifts between cinema, society, and psyche. This is not the answer. But then Irigaray's analyses of the lesbian, mimesis, and masquerade in Freud suggest that, for now at least, there is not an answer, and there is not an answer.

NOTES


For discussions of Irigaray's concept of feminine writing as it relates to film, see, for example, Mary Ann Doane, 'Film and the masquerade: theorising the female spectator', Screen, 23, 3-4 (Sept./Oct. 1982), 74-87, and 'The voice in the cinema: the articulation of body and space', Yale French Studies, 60 (1980), 33-50; Mary C.

2 Robert Lang does cite Irigaray's critique of Freud's 'hom/m/osexual logic' in a recent essay on *Kiss Me Deadly*, but only in a footnote. See Robert Lang, 'Looking for the "Great Whatzit": Kiss Me Deadly and Film Noir', *Cinema Journal*, 27, 3 (Spring 1988), 42, n. 3.

In her discussion of Irigaray, 'feminine' language and radical signifying practice, Annette Kuhn refuses to privilege either avant-garde or mainstream cinema. She argues, rightly I think, that the moment of reception, not the text, holds the key to textual politics. In her reading of Irigaray, 'feminine' language is thus a relationship to language, not a particular form of language: By extension this argument may be viewed as an explanation of and a justification for intervention at the level of signification, for 'radical signifying practice' (Kuhn, 12).

Mary Gentile, Stephen Heath, Mary Ann Doane and E. Ann Kaplan, on the other hand, discuss Irigaray's proposals for a feminine discourse only in reference to avant-garde films. Though Kaja Silverman also invokes Irigaray's concept of a 'feminine language' when she examines avant-garde cinema by women directors, she interprets Irigaray's metaphoric insistence on voice and body literally, and translates it into cinematic terms as entailing a holding of the voice to the body. As a result, for Silverman Irigaray's proposals for a 'feminine language' have far more in common with classic Hollywood than with feminist avant-garde film. Silverman does not, however, use Irigaray in her discussions of Hollywood films. While Silverman's reading of Irigaray raises a number of valid objections, she tends to downplay Irigaray's critique of dominant discourses and, on the whole, I would argue, takes her equation of voice, body and 'feminine language' too literally.


4 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 150. Future references will be incorporated in the text, as, for example, *Sex*, 150.

5 Among the reasons Freud gives for lesbianism are the following: over-identification with or revolt against the father; over-attachment to or hatred of the mother; desire for a male child by the father thwarted by the appearance of a brother, leading to jealousy of and desire for this brother; and, finally and quite simply, anatomical error. See, for example, Sigmund Freud, 'The psychogenesis of a case of homosexuality in a Woman', 'A child is being beaten: a contribution to the origin of sexual perversion', 'Some psychological consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes' and 'Female sexuality', *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 133-59, 107-32, 183-93 and 194-211 respectively. See also Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity', *New Introductory Analyses on Psychoanalysis*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1965), 99-119.

6 Freud, 'Psychogenesis', 159.


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Indeed, Freud notes in 'Some psychological consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes' that when the girl makes the equation 'penis = child' she has turned into a little woman'. Freud, 'Anatomical distinction', 191.

As Irigaray writes in Sexes et Parentes: 'I do not know of any societies which have lived by a market exchange between women . . . . Given their social and cultural role, the commodities which women would necessarily exchange (?!) would be their children, and words and acts about them. Women would exchange these children - without an explicit market organization - against a market status for themselves, as valuable objects and subjects (?) or maternal functions'. Irigaray, Sexes et Parentes, 94, 98-9; translation mine, no emphasis added.

Freud, 'Femininity', 133.

11 Drawing on Joan Nestle's descriptions of butch/femme relationships, I would nuance Irigaray's insights here and argue that the butch's flaunting of masculine clothing and attitudes be seen as unmasking masculinity itself as a posture, a masquerade, thereby making clear by counter-example the constraints under which most women live. The femme's exaggerated femininity, on the other hand, combined with her ability to 'pass' as straight, to be socially accepted - at least when not on the arm of her butch - call attention to the privileges accorded 'feminine' women who are involved with men. See Joan Nestle, 'The fem question', Pleasure and Danger, ed. Carole S. Vance (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 222-A.


13 Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as masquerade', Formations of Fantasy, 38.

14 See, for example, ibid., 42: 'In my case direct recognition of the possession of the penis was not claimed openly; it was claimed for the reaction-formations, though only the possession of the penis made them possible. Indirectly, therefore, recognition was none the less claimed for the penis'.

15 ibid., 36.

16 Irigaray, Speculum, 114. Future references to Speculum will appear directly in the text, as, for example, Spec., 114.

17 The internal quote is from Freud, 'Femininity'. 103. Here as elsewhere in Speculum Irigaray refuses to give precise references or even punctuation indicating quotation. As she says at the end of her book, 'because in relation to the working of theory, the/a woman fulfills a twofold function - as the mute outside that sustains all systemativity; as a maternal and still silent ground that nourishes all foundations - she does not have to conform to the codes theory has set up for itself. In this way she confounds, once again, the imaginary of the "subject" - in its masculine connotations - and something that will or might be the imaginary of the female!' Irigaray, Speculum, 365.

18 In Speculum and This Sex the question of origin - in this case, whether one is born or becomes a lesbian, or is born or becomes a woman - is not at issue. As Elizabeth Berg points out in her review essay on Speculum and Amante marine: De Friedrich Nietzsche, however, the question of origin assumes greater importance in Irigaray's later work: 'Irigaray increasingly appeals (particularly in her recent Amante marine) to the self-evident realities of birth, need (as opposed to desire), unmediated contact, etc., as if physical reality could be separated from its embedding in the
imaginary and experienced directly without recourse to any kind of mediation.' I would agree with Berg's critique of this strategy: '[Irigaray's] attempt to reduce the notion of origin to the simple physical reality of birth is, in the end, a regression to a metaphysics of presence': Berg, op. cit., 18.

19 Duchen, op. cit., 70-1.
20 ibid., 89-90.
21 Doane, 'The Female Body', 32.
22 See, for example, Irigaray, Sexes et Parentes, 171: 'But two things are often forgotten in psychoanalytic theory: the voice with its diverse qualities (timbre, intensity, pitch) and colors. These two components of human identity differ by sex ... Faithful to their colored and sonorous properties the sexes nonetheless escape dichotomic oppositions. Voices and colors are not reducible to bipolar couples': translation mine. Irigaray's emphasis on colour and sound as opposed to vision might prove helpful to film critics seeking ways to discuss other aspects of film besides point-of-view structures and the look.

23 Luce Irigaray, Ethique de la difference sexuelle (Paris: Minuit, 1984), 15; translation mine, no emphasis added.
25 Freud, 'Psychogenesis', 156.
26 Riviere, op. cit. 39.
27 see ibid., 37-8 for a description of the female patient's early fantasies. Although both Stephen Heath and Mary Ann Doane discuss the relationships among masquerade, gender and sexuality in Riviere's analysis, neither addresses the inflection of these categories by class, race and region.

28 Freud, 'Femininity', 117.
29 See Moi, op. cit., 135.
30 Irigaray, Ethique de la difference sexuelle, 101.
31 See, for example, ibid., 103: 'It is necessary that a symbolism between women be created in order that love between them can take place. This love is, besides, not possible even now except between women who can speak to each other'; translation mine. See also 111.

32 In 'Femininity' the repression of women and the feminine is even more acute than is usually acknowledged. James Strachey's translation covers up the fact that Freud addresses himself to the men in a mixed audience, speaking of the women only in the third person plural, as Jane Gallop's translation makes clear: 'Nor will you have escaped worrying over this problem, because you are men; as for the women among you this will not apply, they are themselves the riddle': Gallop, op. cit., 66. Irigaray retaliates in Speculum by including herself in that audience: like Freud, she often uses the pronoun 'we'.

33 Spivak, op. cit., 177, cited in Moi, op. cit., 139.
35 De Lauretis, op. cit., 18-19.
36 ibid., 9-10.
37 Irigaray, Ethique de la difference sexuelle, 114; translation mine.
38 In a paper presented at the June 1987 Society for Cinema Studies Conference Sloan Seale argues that the omnipresence of family photos in Fatal Attraction functions on two levels: ideologically, these photos create a nostalgic spectacle of the happy nuclear family typical of postmodern film; concretely, they get in Alex's and Dan's


42 Susan Faludi devotes considerable space in her article to Lyne’s personal views on marriage and the single women of Manhattan’s publishing world:

They are sort of pretending or trying to be men, sort of overcompensating for not being men . . . . It’s kind of unattractive, however liberated and emancipated it is. It kind of fights the whole wife role, the whole childbearing role. Sure you got your career and your success, but you’re not fulfilled as a woman.

My wife has never worked. She’s the least ambitious woman I’ve ever met. She’s a terrific wife. She hasn’t the slightest interest in doing a career. She kind of lives this with me, and it’s a terrific feeling. I come home, and she's there.

Faludi also mentions that Dearden’s script was originally written from the single woman’s point of view, but was later changed to suit male producers. See Faludi, 49-50; see also Corliss. Still other articles provide information on Glenn Close’s preparation for the role through consultations with psychiatrists. See, for example, Travers and ‘Every man’s nightmare’. See, further, Aljean Harmetz, ‘Fatal Attraction” director exults over his film’, New York Times (5 October 1987); Adrian

De Lauretis, op. cit., 18.
Taubin, op. cit., 90.
Willis’s rewrite of the ending, which she justifies through references to the women characters’ strength and Dan’s weakness, is as follows: ‘Here’s my own fantasy climax: as Douglas’s wife begins to figure out what’s going on, the spectacle of Close’s vengefulness ignites her own feminist anger, long smothered under that sweet nurturing facade. Close then kills Douglas and his wife provides her with an alibi. Or vice versa’: Willis, 85-6. See also Taubin, ‘The rabbit died’ 90.
Rosemary Kegl explains female and especially feminist ambivalence towards the film somewhat differently. For her the film works both as a tribute to Alex’s ‘limited ability to appropriate the powers of humor and horror’ and as a nostalgic resurrection of the bourgeois nuclear family. See Rosemary Kegl, ‘A Fatal Attraction between humor and horror: family affairs from beyond the grave’, ms., paper read at the October 1988 Midwest Modern Language Conference. In its nostalgic recuperation of family values, Fatal Attraction is typical of a significant number of 1980s Hollywood films, especially formulaic genre films. For discussions of the socio-political implications of this trend see, for example, Andrew Britton, ‘Blissing out: the politics of Reaganite entertainment’, Movie, 31-2 (Winter 1986), 1-42; Christine Holmlund, ‘Sequels and remakes in politics and film: Down and Out in Beverly Hills, Rocky IV, Aliens and the New Cold War’, forthcoming in Jump Cut; and Robin Wood, Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). Michelle Barrett and Mary McIntosh discuss in some detail reasons for feminist and left ambivalence towards the family: Michelle Barrett and Mary McIntosh, The Anti-Social Family (London: Verso, 1982).
Gallop, op. cit., 56.
There are some exceptions, however. See, for example, Adler and Venn, Burke, Doane, Gallop, Heath, Jacobus, Kuhn.
Rose, 202, paraphrasing Irigaray, Speculum, 48. ‘Woman’s castration is defined as her having nothing you can see, as her having nothing. In her having nothing penile, in seeing that she has No Thing. Nothing like man. That is to say, no sex/organ that can be seen in a form capable of founding its reality, reproducing its truth. Nothing to be seen is equivalent to having no thing. No being and no truth.’
Rose, op. cit., 227.
See also Irigaray, Sex, 72.
On the subject of feminism and politics, see Irigaray, Sex, 81 and Speculum, 119.
Irigaray, Sexes et Parentis, 178.
Irigaray, Ethique de la difference sexuelle, 66.
Ibid., 69; translation mine.
Sargent, op. cit., 34.