

ground-breaking suggestions about the unconscious relations between the spectator, filmic conventions and the cinematic apparatus, and to slide closer and closer to Johnston's work on the signifying chain, the image and the operations of the diegesis. Although the theory of the spectator and the gaze was invariably involved as a starting point, work centered more and more firmly on the time-honoured objects of analysis of all narrative media: plot, action and character.

Methodologically, this is where *The Women Who Knew Too Much* is situated. In its initial thrust, the book takes up the debates in film theory around the issue of gender and film spectatorship, dealing particularly with some of the more schematic developments from Mulvey, such as that women's response to patriarchal cinema can only be masochistic, while men's response is necessarily sadistic. These are the theoretical underpinnings of the masquerade. But just as Johnston and Doane took their illustration and support from the unfoldings of character and plot, so also in her examination of the issues of the gaze, the spectator and femininity, Modleski offers psychoanalytic readings of the diegetic operations of seven films from different periods in Hitchcock's career. These readings are largely plot-oriented and characterological, emphasizing Hitchcock's complex attitudes towards femininity through his presentation of women characters who are variously hateful or charming, scheming or duped, murdered or married.

As the back cover blurb puts it, Modleski

*claims that critical approaches to Hitchcock have falsely fallen into two camps: either he is seen as a misogynist, or he is seen as sympathetic to women in his demonstration of women's plight in patriarchy. In opposition to these positions, Modleski asserts that Hitchcock*

*is deeply ambivalent towards his female characters.*

Her readings of *Rebecca* (also the subject of Doane's early treatment of the gendered spectator and *the masquerade*), *Notorious*, *Rear Window* and *Vertigo* are especially useful antidotes to the usual readings of these popular films; and her treatment of two early films, *Blackmail* and *Murder!*, and one of the first thorough examinations of *Frenzy*, are fresh and original additions to the Hitchcock canon.

In this way, *The Women Who Knew Too Much* is a pretty good book. It sets out its project clearly and attacks it thoroughly. The examinations of the films are insightful and penetrating, and the theoretical issues are presented without either simplification or undue complication. The writing itself is one of the great strengths of the book. Far from the tortured and tortuous verbiage of — come on, let's face it — far too much of the current feminist discourse, *The Women Who Knew Too Much* is a model of rigour combined with clarity. Lucid, well-argued and compelling to read, in fact it is one of those rare books which actually lives up to the blurbs on the back cover.

This book should take its place along that by now very lengthy shelf of works on Hitchcock, with cross-references to that infinitely longer shelf on the classical Hollywood cinema. I hope that students will take up this book as a secondary source and consult it for essays right along with Robin Wood, Raymond Bellour, Donald Spoto, Raymond Durnat, Fred Jameson, and all the rest of the boys, finding in it just what Modleski intends: the interpretation of Hitchcock from the woman's point of view.

Then why am I not more enthusiastic? Why am I not applauding, with Kaja Silverman and Constance Penley in those cover blurbs, the first feminist rereading

of Hitchcock?

For me, the task of feminist film theory and criticism lies elsewhere, in the support — through analysis, critique and further theorization — of feminist filmmakers. I am increasingly impatient with the feminist examinations of the classical Hollywood *genres* and now *auteurs* which have not begun to abate even after almost fifteen years. Around ten years ago there was a move towards feminist filmmakers: Chantal Akerman, Yvonne Rainer and Marguerite Duras were embraced briefly as salutary opposition to the classic realist text. But they were shortly abandoned in the journals, and no book-length study has appeared. Instead, feminist work, especially from American scholars, has settled back comfortably with those old favourites, those juicy, naughty narrative films where there is really something to talk about: plot and character; romance, danger and death.

Meanwhile, feminist filmmakers in Canada, Hollywood and Europe are finding it harder and harder to survive. We find an interesting but distressing phenomenon in the past ten years. Many women directors get to make a first and even second film. And then no more, because they can't make a profitable return on their budgets. Without commercial distribution, they can't find their audience through conventional means. Feminist critics don't write about them, feminist scholars don't examine them. Thus their potential audience can't find them because they don't know of them. And feminist filmmakers are left without even anything in print to indicate to potential supporters — governments, arts councils, educational TV stations — that there might be good reason to support feminist films. And so they are dying out.

And so I will put this very good book high up on my shelf. If I ever have to teach Hitchcock, I'll take it down again.

## WOMEN AND AGING

Ellen M. Gee and Meredith M. Kimball.  
Toronto and Vancouver: Butterworths,  
1987.

### Mary O'Brien

To date, academic publications on

women and aging have been anthologies and too uneven to use as primary texts for teaching introductory courses on this topic. Therefore, a definite highlight is a recent monograph, *Women and Aging*, published in Butterworth's "Perspectives on Individual and Population Aging" series. Written by two feminist scholars, Ellen Gee and Meredith Kimball, this small, well-researched and highly informative book consists of eight chapters and a

comprehensive bibliography covering issues germane to older women, and largely from a Canadian perspective. Most chapters identify areas for further research and conclude with a discussion of policy implications. Rather than focussing on topics which have tended to limit understanding of middle-aged and older women, such as adjustment to widowhood and the empty nest, the authors have chosen the more arduous task of compiling informa-

tion on broader and more contemporary areas: older women and health, sexuality, the problems of poverty in later life, and the occupational and family life course of women.

Early on, the fact is well-established that aging is a women's issue because of the demographic structure of Canadian society and population aging. The elderly population is becoming increasingly female-dominated, particularly in late old age. In 1981, among persons 80 years and over, there were 184 females to every 100 males. By the year 2201, the ratio for this same age group is expected to be 218 to 100. In addition, three and one-half times more older women than men are widowed and two and one-half more older women live alone. And truly significant is the fact that twice as many older women as older men reside in nursing homes. These facts alone indicate sufficient gender differences in old age to merit special study of older women.

The first chapter sets a theoretical framework for the book by providing an overview of the major sociological and psychological perspectives on aging — a necessary context from which to understand older women. We have finally acknowledged that change and development are not completed in early adulthood but continue throughout the life cycle. It is also recognized that theoretical perspectives influence, in the long run, social policy and intervention. In the case of older women, the authors point out that the perspectives under discussion (mechanistic, organismic, dialectical, normative and interpretive) are applicable to older men and women but the answers they provide may well be different for each sex. A dialectical perspective which emphasizes historical change as a force on individuals' lives is relevant to both men and women. However, the more recent phenomenon of women who have worked in the labour force all their lives and have had few children has created different needs from the generation of women who have followed more traditional homemaking roles — particularly in terms of living arrangements and pensions in old age. The latter will most likely live with daughters in their old age on a minimal income while the former are in need of adequate housing. For women who have been in the labour force, there are gender differences due to pay inequities

and therefore in pensions in later life. In addition, we have to acknowledge that the reasons for poverty for older men and women often differ. Statistics show that 31% of women 65 years and over, compared to 19% of men, live below the poverty level. The percentage rises significantly for unattached (mostly widowed) women. The reasons for these discrepancies are mostly related to inequities in the system effecting women.

To date, most of the research done on women and aging has been concerned with issues and has not fallen into a theoretical perspective. The authors maintain that is largely due to the marginality of women in society as a whole. They point out, though, that in recent years a feminist perspective on aging has emerged which relates the position of older women as powerless and without status to the limited options open to them throughout their lives. As the few roles that have been available to them are lost through a decrease in physical attractiveness, the empty nest and widowhood, women come to be seen as useless to society. Therefore, note the authors, "feminists view the problems that older women face as being socially imposed."

Gee and Kimball attempt in this monograph to blend feminist and other perspectives so as to give as broad a view as possible to their topic. For instance, in a chapter on sexuality, the authors discuss at some length the consequences of the double standard of aging which devalues older women and stereotypes them as being asexual. The double-standard concept is not a new one to feminists. However, Gee and Kimball argue that, contrary to belief, this standard does not seem to have negatively effected the way middle-aged and older women subjectively perceive themselves. Research findings indicate that, despite objective realities, these women do not as a rule find their lives to be any worse than the lives of men. Women's abilities to cope with change that has developed over a whole lifetime, their strong support network of friends, and the easing with age of the need to conform are given as possible reasons for older women's positive self-evaluations.

The authors end this chapter with some excellent suggestions for further research concerning older women's sexuality. Chief among these is that older women

themselves need to be queried as to how they establish their own sexual identities, often without a sexual partner. Despite the "excessive concern that gerontologists have with older people's sexuality ... intimacy can and does occur in its absence." They conclude that intimacy for older women (and younger) is often founded on strong friendships and confidante relationships.

In another chapter on the occupational life course of women, some long-held assumptions about the role of work and retirement in the lives of women are challenged. Despite the pressure on women in the work force to place family concerns above those of work, women do express a high work commitment. The earlier assumption that work was less important to women also led to the belief that retirement would be easier for women than for men. Research shows that women's decisions to retire, like men's, depend largely on financial resources. Also women's experience after retirement, like that of men, is mixed and depends on a variety of factors, particularly financial resources and health. Since only 36% of working women have access to formal pre-retirement programs the authors recommend that such programs be made more available to them.

A chapter on the family lives of women contains an overview analysis of the significant historical changes in family structure that have influenced women's traditional familial roles, hence consuming a smaller portion of their lives, freeing them to pursue other options. Nonetheless increased longevity has resulted in new family demands for many middle-aged and older women, that of the caregiving role to aging parents and spouses. The authors note that caregiving is a critical area for social policy.

Although the section on policy implications at the end of each chapter is sometimes disappointingly short, suggestions given do provide guidelines for further discussion and action. The chapter on "Women and Health" verifies that older women, more than any other group, are prime candidates for preventive medicine. The authors note that health status and quality of life for older women are closely linked. However, women display more sick behaviour than men, are more likely to be institutionalized in old age, receive twice as many prescription drugs

as men, and are less apt than men to receive information about their health status from the medical care system. In addition, older women have high rates of depression and their mental health functioning is lower than men's. Preventive measures, such as public education and encouraging responsibility for one's own health, will not only lower medical costs, but can enable older women to lead more productive lives. Since many women in late old age are institutionalized, a more humane system is needed—both in terms

of the present acute care system, and a greater commitment of resources to home care for the elderly. Another preventive measure is to further enable women to "integrate into mainstream society:" research suggests that women who have "integrated" show fewer health problems than women who remain in more traditional roles.

In their final chapter on further research, Gee and Kimball argue that the greatest lack in our theoretical understanding is in the paucity of findings on variations among

older women. They build a solid case for using qualitative approaches to illuminate individual and unique differences, as well as similarities, by eliminating predefined variables, definitions and categories.

I look forward to using this book as a text. Its multidisciplinary perspective, the selection and organization of materials, clarity of presentation, and the authors' analysis of the literature should provide students with an excellent overview of the world of aging women.

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