

# 1

## Triangulating Performances: Looking After Genre, After Feature



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J. L. Austin's examples of performativity [suggest] that the heterosexualization of the social bond is the paradigmatic form for those speech acts which bring about what they name. "I pronounce you. . . ." puts into effect the relation that it names. But from where and when does such a performance draw its force, and what happens to the performative when its purpose is precisely to undo the presumptive force of the heterosexual ceremonial?

—Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*

Jean-Luc Godard describes a scenario in which you enter a movie theater late, without knowing what's playing. You see something on-screen ("All of a sudden, pow, at 10:00 in the morning, just as you're coming in"), but exactly what it is you see and how to describe it—that's the problem. At one perceptual level, a blond woman is walking up a hill in a city that you may or may not recognize as San Francisco. For a few seconds, you don't know the epistemological and generic status of the image. Only as the woman comes into more detailed focus does it become apparent (at least to Godard's film-savvy viewer) that she is the actor Kim Novak, and the film Hitchcock's *Vertigo*.<sup>1</sup> But the experience of radical generic undecidability lingers on, perhaps haunting all subsequent viewings.

Godard uses this anecdote to problematize the hoary binary division that runs through film production, distribution, consumption, and categorization between feature film and documentary. In his anecdote, fiction (or, more precisely, a spectator's eventual realization or interpretation of film footage *as* fiction) becomes for Godard a "moment of communication" that triangulates, so

to speak: everything on-screen displayed by camera and editing, including actors; how all this was constructed by the filmmaker's team; and the viewer. Part of the point of Godard's anecdote is to complicate this latter category ("the viewer"), so as to obscure the explanatory clarity of our triangle. For while it is obvious that viewers are key players in the game, "*the viewer*" is a notoriously unstable and untrainable beast, particularly because it is always haunted by more or less unconscious ghosts of class, race, gender, and sexuality.<sup>2</sup> So rambunctious is this category in empirical fact that it threatens to disrupt the stability of precisely that theoretical structure of triangulation of which it initially seems to be just one equally codetermining part. I take it that this constitutive tension (i.e., between the relatively stable, metanarrative structure of triangulated vision in theory and the comparatively instable, phenomenological way subjects and subject positions actually perceive and misperceive this same structure) is our concern here, particularly as it may relate to gender and genre.

What's more, the perspective of any viewer may shift imperceptibly even as s/he looks at what appears visible. As the art historian Donald Preziosi has noted (articulating Foucault's depiction of Bentham's prison with Lacan's analysis of Holbein's *Ambassadors*), the panoptical, centered aspect of our vision is often indelibly inscribed by an unsettling, labile countervisual moment of anamorphic projection.<sup>3</sup> Applied to Godard's anecdote, the (male?) viewer's initial, momentary indecision, indeed anxiety, about which genre is being viewed (Is that [female] person acting or not?) anamorphically disrupts "normal" categories of filmic expectation and response. On the one hand, Godard's anecdote happens to recuperate fiction for cinema, since the film in question turns out, objectively, to be *Vertigo*. On the other hand, by the same logic, the upshot could have been reversed. Another film might have turned out to be a documentary film or even, to complicate things somewhat, this very film might be documentary footage of the shooting of *Vertigo*. Godard himself alludes to this possibility elsewhere when he quips (à la Brecht) that his *Breathless* (1960) "is really a documentary on Jean Seberg and Jean-Paul Belmondo" playing their parts.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, in addition to all the more or less *unconscious* pressures of distraction, free association, and daydreaming (as well as the baggage of cinema lore that has been brought into the theater), the viewer can *consciously* (if perversely) decide to look at what is seen *as* fiction or *as* documentary—irrespective of what is known to be the case.

The problem of specifying the precise epistemic locations of fact and fiction, and their oscillatory interrelationship, is also subtended by the notorious impossibility of distinguishing apodictically between autobiography and biography. And this brings us to the problem of performance. The ability of the viewer to "identify" (either positively or negatively by abjection) with what is seen and heard on-screen has to do with shifting transference relationships between biography ("Ah, that's Kim Novak!") and more or less unconscious auto-

biography (“Maybe that’s me?”). In a seminal argument, Paul de Man slyly suggested that “autobiography is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or understanding that occurs to some degree in all texts.”<sup>5</sup> Here another initially clear distinction between constating facts and performing alternative scenarios, collapses. By extension, all genres (in our case feature and/or documentary film) are not something (only) “in” a medium (including, say, its styles of camera, editing, and acting). For genres are (at least) codetermined by the multiple, performative gaze of spectators—part frontal, part anamorphic. The concept “triangulated vision” thus threatens to become an ultimately undecidable de Manian “figure of reading,” indeed performative “de-facement.” This unsettling possibility, if not undecidability, might undermine the confidence with which Brian Winston can assert that the film audience can “tell the difference between a fictional narrative and a documentary argument”—and hence that documentary might still “claim the real.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly destabilized, if not reversed, is Dudley Andrew’s dictum that “genres construct the proper spectator for their own consumption.”<sup>7</sup> Now it is the spectators who construct genres, albeit in ways sooner or later recuperated by institutional conventions, including those of filmmaking, acting, and viewing. For his part, Godard concludes that “it’s the look that creates the fiction” and that “fiction is the look, the text being the expression of this look.”<sup>8</sup> But what, then, is this “look”? How, exactly, is it constructed, when, and by whom? And does gender have anything fundamental to do with the formal, epistemological, and technical problem of film production and reception?<sup>9</sup>

I am interested in moments in film when autobiography and biography become performances in which fact and fiction suddenly, momentarily exchange positions by chiasmic reversal: a single shot or short sequence assumed to be documentary shades into fiction or vice versa. I borrow the term *chiasmus* from Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s unfinished last work, *The Visible and the Invisible*. Here the term refers to a “double and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible.”<sup>10</sup> I want to extend this idea to the interaction between fact and fiction, biography and autobiography, in the audiovisual medium. According to Merleau-Ponty, what he calls these “two maps” (in his case, those of the visible and the tangible, in the sense of what can be felt but not seen, and hence maps of the visible and the invisible) “are complete, and yet they do not merge into one. The two parts are total parts and yet are not superposable” (134). Yet in film (and this might have something to do with Merleau-Ponty’s notorious mistrust of the medium) the chiasmus in question would precisely entail superimposition: between and within images and sounds (what Godard calls *son + image*).<sup>11</sup>

In any case, not only moments “in” films but also critical concepts, such as “triangulated vision” are performative effects of “figures of reading” which, in our case here, both reconfirm and yet also “de-face” the stability of the triangulation between (woman)filmmaker-(woman)actor-(women)spectator. And

we must again ask what gender has to do with this triangulation, and if it is something necessary or contingent. The Godardian “look” of documentary and/or feature is now configured slightly differently from what we noted earlier. We have three subject positions or constructions: the director (editor, camera crew, etc.); the actor (who may imitate certain signs conventionally understood to mark “fiction”); and spectatorial interaction with what is thus seen and heard.<sup>12</sup> Yet the phenomenal act of spectatorship—films as they are actually viewed—tends to play havoc with the metanarrative cogency of this tripartite theoretical model, as we glide more or less uncontrollably between the three “angles” of triangulated vision, always only to return eventually to ourselves, to our bodies. And, while it may matter very much whether the director, actor, and/or viewer is gendered (there is no escape from this in any case), I suggest that the deepest link between triangulated vision and gender may be a function less of gender than of this labile structure of triangulation and dis-triangulation. In other words, triangulated vision is a case of “immanent causation,” in which a significant structure is not separate from, but continues to “indwell” its effects<sup>13</sup>—including those that take adapt explicitly gendered or sexualized forms. As another consequence of this undecidability, I also want to resist thinking of the notion of triangulated vision in only contemporary or national terms. Hence my use of Godard and my consideration presently of a film made by a male German director in 1942. At its deepest level, then, triangulated vision respects borders of neither time, nation, nor gender, even as it is manifested in and as these forms. Just as important, we typically “forget” this fact when watching films; and filmmakers and actors exploit this constitutive amnesia in various ways.

Let us cast our now complicated “look” at three films linked to one another vis-à-vis Godard’s anecdote. Each involves an element of performance in potentially transgressive ways. In each case the transgression in question is simultaneously formal (technological) and thematic (i.e., key to the plot), whereby the normative generic distinction between feature and fiction enters particularly into risk. The first example especially problematizes heterosexual norms; the second overcodes this type of transgression with an ethnographic element in order to problematize Eurocentrism; the third asks us where formal and thematic transgressions are to be located in the history of cinema and what, if anything, they might have to do, necessarily, with contemporary women-directors, actors, and viewers. We begin in the city of Godard’s anecdote.

Susie Sexpert, contemporary California comedienne and performance artist, in direct address to the camera and then to passersby, hands out leaflets advertising sex shows. Location of the shot: the streets of San Francisco. Amongst the passersby, coming out of deep focus toward Sexpert and the camera, a woman approaches. She’s suddenly recognized as the main actor in the movie. The voice of Sexpert changes, making it evident that she herself “becomes” a film

actress at this moment. This chiasmic, performative reversal occurs in Monika Treut's *The Virgin Machine* (1988).

We witness an elaborate ritual performance in which people dance in a circle with huge animal masks (which partly disguise their gender, though we may infer that they are male). The camera cuts to a group of western women, whose adventures we have been following, and one explains to her companions that this is a "tscham ceremony" intended to prepare all mortals for the journey our souls will take after death. Another western woman aims her camera at the film camera, our POV. Location of the sequence: steppes of Mongolia, in Ulrike Ottinger's *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* (1988).

A woman on stage sings a love song. The camera turns 180 degrees for a reaction shot: the audience applauding her performance. The singer onstage is Zarah Leander, the setting wartime Berlin in Nazi Germany. Or is it (also) here and now? This question is posed implicitly, if not also explicitly, in Rolf Hansen's 1942 feature film *Die grosse Liebe*.

These three sequences illustrate the constitutive tension between the three types of "look," but they also encourage a "look" that transcends and problematizes genre categorization—hence it is *after* genre in all senses, even *against* it. As I have argued, the "look" is both theoretically and phenomenologically located within the "triangle" but not firmly so, shifting as it does between its three "angles": director, actor, and spectator. For the sake of convenience (recognizing that these are analytic as much as empirical categories), I take each sequence to illustrate one of the angles of the triangulated "look," stressing at the same time that substantial overlappings occur that are both in and out of the ultimate control of director, actor, and spectator. (Also because of the overlappings, it's possible to spend more time with the first example and increasingly less with each succeeding one.) As opposed to films in which the documentary inserts are marked in contrast to the feature material, these three sequences are narratively and technologically sutured into the diegesis of each film, in a manner characteristic less of either feature or documentary films per se than to film essays. So it is that fact and fiction are tightly interwoven to produce an almost seamless—yet chiasmic—"postgenre" in which, among other things, commonly held categories of sexuality, geophysical region, and historical time become significantly problematized.

### ***The Virgin Machine, or, The Look of the Actor***

Treut's *Virgin Machine* can be viewed as a filmic rendering of a contemporary Bildungsroman (novel of education). Specifically, it both parodies and takes seriously the sentimental education of a young journalist, Dorothee, who

is searching explicitly for “romantic love.” Her picaresque leads from her native Hamburg, and from her lover Hans, to her arrival in an “exotic” San Francisco. Here she discovers “alternative” sexual practices (including S&M and dildos designed for and by women). The aforementioned sequence is pivotal because it introduces Dorothee to Sexpert and hence to initial liberation from heterosexual patriarchy. The film nears climax in Dorothee’s lesbian encounter with a female call girl, Ramona (Dorothee has to pay for what she assumed was free), and ends with Dorothee’s evidently most authentically liberating moment: performing on stage in a lesbian bar.

*The Virgin Machine* is shot in grainy black-and-white film stock, or so it is developed, the style associated with authenticity and/or documentary cinema. This reinforces the effect of both the scene just described and the coverage of the final performance in the bar. Here, as throughout the movie, the quality of the image suggests: “you are there.”

This supposedly nonfiction style is overcoded by several binary sign systems or conventions: acting versus not acting; diegetic versus nondiegetic sound track; studio versus on-location shooting; and so forth. In what I’ve designated, for the sake of my argument, as the pivotal scene (i.e., when the camera focuses on Sexpert passing out advertisements for an upcoming sex show), there is no nondiegetic music, and after she addresses the camera frontally she subsequently appears completely unaware of its presence, at least until her telltale voice changes register to indicate (feigned or real?) “acting” or “stage fright.” In this cinema verité mode, when a woman approaches from the crowd, the camera does not initially focus on her anymore than on any other pedestrian. Only when she comes into the visual and aural field of Sexpert do we interpellate her as Dorothee.<sup>14</sup> The documentary illusion (we now recognize our protagonist or “star,” with whom we have already been asked to identify) is momentarily broken, before being reestablished later. We are further transported out of the documentary mode of looking when Sexpert first addresses Dorothee and the two enter into dialogue. Here Sexpert’s voice changes to become that of an actor in this movie, aware of the camera, which, however, she had already been aware of at another level. The film camera interpellates Sexpert as a fictional construction only when she meets Dorothee, not when she is performing or preparing to perform. Her unexpected filmic artificiality shifts generic gears precisely at the moment when the two women join gender forces. Thus viewers and actors codetermine a genre after genre. In the one case it is our recognition of Dorothee as actor; in the second it is the self-consciousness of Sexpert, by means of which our own “look” is chiasmically transformed through a performance that combines elements that are at once “biographical” and “autobiographical.” Remaining for a time within the fictional narrative reestablished by Sexpert’s voice change, Dorothee accompanies her on a motorcycle to the next performance site where she’ll discuss the pros and cons of various dildos. This time, the

“look” is switched back from the fictional to the documentary, in a simple reversal. In direct address to the camera, Sexpert shows Dorothee and us her wares. To aid this transition, the camera cuts to several bystanders who have nothing to do with the plot. And Sexpert’s voice changes back to how it was before she “first” encountered Dorothee, becoming again “herself.”

In both shot sequences we are at one level “looking” at “real” performances that both suspend and then reestablish the distinction between “feature” and “documentary.” Temporarily we are pointed in a different, third direction, only to be folded back into the familiar binarism and/or into one term or the other. This third possibility, which seems to exceed genre, is intimately linked to both the thematics and the form of *The Virgin Machine*. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the title suggests that this film is—quite literally as well as figuratively—a machine designed not merely to *record* (*constate*) at the level of “biography,” the transformation of a heterosexually conflicted woman into a liberated lesbian but also actually to *produce* (*perform*) this transformation in the audience, as a form of “autobiography”—not merely Treut’s but also “ours.” Whether either transformation (of the actor playing Dorothee, of the filmmaker, or of us spectators) in fact occurs outside the film, is not quite the point. The point is rather that Treut’s mode of production, *this* virgin machine, is *after* and *against* genre, if by genre one can only always mean “fact versus fiction,” “documentary versus feature.” Can we really distinguish who is acting from who is not?

Now, it may be true that, traditionally, strict adherence to categories and to the binary division of fiction versus nonfiction is symptomatic of, or at least undergirds, white, western, heterosexual, male cultural production. It might seem to follow, then, that effective transgressions can be expected to occur in films that problematize traditional gender and sexuality, including those that parody the Bildungsroman, which at least in German literature has been decidedly male-oriented and -dominated. Treut would thus attack this tradition cinematographically by showing that fantasy and reality are not polar opposites but part of a complex process of chiasmic performance. Her most explicit depictions of this performative strategy are in her discussions of sadomasochism.

Treut’s earlier film *Seduction: The Cruel Woman* (1985) and her later *Female Misbehaviour* (1992) both focus on sadomasochism as a consensual, contractual practice that treads a fine line between fantasy, or the playing of a game or role, and the acting out of the real. *The Virgin Machine* also contains S&M scenes in Dorothee’s hotel, but these are not explicitly remarked within or by *The Virgin Machine*: that is, neither diegetically from within by the actors nor nondiegetically by, say, a voice-over. Treut elsewhere has suggested that “the fantasy of masochistic submission draws its effectiveness not from the actual situation of an objectively existing and powerful dependency but rather from playing with the idea of such a dependency.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, Treut’s films are not purely real but also not purely fantasy, much as the aforementioned sequences with Doro-

thee and Sexpert on the street and in the bar are neither purely feature nor purely documentary. And if, by the same logic, the actors' performances are not pure biography or pure autobiography, either, then perhaps our response to the film is expected to follow suit. (Not fortuitously, the plural in the German title, *Die Jungfrauen Maschine*, indicates that the "machine" in question implicates multiple "virgins.") Consequently, I argue that the specific (gendered and sexual) content of the sequences we've looked at eventually must give way to the structural principle that determines them. Thus, the thematic shift away from stable representations of sexuality are formally and technologically informed by a move away from fixed categories of both genre and gender. It is significant that in *The Virgin Machine* the final performance of the transformed Dorothee in the bar takes place before an all-woman audience—but only *in the film*. In a preliminary shot sequence, we see that all men, one man in particular, have been physically excluded from the performance at the club. But actual viewers watching the performance of the transformed actor Dorothee (on any format: in theaters or on VCRs) obviously can include males. At such points, the specificity and geometrical rigor of triangulated vision is chiasmically breached, before it reasserts itself. And so is problematized (for better or worse) its use-value in that larger arena of sexual politics, films, and criticism in which the actors are, in a sense, us.

### ***Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia, or, The Look of the Director***

Ulrike Ottinger's *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* shares with *The Virgin Machine* a basic lesbian problematic, with a difference being that now this theme is implicitly homosocial as opposed to explicitly homosexual. Ottinger also considerably expands the ethnographic focus from the quite conventional sphere of German-American relations depicted in Treut's film into the far more troubled waters of Orientalism. Like Treut, Ottinger is intensely concerned with breaking down (easy) binaries between feature and documentary; indeed she is even more explicitly articulate about intending to do so. It remains to be seen how triangulated vision figures in this attempt, especially with regard to directing.

Ottinger's tripartite film in vibrant color begins on the trans-Siberian express through the former Soviet Union headed to China. Part 1 of the triptych plays exclusively in the train and introduces the first main characters—white Westerners (particularly, but not exclusively, women) of varying skin tones; natural and learned languages; and ethnic, national, and (apparently) sexual "identities"—not to mention (few critics do) social classes. These first scenes, filmed within the train, as well as the shots through the train's windows of the spectacles encountered at stops along the famous route, might be viewed as a homage (intentional or not) to the Soviet feature and documentary filmmaker Alexandre



Medvedkin. For he created “the cinema train” that traveled (with fully equipped editing and developing rooms) to all regions of the nascent Soviet Socialist Republic, chronicling the lives of its radically diverse peoples and attempting to unite them, at least filmically.<sup>16</sup> Be influence as it may, and under Ottinger’s postmodern conditions, the first part of her film focuses on various types of musical and narrative performances. These both differentiate the various actors (male and female) and yet also bind them together from a more or less Western point of view. Part 2 centers on the passengers’ “abduction” by a group of renegade Mongolians led by a “fierce” female leader, to whom one of the female abductees, Johanna, is increasingly, and reciprocally, attracted. This portion of the film concerns less the Western travelers than the visual detailing of customs, costumes, and mores of the “natives.”

It is at this point that we seem to be entering into the realm of documentary ethnography. But just as Treut parodies the *Bildungsroman*, so Ottinger—arguably—ironizes ethnographic and anthropological filmmaking.<sup>17</sup> Part 3 (where my exemplary sequence occurs) continues where part 2 left off: namely, with the dominant focus on the elaborate *tscham* festival with its ritual slaughters of animals, dances, and set performances. The film ends with the Westerners boarding the train to continue their journey. The significant difference now is that there is a new voyager. Either she is another Mongolian princess or, as other critics think, the first princess again but this time in Western garb. This somewhat ambiguous figure explains that she lives part of the year in Paris and summers in Mongolia. So it is, then, that “the enlightenment West” meets “the exotic East” once again, upholding and/or problematizing a long tradition of overdetermined “attraction,” albeit this time with a feminist twist—specifically homosocial.<sup>18</sup>

My question here involves the paradoxical anthropological status of one sequence, indeed the one image: the *tscham*. Clearly, Ottinger has restaged the “documentary” event. Nonetheless, it remains a performance based on an actual ritual—a re-creation of an actuality—thus paying a certain, imaginary or symbolic, homage to the real. In a sense, by staging and directing this real, Ottinger avoids giving the misleading impression that her camera is a neutral, objective, invisible witness to the event “as it really is.” (To paraphrase Lacan, if the real resists symbolization absolutely, this is not to say that symbolization can be avoided.) So when Lady Windemere speaks of the ceremony of death to her audience, it makes sense that it remains unclear if she is speaking to us, to all her compatriots, to Johanna intimately leaning over her shoulder, and/or to the assembled Mongolians also watching (and coproducing) the performance. The camera crosscuts to all of these parties. The cut to us is suggested by Frau Vohwinkel, the one who, as surrogate viewer, raises her camera and aims it at Ottinger’s camera, thereby folding us in/visibly, chiasmically into the performance. Also suitably ambiguous is the referent or recipient of what is meant by “death.”

In a sense, the tscham death at stake is the obliteration of the question of what is real, what is fictional. But this, too, is an old story, and one here involving less closure than the opening up of new possibilities.

Ethnographic filmmaking at its origins, as well as many early feature films, had “exotic settings” with “real natives.” These films thus functioned at once as entertainment but also as a form of surrogate, visual tourism for spectators.<sup>19</sup> In Ottinger’s version of this “cinema of attractions,” the “chronicling” of Mongolia, largely staged by Ottinger, and by the seductively beautiful images that she permits us to watch, in this nearly one-hour segment, are neither reenforced nor disrupted by much narrative. This “sublime” sequence may be intended primarily as unadulterated viewing pleasure, a certain suspension not only of disbelief but of cognitive distance itself.

Questions of the ethics of “ethnographic” filmmaking aside, Ottinger has been commonly viewed as a problematic exception in the canon of West German women-filmmakers. Despite the fact that her films “bring together elements of autobiography, documentary, and fiction, they depart from the manner in which these tendencies have been represented in West Berlin’s women’s films.”<sup>20</sup> This includes the tendency to adhere to a relatively clear separation of genres, fiction or documentary, but not both at once, and not in the same image. Thus, “fantasy and visual opulence predominate over the kind of realism associated with everyday life and vision.”<sup>21</sup>

In the very first scene of the film, Lady Windemere asks us to consider this question: “Was it a confrontation with reality or with the imagination . . . must imagination shun the encounter with reality? Or are they enamoured of each other? Can they form an alliance?” And henceforth, as Brenda Longfellow notes, the film “is structured around a spectacular alliance of reality and the imagination.”<sup>22</sup> Or, in terms of my argument, it becomes an essay film “after” non-fiction and/or fiction, feature film and/or documentary, and biographical and/or autobiographical performance. Ottinger seeks to transcend at least generic limits. In her words, “The continuing endeavours of the film industry to limit filmmakers and directors to the most narrow, stereotyped genre cinema possible cannot be overlooked.”<sup>23</sup> Roswitha Mueller duly points to Ottinger’s interrogation of the “fixity of oppositions.”<sup>24</sup> Longfellow, basing her arguments on Ottinger’s claim that she is trying to create “a new kind of realism,” concludes that *Johanna d’Arc of Mongolia* represents a “hybridization of categories in which the distinctions between fiction and documentary begin to break down.”<sup>25</sup> Clearly, this “hybridization” is also linked to the importance of the figure of the nomad for Ottinger. As she explains in an interview with Therese Grisham, “I became quite interested in nomadism . . . nomad thought is very important.”<sup>26</sup> And, importantly, nomadism, as the constant moving between cultures, genres, and concepts, is reflected in the film’s cinematographic style. This is why Ottinger in effect directs the viewer into a spectatorial position of nomadic oscillation, not

only between documentary and feature, not only between varieties of homosocial experience, but also across wide expanses of space and, in terms of ritual performance, time. Not for nothing do Deleuze and Guattari view what they call nomadology as the figure par excellence of the “war machine” disruptive of all power, not least the “spatio-geographic.”<sup>27</sup>

Cinema has been called the Last Machine.<sup>28</sup> *The Virgin Machine* can be read—particularly in its “look” of the actors—as a virtual machine for the re-production of a simultaneously triangulated and distriangulated vision. So also Ottinger’s film can be read as another type of “machine,” as the attempt to fuse—particularly at the level of her directing, camera work, and editing (over all of which she keeps notoriously firm control) the aforementioned crosscuts uniting all the audiences of the performance: namely, the “Western self” with the “Oriental other.” Although critics rarely attempt to explain the title of Ottinger’s film, perhaps an answer may be found in the heroic—albeit unclarified—allusion to the original Jeanne d’Arc de France, the unique woman-warrior-maiden who led her people to at least momentary victory over the foreign invader, before finding death at the stake. And this may be the ultimate reason why Ottinger literally “directs” attention to the tscham ceremony, as preparation for death at what may be the axial point of her film in terms of the triangulated look. The re/performance of this ceremony arguably *is* the film—if not exactly “war machine”—*Johanna d’Arc of Mongolia*.

### ***Die große Liebe, or, The Look of the (Historical) Viewer***

My final scene opens up the argument beyond the spatial into the temporal and historical in order to problematize the “newness” of what might otherwise appear to be a specifically postmodern and (lesbian) feminist problematic of cinematic triangulation circa 1988 and its critical aftermath. Today, with increasing frequency and intensity, lines between documentary truth and feature fiction are being blurred. This corresponds to the more general social and cultural meltdown of traditional genre and media categories of representation and to the coterminous tendency toward hybridity that seem to be a condition of postmodernity. One result, I have been suggesting, are moments of chiasmus in a cinema that radically problematizes the distinction between “documentary” and “feature,” and “biography” and “autobiography,” and these moments are particularly im/perceptible around performances with, and of, these films. In such moments the validity of the notion of triangulated vision is at once confirmed, disrupted, and confirmed again. This almost imperceptible mixing of the two basic genres may seem to contrast sharply with the earlier film practice of directly intersplicing documentary footage into features but in such a way as to keep them relatively distinct and recognizable. Furthermore, this postmod-

ern problematic may also be part of the overall drift of cinema to shift away from a more or less unquestioned concern to depict human movement through time and space and toward a desire to interrogate space and time themselves, in tandem with various types of their audiovisual compression.<sup>29</sup> However, it should also be noted that in the earliest silent cinema, the conflation of nonfiction footage with narrative was sometimes equally and systematically blurred; indeed films did not become formally divided into the two basic categories until the twenties.<sup>30</sup> Thus we are cautioned against viewing current problematics of cinema as being wholly new—after all categories that we may imagine to be empirical and historical often turn out to be our own analytic projections.

Now, *Die große Liebe* (The Great or True Love) is a love story set in wartime Nazi Germany involving a heartthrob singer and performer, played by Zarah Leander, and an ostensibly not untypical Luftwaffe pilot, played by Paul Wendlandt. The inevitable conflict arises when duty for the fatherland overrides his duty as her lover. Needless to say, in the end she has to accept that service to the führer must come first, family and personal life second. Set against the backdrop of the actual war, the film includes several insertions of newsreel war footage—the kind that was shown before feature films and performance, including this one. Thus we can imagine an audience in 1942 as being sutured into a real that was increasingly, publicly horrific (particularly, for many, after the defeats in North Africa and Stalingrad and the bombing of German cities) in this very film, by its use of newsreels. But I'm interested here in another, rather less obvious, "documentary" moment within the film: Leander's performance as a singer. Based on her most popular songs, these performances are smoothly integrated into the plot yet they may seem to exceed the fictional frame for audiences not merely in the forties but today as well. So it is that a "feature" moment becomes for viewers in, say, 1996 a documentary moment that is just as "real" as it was for viewers back in 1942. This is not any singer performing or any actor reenacting the role of a historical person (such as Hannah Schygulla's performance of Lili Marleen in Fassbinder's eponymous film) but—for a certain viewer or viewing formation—this is actually Zarah Leander momentarily transcending space and time. The two documentary "looks"—that of the 1942 and the 1996 spectator—suddenly coalesce audiovisually, the distinction momentarily moot. The body and voice of Leander exceed their mortal boundaries to become an excess—an excess beyond interpretation precisely because it blurs reality and fiction. In its overabundance this moment becomes Bill Nichols's "one Body too many."<sup>31</sup> Such bodies can barely contain multiple subject positions within triangulated vision. In the case of Leander, she was among other things a gay male and lesbian fetish object as well as heterosexual. In the performance scene in question, Rolf Hansen's camera turns from the view of the theater (both in the film and in our own) toward the reverse angle from Leander's point of view on the audience. In this chiasmic moment we suddenly see (ourselves as) the two Luftwaffe officers. And it is here that their reaction to Leander's singing is to ex-

change deep glances between themselves, before the one, our hero, bolts out of his chair, headed for his unannounced first meeting with Leander, or her character, backstage—and from now on the plot, of course, thickens.

But to what exactly does the title *Die große Liebe* refer? Exactly whose “love of a lifetime” is here in play and at risk? According to the plot, it is obviously the love of fatherland, specifically Hitler, which overrides all other love, even the most profoundly personal. This includes the tacit (homoerotic) male bonding between two Luftwaffe officers, and the explicit (heterosexual) bond between one of them and Zarah Leander and/or her character in the film. But the film cannot determine the sexuality or gender of each member of its real audience. In other words, this performative moment is after genre, in which the distinctions between documentary and feature, biography and autobiography, are momentarily reversed or obviated. It is also, in a sense, a moment after gender and after sexuality. But which historical audience are we now imagining? During this scene, if the film is working properly, there is likely a momentary forgetting, during Leander’s performance of her love song, that the war is—or was—going on. For a German audience in 1942 or in the next few years (the film was screened only in Germany and in its occupied territories), this chiasmic performance can be expected to have one kind of historical effect, as otherwise heterogeneous as it must have been on individual members of the audience. But what Leander’s performance ought not to make us forget—today—is another thing that audiences may well be led to “forget” by this film and particularly this one moment in it: namely, that many other people besides Nazis and other Germans were at physical risk at the time. This is the problem with all the so-called entertainment films of the Third Reich, so actively supported by Goebbels, in his peculiar “great love” of Germany and German cinema. But it remains our problem as film critics.

One lesson we may take from *Die große Liebe* is that chiasmic performances can have enormous power within the supple structure of triangulated vision. While they can be adopted to serve what some of us at least imagine to be progressive and liberatory ends—as arguably in the virgin machines and war machines of Treut and Ottinger—their basic mechanism can serve virtually any purpose imaginable. Indeed chiasmic performances open up our audiovisual synapses momentarily, suspending our cognitive powers, and in such moments theoretically any type of ideology can penetrate. This is perhaps not the least reason why the topic of triangulated vision is important. Even as we perform, we are performed; even as we are performed, we have at least some capacity to change our performance.

My main focus has been the interplay between fiction and truth, and biography and autobiography, as it appears in three moments in three films and/or viewing experiences more or less controlled or prefigured by audiovisual technologies. I have argued that these three moments have in common chiasmic performances that confirm, disrupt, and reconfirm the concept of triangulated vi-

sion: the look that circulates between director, actor, and viewer. One way of viewing these performances would be in terms of what Tom Gunning, referring to early silent films, has called the “cinema of attractions.” According to Gunning, “Rather than being an involvement with narrative action or empathy with character psychology, the cinema of attractions solicits a highly conscious awareness of the film image engaging the viewer’s curiosity. The spectator does not get lost in a fictional world and its drama, but remains aware of the act of looking, the excitement of curiosity and its fulfilment.”<sup>32</sup> But we have seen that, at least as film history has developed, this “solicitation” does not result—necessarily—in high levels of consciousness. Rather, audiences have to help produce it. Part of the fascination with cinema at its inception a century ago, according to Gunning, was a simple marveling at the sheer technology and what it could reveal, before the days of television. He also suggests that elements of this same attraction continue to persist “in later cinema, even if it rarely dominates the form of a feature film as a whole”; for instance, “It provides an undercurrent flowing beneath narrative logic and diegetic realism, producing those moments of cinematic *dépaysement* beloved by the surrealists” (123). In contrast, Godard finds prefigured already in the earliest cinema a split: “Cinema,” Truffaut said, “is spectacle—Méliès—and research—Lumière. If I analyze myself today, I see that I have always wanted, basically to do research in the form of spectacle.”<sup>33</sup> Which may lead us to think that the split in question, which includes the cinema of attractions, is at least as much something that we viewers produce as it is something that historians and critics find readymade in films.

### Notes

1. Jean-Luc Godard, “Introduction à une véritable histoire de cinéma,” *camera obscura* 8–10 (1980): 75–88; especially 78. I am indebted to Robert Ray for this reference.

2. For representative current scholarship on spectatorship, see *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. Linda Williams (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

3. Donald Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), chap. 3, “The Panoptic Gaze and the Anamorphic Archive.”

4. Godard, “Interview with Yvonne Baby” (1960), trans. Dudley Andrew, in *Breathless*, ed. Dudley Andrew (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 165–66; especially 166. Godard generally works from the principle that documentary fact and narrative fiction are mutually imbricated, remarking that “I started from the imaginary and discovered reality; but behind reality, there is again imagination” (“Interview with Jean-Luc Godard” [*Cahiers du Cinéma*, 1962], *Godard on Godard*, trans. and ed. Tom Milne, foreword by Annette Michelson, 2d ed. [New York: Da Capo Press, 1986], 171–96; especially 181).

5. Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 67–81; especially 70.

6. Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Documentary Film Revisited* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), 253. Also thus complicated is Winston's hope that "Grounding the documentary idea in reception rather than representation is exactly the way to preserve its validity. It allows for the audience to make the truth claim for the documentary rather than the documentary implicitly making the claim for itself" (253).

7. Dudley Andrew, *Concepts in Film Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 110.

8. Godard, "Introduction à une véritable histoire," 78.

9. I hope it goes without saying that my intent is not to diminish the importance of gender and sexuality in film or film analysis; but I do want to caution against reducing complex filmic issues to these terms and, more generally, against confusing the filmic transgression of any norm with other, perhaps more significant types of social change.

10. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (1959–61; reprint, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 134.

11. Although she does not deal with film, for a substantial critique of Merleau-Ponty for having neglected sound in his phenomenology, alongside neglect of the sexualized aspect of his own discourse generally, see Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (1984; reprint, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 151–84. See Godard, *Son + Image*, ed. Raymond Bellour, trans. Mary Lea Bandy (1974–91; reprint, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992).

12. This structure bears similarities, of course, to Laura Mulvey's foundational essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), on the tripartite construction of the "male gaze" in cinema—splitting it between the gaze of the director, the characters, and the audience. However, whereas Mulvey locates her theory firmly within one film genre, the feature, I want to expand her theory to problematize gender essentialism and to include not only nonfiction but the very distinction between feature and documentary. Elsewhere I have argued that this results in a third "genre" (or, more precisely, antigenre) called essay film (see my article "The Political Im/perceptible in the Essay Film: Harun Farocki's *Images of the World and the Inscription of War*," *New German Critique* 68 (spring 1996): 165–92).

13. On the use and abuse of structural causality in its application to the human sciences, see Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), especially chap. 1.

14. A similar moment, famously, occurs in Godard's *A Woman Is a Woman* (1961) when Anna Karina emerges from a building into the street full of passersby before she begins recognizably to act.

15. Monika Treut, "Female Misbehaviour," in *Feminisms in the Cinema*, eds. Laura Pietropaolo and Ada Testaferri (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 106–21; especially 109.

16. On Medvedkin's project, see Chris Marker's *Train en marche* (1971) and *The Last Bolshevik* (1993). In the former, the voice-over comments that, in Medvedkin's project, "imagination is no longer the enemy of reality."

17. Immediately before *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*, Ottinger made *China: The Arts, Everyday Life* (1985), a four-and-a-half-hour "documentary" film based on her travels in China. According to her, it functioned as a preliminary version of *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*, adding that "What's also important about this particular documentary is the way it functions for me as a sketchbook: reality connected together" (cited by Janet Bergstrom, "The Theater of Everyday Life: Ulrike Ottinger's *China: The Arts, Everyday Life*," *camera obscura* 18 (1988): 42–51; especially 50). For a detailed analysis of the latter film through the lens of contemporary theories of ethnography and postcoloniality, see Katie Trumpener, "Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia in the Mirror of *Dorian Gray*: Ethnographic Recordings and the Aesthetics of the Market in the Recent Films of Ulrike Ottinger," *New German Critique* 60 (fall 1993): 77–99. Trumpener interprets the film as a serious ethnographic foray informed, however, by unintentional German neoimperialism. In contrast, Therese Grisham and Brenda Longfellow read the film as being considerably more complex and nuanced in its treatment of the "exotic." Grisham supports her argument by analyzing Ottinger's camera movement, concluding that "This underscores, tongue in cheek, the sweeping, objective view of the western cultural anthropologist" (Grisham, "Twentieth Century *Theatrum Mundi*: Ulrike Ottinger's *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*," *Wide Angle* 14, no. 2 [April 1992]: 22–36; especially 24). Also see Brenda Longfellow, "Lesbian Phantasy and the Other Woman in Ottinger's *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*," *Screen* 34, no. 2 (summer 1993): 124–36.

18. One of the final lines in the film is that "The mutual exotic attraction has a long history"—leaving the antecedent somewhat ambiguous. On the early cinema of attractions, see Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator," in *Viewing Positions*, 114–33.

19. One obvious example of this was Flaherty and Murnau's joint production *Tabu* (1931), which, according to the credits, was "filmed entirely on the island of Bora Bora using only natives"; yet, predictably, the resulting narrative was decidedly Eurocentric in its imposition of its particular version of romantic love, and so forth.

20. Bergstrom, "Theater of Everyday Life," 43.

21. *Ibid.*, 43.

22. Longfellow, "Lesbian Phantasy," 126.

23. Ulrike Ottinger, "The Pressure to Make Genre Films: About the Endangered *Autorenkino*," in *West German Filmmakers on Film: Visions and Voices*, ed. Eric Rentschler (1983; reprint, New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988), 90–93; especially 90.

24. Roswitha Mueller, "The Mirror and the Vamp," *New German Critique* 34 (1985): 176–93; especially 188.

25. Longfellow, "Lesbian Phantasy," 129.



26. Therese Grisham, "An Interview with Ulrike Ottinger," *Wide Angle* 14, no. 2 (April 1992): 28–36; especially 31 and 33.

27. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (1980; reprint, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), chap. 12, "1227: Treatise on Nomadology—The War Machine," especially 380–87.

28. The phrase is attributed to the avant-garde filmmaker Hollis Frampton, a protégé of Ezra Pound. See Ian Christie, *The Last Machine: Early Cinema and the Birth of the Modern World* (London: BFI, 1994), 7. Frampton appears wrong to have added that it "is probably the last art that will reach the mind through the senses," unless of course one takes "cinema" in an extended sense.

29. See Gilles Deleuze, *Camera 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (1983; reprint, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); and *Camera 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (1985; reprint, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). One of the interesting problems with this work is that—partly by design—Deleuze blurs the distinction between claims made about a shift in the history of cinema from one kind of image to the other with claims the status of which is purely analytic and might be used to view all films.

30. Though the first recorded application of the term *documentary* to film occurred as early as 1898, by the critic Boreslaw Matuszweski, and in 1914, by the filmmaker Edward S. Curtis to describe his work, these are isolated incidents. Documentary film practice and theory was not formally institutionalized and formalized until the late twenties and early thirties by John Grierson. For a detailed history of the documentary, see Winston, *Claiming the Real*.

31. See Bill Nichols, "Questions of Magnitude," in *Documentary and the Mass Media*, ed. John Corner (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), 107–22; idem, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 229–66; and idem, *Blurred Boundaries* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).

32. Gunning, "Aesthetic of Astonishment," 121.

33. "Interview with Jean-Luc Godard," 181.