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Silence Fiction : Rethinking (Under) Representations of the "Feminine" Through Social Cognition

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Article abstract

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RÉSUMÉ

L'auteure revoit la question de la marginalisation sociale des femmes, mais cette fois à la lumière des théories cognitives sociales des perceptions dirigées par les schémas et les stéréotypes, le raisonnement, la mémoire et le comportement. Les notions d'« erreur fondamentale d'attribution » (« fundamental attribution error»), de « menace du stéréotype » (« stereotype threat ») et de « dépendance aux influences extérieures » (« outcome dependency ») seront convoquées afin d'expliquer pourquoi les mots et les actions des femmes ont traditionnellement été considérés comme ayant moins de portée que ceux des hommes. De plus, l'auteure évalue les bénéfices du modèle cognitif social pour les recherches en études cinématographiques : la compréhension raisonnée de la façon dont notre réalité habituelle et normative est construite peut être un complément fort utile aux théories cinématographiques de la dé-familiarisation qui invoquent la psychologie de l'esprit (notamment, l'« image-temps » de Deleuze).

ABSTRACT

This essay readdresses the issue of the social marginalization of women in light of social cognitive theories of schema- and stereotype-driven perception, reasoning, memory, and behavior. The notions of "fundamental attribution error," "stereotype threat," and "outcome

dependency" will help elucidate why women's words and actions have traditionally been construed as less consequential than those of their male peers. Moreover, the essay discusses the benefits of the social cognitive model for film scholarship. It argues that social cognition's comprehensive, micro-level understanding of how our habitual, normative reality is constructed can usefully complement those theories of cinematic de-familiarization that invoke the psychology of the mind (e.g., Deleuze's "time-image").

Since its inception, feminist scholarship has been seeking to understand the causes of women's oppression in patriarchy. The assumption has been that uncovering the mechanisms responsible for this condition will pave the way to righting social wrongs and breaking the symbolic silence (i.e., social *fictions* regulating female *silence*) that has been women's lot since time immemorial.[1] For understandable reasons, feminist film theory has traditionally engaged methods (psychoanalysis, semiotics) that investigate how representations construct and reproduce the power relations that inform social reality. Given, however, Lacan's inability to completely eschew Freud's biological determinism ("anatomy is destiny"), semiotically-informed psychoanalysis continued to tie social (and symbolic) mastery to a feature of the human body (the possession/lack of the penis), condemning women to irreparable symbolic and social incapacity. "We know that women speak, even though it may not be clear exactly how this takes place" (Doanne, 1991, p. 173). Mary Ann Doane's puzzlement bespeaks the theoretical impasse that was reached by feminist film theory in the attempt to explain and deconstruct women's silence (i.e., social disenfranchisement) through a methodology (psychoanalysis) that identifies this silence as a biological inevitability, and, which, furthermore, grounds its theory of meaning on women's symbolic and biological lack!

I believe that in order to better understand symbolic marginality, we need to examine how a normative horizon of what is real and significant is established and upheld within a culture. We do not perceive and conceive the world in a vacuum. Our senses are socialised to produce only certain, "meaningful" per-

ceptions, in accordance with the categories provided by language and other semiotic systems. As a result—we are told by philosophers, cognitive scientists, sociologists, and æstheticians—we never experience the world as it *is*, in its entirety, in its dazzling complexity.[2] Instead, we only see what we need to see, want to see, and are in the *habit* of seeing, and thinking, in order to survive and function well in our world. Social cognition—a relatively new discipline arising around 1975 and founded on the insights of social psychology and cognitive science—can tell us how our mental representations of the social world are shaped by, and, in turn, help to reshape that world.

In this essay, I propose to readdress the issue of the social marginalisation of women (and other disempowered groups) in light of social cognitive theories of schema- and stereotype-driven perception, reasoning, memory, and behaviour. I believe, moreover, that social cognition can provide film scholarship with a comprehensive, micro-level understanding of how our habitual, normative reality is constructed. (Althusserian Marxism viewed the social world from the top down, through the socializing functions of state institutions, and paid little heed to the formative force of micro-group interactions.) It is my impression that film æstheticians, amidst their efforts to map the potential of cinema to make strange the familiar (and so be art), have tended to overlook "the familiar" as a topic of investigation in its own right, treating it instead as the taken-for-granted referent of (the much-maligned) "psychological realism." For example, Gilles Deleuze—who conceives of a certain æsthetic practice he terms "time-image cinema" as a *reaction* to the hardwired sensorimotor processes of the body—has very little to say about how sensorimotor processes produce the matrix of everyday normalcy that inventive uses of the film medium have the power to "reprogram." In what follows, I will attempt to rectify this oversight and offer through social cognition an anatomy of how reality is parsed and structured (and difference gets stigmatised) amidst social actors' situational interactions. I believe that a better understanding of the mechanisms underlying habitual perceptions, conceptions, motivations, and actions will provide film theory with fresh insights concerning æsthetic

and political possibilities to defamiliarise and change naturalized visions and divisions of the world.

Schematic Thinking and De-familiarisation

Social cognition has over the past two decades grown into a dominant research paradigm in the fields of social, cognitive, and developmental psychology as well as artificial intelligence. It studies both the specific representations people have of their social knowledge and the processes by which social knowledge is constructed and used. Drawing heavily on symbolic interactionism and on Jerome Bruner's cognitive constructivism (itself deeply rooted in Gestalt psychology), social cognition claims that people actively take part in the shaping of their reality. The social world is parsed and rendered meaningful by means of specific frames of reference called cognitive schemas, which develop from experience (they contain generalised and organised, prior social knowledge) and are used and reused to make sense of new experience. Schemas shape what is perceived, thought, and remembered and, thus, guide understanding and behaviour. If Simone de Beauvoir (quoted in Mills, 1995, p. 42) is right in claiming that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman," the schema concept might prove to be a crucial tool in explaining how the construction of gender takes place.

In a comprehensive study of social cognition, Susan T. Fiske and Shelley E. Taylor claim that schematic thinking informs every aspect of our mental functioning. Schemas (which can be person-schemas, self-schemas, role-schemas, event-schemas or scripts, and content-free schemas) "[...] influence the encoding of new information, memory for old information, and inferences where information is missing" (Fiske and Taylor, 1991, p. 121). People most often cue schemas from visually prominent physical features like sex, race, and age. Moreover, Fiske and Taylor (1991, p. 122) write:

> Once cued, schemas affect how quickly we perceive, what we notice, how we interpret what we notice, and what we perceive as similar and different. Thus, another principle of schematic encoding is its operation from

the *earliest moments of perception.* People instantly use age, race, sex, attractiveness, job titles, and prior trait descriptions [...] to form impressions.[3]

According to Fiske and Taylor, people use schemas for meaning making because these provide them with a sense of the world as a predictable and knowable place that they have control over (Fiske and Taylor, 1991, p. 177). Besides, as Ziva Kunda explains in a recent review of the field, schemas (or a network of concepts, to use a more neutral phrase) simplify mental processing and free up precious cognitive resources that can be used to perform other tasks. This implies that the more mental tasks we need to perform in a given period of time the more we are prone to rely on our stereotypes, and the less we are likely or able to consider individual information outside of the most obvious frames of reference. Speed seems to be a key motive for schema use, that is, a top-down, theory-driven processing of incoming data as opposed to a bottom-up, data-specific understanding. However, the costs of this mental economising (through schemas) may be quite high given that the generalisation and simplification performed by conceptual thinking go hand in hand with the elision and neglect of certain (seemingly unimportant) data. This may lead to misjudgments of disturbing dimensions, as shown by the depreciation and marginalisation of certain groups of people due to the stereotypical assessments made about them (Kunda, 2000, p. 19-20). In other words, the speed, ease, and relative accuracy of our rule-of-thumb assessments may easily blind us to the fact that we are all too ready to trade a complex, multi-faceted (and polyphonic) world for a limited number of pre-packaged meanings, which, however, promise to make us feel safe and at home in our world.

For many, the familiar has been more confining than reassuring. The urge of early twentieth-century avant-garde art movements to de-familiarise (make strange) taken-for-granted assumptions about the world can be seen as a reaction, and a challenge, to schematic perception and reasoning (which social cognition describes). Film came to be considered as a privileged means to achieve this goal due to a special affinity between the moving image and the basic processes of the mind.

The cinema/mind analogy has persisted throughout the history of film theory. Hugo Münsterberg (whose approach is rooted in clinical psychology) believes that the photoplay's unprecedented skill to simulate, and stimulate, fundamental mental functions (imagination, attention, memory, emotions) enables it to remodel and change the world.[4] Sergueï Eisenstein's theories of montage are inspired by different psychological models of the mind (e.g., Pavlovian reflexology).[5] Rudolf Arnheim invokes Gestalt principles in his discussion of film as art.[6] André Bazin's (1967, p. 15) celebration of the "impassive lens" of the camera that cleanses objects from "spiritual dust and grime" and "piled-up preconceptions" bespeaks a (phenomenological) longing to see the world anew, untainted by habitual perception. Roland Barthes's (1977, p. 64) understanding of the "filmic" as "[...] that in the film which cannot be represented, the representation which cannot be described" reveals Barthes's primarily æsthetic interest in the cinema: his search for those qualities of the moving image that would enable it to induce alternative modes of perception and thinking and, perhaps, even to test the limits of the conceivable, or the merely possible.

To my mind, Gilles Deleuze's (1989) conception of the "time image" (as described in *Cinema 2*) constitutes the most comprehensive (and ambitious) overview of how the film medium has been used to undermine schematic thinking, bringing to consciousness new facets of the real. Deleuze claims that certain narrative and stylistic strategies can force us to temporarily suspend our "logic and retinal habits" and, thereby, make the phenomena appear in their "visual and sound nakedness, crudeness and brutality," devoid of the *clichés*, and metaphors, that have conventionally signified them (Deleuze, 1989, p. 3, 18-19 and p. 20).[7] In what follows I will investigate, with the help of social cognition, why our "logic and retinal habits" are prejudicial, and what the loopholes are (if any) through which our sensorimotor automatism could be "jammed or broken," as Deleuze would have it. I will focus on how negative stereotyping has affected social representations of women, as well as on women's struggle to represent themselves in meaningful terms. My feminist analysis, however, will be haunted by a fundamental absence: that of

women as a unified, or unifiable group. Speaking about "women," I will keep in mind that, to paraphrase Deleuze (1989, p. 220), women exist "only in the condition of minority," fragmented into an almost infinite number of sub-groupings.

Stereotypes: Uses and Abuses

The mental structures that contain our beliefs and expectations about a social group are called "stereotypes" in social cognition. Ziva Kunda writes that stereotypes are taken to be products of a prevailing culture. Children learn these meaning structures from their parents, friends, and the media. More importantly, "[...] stereotypes are assumed to result from deep personal needs, most notably the need to belong to one's own group, the need to feel superior to others, and the need to justify existing social order" (Kunda, 2000, p. 341). The significance of this statement can hardly be overestimated since it *ties mental mechanisms to social needs*. It suggests that the stereotypical division of people into "in-groups" and "out-groups" (i.e., positively- and negatively-viewed social groupings) provides the social world with a structure that helps make it a fairly "predictable" place. However, again, order and clarity are purchased at a price. Fiske and Taylor claim that the simple categorisation of people into groups minimises the individual variability of the members of an out-group and maximises between-group differences. People in an in-group are typically prone to conceive of themselves and their own group as being positively different (i.e., better) from out-groups whose members they perceive and remember as "all alike, different from us, and bad besides" (Fiske and Taylor, 1991, p. 133). Because out-group members—"usually people from a minority in a particular setting"—are typically perceived and judged along many fewer dimensions than are in-group members, the interchangeability of out-group members also implies that they are not being recognised as distinct individuals.

Fiske and Taylor (1991, p. 123) argue that "[...] categorizing someone as an instance of a schema slants encoding of the content of what the person does." In other words, the expectations

generated by the relevant role schema (or stereotype) will greatly influence how a given person's actions and performance will be judged. This, in my view, accounts for the existence of double (or multiple) standards in judgment: negatively stereotyped out-group members' actions will often be conceived in negative terms while the same act may be valued favourably if performed by a member of a positively viewed in-group. Kunda (2000, p. 349) confirms this when she writes that "[...] our stereotypes can lead us to interpret identical behaviors, traits, and group memberships quite differently when these pertain to differently stereotyped individuals." She observes that a white man's success would typically be attributed to his talent whereas the same achievement of a woman or a black man would be explained by their hard work or good luck (Kunda, 2000, p. 348). Similarly, I would argue, such discursive phenomena as indirectness, silence, hedges, euphemisms, or tag questions (which have been identified as specificities of a female "genderlect") will be judged differently when found in men's and women's language use. Therefore, it is not so much the quality of the words themselves that makes women's speech less effective and authoritative than that of men. Rather, the traditional dismissal of women's discourse as inconsequential or irrational can be attributed to the negative stereotyping of women as a social group.[8] On the one hand, in patriarchal cultures women have been discriminated against as the second, the weaker (and the "fair" but illogical) sex. It is quite telling that leading Western democracies denied their women the right to vote (i.e., to have a voice and make a difference in the public sphere) until the third, fourth, or even fifth decade of the twentieth century.[9] On the other hand, as I will argue shortly, many women's verbal performance is effectively constrained by the *negative expectations* they encounter in the social arena. In Ziva Kunda's (2000, p. 313) words, "[...] the mere fact that negative stereotypes are ' in the air ' may result in a social climate that can hinder the performance of negatively stereotyped individuals."

"Woman," however, is not a monolithic entity, nor do people conceive of it as such. Indeed, Fiske and Taylor point out that people may not habitually think at the level of such "blanket

categories" as male or female, rather they tend to use "basic-level" categories (e.g., "career woman," rather than the "upper-level" category "woman" or the "lower-level" category "woman lawyer"). Basic-level sub-categories are useful since they allow people to fine-tune their general categories with the help of the limited amount of individuating information they may have at their disposal. Unfortunately, it appears, the content of the upper-level category tends to take precedence over situation-specific information (e.g., assertiveness, independent-mindedness). Thus, for example, Fiske and Taylor (1991, p. 143) tell us, women whose behavior contradicts their gender role may be viewed on the basic level as lesbians or as unlikeable macho women. Incidentally, white ("mainstream") feminists' ignorance, negligence, and/or depreciation of the specific experiences of women of colour is another instance of the stereotype-driven judgmental double standard. It also demonstrates a hierarchical ordering of "subtypes" within broad stereotypes. (However, social cognition does little to investigate the graded subdivisions of "women" along the lines of race, ethnicity, class, occupation, age, or sexual preference.[10])

The above discussion of stereotypes establishes stereotypical thinking as the default mode of our mental functioning. However, the social cognitive model also highlights certain circumstances that may mitigate the effects of a negative stereotype, and even block its application, if only temporarily. We will find that the lower the level of abstraction (that is, the more concrete and particular an instance is) the easier it is to bypass the effects of broad stereotypes. (If we have more time to formulate a judgment we may be inclined to pay more attention to individual data and to rely less on our "autopilot.") Moreover, if we are facing a social environment that consists largely of people who are generally characterised by the same upper-level stereotype ("woman"), we might shove our general schema (of womanhood and gender bias) aside and take a closer look at the social actors as individuals. I believe that the cinema can supply us with several telling examples of how these cognitive strategies work.

Let me begin with films that highlight a *community of women*. Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* (1959) offers sensitive, nuanced

portrayals of the daily interactions of four women who share a living space for decades. Sirk's choice of a "female genre" (the domestic melodrama) gives him the licence to situate his story largely within the boundaries of a household—which in this case consists exclusively of women—and, thereby, to elide crucial aspects of social reality. To the extent that the outside world remains foreclosed from the diegesis, so also does gender difference (and negative female stereotyping). Rather, the rarefied atmosphere of this female domestic space prompts us to consider the four protagonists along other, "unexpected" dimensions, for example, in terms of their race, social and financial status, and age.[11] Paradoxically, the only excessive display of female sexuality in the film (performed by Sara Jane) serves to cover over (and to undo) the stigma of blackness. However, the success of this emancipatory move is highly dubious not only because the social view encapsulated in stereotypes becomes "internalised"[12] by stigmatised groups, but also since Sara Jane's "passing" firmly grounds her in the ranks of another negatively stereotyped social group, that of "loose" women. We watch with skepticism her attempts to liberate herself from the label of blackness through turning herself into the spectacle of woman, "to-be-looked-at-ness," acting as a cabaret dancer and a chorus girl. *Imitation of Life* exemplifies how the "community of women" type of films can cue us to bypass certain superordinate categories and activate other, less frequently used lower-level ones. The long list of such films includes, for example, *Little Women* (Cukor, 1933; Armstrong, 1994), *Steel Magnolias* (Ross, 1989), *Fried Green Tomatoes* (Avnet, 1991), *How to Make an American Quilt* (Moorhouse, 1995), *Chocolat* (Hellstrom, 2000), *Antonia's Line* (Gorris, 1995), *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (Almodovar, 1988), and *Daughters of the Dust* (Dash, 1991).

An alternative strategy has been to target the upper-level (abstract) notion of "woman." Sally Potter's adaptation of Virginia Wolfe's *Orlando* (1993) throws into relief the arbitrariness of the gender divide by the protagonist's seamless transubstantiation (performed by an ethereally androgynous Tilda Swinton) from man to woman. A similar confusion of gender (and sexual) identities is portrayed in Fassbinder's *In a Year of*

Thirteen Moons (1978). By distorting, and even rendering unidentifiable the physical (visual and auditory) features that would, under normal circumstances, trigger the activation of a broad stereotype, these films effectively block the use of that stereotype. After all, if we cannot decide whether (or, the degree to which) it is a man or a woman, we don't know which gender schema to apply to make sense of this person.

Another successful way to challenge stereotypical thinking about women has been the doubling of the female protagonist—either by two actresses who take turns portraying the same character, as in Buñuel's *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977), or by two identical-looking yet separate characters played by the same actress, as in Kieslowski's *The Double Life of Véronique* (1991). This time it is the character's status as a discrete, self-identical person that is called into question and left tantalisingly unresolved. As long as the spectator's main concern remains to decide whether or not the protagonist is identical with herself ("is this woman one and the same person?"), the issue of gender is shoved to the side. Moreover, the character's undecideable ontological status is often taken to be a statement about the mysterious, unknowable nature of "woman," contradicting the categorical pronouncements that have been used to define this category. The doublings described here would qualify as "crystalline images" of time in the Deleuzean sense since they render indiscernible pairs of distinct images.[13] As a result, Deleuze claims, the time image has the power to disengage our automatic sensorimotor schemas, and hence to suspend stereotypical thinking.

As I have shown, the availability of time (or lack thereof) is a crucial factor in determining how we process incoming data. When a situation does not compel us to make quick inferences in order to form judgments and decide on an immediate course of action, we are more likely to attend to details that would at first sight be dismissed as insignificant and/or irrelevant (i.e., if considered schematically from the top down). By implication, films that do not demand that we concentrate our cognitive resources largely on narrative construction (as when watching action-packed, fast-paced mainstream cinema) will enable us to

dwell on individual information for its own sake, independent from familiar interpretive contexts. This, I believe, is why Deleuze celebrates time image cinema (as opposed to the movement image that engages sensorimotor processes): because, by decomposing motion and presenting "pure" time, the cinema of the seer (as opposed to that of the "agent" of the movement image) prompts us to put our pre-programmed sets of judgments and actions on pause, and to perceive and conceive "pure" stimuli in their pristine meaninglessness (as *opsigns* and *sonsigns*). Ordinary, monotonous, banal occurrences, and, in general, a slow pacing of the images may trigger such mental de-familiarisation (Deleuze, 1989, p. 2 and p. 13-15). This would suggest that films dedicated to the meticulous depiction of a character's repetitive everyday actions and not much else have a good chance to de-activate schema-driven (top down) thinking. Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), Agnès Varda's *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1961), Benoît Jacquot's *Single Girl* (1995), and Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne's *Rosetta* (1999) exemplify this strategy. Through their close attention to women's day-to-day (or hour-to-hour) activities, these films force us to make sense of the women in terms of the concrete, material situations that they inhabit and shape.

Women Under "Stereotype Threat"

Let me briefly return to the social cognitive model of stereotypes, and specifically to the phenomenon of the "stereotype threat," which, I believe, can throw further light on why physiologically-provided language skills do not necessarily translate to articulateness in social contexts that matter. As I have indicated above, negative stereotyping has serious consequences for out-group members' performance and self-esteem. "A negative group stereotype may lead one to treat members of that group poorly which, in turn, may lead them to behave poorly, thereby confirming the stereotype," Kunda writes. She argues that people belonging to minority groups may show less competence than members of socially dominant groups because of the discriminatory treatment levelled against them that undermines their ability to perform competently. Stereotype threat (i.e., the

fear of being judged by the negative stereotype of one's group) poses a serious challenge to the performance of stigmatised individuals "[...] because the knowledge that they are attempting to solve tasks in which they are negatively stereotyped can suffice to undercut their results"(Kunda, 2000, p. 323-324 and p. 379).

It appears that social practitioners' general *unawareness* of the paralyzing effects of the stereotype threat (including the unawareness of those who are subject to it) makes them liable to a common judgmental error which is termed the "fundamental attribution error" in cognitive psychology (Kunda, 2000, p. 428-432 and p. 532). People's tendency to overestimate the role of personality traits and dispositions in causing behavior and to underestimate the role of external pressures exerted by a *particular situation* seems to work in tandem with stereotypical thinking, which operates with clusters of fairly constant traits. Therefore, I will argue, it makes more sense to look for the causes of women's proverbial incoherent, unclear, and hesitant speech in *situational constraints* shaped by a stereotype threat (i.e., the unfavourably biased reception of women's ideas in social fields that matter, together with women's awareness that their verbal performance is expected to be poor) rather than in women's proclivity to use hedges—e.g., "sorta," "kinda,"—tag questions, and euphemisms, as suggested by feminist linguist Robin Lakoff.[14]

The shakiness of out-group members' position is increased by their uncertainty in deciding how to interpret in-group members' views about them. As Kunda (2000, p. 371) puts it,

> If you are Black, or female, or a member of any other group that has been the victim of discrimination, both positive and negative feedback from mainstream individuals and organizations can be difficult to interpret. You may never know whether such feedback reflects an assessment of your ability or a reaction to your race and gender.

In my view, affirmative action may have a very similar effect on those whom it purports to benefit. For example, Ruth Behar, a Cuban-American feminist anthropologist, describes the insecu-

rity she felt at her acceptance to an Ivy League college, wondering whether she was admitted because of her Hispanic status only and promising to prove to herself that she was "not a minority student" (Behar, 1995, p. 325). Women scholars invited to participate at conferences in order to set the gender balance (almost) right may likewise wonder about the *actual* appreciation and worth of their work. Marie-Pierre Le Hir's (2000, p. 125) comment that "[...] an academic discipline perceived as a women's discipline tends to lose its prestige" supports the claim that symbolic capital (Pierre Bourdieu's term for accumulated prestige) is still unevenly distributed in the public sphere. Obviously, we must not forget that women scholars—and, in general, women who have been trained to master the discursive practices that are highly-valued socially—wield more symbolic capital than most social groups of women. However, in the company of their male peers, even the most highly-qualified women can quickly find themselves (and their style) cramped by the "glass ceiling" of the stereotype threat.

I believe that the sensitive analytical apparatus developed by social cognition to study meaning construction through microgroup interactions can be easily adapted to the study of the diegetic universe of a film. Social cognition can help us understand how spectators make sense of fictional characters' interactions, as well as how the characters themselves evaluate other characters in a film. For example, the social cognitive concept of the stereotype threat can be usefully applied to explore why certain practices, and practitioners, are deemed valuable while others are depreciated by a community. As an illustration, I will examine how the double standard that informs the evaluation of men's and women's professional performance has been thematised in *Courage Under Fire* (Zwick, 1996), a Hollywood film that focuses on the military as the (allegedly) last remaining occupational field where women are admittedly discriminated against. The added interest of the film is its portrayal of the effects of negative gender stereotypes on *memory*.

Courage Under Fire is a detective story *à la Rashomon* that seeks to establish the circumstances of a death through the recollections of eye witnesses. (Not surprisingly, Hollywood will

find a way to reconcile the contrasting testimonies and uncover the Truth.) Captain Karen Walden (Meg Ryan) is posthumously nominated for the Medal of Honor for her courage shown during the Gulf War. Recalling the incident in which Captain Walden lost her life, surviving members of her unit offer remarkably different accounts of the female Captain's behavior. A soldier who owes his life to her remembers her as a courageous, responsible, and determined commanding officer. (Ironically, the soldier's female companion disparages Captain Walden for being "butch.") Another member of the unit, Ilario, who has known Walden for years before the Gulf War mission, repeatedly refers to her by her first name—a slip that would be unpardonable, and unthinkable, were he to be speaking of a male ranking officer. Voicing the film's sympathetic attitude towards women, Ilario reflects on the hardships Captain Walden had to endure in the army in order to be considered her male peers' equal. Considering how she is being remembered, Karen Walden's death proves that, her personal valor notwithstanding, she finally lost the battle against sexist prejudice.

As additional flashback recollections reveal, during the critical events that resulted in the Captain's death her command was challenged by one of the soldiers, Monfriez, who ended up shooting her. Monfriez, whose macho traits the film underlines (partly through his Latino ethnicity), remembers the Captain as a coward, quoting her tearful reaction to a crisis situation to prove his point. However, it soon becomes obvious that Monfriez's negative opinion of Walden has little to do with her actual behavior, which, as the film later shows, was impeccable. Rather, it is Monfriez's rampant sexism (which triggered his criminal behavior, as well as his need to hide what really happened) that distorts his memories of Captain Walden's actions. (In one of Ilario's flashbacks Monfriez addresses his commanding officer as "cunt.") Ilario, too, recalls Walden crying. However, while Monfries emphasises the occurrence in order to justify his negative opinion of her character and ability to command, in Ilario's memories Walden's tears rather confirm her self-discipline and control over the situation. (Monfriez, reasoning, that "she behaved cowardly, as a woman would," is an

instance of the fundamental attribution error.) This discrepancy in recall is congruent with what social cognition holds about the effect of schemas on memory. "The expectancies we have about other people influence the way we process their attributes and behaviors, and thereby, help determine what we later recall about these people," Kunda (2000, p. 168) states. "Our memories can be systematically biased because they reflect not only the reality we have observed but also the manner and extent to which we have processed that reality." This, again, confirms that reality is construed by (and reflects) prevailing social norms and stereotypes, and is, hence, shot through and through with prejudice.

Woman As Translator

So far, social cognition has taught us that sexism, ageism, and ethnic and racial prejudices are the consequences of schema-driven perception, inference making, and memory. What has not been discussed is how these value-laden distinctions come about, turning certain groups of people into "disliked" out-groups and allowing others to conceive of themselves, *and* be conceived by group-alien outsiders, as *the* in-group. Fiske and Taylor (1991, p. 146) note that "[p]eople's treatment of those who are without power—such as children, retarded adults, foreigners [...] or, historically, women and minority groups" suggests that "people may have power-based schemas." However, power is obviously not a topic for social cognitive investigation.

People's goal orientation and the varying degrees of their outcome dependency on others may shed some light on social stratification and in-group/out-group formation. Fiske and Taylor suggest that one of the main reasons why people prefer schema use to processing information from the bottom up is that "[p]eople's *goals* when they examine information *are at least as important* as the information itself." Since schemas appear to be "accurate enough" for predicting and controlling the outcome of one's actions, people find it practical to use and maintain their schemas. As Fiske and Taylor (2000, p. 155) put it, "[...] if you know what to expect, then you know what to do to try to get what you want."[15] This goal-oriented outlook on schema use

posits a *hierarchy* of interests as the guiding principle behind social cognitive processes. It is the particular array of needs tied to a particular interaction together with the *costs of being wrong* which determine the relative balance between people's use of schemas (i.e., stereotypes) versus concrete data and, as Jones and Thibaut write, "[...] fortunately for cognitive economy, we need not be indiscriminately attentive to all the cues provided by the other actor(s)" (quoted in Fiske and Taylor, 2000, p. 155).

I would argue that this "discriminate attention" to "relevant" detail (through the use of schemas) explains discrimination against groups of people who are deemed "irrelevant" (of little consequence) in terms of the gratification of social practitioners' needs. As Fiske and Taylor (1991, p. 156) put it, "If your out-comes (rewards, costs, benefits, or punishments) depend on someone else's actions as well as on your own, you are outcome dependent on that person." When people are outcome-depen-dent, they need to pay more attention to the other person, which implies that they especially attend to *schema-inconsistent* information and rely less on their schemas. In more specific terms, this means that negatively viewed outgroups in a social context—women, people of colour, old people, etc.—may not often be in the position to seriously influence others' outcomes. Consequently, they will not receive the attention necessary for changing the prevailing, overly simplistic, and prejudice-laden stereotypes that signify them. In reverse, given their own high outcome-dependency, these socially devalued groups are com-pelled to pay particular attention to and familiarise themselves with in-group members' values and expectations—which con-cern them in negative terms. Mediating between self and other is the burdensome task of the underdog, who does not know for certain which of these two categories describe her or him best.

I believe that women's "translating skills" as well as the bi-modal (i.e., "female" and "neutral") female linguistic practices described by feminist linguists can be explained by women's general outcome-dependency on men in patriarchal cultures. Since speaking like a woman (in other words, discussing "incon-sequential" topics, being inconsistent, deferential, emotional, and indecisive) is "socially unproductive and politically inexpe-

dient," as Deborah Cameron (1985, p. 105) puts it, women need to switch to the "neutral" (read masculine) code, which is the register invested with/by symbolic power, in order to make a difference. (However, as we have seen, assertive, articulate, self-assured women are often disparaged for their comeuppance, as shown by the pejorative labels of "macho woman" or "butch.") Robin Lakoff suggests that women's "bilingual" status in patriarchy, together with the special situational awareness that translating requires, saps women's creative energies, hindering them from "[...] expressing themselves as well, as fully, or as freely as they might otherwise"(Cameron, 1985, p. 222). Besides, as we have seen, women's full and free expression is further constrained by the stereotype threat, a constant reminder of their discursive disability. It might be argued, as Lakoff has done, that women's translation of themselves into socially meaningful terms under these difficult conditions depletes cognitive energy and bars them from introducing new terms in the social game. Women's strenuous efforts to catch up prevent them from taking the lead. The plight and dilemmas of the translating woman (and the complex relationship between translation and power) are poignantly portrayed in Atom Egoyan's *Calendar* (1993).

Calendar offers an anatomy of the intricate translating processes that inform the age that has been alternately called "postcolonial" and "postmodern." It comes as no surprise that the character who is in control of the new technology (the digital) and the resulting culture of the "televisual" is a white male photographer living in North America. The film chronicles his trip to Armenia to photograph old churches for a calendar, as well as the disintegration of his marriage to his Armenian-born wife, whom he uses as a translator to facilitate his exchange with his native country (whose language he does not master), and whom he eventually loses to that country, and to an Armenian man. Although the photographer apparently controls the ultimate means of translation (i.e., the postmodern common denominators, money and the bit), he is unable to maintain meaningful communication with his significant others: his wife (and other women, whose companionship he buys) and his native culture. (His wife's abilities to translate—that is, to medi-

ate—have proved ineffectual in the face of his silences and inarticulate stutters.) As a final (futile) attempt to master verbal language, the photographer commodifies it—through his purchase of foreign-speaking female voices—and serialises it—by reducing it into interchangeable stretches of nondescript background murmur (in the form of scripted dinner conversations and phone calls that become endless loops).

Calendar confirms the social cognitive insight (voiced also by several feminist critics[16]) that translation-as-mediation, together with other activities of negotiation, is the lot of those who are heavily outcome-dependent on powerful others. This is equally true for *intra-* and *inter*-linguistic translations. (On a global level, speakers of "minor" tongues need to learn the terms of the ruling languages if they want to be heard.) *Calendar* features English as the dominant language, a prerogative of the white Western male (the photographer). All other languages are treated as a kind of exotic (and erotic) noise, an attribute especially of women—who, significantly, all master English besides their respective mother tongues (i.e., all the women in the film are translators)—but also, significantly, of a man who is a native of a "developing country" (Armenia). Characteristically, the Armenian driver does not speak English, a fact which supports the claim that members of dominant groups do not typically engage in translations. In patriarchal communities, like Armenia, the law speaks with a male "accent" and there is no need for men to develop additional communicative skills.

Paradoxically, the translator, who seems to be at home in several languages, cultures, and relationships, finds herself finally dispossessed of all. Her search for history, identity, and agency appears futile and *passé* in an age that has proclaimed the death of the subject. Her newly-found speaking voice (i.e., her ability to speak for herself) makes little sense in the realm of an electronically simulated (virtual) reality—controlled, as we have seen, by the male photographer. The translator's retreat to a traditional society, Armenia (where history and subjecthood still make sense, if only from a male perspective) poignantly illustrates the intrinsic "homelessness" of all translators, this undecidable, unending oscillation between "selfhood" and "other-

ness"—which also informs, and haunts, the Deleuzean time image.

Social Cognition: Is Change Possible?

The question is, where do we go from here? If thinking in terms of various networks of concepts (schemas) is hardwired in our mental makeup, can we at least change our schemas? Social cognition's prognosis concerning schema change is not very optimistic. Since well-developed, stable schemas "[...] lend a sense of order, structure, and coherence to social stimuli that otherwise would be complex, unpredictable, and overwhelming," Fiske and Taylor (1991, p. 150) write, people have a high stake in maintaining their schemas. Kunda believes that "[...] we may be motivated to preserve our stereotypes because these help us to *justify our social order*, our own discriminatory behavior, or our sense of superiority to others." Kunda reminds us that stereotypes are frequently activated automatically (i.e., without us being aware of doing it), which suggests that our power to control our stereotypical thinking is limited (Kunda, 2000, p. 386 and p. 322-323). Although we are able to inhibit the activation of a stereotype and, thus, avoid "the subtle and unintended consequences" it would have on our perception of others, suppressed stereotypes have a tendency to return with a vengeance (Kunda, 2000, p. 342 and p. 345). Since stereotype activation requires much cognitive energy (but, then, so does *not* using stereotypes) there is hope that we might not activate a stereotype if we need to focus on other demanding cognitive tasks. Moreover, Fiske and Taylor (1991, p. 154) note, there are certain strategies (e.g., "providing alternative schemas and focusing on the other as an individual") that may induce people to neglect the use of certain schemas/stereotypes. However, this does not alter the stereotype itself.

If we think that contact with atypical group members can trigger a change in the stereotype, we are mistaken. In order not to be compelled to alter our stereotypical notion of the outgroup *per se*, we tend to judge negatively stereotyped people who have positive attributes as *atypical subtypes*. "It is ironic," Kunda notes, "that the more individuals deviate from the stereo-

type of their group, the less likely they are to bring about stereotype change." We are most likely to modify our stereotype if we come across "[...] individuals who disconfirm the stereotype of their group on one dimension" but are "[...] typical of their group's stereotype in other ways" (Kunda, 2000, p. 384, 390 and p. 386). This suggests that individual reformers are more socially beneficial than lone revolutionaries, at least in the short term. (According to this logic, Susan Sarandon, for example, would run a better chance to alter slightly the female stereotype than Madonna.) Incidentally, this pragmatist view on social change seems to be in agreement with recent multicultural feminist theories that speak of the improbability of a "total" revolution and instead advocate contingent forms of resistance as new ways of transformative politics.[17] Gilles Deleuze (1989, p. 218-220) has expressed a similar opinion with respect to the objectives of modern political cinema.

Dramatic changes in stereotypes do occur, but only over extended time periods, Kunda observes, without paying further heed to the topic. As we have seen, the primary concern of social cognition is to shed light on how mental processes shape, and are shaped by, our interactions in social contexts. However, by limiting its inquiry to individuals' immediate apprehension of, and reaction to, their lived experience, the social cognitive approach fails to take into account the fact that people's mental processes and patterns of behavior are *products* (as well as producers) of the social formation they inhabit. If we wish to explain why certain social groups are more powerful than others and how stereotypes evolve through time we need to turn to theories that describe the structural, as well as functional, properties of the social world in a historical frame. I believe that Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus*—a concept not dissimilar from, although much more intricate than cognitive schemas—can usefully complement social cognitive explanations of women's disenfranchisement in patriarchy.[18]

Concluding Remarks

The notion that a representation may structure reality suggests that changing our images of a world has the power to

reform (i.e., reshape and, possibly, improve) the world. This insight has prompted reform-minded artists, æstheticians, and social theorists to explore strategies that may dismantle normative ways of viewing the world. Feminists, for example, have sought to undo the symbolic *silence* that has enveloped women in patriarchal societies, denying them a social voice, and significance. Due to an affinity between the human mind and the film medium, the cinema has been considered a privileged mean of such de-familiarisation. Nevertheless, amidst their pursuits of the unfamiliar, film theorists have often taken "the familiar" for granted. (Marxist psychoanalytic semiotics considered the real in structural terms, from the top down, and paid little heed to particular actors and practices.)

In this paper I have proposed to take a new look at the everyday world from the bottom up, through social actors' pragmatic and ongoing mental theorising about, and interactions in, this world. I have argued that social cognition could shed new light on how normative (prejudicial) judgments (e.g., about women) are formed and propagated, and, thereby, suggest strategies to undercut such representations. Therefore social cognition could benefit film æsthetics, especially by complementing those theories of cinematic de-familiarisation that invoke the psychology of the mind (e.g., Deleuze's time image). Moreover, a social cognitive interactional model offers insights on how spectators evaluate fictional characters as well as how characters understand (or fail to understand) each other.

Through the concept of the cognitive schema, social cognition demonstrates how people's perceptions, inferences, memory, and actions are based on models of social knowledge. Because schemas are cued by prominent visible features, schemas of gender, race, and age are the most frequently used interpretive frames for evaluating people. Thus identifying a person as a woman triggers, at the moment of perception, the relevant stereotype that "frames" how that person is evaluated in a social context. People's tendency to overestimate the role of personality traits and dispositions in causing behavior (e.g., "she is a woman, therefore she is cowardly") and to underestimate the role of external pressures exerted by a particular situation is called "the

fundamental attribution error" in social cognition. Another important social cognitive concept is "stereotype threat," which explains how stigmatised group members' awareness of the negative expectations that are leveled against them has an unfavourable effect on these people's performance, confirming, in turn, the prejudiced view.

Schema use simplifies and speeds response to the stimuli of the social world. Nevertheless, stereotypical thinking delimits and distorts our judgments. The social cognitive insight that disfavoured groups' traits and actions are consistently construed in terms of simplistic preconceived ideas may explain women's (and, in general, marginalised social groups') lack of a distinctive subjectivity. Moreover, because most women do not typically have the social prominence to significantly influence others' outcomes, they do not merit the social attention and cognitive effort that would be needed to fill in (individualise) the overly generalising categories that signify them. Therefore if women want to make a difference in highly-valued social contexts, they need to develop *translating* skills that use up valuable cognitive resources which could be profitably employed elsewhere.

Although schemas are fundamental structures of our mental makeup, and schema change is costly, schematic thinking can be (temporarily) overridden. I have shown how certain films have made use of the "loopholes" of the cognitive system in order to neutralise the harmful effects of the negative stereotyping of women. In fact, I have argued, Deleuze's complex study of the time image can be read as a compilation of the narrative and stylistic strategies through which the cinema has challenged (or should challenge) the automatic activation of our sensorimotor schemas. However, Deleuze's (1989, p. 224) suggestion that a new political cinema should undertake to invent the missing people (and social meanings) "through trance or crisis," through rendering indiscernible virtual and real, raises serious questions concerning the *pragmatic* value of his deconstructivist æsthetic. The question remains, can the social mind be restructured? Can difference ever be construed in terms other than distinction and deviance?

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NOTES

1. "Silence is a woman's glory," Aristotle asserted 2300 years ago and was followed by innumerable (male) sages who invariably prescribed reticence as the preferred mode of discourse for the female. The proverbial female volubility (i.e., women's notoriety for endless but empty, unclear, and inconsequential speech) does only apparently contradict the notion of the "silent woman": it can be construed as a modality of women's *symbolic* silence. Søren Kierkegaard confirms this when writing that "It requires no proof that a woman can talk." What a woman lacks in Kierkegaard's view is "[...] the power of reflection to insure her against self-contradiction for any considerable time." Kierkegaard's observation that a woman is unable to grasp the logic of "reduplication" (i.e., representation) precedes the Freudian-Lacanian thesis that women have no access to symbolisation. Aristotle and Kierkegaard are quoted in Agonito (1977, p. 54, 176 and p. 181.)

2. As Gilles Deleuze puts it, paraphrasing Henri Bergson, "[...] we do not perceive the thing or the image in its entirety, we always perceive less of it, we perceive only what we are interested in perceiving, or rather, what it is in our interest to perceive, by virtue of our economic interests, ideological beliefs, and psychological demands." Therefore, Deleuze (1989, p. 20) concludes, we perceive only *clichés*. James Elkins (1996, p. 22) argues that we always look with a purpose, namely to use and possess the object we are facing.

3. Emphasis in the original.

4. It is, however, questionable to what extent the mind can surpass—with the help of cinema—the "unalterable" laws of the outside world. Münsterberg himself delimits the freedom of art, and of the mind, by warning the photoplay not to explore things which are "not worth knowing" (Münsterberg, 1970, p. 62, 78, 95 and p. 97).

5. On Eisenstein's theories of montage see "Eisenstein's Epistemological Shift" (Bordwell, 1974-75), and *The Cinema of Sergueï Eisenstein* (Bordwell, 1993).

6. Arnheim writes: "In order to understand a work of art, however, it is essential that the spectator's attention should be guided to [certain] qualities of form, that is, that he should abandon himself to a mental attitude which is to some extent unnatural" (Arnheim, 1957, p. 43).

7. Deleuze was clearly inspired by Alain Robbe-Grillet's ideas on the new novel, on the cinema, and de-familiarisation. Robbe-Grillet, in turn, echoes the Russian Formalists' credo of "making strange" when he envisions a new novel that would open our eyes and minds to the fact that "[a]round us, defying the noisy pack of our animistic or projective adjectives, things *are there*" (Robbe-Grillet, 1965, p. 19).

8. Deborah Tannen (Tannen, 1994, p. 21) expresses a similar view claiming that "[...] one cannot locate the source of domination, or of any interpersonal intention or effect, in linguistic strategies such as interruption, volubility, silence, and topic raising, as has been claimed. Similarly, one cannot locate the source of women's powerlessness in such linguistic strategies as indirectness, taciturnity, silence, and tag questions."

9. The first countries to grant women the right to vote were New Zealand (1893) and Australia (1902). They were followed by Finland (1906) and Norway (1913). Great Britain followed suit in 1918. The U. S. (and Hungary) allowed full franchise for women in 1920. France and Italy procrastinated until 1945, while Switzerland waited until 1971 (!). It was in 1952 that the United Nations Convention of Political Rights for Women passed a decree stating that "women shall be entitled to vote in all elections on equal terms with men without any discrimination." In the meanwhile,

women are still denied voting rights in conservative Arab countries around the Persian Gulf. (Source: http:\\ www.britannica.com)

10. The fact that social cognitive accounts of stereotypical thinking themselves tend to dwell at the level of upper level categories (treating, for example, women and black men as interchangeable instances of the negatively-stereotyped outgroup, as Kunda does above) suggests that social cognition might need to fine tune its (schematic) analytical methods in order to adjust them to a social reality where conventional categories are increasingly reorganised and splintered.

11. A large literature discusses Sirk's masterful uses of the domestic melodrama to convey "excessive" social criticism. See for example, Thomas Elsaesser (1992, p. 512-535).

12. Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus* explains how the value judgements of a historically-produced social structure become embodied, and naturalised, by social actors. The social cognitive notion of the "stereotype threat"—which I will explain later in the paper—can be understood as a consequence of people's unconscious, habitual knowledge and reproduction of the social structure (and power relations). For a detailed description of the *habitus* see, for example, Pierre Bourdieu (1977, p. 78-88). A useful summary of Bourdieu's theory of practice can be found in John B. Thompson's introduction to Bourdieu's *Language and Symbolic Power* (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 1-31).

13. Deleuze (1989, p. 103) claims that in *That Obscure Object of Desire*, Buñuel "[…] achieves […] a direct time image."

14. The "mother" of feminist linguistics and writing in the 1970s, Robin Lakoff surprisingly reconfirms the stereotypical view of the female "genderlect" advanced by sociolinguist Otto Jespersen in 1922. Following Jespersen, Lakoff characterises women's speech as unclear, lacking authority, which she attributes (see "fundamental attribution error!) to certain discursive strategies (tag questions, hedges, euphemisms). See Robin Tolmach Lakoff (1978).

Pierre Bourdieu argues that the power of words does not come from the words themselves but in the belief of the legitimacy of those who utter them. Bourdieu demonstrates how social agents, though their *habitus*, unwittingly recognise as *natural* (and misrecognise the arbitrariness of) the legitimacy of those speakers who, and those words which, represent the dominant paradigm. It is *symbolic* power that tends to posit male discourses as legitimate in contexts that socially and culturally matter. Women and their language are viewed negatively because they lack social acceptance. Furthermore, because history (i.e., a history of male dominance and of misogyny) is made into second natures through the *habitus*, women are disposed to experience their inferiority—and that of their verbal utterances—as a natural condition. See Pierre Bourdieu (1991, p. 55, 82 and p. 170).

15. Emphasis added.

16. Beside Robin Lakoff, several other feminist critics have commented on the social translating skills of women (and, in general, oppressed groups). Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Cherríe Moraga have equally lamented the fact that it has always been the task of social outsiders to stretch out and bridge the gap between themselves and their masters. Audre Lorde, (1984, p.114); Gloria Anzaldúa (1999, p. 107); Cherríe Moraga's "Preface" to Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (1983, p. xv).

17. See, for example, "Introduction" in Ella Shohat (1998, p. 15 and p. 52).

18. Due to space constraints, this essay cannot explore Bourdieu's social theory (especially his notion of the *habitus*), which, in my view, could greatly contribute to our understanding of the socio-historical construction of women as the "second sex" in patriarchy. The *habitus*, I would argue, can be understood as the sum total of one's culturally-shared cognitive schemas: a generative matrix of perceptions, cognitions,

and actions. Bourdieu's significant expansion of the schema concept consists in his conception of the *habitus* as social structure embodied, "somatized," so to speak—or as history turned second natures. Bourdieu argues that the continued survival of a social structure depends on its (mis)recognition by the dominated, who are unconscious of the arbitrary nature of the representations which reinscribe their dominated status. This explains, for example, how in patriarchy women unwittingly, so to speak, *habitually*, recognize the norms that constitute them as the "second sex" and even contribute to the reproduction of these norms through their, again, *habitual* actions and language. See, for example, Bourdieu (1977 and 1991).

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