

Gaze, Gender and Genre

LOOKING AT *DANZÓN*

Psychoanalytic Models of Development

- ◎ Mulvey drawing upon Freudian and Lacanian models of psychosexual development, both of which posit the male's recognition of sexual difference and concomitant identification with the father ([Freud](#)) or "Name of the Father" ([Lacan](#)) as key stage
- ◎ Oedipus complex and castration anxiety part of movement away from the mother toward the father or the symbolic order

Cinema and the Pleasures of Scopophilia

- ◎ Cinema engaging both voyeuristic and narcissistic aspects of looking
 - Erotically pleasurable looking via “voyeuristic separation” from figures on screen (74/307).
 - Narcissistic looking via identification with ego-ideal of figure on screen (typically main male performer)

Gendered Looking Relations

- ◎ Cinematic codes → looking relations structured around gender imbalance
 - “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female” (75/309).
 - “Traditionally, the woman displayed [on screen] has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium . . .” (75/309).
- ◎ Consequently, male as “narrative,” with actions moving story forward and female as “spectacle,” with body halting narrative

Cinema and the (Un)Pleasure of Scopophilia

- However, looking at female image on screen can prove threatening (via raising castration threat) as well as sexually stimulating.
 - “But, in psychoanalytic terms, the female figure poses a deeper problem. She also connotes something that the look continually circles around but disavows: her lack of a penis, implying a threat of castration and hence unpleasure” (76/311).

Assuaging the Threat

- ◉ Screen female investigated and demystified
- ◉ Woman controlled, punished or forgiven
- ◉ Female figure displaced by or transformed into a fetish object

Sadistic Voyeurism

Fetishitic Scopophilia

Working Outside the Dominant Paradigm

- ◎ What constitutes the female gaze?
 - Reversal of terms, with active female looking and passive male body fetishized or punished?
 - Depiction of actively gazing female without male object?
 - Subversion or elimination of cinematic techniques typically deployed to objectify the female body?
 - Depiction of women returning or desiring a male gaze?
 - Something else?

The Gaze in *Danzón*

- ◉ Does the film undercut dominant looking relations? How so or why not?
- ◉ Does *Danzón* construct a female gaze? How so or why not?



Screen shots from *Danzón* (1991)

The “Golden Age” of Mexican Cinema: Melodrama and the Female

- Early 1930s to 1960s
- Included emotive musical performances
- Two trends: family melodrama and epic melodrama
 - Ana López (“[Tears and Desire](#)”): “The melodrama always addresses questions of individual (gendered) identity within a patriarchal culture and at the heart of the definition of Mexico as a nation”
- Settings: Home and nightclub
- Conflicts around shift from old to modern values and resulting gendered identity crises

Melodrama Character Types

- ◉ Sainly, suffering mother whose desire is repressed/channeled into caretaking; rigid father
- ◉ Independent mala mujer—mistress or bad mother who's sexual desirous and desiring
- ◉ Subgenres
 - Fallen and redeemed mother
 - Cabaretera (cabaret, nightclub) films with entertainer and prostitute characters



Image source: [San Diego Latino Film Festival](#)

Danzón and Melodrama



- ◉ What elements does the film borrow from melodrama?
- ◉ How does it rework the genre?
 - “While *Danzón* clearly draws on these classic, woman-centered melodramatic genres, it does so obliquely. . . . Novaro simply captures an atmosphere and a style, discarding the framework of overarching moral conflict” (Rashkin 84/176).