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The Feminist Cinema of Joanna Hogg: Melodrama, Female Space, and the Subversion of Phallogocentric Metanarrative

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***Abstract**: In this article, I provide a scholarly introduction to the cinema of contemporary British director Joanna Hogg that stands in direct contravention to existing auteurist and concomitantly phallogocentric critical discourses on her work. Thus I establish an alternative, feminist theoretical framework for analysis of Hogg's films, synthesising feminist and structuralist methodologies. Via close textual analysis of each of Hogg's three feature films, emphasising their implicit critique of phallogocentric narrativisation vis-à-vis the deployment of certain "melodramatic" conventions, I argue that the director creates a filmic space both literal and conceptual for "the female". Significantly, this contravenes the inherently phallogocentric theoretical framework by which auteurist film criticism has (up until now) largely attempted to "package" Hogg's work. I thus conclude the cinema of Joanna Hogg represents a subversive challenge to phallogocentric metanarrative, within which auteurist film criticism has traditionally been imbricated.*

This article intends to provide a scholarly introduction to the cinema of Joanna Hogg, who, despite having accrued numerous awards and plaudits over the past decade as a director, has not yet received sustained critical examination within academia. This is somewhat surprising in the context of feminist film studies, given Hogg's prominence as an anglophone-Western female film director, as well as her relative newcomer status. Certainly, the fact that Hogg has been able to release three feature films in the last eight years on relatively low budgets (though with increasing financial input from investors, film to film) and to critical acclaim in journalistic media is remarkable for a director, regardless of their gender. Furthermore, Hogg's films have prominently featured middle-aged female protagonists, a demographic still afforded relatively scant narrative attention in either mainstream or independent cinema. I find it therefore appropriate—if not pressing—that a feminist framework for the critical analysis of Hogg's films should be established, particularly in light of the (I shall argue) implicitly phallogocentric and thus often misrepresentative critical discourses that have surrounded her work up till now. This article will therefore serve as a point of embarkation for feminist theoretical analysis regarding the cinema of Joanna Hogg. Specifically, it will perform two functions: first, a critique of the auteurist and concomitantly phallogocentric theoretical framework built up around Hogg in the absence of scholarly debate, and, second, the suggestion of an alternative theoretical framework, synthesising feminist and structuralist methodologies, by which her films might be liberated from latently misogynist auteurist criticism.

It is my contention that Hogg's filmmaking practice represents a feminist challenge to the traditional school of journalistic criticism that has championed her work up till now. Such critical appreciation has largely been based on a linkage between Hogg's perceptibly realist aesthetic and a canon of predominantly male European arthouse directors. Hogg's films are, however and ironically, united by an implicit critique of phallogocentric narrativisation, imbricated in their deployment (though not without problematisation) of certain

melodramatic conventions typically associated with the traditionally "female-oriented" genres, the woman's film and family melodrama. In this way Hogg's films are (thus far) identifiable as narrative forms that contravene the inherently phallogocentric theoretical framework by which auteurist critiques have largely attempted to "package" them: they consciously provide spaces both literal and conceptual to the female. Beyond critiquing phallogocentric narrative convention, then, Hogg's oeuvre furthermore implicitly subverts phallogocentric metanarrative, or discursive convention by which filmic narratives are qualified and hierarchically ranked according to systems of meaning in which hegemonic-patriarchal ideology is embedded. It is therefore with some hesitancy that, while respecting Hogg as a practicing artist whose work evinces certain continuities of narrative, theme, form and style, I am ascribing to her "a cinema" that is defined by its difference from others (particularly mainstream/genre cinema). It is not my intention to be thus reductive or exclusionary in my analysis of her films. If Joanna Hogg is indeed the author of a cinema, it is one marked by stylistic porousness and generic imbrication, unafraid of, and in fact embracing, the "melodramatic" at both the semantic (iconographic) level of structuration and as an ideology of performance and narrativity. Through her work to date, Hogg effects the subversion of certain phallogocentric narrative tropes, including the male hero-protagonist, plot linearity (as an extension of classical narrative realism), and employment of the subjective/identificatory gaze, which taken altogether distinguish her work from traditional (phallogocentric) forms of film-narrativisation and, by extension, confound traditional (metanarratological) methods of auteurist critique.[1]

Before going on to examine these feminist strategies of subversion with regard to each of Hogg's feature films, I want first to offer a review of the journalistic critical discourses on Hogg heretofore. At the expense of positing her subversive tendencies as a director, media coverage has rather focused on cementing Hogg's status as a new British director within a crystallised canon of mostly European auteurs. Critical analysis of her films has thus far largely been concerned with contextualising Hogg's representation of upper-middle-class Britons within a history of class-conscious British auteur filmmaking, with comparing her style as a filmmaker to that of a range of European arthouse auteurs, and thus positing her indebtedness to canon, and with distinguishing her work from mainstream genre filmmaking. I argue that this three-pronged critical approach has ultimately worked against an appreciation of Joanna Hogg as a subversive feminist filmmaker, despite Hogg's frequent assertion in interviews that she is interested in exploring uniquely female experiences on film through various strategies of performance and representation. Indeed, regarding her most recent film, *Exhibition* (2013), Hogg has expressed: "I was interested in how two artists can live together when engaged in different creative practices, and the struggles it begets from the female perspective" (qtd. in Salovaara). With this in mind, I aim to perform an interventionist-feminist critical analysis of Hogg's films.

Since her debut as a feature-length film director with *Unrelated* in 2007, as mentioned, Joanna Hogg has received considerable critical praise in the media, including interviews, reviews and feature articles in such periodicals and non-peer-reviewed film journals as *Film Comment* and *Sight & Sound*. I shall draw on such material (in the absence of scholarly sources) in order to illustrate the phallogocentric biases and profound limitations of auteurist film criticism regarding Hogg. Despite her having directed only three films to date, such middlebrow criticism—particularly following the release of *Exhibition*—has tended to represent Hogg as a budding auteur, her work as a writer-director evincing certain narrative and formal consistencies, including a spare/realist aesthetic and implicit themes of class and domesticity within her work. In *Sight & Sound* Nick Roddick has gone so far as to

suggest that Hogg heralds a new wave of British social realism, attendant on representing the experiences of the British upper middle class, a section of society that has all but been denied relevancy in British audiovisual art and culture over the last fifty years (13). Hogg's films—which centre on upper-middle-class people in physically comfortable if emotionally fraught domestic milieus—could indeed be seen as an exception to the working-class-centric, kitchen sink realism that has been a vernacular for British auteurs such as Tony Richardson, Lindsay Anderson and Ken Loach since the 1960s. *Film Comment*'s Jonathan Romney has thus drawn a parallel between Hogg's work and "outsider cinema", justified by its concern with a social stratum "considered fundamentally alien to cinema" and/or closely identified with melodramatic (i.e. "not serious or realistic") forms of entertainment (i.e. "not art"). By this token, such criticism, albeit generally flattering, has both exaggerated her as yet small body of work as spearheading a new wave of British cinema and, paradoxically, reduced it to existing within the same class-conscious thematic context as the canonical British auteurs'. This is despite the fact Hogg has openly disavowed a conscious interrogation of British class politics throughout her films ("It's not a theme I'm interested in") and refuted that she will maintain thematic focus and/or formal consistency in the future: "I don't like to be defined as a filmmaker who has a certain style" (qtd. in Fuller). Thus, domestic film critics' championing of Hogg has performed a well-intentioned, if ultimately counterproductive and unreliable, attempt to canonise Hogg as a Great British Filmmaker. Furthermore, they have done so without attending to the more unique aspects of her artistry or, indeed, proposing new or alternative theoretical frameworks by which to analyse her films as distinct from—if in dialogue with—other filmmakers and film traditions.

Mitigating the extent to which Hogg has effectively been represented in the media as on an artistic level with the canonical British directors, critics have been obliged in reviews to draw parallels between Hogg's style and that of canonical arthouse directors such as Ozu, Rohmer, Haneke, Bresson and Antonioni (the five most frequently cited). This has been based on the self-evident "sparseness" of her directorial execution (according to Romney), marked by long takes, naturalistic lighting, avoiding close-ups and decoupage, hiring nonprofessional actors, favouring improvisation, shooting on location, eschewing background music while augmenting the "natural" aural topography in collaboration with sound designer Jovan Ajder, and, finally, eliding certain narratively significant moments from the syuzhet of each film (Dallas; Fuller; Shoard; Romney). Critics' insistence on probing the stylistic heritage of Hogg's work, thus positing her indebtedness to canon, has effectively (and self-defeatingly) contradicted the very sense of innovativeness in Hogg's work that such discourses have purported to defend. Nor is it insignificant that Hogg's directorial style has consistently been yoked back to an overwhelmingly male canon of filmmakers, despite her uniqueness as one of the relatively few, critically high-profile female directors working prolifically in Western cinema. Perhaps this speaks more explicitly to a self-evident history of sexism within the capitalist-patriarchal structures of film industry—which has often discouraged and/or outright prevented women from attaining directorial and other leadership positions—than it does to the received institutional sexism of a large body of critics who, without acknowledging gender imbalance, attribute Hogg's directorial prowess to the tutelage of a range of cinematic forefathers. Particularly troubling is a tendency within critics' summary biographies of Hogg to reference her early friendship with Derek Jarman, thus implying a kind of "mentorship" (Shoard) and stylistic indebtedness for which no textual proof actually exists. Ultimately, the existing critical discourse on Hogg has propagated an inherently (if unintentionally) phallogocentric frame of reference that traditional auteur theory provides, strenuously archiving the talents of "men of the cinema"—Truffaut's telling phrase (13)—since 1954.

Further betraying what I would argue amounts to a latently chauvinistic bias on behalf of many of Hogg's would-be champions, critics have evidenced considerable anxiety over the generic classification of her films. This may derive, in part, from Hogg's oft-cited experience as a jobbing director of TV dramas and music videos before she moved into directing feature films—a past purposely juxtaposed with her current auteur status and used to emphasise her films' relative generic ambiguity, marking them as distinct from mainstream and commercial film forms, particularly melodrama. While Romney has argued that Hogg's tendency to set her films within the mundane, domestic spaces of the upper middle class (which is iconographic of Hollywood film melodrama) as a challenge to the precepts of art cinema—nevertheless reinforcing the stereotypical association-cum-dichotomisation of "high art" and generic ambiguity versus "low art" and melodrama—*The Guardian*'s Catherine Shoard has more directly criticised Hogg for relying on melodramatic convention. In review of her sophomore feature *Archipelago* (2010) she writes: "While *Unrelated* bore the residue of her tenure on soaps, its narrative propelled by conventional dramatic devices—sexual desire, rejection, catharsis—*Archipelago* is a more immediately distilled and sincere work." Shoard thus characterises Hogg as having "matured" away from a reliance on melodramatic structuring devices—similarly characterised as juvenile, simplistic, half-formed/basic, and over(t)ly emotional, the familiar chauvinist critiques of the "feminine" sensibility—without elucidating how the "conventionally dramatic" (i.e. "melodramatic") necessarily confronts either "directness" or "sincerity" (qualities seemingly incumbent on the artist).

In so doing, such critics have disregarded a vast diversity within melodrama—either/both as a classifiable genre divisible into further subgenres such as the "woman's film" (Doane; McKee), "fallen woman's film" (Jacobs), "maternal melodrama" (Williams "Something Else"; Kaplan), and/or the "family melodrama" (Elsaesser; Schatz), which emerge and find pockets of popularity/relevancy depending on social-historical context, or perhaps more simply as a generalised "mode" of filmmaking, characteristic of mainstream/hegemonic/Hollywood cinema (Williams "Melodrama Revised", 42) and providing an efficient narratological shorthand for the representation of "spiritual crisis" (Elsaesser 74). It is not within the remit of this article to discuss the various ways in which genre theorists have analysed the issues of stylistic "excess", repression, gendered spectatorship and identification pertaining to melodrama, but it remains that, gener(ic)ally speaking, the "melodramatic" tends to be associated with an "emotional punctuation" of narrative through style (Schatz 148), thematic conflicts of repression versus transgression according to Oedipal psycho-sexual constructs, domestic settings, and, above all, a prioritisation of "women's issues" and female protagonists—the specific and gendered nature of the "pleasures in viewing" such, particularly in the case of ideologically conservative Hollywood cinema, has been the source of considerable theoretical debate (Mulvey "Visual Pleasure" and "Afterthoughts"; Gledhill; Doane; Studlar; Modleski). Taken altogether, theoretical consensus within academic film studies has been that melodrama is a complex narrative film form that at the very least poses potential subversive challenge to the hegemony of phallogocentric narrative within classical realist film prioritising male subjectivity. Consequently, film direction within/according to melodrama may be seen as contravening the hegemony of phallogocentric metanarrative which is concomitant to auteurist film theory, and by which female authorship and/or subjectivity is frequently disregarded and often implicitly derided for its generic associations.



***Archipelago* is set within the domestic-female space of melodrama. Screenshot.**

This appears to be beyond the grasp of middlebrow critics whose attempts to separate Hogg's work-as-art from the generic implicitly denigrate aspects of her films which are iconically melodramatic: their domestic setting, focus on female protagonists (who are all in some way conflicted by their choice either to act out or reject a maternal role), and indeed their juxtaposition of "melos" or music/sound in relation to and/or as commentary on the drama/story. This, again, is despite Hogg's noted attempts to steer deconstructive analysis of her films away from considerations of class and style and towards a more sustained discussion of abstract concepts in her films, such as female sexuality and the body's relationship to place versus space (Salovaara; Fuller). This is not to say that readings of the implicit significance of class, for instance, in Hogg's work are necessarily invalid; yet it is notable that those critics (Roddick; Romney; Dallas) who have probed her films for an authorial mark have tended to fixate on this particular trope—the significance of which the director herself has discounted—without giving equal analytic weight to certain other outstanding narrative constants within Hogg's three releases to date, particularly their preponderance of middle-aged female protagonists and their firm location within domestic/private spaces.

In the rest of this article, then, I intend to intervene on this critical oversight by re-framing discourse on the cinema of Joanna Hogg to stress its subversiveness, vis-à-vis melodrama, of the phallogocentric metanarrative which auteurist criticism of her films has typically employed. Specifically, I want to look at how Hogg deprioritises phallogocentric narrative structuration in her films, focusing on middle-aged female protagonists in domestic settings through a-linear storylines, thus formally deviating from and "exceeding" the otherwise rigorously minimalist aesthetic by which she may be linked to the canon of (largely) realist auteurs. I thus ascribe to Hogg a melodramatic mode of expression.

As Gledhill has argued, extrapolating from Brooks, the melodramatic exists in dialectic with realism (and, alternately, modernism) to contravene the "limitations of [realist and modernist] conventions of representation" regarding the material conditions of patriarchal-bourgeois existence and repression therein (45). Not coincidentally, melodrama takes as frequent focus the domestic issues of middle-class women—the female experience and/or "the feminine"—thus speaking of, and to, the metaphorically silenced through nonlinguistic means: mise en scène, melos, and pathos. Also, not coincidentally (and as seen

by recent media discourse on Hogg) melodrama is represented frequently in the journalistic media/auteurist film criticism as superficial, a-political, sensationalist, and over(t)ly romantic: all stereotypically indicative of the feminine. Thus, auteurist film criticism has afforded little space in the canon to the melodramatic (or, indeed, the female), admitting primarily realists (e.g. Renoir, Welles, De Sica), classical realists (Hawks, Hitchcock), and formalist-modernists and postmodernists (Godard, Bergman, Angelopoulos). As Gledhill notes, Sirk is of course the notable exception, for whom melodramatic allowance is made because the ideological subversiveness of his films appears greater than the sum of its narrative and formal parts (44). However, melodrama is not so much mutually exclusive of narrative and/or stylistic realism, as it is frequently coexistent and thusly even more challenging to the phallogocentric metanarrative of classical realism. The cinema of Joanna Hogg would attest to this. Indeed, throughout her three films to date she has been actively engaged in the establishment of "female spaces" in contemporary cinema—be it "mainstream", "realist", "arthouse", "independent", "British", and/or "European"—analogous to the melodramatic mode's challenge to phallogocentric narrativisation.

Hogg's cinema contradicts the historically phallogocentric bias of both mainstream and independent narrative cinemas by making women and "female" experiences the focal point of story. Crucially, however, she does so without necessitating the adoption of a particularly gendered gaze or perspective in identification with the narrative subject. This has made her films harder to categorise or label generically, or, therefore, ghettoise within the auteur canon as classically melodramatic. Indeed, those film genres, such as the romantic comedy, the "woman's film", and the family melodrama, which have tended to offer sustained narrative agency to female protagonists also tend to be presented as overtly melodramatic in popular, commercial, and critical discourses. Such a labelling strategy has presumably interpellated and attracted a predominantly female audience; at the same time, it has implicitly maintained the artistic credibility of realist and modernist counter-forms of narrative cinema, as well as the hegemony of phallogocentric metanarrative, and the authority of latently misogynistic auteurist film criticism. Hogg, however, has sidestepped the issue of interpellation and marketing by presenting iconically melodramatic narratives through iconically realist aesthetic means. In such a way, perhaps, her films do not so much subvert the "male gaze" or mode of looking as they purposely eschew the male voice narratively.



Protagonist Anna of *Unrelated* is set apart from the family group as a childless woman. Screenshot.

By focusing on middle-aged women caught in a negotiation of their inclination towards (or feelings of responsibility to desire) motherhood, Hogg's films—*Unrelated*, *Archipelago*, and *Exhibition*—have each interrogated with varying degrees of explicitness narrative themes of maternity and sexuality, which are presented as interdependent, if conflictive, facets of femininity and the "female experience". Regardless of Hogg's acknowledged interest in exploring such conflicts (for I want to focus on the textual material at hand, rather than excavating an archaeology of Hogg's auteurship) I argue this conflict represents a fundamentally "meaning-bearing structure" within her work.[2] Before going on to defend this position, however, I offer a brief synopsis of each film in order, highlighting those aspects of narrative which may be seen to contradict or subvert phallogocentric narrative logic and/or perspective.

In *Unrelated*, the middle-aged Anna (Kathryn Worth) arrives at her friends' Tuscan villa for a holiday; she is conspicuously without her partner, with whom she has intermittently strained conversations over the phone. Anna begins to align herself with "the young" of the family group, as Anna's friend Verena (Mary Roscoe) refers to the children, rather than "the olds" with whom Anna ostensibly belongs. Anna further transgressively rejects asexuality—regarded to be "proper" or age-appropriate in her role as childless, middle-aged woman—as she grows close to the teenaged Oakley (played by Tom Hiddleston in his first feature film role) before propositioning him and being awkwardly rebuffed. (One presumes that, to Anna's mind, Oakley represents both a younger version of herself who, pre-sexual commitment to her partner, she desires to be again, as well as the teenage child of whom she could now be the mother but is not sure she desires.) Compounding Anna's increasing sense of isolation, she is rejected by the young after admitting to their parents that they were involved in a car accident. Thus set socially adrift, Anna leaves the villa but is pursued by Verena, who draws out of Anna a second, more deeply mortifying confession: the source of her mid-life crisis has been her discovery, a short time ago, that she was not, in fact, pregnant with her partner's child, as she had somewhat naively suspected, but rather menopausal and past the point of bearing children. Following Anna's cathartic revelation, she returns to the villa where she rejoins her "proper" place among the olds. The families depart, leaving Anna alone in the empty house. She leaves, and is last seen talking optimistically on the phone with her partner, presumably having come to terms with the fact that she will never bear children but she retains a family in another form.



Edward seeks advice from a surrogate father figure outside the home of *Archipelago*. Screenshot.

Out of the three films, *Archipelago* is the only to focus, ostensibly, on the psychological conflict of a central male protagonist; Hogg has stated she was interested in telling a story from a male perspective, though nevertheless as an extension of herself: "I thought it would be interesting to create a character that has elements of myself but a man, a lot younger" (qtd. in Salovaara). Edward (Hiddleston, again) has returned for a family holiday on the Isle of Tresco before leaving to take up a public health job in Africa. His fraught relationship with mother Patricia (Kate Fahy), who has organised the gathering, and his sister Cynthia (Lydia Leonard), who bears deep-rooted (though unspecified) resentment against her family members, is complicated by his attempt to befriend the hired cook Rose (Amy Lloyd, a real-life cook and nonprofessional actor) out of embarrassment over his class privilege, as well as his looking for guidance from surrogate father-figure and art teacher, friend-of-the-family Christopher (Christopher Baker, a real-life painter and nonprofessional actor). Indeed, in the absence of the family patriarch, with whom Patricia is seen (similar to Anna) having a series of increasingly antagonistic phone calls, the family appears unanchored—though the temptation to ascribe their family dysfunction to a lack of patriarchal authority would be misguided. Christopher's advice to Edward to "toughen up" is dubiously given, and emotional equilibrium between family members begins to assert itself when Patricia, overheard by the rest of the group, excoriates her husband over the phone: evidently it is matriarchal, rather than patriarchal, authority that has been missing from the family. It becomes clear that Patricia has been caught between intense feelings of duty to provide a stable, loving home for her children (the impossibility of which is symbolised in her literal "renting" of a home-space) and her feelings of longing and loyalty for a physically and emotionally distant husband. Before vacating the house, the family replaces a painting that had been taken down from the living room wall at the beginning of the film, heretofore unseen by the audience: the picture of a turbulent sea, its imagistic violence an assault on the spare environs of the house, and reminiscent of the psychic conflicts that reside within each member of the family. The film ends with an image of a helicopter, circling back on the opening images of Edward's arrival but conspicuously without the identifiable figure of Edward to provide a sense of cathartic release and, thusly, to "close" the narrative.



D and H struggle to communicate effectively with(in) the space of their home in *Exhibition*. Screenshot.

Exhibition is the least amenable of the three films to summarisation. It holds tenuously to narrative linearity, jumping back and forth between images of the protagonist D (Viviane Albertine) interacting with her husband H (Liam Gillick) as well as a small number of other characters and, most importantly, with(in) the environment of her home. Indeed, it is as if the house was a third protagonist in the film, a possibility Hogg has entertained herself: "The house is not just another character; it's the whole world for the characters" (qtd. in Dallas). Through snippets of conversation, it becomes clear that D and H, a childless couple, are planning to sell their home—a decision D has to be persuaded into; at the same time D is experiencing a crisis of confidence in her performance-art work (comparing herself to her husband, presuming his disapproval). Interspersed with conversations to this effect are scenes of sexual negotiation between D and H: H asking D to come upstairs for sex, D refusing and/or becoming completely unresponsive (though at another point masturbating next to H as he sleeps in bed), and "finally" (though it is uncertain if this occurs chronologically later) making love on a sofa. Juxtaposed with these scenes, shot in Hogg's typically realist manner, are insets of dream-like images from D's point of view (D swimming naked in a pool; D watching herself being interviewed by H; D remembering/imagining being led up the stairs in her wedding dress by H as music plays in the background—also the first instance of background music in Hogg's films and clearly signifying an "unrealistic" state), alongside images of D rehearsing her work in her room, utilising furniture as props, and moulding herself to the interior structures of the house as if to become one, physically, with its framework. The implication is that D's experience of her domestic environment is highly physicalised, even sexual. Indeed, it appears D is most interested in sexual situations and/or sex with her husband when she may be viewed in private from a public vantage point, taking in the full physical extent of her actions-as-performance: she becomes unresponsive to H when she closes the curtains; she opens up to him when they have sex in front of a window. This transference of sexual energy and/or attraction is attributable to her childlessness, which allows her sexual/reproductive energies to be directed towards physical surroundings and the performance of art that replaces the birthed child as a locus of emotional energy. This psychosexual displacement is not represented as necessarily neurotic/pathological but rather as a straightforward alternative for D as a middle-aged woman who has chosen to remain childless. Releasing her home is both as traumatic and as potentially liberating as releasing a child from guardianship. As they pack up their belongings, D finally informs H that she has been offered a solo exhibition at a gallery; he is supportive. The film's final image is of the

new occupants, a young family observed voyeuristically through the window from a low angle outside the house, asserting themselves within and throughout the space previously occupied by D and H.



D experiences sexual dysfunction within closed-off/private spaces, i.e. non-exhibitory spaces. Screenshot.

All three films share certain iconographic traits of family melodrama including a female-centric cast of characters, "the claustrophic atmosphere of the bourgeois home" (Elsaesser 84), and implicit themes of female sexuality and maternal loss (or, rather, the longing for an experience of maternity predicated on future loss that will never be: a "desire to desire", borrowing from Doane's book title). While *Archipelago* initially prioritises the explicit dramatisation of scenes involving a male protagonist, as established by the opening shots of Edward's arrival, the rest of the film is not in fact concerned with examining the family from his perspective (though this would have been easily conveyed with recourse to point-of-view/reaction shots on/from Edward's perspective, devices which Hogg typically eschews); the film rather decentres Edward from narrative in refusing to "image" him at the last. Similar to *Unrelated* and *Exhibition*, the film resists encouraging subjective identification with a male character or protagonist. If the films do not otherwise gender narratological perspective as "female" then, they do consciously engender an "experience of the female" within the physical spaces of their stories, parallel to their objective documentation of family life.

A less explicit challenge to classically realist/phallogocentrist narrative conventions in the cinema of Joanna Hogg is her apparently increasing ambivalence towards linear narrativity. While *Unrelated* may be seen to follow the classic melodramatic trajectory of loss-catharsis-acceptance on behalf of its protagonist, *Archipelago* follows a rather more circular pattern of narrative in which the cathartic moment—Patricia's emotional breakdown over the phone—is followed not by a scene of reconciliation between family members, but rather their quiet departure from the house, as if nothing had happened (and indeed nothing has been resolved). They leave both house and narrative as they found it, uninhabited by characters. *Exhibition*, then, dispenses with temporal coherence, freely jumping between stage-times within D and H's house and their relationship (which are, of course, inextricably physically linked) and D's dream-space. The spectator is consequently prevented from establishing an objective perspective on the progression of event-images presented by the

unfolding of "story" as such, and thus dislocated. Rather than a series of causes and effects, the narrative thus takes the form of a train of interconnected moments/performances, such that it leaves more the lingering impression or emotional residue of a story having been told, than a coherent understanding of what the "action" has been: it is an amalgamation of stand-alone *acts*, much like what one is led to believe D would perform in her gallery exhibition as a reflection of her lived experience.

In such a way, Hogg's films may be said to break with classically melodramatic convention in deprioritising the cathartic moment as a locus for narrative meaning. On the other hand, performed moments of emotional release—similar in intensity to those moments of catharsis typically associated with melodrama—do indeed "punctuate" her films, borrowing from Elsaesser's assertion that melodrama may be seen as a "system of punctuation, giving expressive colour and chromatic contrast to the storyline[s]" (74), which might otherwise be characterised as "coolly" (Fuller) observed. Both Anna's and Patricia's emotional outbursts function as self-evidently "dramatic" against the almost documentary-like framing action and as complemented by the actors' typically naturalistic/improvisational performance style.[3] Rather than existing as melodramatic aberrations, then, within otherwise rigorously realistic films (as Shoard has suggested they function), I would argue such moments exemplify Hogg's filmic utilisation of melodramatic device to signify intense emotional experience in a compressed form. In *Unrelated*, this externalised emotional experience, as performed by Anna/Worth, is lent narrative significance according to the classically realist paradigm, in that it leads to Anna's acceptance of her situation. In *Archipelago*, on the other hand, Patricia's explosion in anger does not ultimately impact meaningfully on the characters' understanding of, or behaviour towards, each other. This in fact anti-cathartic moment highlights the essential pathos at the heart of the film: the protagonists, as in the classic family melodrama, fail "to act in a way that could shape the events and influence the emotional environment, let alone change the[ir] stifling social milieu" {Elsaesser 78–9). Thus, Hogg employs classically melodramatic narrative devices in her films—particularly *Unrelated* and *Archipelago*—in order to define through punctuation her female characters' emotional landscape.

Finally, in turning to consider Hogg's formal tendencies as a director, we find evidence of her fundamentally realist aesthetic working through/alongside a melodramatic mode of representation to similarly punctuate the emotional spaces of her films (populated, crucially, by female protagonists). For the most part, and as I have already suggested, Hogg's disciplinedly realist style—marked by long takes, framing characters in middle-long shot in order to take in the breadth of their bodily performance, using natural light on location, eschewing background music—works paradoxically to resist any immersive identification with the filmic subject on behalf of the viewer. This almost confrontational, documentary-like visual style represents a stark contrast to the classical realist style of Hollywood, which is immersive and encourages viewer-identification with the filmic subject (who is usually male) (Bordwell 24–41). In such a way, I have suggested, Hogg defies narrative convention, which is also predominantly phallogocentric. Yet sound in Hogg's films—which would at first also appear to complement the overall effect of realism—may in fact be seen to work towards a conventionally melodramatic amplification/punctuation of the female protagonist's emotional state in relation to her physical space. In this sense, Hogg's films are imbued with "melos", a music of sorts, on top of action/drama.

Elsaesser has noted that sound functions as an important element of mise en scène, which gives "depth to the moving image"—thus defining the parameters of space—and as

such defines melodrama as a "particular form of dramatic mise-en-scène" (75). This is by virtue of the fact that melos, or musical accompaniment, functions in melodrama to mark the "emotional effects" of characters' experience (74). I argue that realistic sounds are foregrounded to such an extent in Hogg's films that, in addition to becoming iconic of her style and mise en scène, they take on the signifying function of music in melodrama: they come to constitute melos. Indeed Hogg has stated in interview with Dallas that sound design "provides an essential tension" within her films, providing "a kind of musical soundtrack". With recourse to a brief discussion of sound in her films, this is borne out.



D experiencing physical communion with the domestic space. Screenshot.

Sound consistently functions in Hogg's films to highlight the isolation of her protagonists in space, and increasingly as a punctuational echo of their emotional states. In both *Unrelated* and *Archipelago*, sound (other than dialogue) is largely atmospheric: the only sounds that are heard over speech derive from the environment (e.g. moving furniture, wind, rustling leaves, chirping birds, and so on) to the effect that the individual audio-viewer is apparently placed in a middle-distance objective position compared to the story-space. However, Hogg manipulates the levels of sound such that, for example, a chair being pulled out from beside Anna at the breakfast table projects startlingly louder than it would had it not been amplified in postproduction, or the sound of wind and breaking waves overlaid the image of Rose scrambling across rocks in *Archipelago* appears suddenly, overwhelmingly to dwarf her. In each case, Hogg utilises sound as an agent of space definition, to demonstrate the expanses between the subject-image and her surroundings (or his, as in the case of Edward, whose speaking voice is often layered over—and similarly aurally dwarfed, if not muted—by natural sounds). Sound therefore functions to pass comment on the emotionally isolated states-in-space of the narrative subjects of *Unrelated* and *Archipelago*.

In *Exhibition*, however—again demonstrating a progression of formal technique on behalf of the director—Hogg uses sound to echo, mirror, and illustrate D's emotional reactions, more directly analogous to the function of a musical track. In particular, Hogg repeats an aural motif by which D, having spoken to H over their intercom, hears the scraping of H's chair across the floor above her, or the sliding of a door in the hall next to her, signalling H's leaving the house. The sounds penetrate the otherwise stillness and silence of the interior space of the house, quite literally speaking to D's anxiety over her husband's

emotional state. Indeed, whenever D is still, the house appears, through aural signification, to be somewhere/somehow in motion, reflective of D's intense physical and emotional connectedness to her environs. Functioning thusly like music or melos, sound in *Exhibition* defines the emotional and physical space of its female protagonist. Certain noises, like H's scraping chairs, or the rustle of leaves outside the window, become indexical of D's emotional state or metaphysical landscape. This is an extension of how sound design is used in Hogg's first two films to punctuate protagonists' emotional situation according to a melodramatic code of expression. It is also a further example of how Hogg prioritises the definition of female space within her films' narrative form as a feminist contravention to the phallogocentric mode of representation paradigmatic of narrative cinema.

Conclusion

In this article, I have attempted to establish a working theoretical framework for the analysis of Joanna Hogg's films as predicated on the definition of female spaces. I have contended that Hogg, despite a noted tendency towards the rigorous exercise of realist style and technique, has in fact utilised a melodramatic mode and/or code of representation, with concomitant subversion of phallogocentric narrative, towards the practice of a fundamentally feminist cinema. This has furthermore served as an intervention into the implicitly phallogocentric and misrepresentative critical discourses, or metanarratives, that have surrounded Hogg's work heretofore, by virtue of their latently misogynist bias against the melodramatic and/or female-centric. Indeed, a narrative of realist auteurship has been built up around Hogg in recent years vis-à-vis journalistic criticism (in lieu of sustained academic analysis) as a means of assimilating her work into a phallogocentric theoretical framework of film theory and criticism. I would go so far as to suggest this has amounted to an attempted colonisation of the female spaces established within her films—a colonisation against which this article has hopefully intervened. Marked by a greater narrative and formal inclusiveness and range than she has tended to be credited with by traditionally auteurist critics, Hogg's films have so far resisted strict categorisation according to genre or style, existing in open discourse with a range of formal and narrative traditions, and inclusive of a melodramatic mode of representation. No doubt, Hogg's films will continue to engender sustained critical analysis as she releases films that expand the generic scope of realism in the cinema, alongside the representation of—and provision for—the female experience with which she is actively engaged.

Notes

[1] In this piece, I therefore use "narrative" and its derivatives as denotative of "filmic story", whereas "metanarrative" invokes broader theoretical and critical discourse on how films function to create meaning and/or are qualified. In such a way, "auteurship" is a (phallogocentric) metanarrative of film, qualifying individual films according to or against the narrative (as well as formal) tropes and tendencies of a canon of predominantly male-directed films.

[2] I am here consciously invoking Rick Altman's terminology in the structuralist analysis of genre cinema, by which he separates meaning in film as constructed according to syntactic

(largely "meaning-bearing"/ideological) and semantic (iconographic) levels, analogous to a language (10–11).

[3] In interview with Fuller, Hogg has stated her preference for allowing actors to inhabit the space of their scenes, both literally (in that they tend to live on set/shooting location) and figuratively: she will provide actors with documents that outline characters' actions, yet always give them time and space when shooting to improvise dialogue and performance.

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