

Sally Potter: Selected Academic Bibliography

Career Overviews

Anne CIECKO, "Sally Potter: The Making of a British Woman Filmmaker." *Fifty Contemporary Filmmakers*. Ed. Yvonne Tasker. London: Routledge, 2002. 272–280.

- Ciecko describes Potter as "the foremost woman director to have emerged in the UK in the last twenty years," partially because of her European and global remit (272). Potter's most recent film (at the time of publication) *The Man Who Cried* illustrates this claim: it was a French co-production with Hollywood stars, a cinematographer from the European arthouse tradition, which imagined "the feature film as a composite artwork" with strong, relevant, contemporary themes (272). Her previous film *The Tango Lesson* reflexively explored what it means to be a British-international independent filmmaker "in an industry where female film directors are few and far between" (273). Ciecko situates Potter's dynamic international success in the context of the many British women directors making shorts, television and collaborative projects, and contrasts Potter's self-taught background at the London Film-makers' Co-op, and her involvement with small organisations such as ArtsLab, with the current structure of film schools and government-funded workshops. She points to the influence of Potter's generation of filmmakers and theorists, including Laura Mulvey and Claire Johnstone, in creating spaces in which women could produce and exhibit films, and in changing the canonical histories of cinema that excluded women. Potter is "widely celebrated as a model for independent filmmaking" at independent and feminist festivals globally. Ciecko argues that this dates back to the excitement around *Thriller* in the critical community, and that Potter's films have moved towards the mainstream and narrative while retaining their critical eye and genre-blending strategies. She extended these skills to directing two television documentaries that looked at the British and Russian cultural consciousness as represented in cinema, but resisted the further lure of television or Hollywood to remain independent. *Orlando*'s commercial and critical success marked the value of Potter's stringently independent model, which she pursued even after she was considered "high risk" due to *The Gold Diggers*. *Orlando*'s post-national and transnational consciousness fit with the zeitgeist of post-Thatcher England and suggested a filmic and social European community, as well as being connected visually to the work of British arthouse directors Derek Jarman and Peter Greenaway. Like them, Potter is to be recognised as an auteur for her singular vision.

Verina GLAESSNER, "Sally Potter." *Women Filmmakers and Their Films*. Eds. Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, Amy Unterburger and Katrien Jacobs. St James' Press: 1998. 340-42.

- Glaessner draws attention to the way in which Potter has participated in and drawn on avant-garde, independent, feminist and experimental cinema while also considering herself part of entertainment and show business, thus refusing to be labelled or contained – and suffering from economic structures that seek to label and contain filmmakers. She connects this hybrid identity to Potter's performance background, which survives in her practice of touring extensively with the films, and offering Q&As and masterclasses. Glaessner offers accounts of *The Gold Diggers* and *Orlando* that make connections between the economic circumstances and labour of production and visual, aesthetic and emotional appeal of the finished films. She stresses the difference of Potter's choices from the mainstream of filmmakers, and the pleasure in cinema that informs them, and that they in turn give to the viewer.

Sue HARPER, "Directors" [section]. *Women in British Cinema: Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know*. London & New York: Continuum, 2000. 201-02, 208-10.

- Harper describes Potter as "undoubtedly the most imaginative" of the British female directors emerging from the 1970s avant-garde (201). She describes *Thriller* as a "major cinematic innovation" for its deconstruction of *La Bohème* in such a way as to reveal the problematic pleasures of the opera's politics, while finding new pleasures that reversed or re-imagined power and identity (201-02). This pleasure, she argues, was not an endorsement of feminist psychoanalytic criticism and did not stem from critical theory, but rather from Potter's performance practice (202). Similarly, *The Gold Diggers*, which dealt thematically with complex theories surplus value connecting the circulation of gold and the objectification of women, is described as "rivetingly entertaining, with a quixotic lightness of touch" (209). Harper sees its intellectual quest as part of its aesthetic pleasure, and comments on Potter's conception of the film as a spiral rather than linear. *Orlando*, argues Harper, takes Virginia Woolf's long essay on gender and sexuality and finds a visually arresting, sensual story in which difference – of nationality, gender, physicality – is the source of harmony and pleasure (210).

Scott MACDONALD, "Interview with Sally Potter." *Camera Obscura*. 35 (1995). 187–220. Reprinted in *A Critical Cinema 3: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. 397–427.

- MacDonald's interview is particularly useful for its depth of coverage, which includes descriptions and discussions of Potter's early short films and expanded cinema works, revealing the development of her work from shorts to features, and from performance to directing. The lengthy, richly detailed introduction covers Potter's career from *Jerk* (1971) to *Orlando* (1993), drawing particular attention to Orlando's gaze to camera as Potter's comedic and engaging solution to the unison of feminist theory and popular filmmaking. At the start of the interview, MacDonald compares Potter's radical reinventions of herself, and the hiatus in her career between *The Gold Diggers* and *Orlando*, to Orlando's transformative sleeps. Potter comments that she is a continuum to herself, but she also has to yoke together multiple facets: she's currently learning tango *and* talking to film journalists. She continues that she is often in a love/hate relationship with current projects, but what sustained her through *Orlando*'s long genesis was the "idea of being able to emerge into a continual present... saying good-bye to a past" (401). MacDonald alludes to her multi-disciplinary training as her past, and Potter responds that she is still a musician, dancer and filmmaker, and the first two are always involved in the last. She traces her background in film, as her primary medium, to borrowing a camera from her uncle, and making films with him and his partner, filmmaker Sandy Daley, with family support and artistic autonomy. She left school a few years later and joined the London Film-makers' Co-op, and showed her films in underground film festivals, but felt excluded from the English structuralist scene, both aesthetically and socially. She talks about her experimental shorts, made on her kitchen table, and that they were handmade, very basic but asking complex questions about space, time and embodiment. MacDonald asks about the relationship between these avant-garde films and Potter's current narrative filmmaking. She answers that she doesn't perceive them as different, although the earlier work was more concentrated, and very focused on her love of the medium itself – and of editing, which was cheap. She describes the austerity of the early films as images of herself, as a filmmaker lacking financial resources, and seeking to go "beyond the edge of the frame" (405). These frustrations led her to dance and choreography, where she learnt how to direct performers, and had the experience of conceiving and delivering "full" shows (as opposed to shorts). She then discusses how *Thriller* emerged from her living situation as a squatting artist surviving on grants, and her perception of the class difference that allowed her to make art while a seamstress couldn't, and a resulting interest in poverty. She investigated the gender and class politics of opera, but still found herself moved by Puccini's music for Mimi's death scene in *La Bohème*. Although *Thriller* is often read as heavily theoretical, Potter points out that the response to questions about the meaning and importance of theory in life and film, in *Thriller*, is laughter. Yet the film is also a thriller, very dislocating and eerie, and Potter describes the making of the film as itself a thriller because she was moving on uncharted territory. But audiences were incredibly responsive, and it encouraged Potter to begin work on *The Gold Diggers*, which MacDonald describes as conjoining *Thriller*'s structuralist and critical concerns with the form of a commercial entertainment. Potter narrates the process of making the second film, which followed a similar route to *Thriller* in that it did not have a completed script, with the idea being that it would be constructed in the editing room. But it was a larger-scale film, shot in hostile weather conditions with an inexperienced crew and a large budget – and Potter had never cut 35mm before. However, she enjoyed directing the large cast, and felt comfortable doing so after her performance experience. They discuss the imagery in *The Gold Diggers*: its references to the history of cinema, its argument about the equation of women and gold, and conclude that many viewers didn't get it. Potter comments that "it was [her] attempt to respect the audience's intelligence," and that audiences were passionately divided in their responses (414). As well as teaching her through reception from more varied audiences than she was used to, *The Gold Diggers* taught Potter a great deal from its production: about the need for a script, about working to a schedule, and about communication. She was ready to begin a new film immediately with all this new knowledge, but found it hard to raise funding. *The London Story* was devised to have a short production time and be easier to make and fund, and its completion was very satisfying. *I Am An Ox* was also satisfying because of Potter's connection to Russia and Russian cinema, from her several trips to the country, which gave her insight into a completely different model of cinematic production. MacDonald then talks about how she achieved communication in *Orlando* through the to-camera look, and its comedic and intimate power. MacDonald mentions that the novel lacks that intimacy, and Potter talks about the choices she made in adaptation, including her very different handling of the transformation scene – and how the film version works because of the relationship built up by the to-camera looks, and by the transformative editing, which is something else Potter learnt on *The Gold Diggers*. The transformation is also different from the novel because Potter needed to create some narrative logic, and saw an opportunity to critique Woolf's colonial and class politics. Potter discusses her relationship with Tilda Swinton, who came on board in 1988, *Orlando*'s bracketing with *The Piano*, the film's budget (approx. \$4 million) and her mentoring relationship with Michael Powell, and the film's other dedicatee, Beatrice

Quennell, Potter's grandmother. MacDonald then asks about future projects and Potter's personal life; she is reluctant to talk about either, and points to the theme of polymorphous desire and refusing labels that runs through her work. She connects her refusal to identify with a particular identity with *Orlando's* queer frame, seeing its difference as productive.

Patricia MELLENCAMP. *A Fine Romance: Five Ages of Film Feminism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995.

- From the picture of Tilda Swinton in her elaborate 18th century costume as Orlando on the cover of this book to Mellencamp's personal anecdote about travelling to a women filmmakers' conference in Tbilisi, Georgia with Swinton and Potter, it's clear that Sally Potter's oeuvre and approach to filmmaking is central to Mellencamp's arguments. Potter is the first, and exemplary director, of the third "age," Experimental Feminism, which is prefaced by a still from *Thriller*. Mellencamp reads both *Thriller* (156-59) and *The Gold Diggers* (159-64) as doing feminist theory, and as being ahead of their times. She notes that both films are concerned with work, money and age (156), and work by raising questions about what Potter calls the "personal historical" (156). Mellencamp usefully narrates both films with dialogue quotations, and draws connections between *Thriller's* commentary on women's exclusion from participating in both a capitalist economy and the arts with Potter's working practices (159). She notes that *The Gold Diggers* offers a multi-faceted critique of genre and continues *Thriller's* critique of the sexual economy, by looking at the star system, as well as reinstating a powerful female gaze and an active female protagonist (161-63). The book's final section is called "What Virginia Woolf did Tell Sally Potter," and argues that the film's lavish yet independent production is comparable to Woolf's "room of one's own," (281-82) offering a vision of history as high fashion (as opposed to the slavish recreations of traditional costume drama), and witty dissection of the English class system (285), ending with a celebration of imagination and change and the present, characteristics that Mellencamp explores and praises in other contemporary women filmmakers.

"Sally POTTER." *Contemporary Authors Online*.

- A condensed critical bibliography that offers brief insights into the conflicting reception of each of Potter's feature films in the international media, focusing on well-known reviewers such as Janet Maslin and Elvis Mitchell, demonstrating how Potter's films have passionately polarised viewers. Stresses the range, ambition and beauty of Potter's work, and the themes of relationship, history, politics and aesthetics that run through her *oeuvre*. Useful bibliography.

B. Ruby RICH, *Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1998.

- *Chick Flicks* is unlike any other book on this list, in that it combines autobiography with critical theory, following Rich's central involvement in shaping feminist cinema through her work as a journalist, academic and programmer. As well as an anecdotal record of Rich's friendship with Potter and members of her circle (Lindsay Cooper, Julie Christie), the book includes Rich's ground-breaking review of *Thriller* from the *Chicago Reader*. Rich and Potter met in 1976 at the Edinburgh Film Festival, when Potter was a celebrated performance artist thinking about making film. Rich situates this meeting in the context of the publication of Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," the new American independents, and changing directions (away from structuralism) in avant-garde cinema. Three years later, she saw *Thriller* at Edinburgh, and invited Potter to bring *Thriller* to the US to speak at her class in Chicago, while Potter, Rose English and Lindsay Cooper waited to hear from the BFI about money for *The Gold Diggers*. Rich offers an account of Potter and English's performance *Berlin*, which she regrets not having seen, and celebrates having heard Potter's lecture to her class, which attracted no less a personage than Stan Brakhage, who engaged Potter in furious debate. Rich persuaded Potter to distribute *Thriller* through a small, feminist company called Serious Business, who were successful on the educational circuit, but lacked paying venues. Potter returned to the US in 1981 for a fractious yet influential panel on feminist cinema; Potter was also in New York to perform with the Marx Brothers, formed by her and Cooper, at one of English's events. The style of this musical evening presaged that of *The Gold Diggers*, which went into production shortly thereafter. Rich returned Potter's visit, travelling to the UK in 1982 to see the rough cut of the new film, then called *Gold*, with the BFI's (all-male) panel. Rich found the film "emotionally exhilarating" and praised it in her report, as well as filing an interview with Julie Christie, who rarely granted them. Rich attributes the critical attacks on *The Gold Diggers* by UK film journalists to the perceived hubris of Potter being asked to program a season at the NFT by new programmer Sheila Whittaker. Rich narrates Potter's journey from the disaster of *The Gold Diggers* to making *Orlando* and *The Tango Lesson*. She ends with an instructive question: "how many films were lost in those lean years?" (226).

Kristi McKIM, “ ‘A State of Loving Detachment’: Sally Potter’s Impassioned and Intellectual Cinema.” *Senses of Cinema*. 2006. <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/directors/06/potter.html>

- McKim argues that, although Potter’s formal concerns have altered throughout her career, her emphasis on the “cinema’s transformative capacity.” She roots this in Potter’s dance and performance training, and considers the “choreographic grace” that informs and structures her films. After looking briefly at *Thriller* and *The Gold Diggers*, McKim considers how Potter combined the structuralist and political concerns of these earlier films with the sumptuous virtuosity of *Orlando*, and found increasing critical admiration. She argues that the spectator’s experience of the films is characterised by a mixture “of detachment and fascination” with her complex, intelligent characters who defy categorisation, as the spectator follows them on a quest for harmony and integration. She argues that critics who are dismissive of Potter’s ardent refusal to create simplistic characters and forms are impatient with, or disturbed by, the emotive, personal and unscripted force of her “moments of extreme wonder” (Jane Campion on *Orlando*). *Yes* represents, for McKim, the culmination of Potter’s work, and marks her increasing comfort with the sensual body and the integration of multiple cinematic languages (colour, sound, speech, music, bodily gesture) to interweave narrative and metaphor. She considers how these metaphors, which appear throughout Potter’s *oeuvre*, stem from a unique use of “charmed spaces,” which operate like close-ups (another meaningful term in Potter’s cinematic vocabulary) to create intense, non-realist conjunctions of time and space in which sensuous detail is emphasised as a route to transformation. This, she argues, derives from Potter’s close involvement with all aspects of the filmmaking process, and her work with the actors, as seen in the extra on the *YES* DVD, “Finding Scene 54.” The emotionality of the rehearsal process, and the difficult journeys of the protagonists within the films, result in open, hopeful endings that are not sentimental but satisfyingly complete.

Kristy WIDDECOMBE, “the Contemporary Auteur: An Interview with Sally Potter.” BFI 16+ guides. <http://www.bfi.org.uk/filmtvinfo/publications/16+/potter.html>

- Potter talks about the idea of the *auteur*, and the balance in recognising that filmmaking operates on the labour of hundreds of people collaborating, but that final decisions rest with the director, who manages the work of her collaborators. She discusses her diverse filmmaking experiences, from doing all the technical work on *Thriller*, to making *The Gold Diggers* collaboratively, to adapting *Orlando* from Virginia Woolf’s novel and building a transnational production company. Potter notes that the term *auteur* is applied to male directors, even if they have long-term collaborators or producing partners; but when women do – as Potter has worked with producer Christopher Sheppard on all her films since *Orlando* – they forfeit the term. She talks about Sheppard’s role as a producer in running Adventure Pictures, and the way they work together, describing his considerable input, as well as the input of her collaborators behind and in front of the camera. These collaborations, she insists, are *part* of being an *auteur*, and it’s important to consider both the director as decision-maker, and the way that she interacts with her cast and crew in thinking about *auteur* theory. Widdecombe points out that this aspect is little discussed, and Potter notes that female directors may be readier to admit collaboration and recognise the work of all involved in filmmaking, but says that she does not limit herself with the term “female director” or “feminist” (which has become an insulting shorthand in the media), because it can stop viewers from engaging with the aesthetics and wider cultural politics of her films. Potter talks about the difference between writing (alone) and production (with a large team), and how working with different budgets can affect her sense of herself as an *auteur*. She talks about *Yes*, which was in process at the time of the interview, and about her methods of writing and filmmaking: finding an idea, returning to it through the various stages of making the film, and finally knowing when to let go – and dealing with the film’s unpredictable reception.

Films

THRILLER (1979)

Joan COPJEC, “*Thriller: An Intrigue of Identification.*” *Ciné-tracts*. 3:3 (Autumn 1980). 33-38. <http://dl.lib.brown.edu/cinetracts/CT11.pdf>

- Copjec demonstrates that *Thriller* has the potential to cast light on the problematic nature of identification as discussed in psychoanalysis, and to complicate the simplistic manner in which the psychoanalytic concept of identification has been treated in film theory. Metz, for example, describes it as entirely of the order of the Imaginary, proceeding only through visual means. Film theory has been too dependent on Lacan’s mirror stage, which renders the spectator absent and erases the body. Copjec points instead to Freud’s constantly revised concept of identification, culminating in a triple definition which relates identification to signifying systems – that is, identification is concerned with the

shift from the Imaginary to the Symbolic, and therefore is less voyeuristic and alienating than Metz implies. *Thriller* occurs in the space of this shift. The way in which it uses mirrors, and in which the shadow of the camera operator is visible, proposes a completely different scheme of film-spectator relations than Metz does, one that is rooted in melancholia and the incorporation of loss. To demonstrate this, Copjec compares *Thriller* to *Oedipus*: both are thrillers in which the narrative is initiated by a detective who has to solve a mystery about his or her self. "Although both...are replete with images of vision, eyes, mirrors, sight, it is primarily through the medium of the voice that their narratives are related" (37). The voice, which is made spectacular in *La Bohème* by virtuosic singing, is returned to meaning in *Thriller*, and its particular meaning for Copjec is that Rodolfo consumes Mimi, emphasized by Potter's counterpointing of Rodolfo's singing with Mimi's tubercular cough. Copjec also discusses the ways in which the carrying on and off of women in *La Bohème*, foregrounded by Potter's retelling, reiterates this narrative of consumption, in which the female character, Mimi, is included in order to be excluded, to sustain Rodolfo's power. The film "changes the diva of the opera into an *operant*... and a *revenant*," a detective and a ghost or corpse, and this activeness, which splits the character between performers, creates difference, showing that identification is not logical and singular, but illogical and multiple (38). Change to structural power can therefore take place because there is no fixed system or originary moment. The operant and the revenant can, and must, exist together and interact.

Elena DEL RIO, "Rethinking Feminist Film Theory: Counter-Narcissistic Performance in Sally Potter's *Thriller*." *Quarterly Journal of Film and Video*. 21:1 (2004). 11-24.

- From a vantage point of twenty years, del Rio argues that feminist psychoanalytic film theory, in trying to undo the Aristotelian connection between the female and the bodily by erasing signs of embodiment, came dangerously close to erasing the power of the female body and voice to upset signification. *Thriller*, which was read influentially by a number of psychoanalytic feminist film theorists as part of their erasure of the feminised body and its sensory pleasures, can be read more productively with phenomenology to reveal traces of the lived body in its use of dance performance and of Colette Laffont's distinctive voice. The body in *Thriller* is unlike the body in classical cinema because it divests itself of the surface beauty and feminised gestures that make the female icon a source of traditional visual pleasure. This is because *Thriller* is influenced by melodrama, but examines rather than stages the emotions through its emphasis on Laffont's voice as one of the bearers of meaning. Del Rio takes issue with Kaja Silverman's claim that the female voice has to be disconnected from the body in order to escape the narrative trap of classical cinema. Instead, Laffont's voice, which is anchored in the specificity of her French accent, "construct[s] a kind of communal female body and agency" by speaking as and of all of the female characters (Mimi, Musetta, the seamstresses) at various points, and with shifting pronouns (15). Laffont's voice also becomes the sole sensual element as opera is stripped of its sensory overload, and this minimalism reveals a new set of female gestures that are not constrained by patriarchy but chosen for their controlled expressivity. The syncing of the voice when Laffont reads from *Tel Quel* repeats this, indicating the potential for reuniting language and the (female) body alienated by patriarchy, and then again by feminist theory.

E. Ann KAPLAN, "Night at the Opera: Investigating the Heroine in Sally Potter's *Thriller*." *Millennium Film Journal*. 10/11. (Autumn/Winter 1981). 115-22.

- Kaplan argues that *Thriller* is not a rejection of psychoanalytic theory, but an engagement with it and refusal to be determined by it. *Thriller* moves from psychoanalysis as a first stage (looking at the individual) to Marxist critique (looking at the individual in society), and these two methods of investigation are intertwined. These are represented in the film by Mimi's investigation of her death, and Mimi's psychoanalytic discovery that as a female subject she lacks a place (in the thriller genre) from which to speak; and her materialist investigation of classical narrative's exclusion of women, workers and mothers. Potter is then able to link narrative, psychoanalytic discourse and historical discourse. This is communicated visually, rather than verbally, and through a specific and unusual relationship between visual and aural languages. Mimi's ability to speak – both on voice-over and diegetically – accompany her non-traditional appearance and gestural language to suggest that she has found a position as a speaking subject, in contrast with "Mimi 2," the Mimi of Puccini's opera, which is quoted on the soundtrack and in intercut stills. The frozenness of the stills, and their traditional framing, is contrasted with the stark set "Mimi 1" (Laffont/English) inhabits, which is shadowy, minimalist and ominous. Mimi 1's arabesque repeats and undoes the choreographed death scene of Mimi 2. The physical and visual realisation of Mimi 1's questions about identity underlines what is at stake: representation and its burden of patriarchal discourse. This is particularly true of the representation of Mimi 1 as a split subject, through mirror reflections, shadows and cast doubling. She reads Laffont's laughter at *Tel Quel* as a rejection not of theory, but of texts (as opposed to self-reflection). In the third iteration of the opera's narrative, following Laffont's laugh, Mimi 1 recognises

and analyses the *material* conditions of the story, comparing the different types of poverty experienced by Mimi and Rodolfo. Kaplan sees Potter's intervention into conventional narrative and her creative use of theory as "exciting," arguing that it "offers the possibility for change" (121, 122).

Jane WEINSTOCK, "She Who Laughs First Laughs Last (*Thriller* by Sally Potter). *Camera Obscura* 5 (1980). 100-11.

- Weinstock reads Colette Laffont's laughter in *Thriller* via the work of Jacques Lacan on the mirror and the Other, arguing that although Laffont laughs at the theoretical text that she reads, critical theory represents the avant-garde from which *Thriller* draws its energy; Potter is powerfully exploring the psychoanalytic question of women's place in patriarchal discourse through the dissociation of voice, body and identity in Laffont's performance. Weinstock argues that Julia Kristeva's idea of the semiotic *chora*, or maternal sound-space, offers a productive reading of Potter's use of voice. She comments on Potter's incorporation of historical photographs of seamstresses as a record of women's history, returning the "mother" to visibility by refusing cinematic realism. She analyses Potter's use of the mirror in the film and how it engages the spectator intellectually, as well as creating – in concert with the camera – split subjects, or rather a new category of being "dancing in that ambiguous space between subjecthood and objecthood" (106). Weinstock questions, like Mimi, whether it would have been better to be the hero, and – like Potter – dismisses it, considering the potential for relationships between women. Quoting Kristeva on humour, Weinstock connects female spaces, dance and laughter as ways of obtaining pleasure, as opposed to Freudian jokes, which create male pleasure at female expense. This is the potential she observes in *Thriller's* anarchic spaces.

THE GOLD DIGGERS (1983)

Pam COOK, "British Independents: *The Gold Diggers*." *Framework* 24 (Spring 1984). 12-30.

- Cook opens by quoting Potter's press notes in full as preface to an in depth interview. They begin by talking about gold, and its multiple levels of meaning, both material and metaphysical. Potter comments, however, that "a film doesn't set out to be an academic treatise... it achieves... a poetic clarity" (14). She then quotes a passage from Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* about the metaphysics of money, and the elusiveness of gold as a symbol, which Potter relates to the standard of female beauty. The film deals with these interlocking concepts through visual and verbal puns, "deep play with the language of film" (15). The relationship between Celeste and Ruby is predicated on exposing the equivalence of women and gold, and suggesting new relations and seeing differently as an act of change. This also affected the structure of the film, which is a spiral, enabling events to be repeated and reworked to create change. Potter talks about the structure as producing detachment, and the importance of not falling into the trap of being identified, as a woman, with excessive emotionality, but rather to see the fluent expression of emotions as creating a kind of detachment. This relates to the film's "great passion in austerity" and the pleasure of formalism – although this doesn't exclude play and humour in the film (Potter, 18). Potter talks about how her background in performance art enables her to represent the female body without objectifying it, because she has also been the subject of the gaze. The female protagonists are not subjects of narrative identification, but rather abstracts that encourage the viewer to identify with structures or processes, be they alchemical, material, or unconscious. Celeste's detachment is not only a deterrent to vicarious identification, but a reversal of the casting of black women in excessively emotional roles, while Ruby's role, which retains a lot of the femininity rejected by feminists, represents negotiation between complex selves rather than collusion. Iceland, which Potter visited while touring with the Feminist Improvising Group, offered similar contradictions and detachments as a landscape, standing in both for the colonialist Gold Rush and (thus for) the male appropriation of female bodies. Cook observes that the film absents the tragedy of the working class man; Potter counters that the film focuses on sexism rather than class, and that all the men in the film are presented comedically rather than cruelly or with prejudice – and the end of the film focuses on the politics of the men's movement, in which men have to negotiate with and address each other as sensual bodies. They discuss the careful choices of music and costume that define the film's feel, and the creation of the protagonists' roles, and the variety of new roles opening for women that don't mimic male heroism. These roles are achieved through "dream or vision," and through realising that gender roles are not fixed but historically constructed. This is why Potter found an all-female crew, to show that those roles could be taken by women, but she also says that "as an artist... one is on some level essentially androgynous," and that she has access to all of cinematic history (27). Potter comments that she would like to reach a mass audience, and to make universal cinema, and doesn't see these aims as incompatible with her politics. She argues for a "reconciliation between those [different] kinds of cinematic spaces... reject[ing] the idea that independent cinema is inherently superior to, or better than, mass cinema" (29). This connects back to Potter's argument that minimalism and pleasure can co-exist in one film, and she argues that independent cinema can succeed on its own terms, and as entertainment.

Jonathan ROSENBAUM, "The Gold Diggers: A Preview." *Camera Obscura* 12 (Summer 1984): 126-29.

- Rosenbaum opens by discussing the cool reception of *The Gold Diggers*, and unable to understand their antipathy considering that he found the film "visually stunning, witty and pleurably inventive throughout" (127). He relates it to Potter's performance art background, and describes it as "marginal in the best and most potent sense" (127). He also identifies its feminist politics as linked to its experimental form. Rosenbaum goes on to quote Potter's press notes at length (concerning the thematic drive of the picture and its realisation through formal choices in editing, cinematography, casting and location shooting, as well as the film's references to multiple genres, particularly the musical) along with the list of films she programmed at the NFT to contextualise *The Gold Diggers* on its release. He concludes with Potter's statement that her "desire was and is to give pleasure; to heal the 'pleasure time blues' of the opening song" (qtd. 129).

Mandy MERCK, "Composing for the films: Mandy Merck asks Lindsay Cooper about Scoring the Independents," *Screen* 25:3 (May-June 1984). 40-54.

- Lindsay Cooper, who composed the score for *The Gold Diggers*, also worked with Potter in a number of live music improvisation groups, including FIG (the Feminist Improvising Group) and the Marx Brothers, around the same time as she collaborated with Potter on the collective process (with Rose English) of creating *The Gold Diggers*. Cooper also scored, with some vocals by Potter, the feminist classic, *The Song of the Shirt*, shown as Edinburgh in 1979 alongside *Thriller*. She talks to Merck about the precise structure of *The Gold Diggers*, which is almost through-scored, the cross-referencing that was made possible by her having been involved with the film from the beginning. She also talks about the film's relationship to Hollywood musicals, its use of diegetic song, the dominance of dance forms in the score (and the relevance of this to the film's story), and the relation of the score to Potter's rhythmic editing. She describes Potter as "light years ahead of everybody else" in terms of her understanding of music, due to her background as a singer and live performer (51). Merck comments that Potter is unusual in this, as few feminist filmmakers in the 1970s were interested in sound, being preoccupied with altering the visual field. Cooper comments that the first pressing of *The Gold Diggers* soundtrack sold out immediately, highlighting Potter's commitment to and foregrounding of sound in her films.

Kaja SILVERMAN, "Disembodying the Female Voice" [section]. *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988. 178-186.

- Silverman offers a narrative account of *The Gold Diggers* that concentrates on the operation of voice in relation to the image, at the conclusion of a book-length study of the problematic female voice in classical Hollywood cinema, particularly thrillers in which the voice traps women into confession and erasure. "Seeing Red," the song that Potter sings over the pre-credit sequence of *The Gold Diggers*, espouses a similar opinion of classical cinema, focusing on the director as a spectator, and the association of pleasurable female spectatorship with the mother, whose image is juxtaposed with these song lyrics about the loss of pleasure. The song sketches the quest that forms the narrative of the film, in which Ruby (Julie Christie) searches her memory for her mother, the woman seeing laughing silently during the song. The search, in which Ruby has to move her memories from her unconscious to her consciousness, demonstrates a similar collapsing of classical narrative logic to Potter's song, which erases the foundational distance between director and spectator; the distinction between spectator and fictional character is then collapsed by a riddle spoken as voice-over in which Ruby describes herself as the cinematic image, and Celeste repeats it – varying the pronoun from "I" to "you" – to position herself as a spectator within the film. The fictional character has absorbed the viewer, reversing the process described by psychoanalytic critics. Inside and outside are reversed via unanchored voice-overs, calling into question the boundary between interior and exterior that is marked by voice in classical cinema. Both Celeste and Ruby pass, in the course of the narrative, from spectator to performer, particularly when Ruby passes through an *Alice in Wonderland* like sequence to perform in a stage version of her own life – while she still sits in the audience. When the *Alice in Wonderland* sequence then seems to repeat, instead of re-entering the stage, Ruby enters the landscape of her childhood and interacts with herself as a child. Like Ruby moving fluidly through impossible yet united spaces, the voices in the film move between inner and outer, dialogue and voice-over, synch and voice off. This undermines the economy of subject and object, suggesting a transversal, horizontal cinema, in which viewer and performer can exchange positions. This also threatens the social order, and the film's subtext about discovering and disrupting the parallel economies of gold and female beauty, suggests the political potential of the fluid voice. Silverman turns to Luce Irigaray's essays on commodity and exchange value to examine this aspect of the film. Irigaray argues that when men are able to be in touch with one another without women as a mediating exchange value, both men and women gain in pleasure. Silverman argues that this is borne out by the second iteration of the ball scene in *The Gold Diggers*, in which the men dance among themselves as Ruby and Celeste ride off together.

ORLANDO (1992)

Stella BRUZZI, "The Erotic Strategies of Androgyny" [section]. *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies*. London & New York: Routledge, 1997. 189-99.

- Bruzzi, having considered how clothing in films operates to construct spectatorial desire and identification, follows a chapter in which she claims cross-dressing as conservative with a final chapter considering the radical potential of androgyny. She asserts that androgyny is both more erotic and more transgressive than cross-dressing, "because it is not defined by an acceptance of the fixity of gender binaries, but rather by the effect of ambiguity" (172). Considering *Orlando* alongside its immediate contemporaries *The Crying Game* and *The Ballad of Little Jo*, Ciecko argues that "[o]n the androgynous body is enacted ambiguity, the diminution of difference, and what is manifested is a softening of the contours – between corporeality and metaphor, male and female, straight and gay" (176). Bruzzi reads the revelation of the mirror scene as the pleasurable conclusion to one series of possibilities: that the Lord Orlando's (feminised) clothing might slip and reveal "doubt about his sex," and initiates another pleasurable sequence, in which the Lady Orlando might "reveal" her previous masculine existence – which, indeed, she does: gathering her skirts to run, intimating to Shelmerdine that she had been a man, and arriving in "The Present" as a motorbiking androgyne. Following Judith Butler, Bruzzi endorses this constant play between and across gender boundaries, asking "[i]f a radical statement is intended, a public declaration of dissidence, what is the point of keeping the motions of that transgression (the gender fluidities) invisible, wrapped in the secretive veils of passing?" (190). She quotes Potter's post-gender comments from interviews, and refers approvingly to the generative potential of "Orlando's radical, utopian androgyny: an androgyny less about transgressing genders than leaving them behind" (191). In a related move, she reads the clothing as less concerned with historical accuracy than with excessive, parodic and "citational" performance (193). Considering the second half of the film, Bruzzi notes Shelmerdine's Romantic and anarchist sexuality, which is feminised in appearance and in his treatment as the object of Orlando's (and the viewer's) gaze. In their relationship, "androgyny comes to encompass both the corporeal and the cerebral. Their ambiguous, shared desire is then represented, when they are in bed, through the abstraction of the body... mak[ing] the body (the most obviously gendered sign of all) into an abstract, unrecognisable image" (198). In unsettling the specifics of whose body the camera/spectator is desiring, Potter's choices also unsettle the gendered desire of the spectator, and imparts to them a sense of productive and liberatory instability that reside in a pleasurable body able to experiment through clothing rather than be confined by it. Androgyny, as between Orlando and Shelmerdine, depends on the eye of the beholder, and thus reveals the gendering of vision and visual desire – and our ability to alter it.

Anne CIECKO, "Transgender, Transgenre, and the Transnational: Sally Potter's *Orlando*." *Velvet Light Trap* 11 (1998). 19-34.

- Ciecko is primarily concerned with film history and the 'costume drama' genre. She argues that Potter's film subverts the generic classification afforded to the tradition of British middle-class national cinema of literary adaptation firstly through its transnational production and financing, and secondly through the film's critique and subversion of gender. In order to position the film in relation both to British establishment filmmaking and gender theory, Ciecko offers an overview of Potter's career and the critical reception of the film. She quotes critics such as Marjorie Garber and Jane Marcus, and unpicks their arguments concerning anxiety over Potter's fidelity to Virginia Woolf's novel. She suggests that Potter escapes archival questions of fidelity by not regarding Woolf as a cultural or historical product, or an academic set text, but an interlocutor. Having established the film's relation to stately home cinema and its associated cultural economy, she considers the way that Potter subverts it through inclusion and deconstruction. Reading Quentin Crisp's casting as Queen Elizabeth I, Ciecko refers to his self-designation as "one of the stately homos of England," and considers an alternate British, working class and theatrical cultural history in which gender-bending is a *cultural* tradition (27). Pointing to Potter's background in performance, Ciecko teases out the vaudeville and cabaret aspects of *Orlando*, illustrating its connections to popular and queer culture through the casting of Jimmy Somerville. Alluding to Potter's multiple roles in conceiving the film across genres, Ciecko considers the importance of writing as a code unites Orlando, Woolf and Potter as female artists engaged in a quest to create a sense of community mediated through the act of 'writing' (28). Writing is identified as a female, feminist and class-radical activity, when Orlando writes for only the second time in the film, to sign away her house and inheritance. This radical alteration of Woolf's narrative forms part of Ciecko's argument about Potter's work of adaptation, and in her epilogue, she parallels Potter's successful unison of costume drama, class and imperial critique, and queer pop sensibility with the triangulation of gender identity, imperial politics and torch song in *The Crying Game*.

David EHRENSTEIN, "Out of the Wilderness: An Interview with Sally Potter." *Film Quarterly* 47:1 (Autumn 1993). 2-7.

<http://www.geocities.com/Paris/Parc/8797/article/fq.html>

- Ehrenstein is a long-term fan, enabling him contextualise *Orlando* in Potter's earlier work as a filmmaker, choreographer and musician, as well as drawing her to comment on her influences (Powell, Jarman), beginning with a personal conversation about the history of British alternative film. Potter, exploring her own place in that alternative history, comments on the critical failure of *The Gold Diggers*, describing the film as coming from a theatrical practice of improvisation: "I learned that if you have a rock-solid script, you can move really fast to get what you need, and then you can improvise and make changes at the spur of the moment" (3). Having developed a "rock-solid script," Potter welcomes *Orlando*'s commercial success as a personal success in terms of communication with the audience. She credits some of this success to the influence of her mentor, Michael Powell, observing implicitly the unison in which costume, location and performer operate in *Orlando*: "There's one thing I think I unconsciously stole from his film *Gone to Earth*: the scene where she's running in the garden in her dress. That's the key to using costumes in films – you have to discover how they move" (4). Furthermore, she foregrounds the importance of choreography, not just in dance scenes but as a through composition for the film: "What you're doing in making a film is choreographing the relationship between the camera, the actors, and the space" (5). She relates this to her background in performance and dance, and discusses with Ehrenstein other things she has learned from her training outside of cinema. Of the music in the film, she observes that "I know from music that the whole thing about women having high voices and men having low voices is all rubbish. So I rewrote the ending so that the film would be bracketed by Jimmy." Continuing this thought, she compares her ending with Woolf's and argues that the feeling is similar to Woolf's incoming airplane, and the effect is equally, and more immediately, ecstatic. "So I end the film in this way on a high, on an up – in ecstasy" (6). This ecstasy, and her process of finding a cinematic language for Woolf relates to Woolf's description of the novel as " 'exteriorising consciousness' " (5) in a very image-led manner. Woolf also felt that *Orlando*, unlike her other novels was an entertainment, which accords with Potter's desire to make films that entertain and partake of entertainment traditions. But she comments that this does not exclude the film from bearing meaning: "sometimes when somebody sets out to make an 'entertainment' the more serious issues surface in their own right in a less pedantic or polemic way" (5). With reference to this mediation of entertainment and politics, Ehrenstein raises the question of gender politics insistently, recalling to Potter her previous association with the women's movement. Potter's, like *Orlando*, is not evasive of definition but finds it limiting when employed by other people, expressed by her comments on identity politics, and the film's utopian potential for radical queer identities, "that the film's contribution to that area is not so much about gaining identity as it is about blurring identity. It's about the claiming of an essential self, not just in sexual terms. It's about the immortal soul" (6-7). In this context, she is troubled by the dominant culture's appropriation/definition of feminism, and how it led others to mis-define her as "everything they fear. But I've learned that to win, you've got to have cover. You've got to be clever. You've got to speak freshly with nice juicy words that intoxicate" (7).

Rose LUCAS, "Orlando." *The Cinema of Britain and Ireland*. Ed. Brian McFarlane. London & New York: Wallflower Press, 2005. 217-226

- Lucas, asserting *Orlando*'s place in the canon of British cinematic excellence, argues that the film follows, and enlarges on, the novel in asking fundamental questions about individual and cultural identity: how it is constructed by historical circumstance, how it changes, how it is richer than labels or categories, and how it relates to the creative process. She connects this series of questions to Potter's own background as a creative artist working independently in a highly structured and conformist medium. Lucas points to Potter's concerns with labour, economics and use value as they relate to gender and to artistic production, as expressed in *Thriller* and *The Gold Diggers*, and their reworking in *Orlando*, and connects this to Potter's post-*Orlando* positioning between commercial success and a UK art-house tradition, and specifically Derek Jarman and Michael Powell. Having established Potter's credentials and relation to the British scene, Lucas points out that the film, although concerned with Englishness and empire, explores it appropriately through multi-national locations, with transnational financing and a global cast and crew, reflecting on the exclusion of women, working class people, and ethnic Others from the category of Englishness. This external perspective is connected to Woolf's feminism and her critique of patriarchy. Lucas points out that *Orlando* is the most successful of a number of Woolf adaptations from the same period, through its discovery of a cinematic language for Woolf's radical, experimental prose style, which move the adaptation away from the realist demands of costume drama. Lucas contrasts the film with popular Merchant-Ivory and Kenneth Branagh literary adaptations due to its lack of nostalgia, its disinterest in verisimilitude, and its freedom from "slavish 'fidelity' ... with all the adherences to hierarchical class values that this implies" (221). The film is engaged with showing and critiquing the history of representation, rather than naturalising it, and

operating similarly with adaptation, situating the film and novel as fluidly related intertexts rather than in a dominant-subservient position. This invites “active, interpretative engagement from the spectator” and frees Orlando from the specular economy of the male gaze (221). This is further supported by the film’s challenges to rigid gender boundaries, both in its visual language and casting, and in the changes Potter makes to Woolf’s narrative (Orlando having a daughter rather than a son, not marrying Shelmerdine, losing the house, and finding herself in “The Present”). In all its strategies, the film seeks to conjoin Woolf’s experimental modernism with the instabilities of postmodernism around sex/gender and class politics. Lucas finishes by reading Orlando’s journey through gender, and a close reading of the moment of her transformation, in light of Judith Butler’s influential critical work *Gender Trouble*. She concludes that Orlando as travelled beyond sameness to find “the possibilities of difference” (224).

Sharon OUDITT, “Orlando: Coming Across the Divide.” *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*. Eds. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan. London & New York: Routledge, 1999. 146-56.

- Ouditt focuses on the question of literary/cinematic relationship, and asks whether the adaptation of a Modernist novel previously considered unfilmable means “we catching the death knell of the printed book [in the angel’s song]” (146). She argues, however that Virginia Woolf was more pro-cinema than is usually presented, but insisted that film would have to develop its own language rather than relying on literary sources and techniques, particularly in developing an emotive or kinaesthetic language that would replace/supplement speech: “ ‘the cinema has within its grasp innumerable symbols for emotions that have so far failed to find expression’ ” (Woolf, qtd. 147). Indeed, as Ouditt points out, Woolf argued that literature “could learn from the more abstract potentialities of the use of the moving image, and from its different ways of handling narrative” (147). She reads the oak tree in the film as a cinematic version of Orlando’s poem (in the novel) “The Oak Tree,” seeing them as metaphors for artistic production and feminist inheritance. Following Woolf, she reads several scenes of the novel as filmic, using pans to establish setting, or close ups to ‘read’ the body (150). She also observes instances of montage, cross-cutting, flashbacks, dissolve, and tracking (151). In moving to the film, she makes the important point that “Potter is less constrained by a particular biography” (unlike Woolf writing about Vita Sackville-West) and that her adaptation has a political edge despite being a commodification of a commodification of intimacy (153). Looking at the (juxtaposed) use of cinematic conventions in the film, such as establishing shots and title cards, she comments that “conventions are not only ways of making us see, but ways of making us see that we are looking” (154). She reinforces the potential for embodiment in film when she notes that “[w]here the novel makes use of flashbacks, the film will frequently dwell on an image or a face, inviting the viewer to explore its associations” (154). She concludes that Potter’s adaptation is successful because of its response to “Woolf’s consciousness of the interplay between word and image, her openness to the capacities of form to convey meaning, her visual imagination and interest in multiple perspectives... Potter seems to accept it, to embellish it... and invites viewers to take part in the dialogue which she has established” (156).

THE TANGO LESSON (1997)

Corinn COLUMPAR, “The Dancing Body: Sally Potter as Feminist Auteure” in *Women Filmmakers: Refocusing*. Eds. Jacqueline Levitin, Judith Plessis, and Valerie Raoul. 108-16.

- Columpar is concerned to discover why Potter’s film, in which she plays a semi-autobiographical character called Sally, was received poorly by many (male) film critics who praised a similar act of self-staging in Woody Allen’s contemporaneous *Deconstructing Harry*. In undermining the gendered charge of narcissism, Columpar focuses on the female body as the source of critics’ anxiety and of the film’s investigative pleasures. She connects the *dancing* body both with the film’s genre-bending combination of backstage musical, romantic comedy and autobiographical essay on creativity, and with Potter’s virtuosity as a filmmaker (as well as a dancer). She points to Potter’s long professional and personal involvement with dance, and the influence of her dance training on her filmmaking from *Thriller* onwards. Dance, according to Jane Desmond, is “a potential utopian site for imagining what a feminist politics of the body might look like” (qtd. 111), and it is this utopian politics that Columpar observes in the film’s self-reflexive structure hinging on the visible, performing female bodies of the models in *Rage* (the film-within-a-film) and Sally’s dancing body. Columpar contends that some critics denigrated Potter as a performer to mask their deeper anxieties about a woman director, specifically one whose visual language is so different from classical cinema. This is emphasised by the film’s reflexivity, borne out by the formal contrasts between the black and white “real world” footage and the technicolour glimpses of *Rage*, that make the viewer aware of how Potter, as director, uses her eyes. The specular focus on Pablo Veron also draws attention to this different visual economy, and the construction of Pablo as spectacle is connected to the display of dancing male bodies in classical

Hollywood cinema – but also different, because Pablo is neither forced to perform (hyper) masculinity, nor fetishised like a female icon; Columpar argues that this connects back to the dancing body as a meaningful, and shared identity. This sharing allows the film to “eras[e] the distinction between spectacle and narrative that is inherent in the structure of a typical musical,” encouraging the viewer to read all dance as part of the film’s rejection of illusionistic realism, and all gesture as performed and significant (113). This latter provides the structure in which the film’s theme of (mis)communication and multiple languages (verbal, gestural, visual) can be explored, and suggests the shared, responsive, learned gestural language of dance as a “utopian” site of both identity and communication. An emphasis is placed on a subjectivity grounded in corporeality, which Potter has explored, through the language of dance, throughout her work. Columpar draws attention to the deconstruction of the arabesque pose in *Thriller* and to Orlando’s transformation – and the themes and visual languages of both films are incorporated into *The Tango Lesson*, mirroring the development of her own filmmaking, as shown in the movement, within the narrative, from making *Rage* to making *The Tango Lesson*. This grounding in Potter’s own experience balances “practised embodiment” and Potter’s visual virtuosity, a balance that can be seen in the poster image of Pablo and Sally in a tango pose beneath a painting of Jacob and the Angel (115).

Lucy FISCHER, “ ‘Dancing through the Minefield’: Passion, Pedagogy, Politics, and Production in *The Tango Lesson*” in *Cinema Journal*. 43:3 (Spring 2004). 42-58. Reprinted as “Sally Potter: Passion, Politics and Production in *The Tango Lesson*” in *Women & Experimental Filmmaking*. Eds. Jean Petrolle and Virginia Wright Wexman. Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005. 131-146.

- Mirroring the structure of the film, Fischer’s article is divided into ten “lessons,” exploring what it is that the film teaches through *its* lessons, how it does so, and why the concept of film as pedagogical is so important. Fischer argues that *Thriller* was received as a “theory film,” a cinematic work that, rather than being focused on narrative, was focused on laying out a theoretical position *through* narrative, and observing its consequences. *The Tango Lesson* is a revised “theory film” that responds to changes in critical theory and its relation with filmmaking, and to Potter’s development as a filmmaker. Lesson 1 concerns the film’s staging of the female author, who writes (or doesn’t write) with a pencil rather than a pen(is), is distracted by domestic issues, and whose domestic space disintegrates. The second lesson looks at the film Sally was writing, *Rage*, and Sally’s decision to abandon it, which Fischer sees as an exchange of the emotion of rage for the pleasure of tango. This focus on pleasure represents and engages with the post-Laura Mulvey search for a feminine aesthetic language, and alludes to the surge in studies of popular culture and women’s pleasurable spectatorship. This pleasure, suggests Fischer in Lesson 3, is for Sally, Potter and the viewer, and relates to the film’s basis in, and transformation of, lived experience. Fischer highlights the critical anxiety provoked by Potter reversing the trajectory of the women in cinema: from behind to in front of the camera, instead of the usual vice-versa. Lesson 4 notes that several avant-garde dancers have made films that display virtuosity in both dance and cinema, and also to films such as Dorothy Arzner’s *Dance, Girl, Dance*, which use dance to foreground and critique the place of the female icon in the entertainment industry. Thus, Potter’s use of dance refers both to the pleasures of mainstream musicals, and to the cerebral pleasures of avant-garde film, demonstrating the sensuality and complexity of both. Specifically, she focuses on the tango – the subject of Lessons 5 through 8 – with its particular class, gender and colonial politics. Fischer, assaying the film against Marta Savigliano’s study of tango, suggests that Potter deconstructs the association of the dance with female melodrama, and – as a white woman dancing with a Latin American male – subverts the colonial gaze cast on tango. Fischer also elucidates Potter’s reference to feeling Jewish as part of this refusal of exoticisation, and connection to “the history of tango [as] as history of exiles” (Savigliano, qtd 53). Fischer argues that this revises the canon of EuroWestern cinema’s use of tango, including *The Four Horsemen* and *Last Tango in Paris*, in terms of both sexual and colonial politics. By taking the role of the white traveller, Potter undermines the connection of masculinity with autonomy, and by casting Pablo as the object of the gaze, suggests a fluidity and exchange of gendered characteristics in which Sally and Pablo are doubles. Fischer uses her ninth lesson to compare Potter’s film in detail to Carlos Saura’s *Tango*, released a year later, which, despite its tacked-on overt reference to Argentinean politics, stages the drama of the male artist at the expense of his female partner, and is complicit in the exoticised, colonial reading of tango as violent. Fischer concludes that this reverses the “shot/countershot” tradition of women’s filmmaking, as Saura had to respond to Potter – like Pablo entering the tango embrace with Sally, based on the painting. The blank page of the film’s opening can now be re-read as “an emblem of how the tables have turned” (56).

Ulrike VOLLMER, "Towards an Ethics of Seeing: Sally Potter's *The Tango Lesson*." *Literature & Theology*, 19:1 (March 2005). 74-85.

- Vollmer's aim is "by examining *The Tango Lesson*, a film that focuses on the act of seeing... to be able to suggest how cinema might be religious, how seeing itself could be an act of faith" (74). She sets out previous definitions of the interconnection between film and religion, and argues for her own, which is ethics-based, drawing on feminist theology's structuring principle of relation and Emanuel Levinas' definition of religion as "the bond that is established between the same and the other without constituting a totality" (qtd. 76). It is this act of seeing as a positive relation, mediated by language, that Vollmer traces through *The Tango Lesson*. She points to the difference between the operations of the gaze in *Rage*, where there is no relation, and in the black-and-white *Tango Lesson*, where there is a journey to relation through dance, love and filmmaking. She reads Sally's gaze at Pablo, mirroring Potter's gaze, as relational in that it is interested in Pablo's subjectivity as a dancer and a human being; her vision enables Pablo as a dancer and performer. The film demonstrates seeing as not only an act of witnessing, but of creating or helping the Other create themselves. Pablo, because he has been seen in full subjectivity, is able to resist Sally when she wants him to cry on screen, to demonstrate that images cannot contain everything that is seen. Images are contested by the Other who looks back at the I, destabilizing the totalizing nature of the image, and making possible a visual relation that is ethics-based. Vollmer extracts several tenets towards an ethics-based reading of film as religion from her reading of *The Tango Lesson*, including a rebuke to Paul Schrader's concern with transcendental style, which replaces seeing with believing. Vollmer places the embodied, reciprocal look at the centre of her ethics, and at the centre of *The Tango Lesson*.

THE MAN WHO CRIED (2000)

Ginette VINCEDEAU, "The Man Who Cried" [review]. *Sight and Sound* 11:1 (January 2001). 54.

- Vincendeau connects *The Man Who Cried* to *Thriller*'s fascination with the power of opera, and to *Orlando*'s lavish cinematography and design. She describes the film as having an "'operatic' sensibility" that connects the high art of opera, and the denigrated melodrama, or women's picture. The review praises the film's aesthetic realisation, particularly its "superb music," which not only expresses but narrates the multiple ethnic and cultural identities of the central characters. She draws attention to music's power to express different forms of love, from the father-daughter love that bookends the film, to sexual desire, romance, community, the love of power, and the love of art itself. This is supported by passionate performances from the main cast, and by the arrangement of history as spectacle in a series of striking visual images.

YES (2005)

Cynthia LUCIE, "Saying Yes to Taking Risks." *Cineaste* 30:4 (Autumn 2005). 24-30.

<http://www.cineaste.com/fall05potter.htm>

- Lucie opens her article with a review of Potter's career that draws attention to her originality, her virtuosity and her choreographic filmmaking. She considers the mixed reception of Potter's films, and argues that "critics consistently acknowledge Potter's genuine talent and versatility." She describes *Yes* as a tour de force, and specifically discusses the film's metaphysical concerns and their integration into the formal languages employed "in complete accord." Potter responds to questions about 9/11 and about the identity of the protagonists, both of whom are from religiously-divided cities, by talking about humanizing the enemy, and the long traditions of inter-cultural friendships and communities even in bitterly factional areas. She's American identity both reflects that the majority of Americans are immigrants, and that power structures do affect and intrude on intimate relationships. Her character's profession, as a molecular biologist, is multi-faceted, permitting a commentary on the relation of the very small to the very large (in terms of both mirroring and affectivity), and on the power dynamics of a relationship between a white professional woman and a deprofessionalised Arab immigrant man. But the science in the film is not hard-edged and materialist, but rather a way of connecting with the metaphysical. The resolution of the relationship at the end of the film is on a similarly metaphysical, non-realist level, Lucie suggests, and Potter comments that when She addresses the camera as God, She is addressing the audience. Cleaners also address the audience, and their central role in the film marks our inability to clean up after ourselves, and our dismissal of the people who do. The cleaner's visibility – and her ability to "see" us – reverses our perception, and also allows for comedy between more weighty scenes. Visibility is a key theme in the film, which considers the invasive "invisible" watching of surveillance cameras and the invisibilising of the immigrant experience, and searches for a respectful form of making visible. This leads to the conflict between He

or She, and She's eventual resolution to let go of her anger and accept that she fits the dominant subject position, and so listen to He. The reconciliation in Cuba thus happens in a thirdspace, one that is not identified with either of them, and is unresolved – hopeful, but not necessarily happy, says Potter. Lucie suggests that She is still caught in the Western individualistic “me” at the end of the film, even in a Communist country, but Potter argues that change has to start with the individual questioning herself, particularly in a place like Cuba where it is only possible to be a tourist and no false sense of community or belonging can be enjoined. Lucie raises the question of Potter's visual and structural choices, in having sections shot at six frames per second, and in introducing the aunt three-quarters of the way through the film, with an eight page monologue. Potter discusses these formally experimental decisions, and their engaging effect, as both break down realism and create a space in which the viewer can engage with the themes and characters rather than illusionistic narrative and emotion. They then discuss a third formal innovation, the verse screenplay, which Potter agrees was a risk, and part of her history of taking risks – but also part of a long history of narrative drama, as well as being non-realist, and able to fluently incorporate Potter's tendency to introduce multiple, interconnecting themes into her films. This relates to Potter's unconventional and complex characters, including Antony, for whom she feels great sympathy, and Grace, who represents the potential for intergenerational relationships between women, and the difficulties of the post-feminist generation who have all the rights but have not been politically radicalized. Potter observes that these interpersonal dynamics, as well as themes of exile and identity, and formal experimentation, have formed a thread through her work.

Daniel Garrett, “Dreaming Wide Awake.” *Offscreen*. 9:9 (September 2005).

http://www.offscreen.com/biblio/essays/dreaming_wide_away/

- Garrett describes a Q&A featuring Potter and Joan Allen at Barnes & Noble in New York in June 2005, and compares the film to a number of contemporaneous releases that are committed to representing emotional authenticity, partially to assess whether there is a cultural zeitgeist shaping the year's releases, which all concern relationality in one way or another. He considers *Yes* as the most successful because of its combination of an investment in aesthetic precision and a subtle political awareness predicated on the relationship between individuals. He notes that “He and She have inherited the history—that is to say, the conflicts—of the world, and when they remember that, when they allow themselves to be only social beings, not individual beings, they begin to trip themselves and each other up.” He examines the way in which all the characters in the film hold and lose their illusions through their interaction with other characters who are searching for truths. He offers a review of the US reception of the film, drawing particular attention to the positive reviews it received outside of New York, from Jonathan Rosenbaum and Roger Ebert (both Chicago), as well as Bill White (Seattle). In closing, he compares the film to Ingmar Bergman's *Saraband*, as both films conceive of cinema as a canvas for “human experience; for films that assume what happens between people can be of personal, philosophical, and political importance.”

Other Resources

<http://www.arts.ac.uk/research/filmcentre/bibliographies/potter.html>

<http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/individual/24061?view=credit>