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## Gender, Image, and Sound in *Letter to Jane*

### **Abstract**

*Letter to Jane* (1972), a 52-minute essay in the form of a film centered on a single photograph, has been criticized to be a statement of the male dominance over the female figure. This paper evaluates this critique by analyzing the interactions of gender with image and sound throughout the film based on three prominent theories. Through Laura Mulvey's theory of "the gaze" we find that *Letter to Jane* presents an active female character and passive male figures, contrary to the traditional gender roles that Mulvey argues are present in Hollywood cinema. Based on Mary Ann Doane's theory of the voice-over commentary we understand that the presence of the two male narrators in the film takes away the authority and dominance of the masculine voice. It can be realized that *Letter to Jane* uses Bertolt Brecht's "alienation effect", which creates a distance between the events and the spectators of the film. From these three theories, it can be concluded that *Letter to Jane* asks the audience to consciously make an evaluation of the gender roles rather than accept the traditional dominant male figure and passive female figure.

### **Keywords**

Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Pierre Gorin, Jane Fonda, Laura Mulvey, gaze, Mary Anne Doane, voice-over commentary, Bertolt Brecht, alienation effect, gender roles in cinema, humanities, cinema studies, Karen Beckman, Beckman, Karen

## Gender, Image, and Sound in *Letter to Jane*

Siwei Zhou  
Cinema and Photography  
May, 2008

“There’d be a country./ In the country/ there’d be countryside./ In the countryside,  
there’d be cities./ In the cities, there’d be houses./ In one of the houses/ there’d  
by Him/ and in one of the houses,/ there’d be Her./ There’d be Her and Him.”

From *Tout va bien* (Godard and Gorin, 1972).

From the beginning, *Tout va bien* highlights the main elements of cinema: the money required to sustain the production, the place and setting of the events in the film, and the male character and the female character. In doing so, it establishes gender difference to be an ever essential aspect of cinema. This concept is carried on in the postscript to the film, *Letter to Jane* (Godard and Gorin, 1972). Produced with a minimum budget of \$300<sup>1</sup>, *Letter to Jane* undermines the element of money in filmmaking. The aspect of place either becomes insignificant, as the basis of discussion of the entire 52-minutes duration is centered on a single photograph taken in Vietnam, or else completely significant, as the film asks how we move between here and elsewhere. The narrators state, “[this film] is a way of not marking time,”<sup>2</sup> and, “What is important is that we are going to travel [to Vietnam] by our own means.”<sup>3</sup> We will assume that place is unimportant because it does not matter where the narrators physically are located during their commentary on the photograph; they could be in a filming studio or in

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<sup>1</sup> Klein, Michael. "Review: [untitled]." *Film Quarterly* 27(1973): 62-64.

<sup>2</sup> *Letter to Jane*, 1:04

<sup>3</sup> *Letter to Jane*, 6:47

Vietnam. Thus, one might argue, *Letter to Jane* isolates the role of gender to be the focal cinematic element.

### **Introduction: Background to the Film**

In *Letter to Jane*, directors Godard and Gorin address a notorious news photograph of Jane Fonda, star actress in *Tout va bien*, taken in Vietnam on her visit to advocate peace during the Vietnamese War. The image of the film primarily consists of a photograph of Jane, taken by photographer Joseph Kraft and subsequently published in *L'Express*, repeatedly shown in its original form, scanned, cropped, or juxtaposed with other photographs. Godard and Gorin claim that this single photograph best answers the question that *Tout va bien* tried to answer: “What part should intellectuals play in the [Vietnamese] Revolution?” The conclusion that they come to in *Letter to Jane* is that the only way we can help in the conflict is to listen and to think, rather than to speak and to act.

Made in 1972, during the second wave of the feminist movement that influenced the development of feminist film theory, *Letter to Jane* participates in the intellectual dialogue of gender roles. Godard and Gorin explicitly voice the problems associated with two male narrators criticizing an immobilized female figure in a photograph. In the previous film *Tout va bien*, Jane Fonda had been cast as the leading female role but was almost unwilling to act in the film because, as a recent activist in the feminist movement, she did not want to work under men. Gorin had to personally fly to see her to persuade

her to stay in the film.<sup>4</sup> One can look at *Letter to Jane* to be Godard and Gorin's response to Jane's feminist ventures. Furthermore, both Godard and Gorin had encountered problems with their wives not understanding their filmmaking as an essential passion of their life rather than just as a job:

From an American interview Godard says, "We tried, and it was a complete failure, because we finished the movie alone, and our wives thought of it, at that time, as only our work – you know, 'this is your job. I have my job too, and this is your job.' We tried to make the movie in order to raise the problem – not to solve it, but just to raise it – to say 'This is our job from a technical point of view, yeah, but from a more general point of view it's our life.' Trying to work with our wives on movies, when they are not especially interested in movies, was correct at that moment."<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, one can interpret the two males' criticisms of the female figure as a displacement of their frustrations with the disinterested women in their lives, leading to Godard and Gorin's desire for the passive female to simply listen to them as they voice their critiques.

Both Godard and Gorin's conflict with Jane Fonda and their previous tensions with women's responses to their filmmaking may have influenced the production of the film, which at the time "was perceived as a vicious attack by two men on a woman who

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<sup>4</sup> MacCabe, Colin. *Godard: a Portrait of the Artist at 70*. 1st. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2003. 232.

<sup>5</sup> MacCabe quoting Goodwin, Michael, Tom Luddy and Naomi Wise. 'The Dziga Vertov Film Group in America: An interview with Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin'. *Take One* vol. 2., no. 10 (march-April 1971), 235

was given no chance to respond.”<sup>6</sup> Critics have argued that *Letter to Jane* is simply a 52-minute essay in the form of a film, proving the dominance of the male figure over the passive, silent female figure. On the contrary, this essay will argue that through certain techniques employed via image and sound in *Letter to Jane*, Godard and Gorin, as Erik Ulman argues, “are repeatedly at pains to distinguish Fonda as person from the social role they criticize.”<sup>7</sup> First, we will look at gender through the image of *Letter to Jane* by discussing the film in light of the theory of “the gaze” which Laura Mulvey establishes in her prominent essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (Mulvey, 1973)<sup>8</sup>. Second, we will focus on gender through sound by engaging in a discourse with the theory of voice-over narration established by Mary Anne Doane in “The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space” (Doane, 1980)<sup>9</sup>. Third, we will look at how elements of both image and sound support the use of the alienation effect that Bertolt Brecht defines in his book *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of the Aesthetic*.<sup>10</sup> Finally, we will tie everything together to conclude that Godard and Gorin indeed ask the audience to break through the classic portrayal of gender in film to reach a more critical perspective on gender roles.

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<sup>6</sup> MacCabe, 234

<sup>7</sup> Ulman, Erik. "Jean-Pierre Gorin." *Senses of Cinema*. May 2005. 31 March 2008  
<<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/directors/03/gorin.html>>.

<sup>8</sup> Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*. Ed. Patricia Erens. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990. 18-40.

<sup>9</sup> Doane, Mary Ann. "The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space." *Yale French Studies* 60 (1980): 33-50.

<sup>10</sup> Brecht, Bertolt. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. Ed. and Translated. John Willet. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964.

## Image: The Gaze

In her widely influential feminist film theory essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1973), Laura Mulvey points to the “male gaze”<sup>11</sup> as a central component of classical Hollywood filmmaking. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Mulvey argues that cinema provides visual pleasure through scopophilia (the pleasure of seeing) and identification with the on-screen image, which Jacques Lacan described as an unconscious object of fantasy that is linked with “phallic” desire. The woman becomes the object of the male lead actor’s gaze and exists for his possession. The viewers identify with the male lead and therefore come to possess the woman as the “object-to-be-looked-at”, experiencing the male lead’s visual pleasure as well. Mulvey’s essay is particularly applicable to *Letter to Jane* because the two works are almost exactly contemporaneous and Mulvey was deeply influenced by Godard in her critique of Hollywood and search for a feminist avant-garde. Although Freud’s psychodynamic approach is beyond the realm of this essay, many of Mulvey’s analyses allow us to see and to question the role of Jane in the photograph and the film. Similarly, even though *Letter to Jane* is far from being Hollywood cinema, the dialogue, the film, and the article highlight how Godard and Gorin are able to mock their own absolutism to allow the viewers to evaluate gender roles for themselves.

Mulvey establishes the roles of the male and female characters based on their relation to the gaze:

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<sup>11</sup> Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Issues in Feminist Film Criticism. Ed. Patricia Erens. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990. 18-40.

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*.<sup>12 13</sup>

In *Letter to Jane*, this “to-be-looked-at-ness” is naturally established through many different layers within the film. Firstly, the images on the screen are meant to be looked at because it is a film and films are meant to be watched. Contrary to convention, Godard and Gorin make the film difficult for the audience to watch after a while through their loquacious rhetoric and constant repetition of image and sound. Furthermore, the power of the gaze is heightened because the main image shown is a single photograph and photographs by themselves are meant to be looked at. The difference between film and photography lies in the duration of viewing; the audience of a film is subject to seeing what the directors choose them to see whereas the audience of a photograph is free to view as they so choose. Therefore, through the filming of the photograph, the audience is forced to impose its gaze on Jane, who is the focal point of the photograph. Furthermore, Mulvey argues, “the man controls the film fantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the tendencies represented by woman as spectacle.”<sup>14</sup> Godard and Gorin are perceived to be the active males who are furthering the plot of the film by commenting on Jane in the photograph,

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<sup>12</sup> Mulvey, 33

<sup>13</sup> This position has been widely criticized. Some of the points of criticism include Mulvey’s neglect to address the role of the female spectator and her writing to be within the heterosexual patriarchal order.

<sup>14</sup> Mulvey, 34



who remains passive because she neither moves nor speaks. Although the audience never actually sees the gaze of Godard and Gorin because their faces are never caught on film, they narrate their gaze in that the gaze is implied through their voices. Based purely on Mulvey's analysis, the audience will connect with the narrators and impose their gaze upon the image of Jane. But in fact, Godard and Gorin break the connection through their narration, which we be explored in further depth in the next section of this essay, so it serves to deconstruct the paradigm that Mulvey establishes. Moreover, as Mulvey claims, "the male cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification,"<sup>15</sup> Godard and Gorin attempt to objectify the sexuality of Jane by addressing her as "the actress" or "the militant," which are the social roles in which they try to criticize; "the actress" because the term suggests a inherent passivity within itself because, as Mulvey argues, the female character in film passively allow the male character and the audience to impose their gaze upon her; and "the militant" because the term suggests aggressive activity. In the end, they can't help but address the problems that are perceived when two male figures comment on a female figure in the film:

There is another problem too, and one that we can't avoid. We are both men who have made *Tout va bien* and you are a woman. In Vietnam the question is not put that way, but here is it. And as a woman you undoubtedly will be hurt a little, or a lot, by the fact that we are going to criticize a little, or a lot, your way of acting in this photograph. Hurt, because once again as usual men are finding ways to attack woman. If for no other reason, we hope that you will be able to come and

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<sup>15</sup> Mulvey, 34

answer our letter by talking with us as we go about reading it in two or three places in the U.S.<sup>16</sup>

Rather than this traditional view of the gender dichotomy in film, the multilayered medium of *Letter to Jane* reverses the roles of the active male and the passive female. For example, if we look at the photograph outside the context of the film, Jane is the active one. After all, she is the one who traveled to Vietnam to attempt in promoting peace, while Godard and Gorin are sitting in their studio criticizing Jane's actions and advocating for intellectuals to simply listen to the Vietnamese as the appropriate way to alleviate the conflict. Or at least Jane's journey to Vietnam makes us question what counts as "active".

Looking at the photograph on its own, there are three main characters: Jane, a man with his back to the camera, and a Vietnamese revolutionary further behind the first two. Godard and Gorin comment in the film that, contrary to what the caption accompanying the photograph when it was originally published says, Jane is in the act of listening to the Vietnamese man toward whom she is facing, rather than questioning him. They say that the photograph is physically mute and is in need of caption, but, when the caption is inaccurate, Godard and Gorin speak for the photograph in *Letter to Jane*. In the photograph, the audience is never able to see the face of the man Jane faces because the back of his head is turned towards the camera. Of the two people facing the camera, the profile of Jane is very clear while the face of the Vietnamese man is blurry. The Vietnamese man also listens and also bears a gaze, but because he is blurry in the photograph, the gaze of Jane dominates. Although Mulvey argues for an active male and

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<sup>16</sup> Letter to Jane, 13:34

a passive female in cinema, Jane actually becomes the active figure with the dominant gaze in the photograph. Part of the unique gender dynamics of the photograph can be attributed to the nationality of the people presented; Jane is American, whereas the two males are Vietnamese. This effect of ethnicity on gender roles is one of the limitations of Mulvey's paradigm for *Letter to Jane*. Furthermore, it is interesting that on the website "The Online Movie Database," Jane Fonda is listed as a "Narrator" in *Letter to Jane* whereas both Godard and Gorin are listed as "Narrator (voice)".<sup>17</sup> This seemingly false perception could suggest that Jane plays a larger role in the film in that Jane in the photograph has a voice in the film even though she never verbally says anything. When Godard and Gorin acknowledge that they are gazing at Jane in the photograph, it becomes Jane Fonda and her actions in Vietnam that gain the attention and that have the power as the result of the narrators' dialogue. Jane's voice, through her image in photograph and the power that she gains from being the center of attention, allows her to become the character that the audience relates to. This ultimately plays against the traditional gender roles in film and forces the audience to watch the film in a more critical light.

Although the image and the constant returning to the photograph of Jane is an essential component of the film and key to understanding its message, both Godard and Gorin have a history of emphasizing sound over image not only because "Economically, it was much easier to experiment with the sound than with the image,"<sup>18</sup> but also because Godard had a more personal basis for his distrust of the image. He credits the problems in his relationships with two women, his first wife Karina and his later wife Wiazemsky,

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<sup>17</sup> "Letter to Jane: An Investigation About a Still." The Online Movie Database. April 2008. 30 Apr 2008 <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0068846/>>.

<sup>18</sup> MacCabe, 226

both actresses who appeared in films he directed before they were married, with the idea that “both women had come to him as images – they were creations from the screen, not real women.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, we must now turn to consider sound in the film, specifically the voice-over narration.

### **Sound: The Voice-Over Commentary**

In her essay “The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space,”<sup>20</sup> Mary Ann Doane discusses how sound is able to unify the body of time and space within a film, and defines the three types of space that are used in cinema: the “diegesis,” which is the “virtual space that is constructed by the film and is delineated as having both audible and visible traits”<sup>21</sup>; the space on the screen, which the audience is able to see; and the space outside the screen, the movie theater or the auditorium, where the sound of the film is projected. More applicably to the film in question, she then explores the function of the voice-over commentary in documentary films. One can argue that *Letter to Jane* can be classified as a documentary, among other things, because the only speech comes from the narrators, who use the essay form to document and express their opinions about the function of Jane in the photograph.

Doane contrasts the voice-over commentary with the other forms of voice that are separated from the body in a film:

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<sup>19</sup> MacCabe 226

<sup>20</sup> Doane, Mary Ann. "The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space." Yale French Studies 60 (1980): 33-50.

<sup>21</sup> Doane, 39

...the voice-over commentary is necessarily presented as outside of [diegetic] space. It is its radical otherness with respect to the diegesis which endows this voice with a certain authority. As a form of direct address, it speaks without mediation to the audience, by-passing the “characters” and establishing a complicity between itself and the spectator – together they understand and thus *place* the image. It is precisely because the voice is not localizable, because it cannot be yoked to a body, that it is capable of interpreting the image, producing its truth.<sup>22</sup>

It is true that Godard and Gorin’s narration in *Letter to Jane* speak directly to the audience without mediation and through the use of the male voice, which is the historical paradigm for the voice-over in documentary. But in no way does the voice have the power of “the possession of knowledge and in the privileged, unquestioned activity of interpretation.”<sup>23</sup> As Doane explains later in the essay:

This “oneness” is the mark of a mastery and a control and manifests itself most explicitly in the tendency to confine the voice-over commentary in the documentary to a single voice. For, according to Bonitzer, “when one divides that voice or, what amounts to the same thing, multiplies it, the system and its effects change. Off-screen space ceases to be that place of reserve and interiority of the voice...” This entails not only or not merely increasing the number of voices but radically changing their relationship to the image, effecting a disjunction between sound and meaning...<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Doane, 42

<sup>23</sup> Doane, 42

<sup>24</sup> Doane, 48

The narrators in *Letter to Jane* lose the omnipotent status that is usually present in the voice-over commentary because both Godard and Gorin speak. As soon as the second voice enters the conversation, the spell of the omniscient narrator is broken because a discourse is established. Even if the two voices do in fact concur with each other, the audience knows there are other opinions. Furthermore, the narrators hardly have the voice quality that demands attention and authority. Both French directors speaking in English, their accents are almost humorous at times. And their dialogue is far from being rehearsed. Godard and Gorin stumble over their words or repeat themselves throughout the film. When there is this “disjunction between sound and meaning” there becomes a loss in the credibility of the narrators, and if the audience cannot connect with the sound of the narrators, they must turn to the image for truth. Doane claims, “The voice appears to lend itself readily as an alternative to the image, as a potentially viable means whereby the woman can ‘make herself heard.’”<sup>25</sup> In this case, if the voice cannot be trusted, the only option is to turn to the image of Jane Fonda, in which Jane has already been established to be the dominant figure. It is ironic how, in the film, Jane is able to make herself heard through the photograph even though the sound is dominated by masculinity.

Similarly, the narrators directly address Jane and the audience, which gives the audience the responsibility to respond. In fact, the narrators even state, “we prefer to ask critics, journalists, and spectators to kindly make the effort of analyzing the photograph of you in Vietnam.”<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, the audience is asked to question the photograph

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<sup>25</sup> Doane, 49

<sup>26</sup> Letter to Jane, 1:40

rather than the narrators, but in their solicitation of the questioning of the photograph, they also elicit a question of the questioners.

The combination of multiple voice-over narrators and the direct address of the audience to construct its own response to the photograph of Jane and the role in which she plays in it as well as in the crisis in Vietnam. Through the weaknesses of the authority of sound through voice-over narration, the audience is encouraged to come to different conclusions from what the narrators suggest in their commentary.

### **Image and Sound: Brecht's Alienation Effect**

Both elements of image and sound in *Letter to Jane* relate to the “alienation effect” which Bertolt Brecht describes in his essay “Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic”.<sup>27</sup> In “taking the incidents portrayed and alienating them from the spectator,” the aim of this technique “was to make the spectator adopt an attitude of inquiry and criticism in his approach to the incident.”<sup>28</sup> Specifically in the film, the lack of a setting, the unrehearsed speech of the narrators, and the direct address of the audience create the alienation effect.

The undermining of the place and setting of the film creates a sense of universality and timelessness, or as Brecht says,

The environment is remarkably unimportant, is treated simply as a pretext; it is a variable quantity and something remarkably inhuman; it exists in fact apart from

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<sup>27</sup> Brecht, Bertolt. Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic. Ed. and Translated. John Willet. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964.

<sup>28</sup> Brecht, 136

Man, confronting him as a coherent whole, whereas he is a fixed quantity, eternally unchanged. The idea of man as a function of the environment and the environment as a function of man...corresponds to a new way of thinking, the historical way.<sup>29</sup>

This mindset is directly reflected in the directors when they say “It is a way of not marking time...,”<sup>30</sup> comparing Jane’s gaze and expression to that of Henry Fonda in films *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Young Mr. Lincoln* as well as to that of John Wayne. These juxtapositions highlight the universality of the Jane’s gaze as well as equate the gaze of the female with that of the male character. Similarly, it doesn’t matter if the environment of the film is New York, Vietnam or France. The indifference to place allows the audience to focus its complete attention on the photograph and the gender dynamics of the film. In effect, the directors are addressing and asking the audience to question the problem of gender roles in society by breaking through the boundaries of time, space, and gender.

Moreover, Godard and Gorin do not perfectly rehearse their dialogue in *Letter to Jane* because, as required by the alienation effect, “the actor does no allow himself to become completely transformed on the stage into the character he is portraying.”<sup>31</sup> Although this is film rather than theater, the characters that Godard and Gorin want to avoid being transformed into are the classical, omniscient narrators of film. This allows the directors to not only question the photograph of Jane, but to also be questioned by the audience.

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<sup>29</sup> Brecht, 97

<sup>30</sup> *Letter to Jane*, 1:40

<sup>31</sup> Brecht, 137



Most importantly, in Brechtian Theater, the “fourth wall” between the classic theater actors and the audience is broken down so the actors directly acknowledge that the audience is there. This is accomplished when the directors directly address the spectators to which they are speaking to – Jane and the audience. Here Jane also shifts from image to viewer as Godard and Gorin address her as a member of the audience. As “the audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event which is really taking place,”<sup>32</sup> “the acceptance or rejection of [the actor’s] actions and utterances was meant to take place on a conscious plan, instead of, as hitherto, in the audience’s subconscious.”<sup>33</sup> In this way, the audience is forced to consciously formulate its own criticism of the actors’ actions. This effect is used in a similar manner in film. In *Letter to Jane*, this forces the audience to inquire critically about the intended message of the narrators, which is the question of gender.

Instead of engulfing the audience in the drama of the film, the alienation effect creates a distance between the events that are unfolding on stage and the spectator who is witnessing them. Through the use of this effect, the audience is required to consciously form their own opinions, which do not necessarily have to be what is expressed by the narrators. By employing these techniques, the directors shift the attention of the film from the direct address of a militant’s operations in Vietnam to the implicit question of gender, allowing the audience to formulate answers and then more questions to those answers.

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<sup>32</sup> Brecht, 136

<sup>33</sup> Brecht, 91

## **Conclusion: Tying it all together**

Through the analysis of image, the gaze serves different functions in the layers of the film. In the photograph under scrutiny, the female gaze is dominant and Jane is the active character furthering the action through her journey to Vietnam. In the film itself, Godard and Gorin comment on the photograph and Jane as the main figure and, therefore, bear their look upon her. But the gaze of the narrators loses its omnipotence through the voice-over commentary of two narrators whose voices do not have the authoritative quality of the classical narrator. Finally, particularly through the directors' direct acknowledgement and address of the audience, the alienation effect is in use, resulting in an audience that consciously questions and evaluates the events of the film. The use of the alienation effect along with a powerful female gaze in the photograph allows the female voice to become heard.

What appears to be the main question addressed in the film, "What role should intellectuals play in the revolution?" is answered, "...the most important fact about the picture is listening; listening to Vietnam before talking about it."<sup>34</sup> This question becomes subordinate to the implicit question of the film, the question of gender roles, to which the explicit question provides the answer. The most important thing is to listen about the questions of gender roles before we are able to make a judgment about them. Therefore, we can see that the two questions, explicit and implicit, are linked. Furthermore, the narrators then go on to say, "Where as, at the same time, Nixon, Kissinger...are not listening to anything or refusing to listen to anything." By criticizing very prominent male figures while claiming that Jane is doing the right thing by listening, the directors do

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<sup>34</sup> Letter to Jane, 51:20

not treat Jane as the passive female who willingly allows them to criticize. And when critics of *Letter to Jane* claim that, in the words of Kent Jones, “it’s still two guys ganging up on a girl,” it is the critic who is falling into the fault that Godard and Gorin have named; that of not listening and of not questioning. Not questioning in that they simply acquiesce when the directors explicitly address their awareness that their film appears to be two males attacking the image of a female. Not listening in that the voices and the speaking techniques used by the directors elicits a questioning of their words. In the film, the directors have actually given Jane a greater voice because, as Godard stated in an interview with Robert Phillip Kolker, “You have spent one hour looking at a film about a still you would normally look at for two seconds.”<sup>35</sup> By focusing on the photograph and on the gaze of Jane Fonda for that period of time, the audience is forced to consciously make an evaluation about the gender roles that are played in the photograph and in the film, and also to think about her role in Vietnam.

If the audience is intended to make its own critical judgments about the photograph and the roles of gender in the film, it is logical to ask why there are so few responses to *Letter to Jane* as a film. Even though the directors directly address Jane and ask her to respond, there is no proof that Fonda even acknowledged that such a film existed. Afterall, Godard and Gorin state,

And so we must find a way to enable [the audience] to really ask questions if they feel like it or give answers to the questions we have asked. A spectator must be able to really think and think first of all about this problem of questions and answers. We must be able to be really upset about a spectator’s questions or

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<sup>35</sup> Jones, Kent. “Letter to Jean-Pierre and Jean-Luc.” *Tout va bien* DVD booklet. 14.

answers and to answer or ask questions other than with ready made answers or questions to ready made questions or answers that ready made by whom, for whom, against whom.<sup>36</sup>

It may be that the audience is still wondering about the “problem or questions and answers.” Or that, as feminist philosopher Judith Butler argues in her book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, if there are set answers to what gender stereotypes are it only perpetuates the divide between the genders, and only by asking questions without answers can the stereotypes be broken.<sup>37</sup> But to go into depth about the answer to this question is beyond the scope of this paper.

This paper is not a response to *Letter to Jane*; it is a response to the critics who have claimed that the film is a misogynist attack on a woman. The answer to the film is not as simple as those have claimed. The film is continuously asking its audience to inquire the role of intellectuals in the revolution, the techniques of filmmaking, the media of cinema and photography, as well as the representation of gender roles. Thirty five years after the release of the film, *Letter to Jane* is still eliciting questions and searching for answers about gender, image, and sound.

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<sup>36</sup> *Letter to Jane*, 5:33

<sup>37</sup> Butler, Judith. *Gender Troubles: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 2nd. New York: Routledge, 1999.

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