WOMEN'S STUDIES 303-3

Fall Semester 1981

SPECIAL TOPICS
DOMESTIC MELODRAMA: CINEMATIC INVESTIGATIONS

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Course Outline

This course will examine a number of films produced by Hollywood in the 1930's and 1940's for a female audience. These films, most of which operate at a melodramatic register, emphasize the need for "containment" - for containment of women within conventional architectural spaces (the house, the mental institution), social organizations (marriage, the family, the heterosexual affair), psychic formation (paranoia, masochism, hysteria), and discourses (medicine, psychoanalysis). We will explore melodrama as an expressive mode which results from the obligatory residence of the female subject within these structures. We will also study the ways in which the "woman's film" orchestrates female desire and the means by which it attempts to implicate the viewer. Directors whose work will be discussed include: Stahl, Wyler, Sirk, Hitchcock, Ophuls and Arzner.

Required Readings

Sigmund Freud - On Dreams
Sigmund Freud - Sexuality and the Psychology of Love
Sigmund Freud - Dora: A Case Study

A photocopied package will be delivered (at cost to the students) in the class. Approximate total reading will be 30 pages each week.

Viewings

There will be 1 or 2 films each week. Students will be required to view each film two times.

Written Assignments and Grading

Students will be asked to keep a journal in which they will make weekly entries on the films and the readings (worth 75% of the grade).
Students will be expected to contribute to class discussion (worth 25% of the grade).