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INTRODUCTION
In the scholarly study of American film’s New Hollywood era, occurring from the late 1960s to the late 1970s, director Robert Altman’s work is not discussed as much as his contemporaries, such as Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola. While an innovator of directorial style, Robert Altman was also unique in the inclusion and positive portrayal of women in his films.

MY GOAL
After comparing Altman’s films to other films of the New Hollywood period, I believe that Altman’s films have a feminist quality. By analyzing the role and treatment of women in his 1970s’ film, I submit that Altman’s films should also be analyzed through a feminist lens. However, Altman’s perspective is not in complete accord with Second Wave feminist goals. Therefore, I define Altman’s form of feminism as “Altman’s Feminism.” For my thesis, I utilized a feminist psychoanalytic lens, specifically referring to Laura Mulvey’s famous essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” to argue that 3 Women (1977) is an “Altman Feminist” film.

METHODOLOGY: “ALTMAN’S FEMINISM”
In review of Altman’s filmmaking during the 1970s, I argue that Altman’s films display a perspective of feminism called “Altman’s Feminism.” Except for his commercial hit MAIDEN HEART (1970), all of Altman’s 1970s can arguably be labeled as “Altman Feminist.”

What is “Altman’s Feminism”? After examining the portrayal, the roles, and the relationships of women in Altman’s 1970s films, I define “Altman Feminism” as either the sole or equal focus on the female characters whose presence furthers the narrative, are treated with respect and/or sympathy, and are given traits that label them as a subject rather than a sexual object.

The two films I discuss in my thesis that best exemplify “Altman’s Feminism” are McCabe & Mrs. Miller (1971) and Nashville (1977). For McCabe & Mrs. Miller, the inclusion of Mrs. Miller (Julia Christe), pictured below, depicts a “new view of the West” as seen through the female perspective (Self). Further, she is much more business savvy than McCabe, who, in contrast, is presented as dimwitted.

In Nashville, the women are presented as more logical and caring whereas the men are depicted as conned and greedy. The film arguably centers around country singer Barbara Jean (Krose Blakely) and her actions. As seen through the close-ups of Jean as she sings, the film is much more sympathetic to Jean than her male counterparts. Overall, Jean’s character demonstrates the destructive hold on women by patriarchal society.

BACKGROUND
WOMEN IN THE NEW HOLLYWOOD ERA
The New Hollywood era’s films typically center around men and pose questions about masculinity, such as The Godfather (1972), The Dear Hunter (1978), and Five Easy Pieces (1970). These New Hollywood films tend to be misogynistic. Such treatment is at odds with the social context of the era, specifically the women’s liberation movement.

Women’s treatment and representation in film during this era was, what film critic Molly Haskell has stated, rather “ambigious.” While there are a few “feminist-inspired films” (Haskell) with female protagonist stories, such as Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore (1974), A Woman Under the Influence (1974), and Klute (1971), overall women are either not represented at all or portrayed very negatively.

Women in the New Hollywood era tend to be either demonized or sexualized. Examples of canonical films from the era that sexualize or demonize women include A Clockwork Orange (1971) and One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest (1975), respectively.

Aside from the few female protagonist driven films, the New Hollywood era was not kind to women.

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND “VISUAL PLEASURE AND NARRATIVE CINEMA”
I choose to analyze 3 Women through a feminist psychoanalytic framework. For my thesis, I focused on one text, Laura Mulvey’s groundbreaking feminist film theory essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” I chose this text because it is considered to be one of the founding texts of feminist film theory.

Critical points in Mulvey’s essay that are important to my research include:
- “identification with the image seen” (715) and mirrors
- The two avenes of escape from castration anxiety (718)
- “the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form” (711)
- The call to a new avenue for feminist filmmaking by “freeing” the look of the camera (722)

3 WOMEN (1977)
ESCAPING FROM CLASSICAL NARRATIVE CINEMA
3 Women is classified as one of Altman’s personal films. These personal films can also be categorized as art cinema. Scholar Robert F. Self defines art cinema as a form that “seeks to liberate the spatial and temporal systems from subservience to narrative cause and effect,” as well as the “calling] attention not to some story, that implicit chronology of realistic events, but to narration, to the explicit manner of the film’s presentation” (46).

In other words, art cinema is a deliberate break from the classical narrative mode, which “shapes the viewer, voyeuristically safe and distanced, as a passive, unself-conscious consumer of a story that seems to tell itself” (Self 45). Choosing such a route for 3 Women, I argue that, in accord with the film’s eventual formation of a maternity, 3 Women needed to pursue an art cinema route because it breaks from “the ways the unconscious…structure ways of seeing and pleasure in looking” (Mulvey 712).

GOAL FOR ANALYSIS OF 3 WOMEN
The goal of my analysis of 3 Women is to argue that the film is an “Altman Feminist” film because its art cinema approach criticizes patriarchy’s hold on women, and allows the three women in the film to create a maternity. In addition, the three women are the film’s protagonists and their relationships with one another and their surroundings place them at the center of the narrative. Like Mulvey’s essay, the film calls for a breaking off from the existing order of male dominated society and forming a mode that depicts women as subjects rather than objects.

SAMPLE OF WORKS CITED


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CONCLUSION
Having closely analyzed these few films, I realized the importance of analyzing Altman’s work through a feminist framework. The feminist psychoanalytic framework could be extended to include other theorists, such as Kaja Silverman and Teresa de Lauretis. In addition, the feminist framework can be expanded to include not just the psychoanalytic perspective, but also other feminist frameworks, such as an intersectional lens.

Overall, my research provides substantial evidence for Altman to be considered a feminist director, specifically in his feminism. This research can be expanded to analyze all of Robert Altman’s filmography.

Regardless of viewpoints of what feminism should or should not be, Altman’s films maintain that women are equally represented with an equally valid perspective. Altman’s female characters are treated as people, typically with respect and trust, as people with both flaws and favorable attributes. Whatever the case, Altman’s films can be considered as a feminist outlet for the New Hollywood era.