

A Feminine Language in Cinema

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A Feminine Language in Cinema

A Dramatic Feature Film Written And Conceived
Using A Framework Of Feminist Film Theory

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Table of Contents

Attestation of Authorship	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Abstract	vi
Introduction	
Theories, Discourses and Filmic Practices of Feminisms	7
Research Aims	8
Situated Encounter	10
Research Significance	11
Historical Narratives of Feminine Film Theories	
The ‘Two Feminisms’	16
Re-visioning Hollywood	18
Shots and Words	21
A Feminine Manifesto	
The Manifest and the Latent	24
To show feminine conditions of representation	27
To shift terms of representation	31
To investigate feminine narratives	34
To give space to the feminine	39
To embrace a place of longing	41
To create in a boundless space: the feminine auteur	43
Conclusion	
A Feminine Vision	46
References	50

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Abstract

A Feminine Language in Cinema is a creative-work or practice-led Master of Philosophy project. The creative component is a feature film screenplay, *En Abyme*, developed for mainstream audience reception in such a way that key aspects of a feminine sensibility are fore-grounded. As a woman screenwriter and director who has been engaged in the New Zealand film industry since the 1970s, I am acutely aware of the marginalised conditions of women in the production of feature films, as well as the marginal reception within the financing arms of the industry when projects concerning women protagonists in everyday sensibilities of being a woman are broached. My aim with this research was to develop a feature script that engages women's sensibilities. That development was to be undertaken in conjunction with the assaying of the history of feminist struggle in filmmaking and film theorising since the 1970s.

In the course of this research and screen writing, I developed what I have termed a "Feminine Manifesto" that serves to establish some guiding principles for my own approaches to filmmaking and, hopefully, approaches by other women in the industry. Like the *Dogma 95* Manifesto, developed by the Danish filmmaker, Lars von Trier, the manifesto establishes a series of propositions or guides for how to act in approaching contexts of 're-visioning' cinematic practice. Unlike the Danish model, my Feminist Manifesto is more allusive, abstract and interpretative, offering more an ethical opening to practice than a defined knowhow to mechanically engage film apparatus.

The exegesis is not the 'thesis' of my research. As practice-led, my research outcomes are constituted in the creative work. This exegesis establishes contexts for this research and offers a close analysis of scenes from the film script in order to show, or manifest, how each of the six principles of the Feminist Manifesto are to be understood and deployed. My 'explanations' are neither ideal nor exemplary instances of the demonstration of the manifesto principles. Nor are they a mechanical 'translation' of the manifesto as if it was an instrument or mechanism for producing feminine cinema. My best hope is that we recognise a resonance between aspiration, promise and invention, such that a realist narrative, a fairly conventional film can show how women's cinema can function.

My engagement with feminist film theory traces an historical trajectory principally spanning the Atlantic. We find that in both the United States and the U.K. in the early 1970s feminist concerns with equality and questions of the representation of women turned to the medium of mainstream cinema. Feminist film theory made its strongest developments in the UK's cultural theory adoptions of French Marxist and psychoanalytic theory, along with the reappraisal of popular cultural cinema with the French New Wave analyses of 'auteur' cinema. The result with a powerful critique of (particularly) Hollywood cinema for its constitution of an essentialist 'male gaze' that erased the 'presence' of women as anything other than an object for masculine pleasure.

The exegesis engages with the ongoing debates around the scopic pleasure, and the shifts in theoretical investments from the 1970s to the present, as it establishes a critical context for understanding the impetus for the screenplay, and offers modes for that work's reception.

Introduction

Theories, Discourses and Filmic Practices of Feminisms

Deceitful like Eubulides and like realities, women are discovering something that could cause the greatest revolution in the West, something that (masculine) domination has never ceased to stifle: there is no signifier; or else, the class above all classes is just one among many; or again, we Westerners must rework our space-time and all our logic on the basis of non-centrism, non-finality, non-truth. A United Nations vote denounced Zionism as racism, to the great scandal of the West which suddenly found itself in the minority. One day a UN vote will denounce as male sexism the primacy accorded theoretical discourse to the great scandal ... of us all. (Lyotard, 1978: 16)

To those who still ask, “What do women want?” the cinema seems to provide no answer. For cinema, in its alignment with the fantasies of the voyeur, has historically articulated its stories through a conflation of its central axis of seeing/being seen with the opposition male/female. ... Cinematic images of women have been so consistently oppressive and repressive that the very idea of a feminist filmmaking practice seems an impossibility. The simple gesture of directing a camera toward a woman has become equivalent to a terrorist act. (Doane, 1981: 23)

Of the many cinematic images to which I return throughout this book, three are most insistent. One is the image of a woman filling a canteen with water, a memory-image that Rea Tajiri creates of her mother in the videotape *History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige* (1991). Another is the movement of a camera caressing the surface of a still photograph of the artist dressed in her mother's sari, in Shauna Beharry's *Seeing is Believing* (1991). Finally there is the blurry, tactile image of the naked body of the

artist's mother in Mona Hatoum's *Measure of Distance* (1988), as a voice-over speaks of her longing to press her faraway daughter close to her heart again. (Marks, 2000: xi)

Research Aims

I have commenced the Introduction to this exegesis with three epigraphs, three strategic or, perhaps, tactical citations that in a sense encapsulate at once the arc or trajectory of my endeavour, its disjunctive historical or genealogical imperatives and a somewhat startling recognition of a 'then' and a 'now' when it comes to the stakes of feminism, and the practices of cinema and the ways these two fields have folded 'then' and 'now'. J. F. Lyotard's essay appeared in the cultural philosophy journal *SubStance*, which at the time (the late 1970s and early 1980s) was a key vehicle for the introduction of (particularly French) critical theory, structuralist and post-structuralist thinking to an American academic audience. I have cited its closing paragraph. A strong theme at this time was psychoanalysis, particularly Jacques Lacan's thinking, engaged primarily through feminist critique. Lyotard's text looks, perhaps, a little naïve and simple to us today. However, feminism at this time, and still yet today perhaps, saw the hegemony of a masculine culture at such a fundamental level, that theory itself, and the (at that time) ruling supremacy of the signifier, silenced women essentially. This is echoed in Mary Ann Doane's text repeating a theme of the "stake" of women's struggle. Her text appeared in the influential journal *October*, established more-or-less about the same time as *SubStance*, again for a particularly American academic audience, though more focussed on "Art" in contexts of theory, criticism and politics. This was a prestigious journal, setting a high benchmark for critical scholarship. I have cited the opening paragraph of Doane's text. I recognise the impossibility posed for generating a genuinely feminist filmmaking practice.

By dramatic contrast, the American film theorist, Laura U. Marks, opens her 2000 publication, *The Skin of the Film*, with a paragraph that somewhat unproblematically, unapologetically and unpolemically introduces a key thematic for the book via reference to three women filmmakers (artists) whose practices are political and feminist, and significantly not particularly Eurocentric or Anglo-American. It seems that in the space of twenty years contexts for critical engagement in film by women have shifted, as has the very understanding of the constitution of technology, and the theoretical frameworks by which films are discussed. If the object of analysis for Marks does not coincide with that of Doane, then the very industry at stake, and the apparatus of its distribution, recognition and understanding equally do not coincide. I want to pinpoint my research, its aims and significance, along the traversing of an arc whose trajectory moves from the coterminous emergence of film theory and feminism, and hence feminist understandings of cinematic practice, to a more-or-less contemporary understanding of cinema and feminism. This arc needs to be understood precisely in terms of significant shifts in paradigms, as with the work of Marks, but

also with lamentable lags where, in fact, we may recognise the stuff of critique now thirty years old being as relevant today as it was then.

My Master of Philosophy thesis, *A Feminine Language in Cinema*, is practice-led. This needs to be emphasised, and emphasised again. This exegesis is not the thesis, as scholarly as it might (or might not) be. The 'thesis' of this 'thesis' lies in the outcome of the creative practice, in this case a screenplay, *En Abyme*, a screenplay for a mainstream feature film, aimed at a popular main-stream audience, entangled, though tactically, in what we might term a 'Hollywood mainstream'. The screen-writing researches how an approach to creating mise-en-scene, film characters, film language, might address how a particular subversion, or reversion of the 'gaze' could operate in order to instantiate another moment of identification with women within specular circuits of identification. In this sense, the research is creative, speculative and experimental. It is open, interpretative, and engages questions of 'style' as questions of a 'feminine operation.' The exegesis you are currently reading is not the 'thesis'. It provides a context for the thetic question, its research path and creative outcome. The exegesis enables me to articulate in 'parergonal' fashion, in the fashion of a frame or framework, what border regions contain my filmmaking practice and how it (my practice) at times overflows those borders. It enables me, in moments of frustration, to recognise that feminist theory already thirty years old (or older) has not lost a syllable of relevance. It enables me to explain, as someone who has devoted her life to professional filmmaking, that being a woman in this industry was and still is a battle at every level, despite the enlightened progress of critical theory, academic progress in cultural theory and screen theory, funding bodies who unproblematically employ women as senior managers and so on. In a nutshell, the aim of my research is to investigate relevant feminist film theory for insight into the characteristics of feminine work and practice. Such 'insight' aims at sophisticating creative film practices and to further investigate theory for frameworks that can be activated in the development of feminine work in cinema.

I want to make one more comment at the beginning of this exegesis about what is in scope for the thesis and what has remained out of scope, excluded not so much because of marginal interest or concern but because the limits to an M. Phil exegesis do not allow me the space for full consideration of all salient matters. What is in focus is a depth of concern with a body of feminist theory and practice concerning filmmaking and film viewing. By 'theory' I am fairly much exclusively referring to feminist film theory although I recognise that coincident with the emergence of feminist film theory there has been the emergence of another engagement with film and theory by researchers such as David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson. There is a wide body of literature within film and screen studies that engages with the structure of filmmaking, the pro-filmic and what we could term film 'language.' I have not addressed this body of literature in this study, though recognise that a larger study would necessarily need to address such material. Equally, I have not engaged with a body of literature explicitly negotiating screen writing, texts such as Christopher Vogler's popular *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structures for Writers* (2007), which has come under attack from feminist film critics. Nor have I engaged in a close analysis of extant screenplays as a

way of defining or delineating my own frameworks of engagement. Again, I recognise this avenue of analysis as important. However, in a practice-led M. Phil, and within the limits of a framework for exegetical engagement, I had to place such analysis out of scope.

A third arena I have not kept in scope defines the impact of significant modifications to technologies of film production from the 1970s to the present. In the early 70s, Chantal Akerman, for example, made experimental film using 35mm equipment. Today she would, perhaps, use a hand-held Sony high definition digital video camera. There is much to discuss with respect to technology as a political impetus to production and distribution, that impacts on feminist filmmaking. However, for the screenplay I have written, I am looking to an 'orthodox' production context.

Situated Encounter

I began working on films in the mid-seventies and went on to writing and directing work in the mid-nineties, a period spanning the second-wave of feminism with its protest and consciousness-raising objectives, to a period of post-feminism or the third-wave of feminism, a time in which many of the original objectives of feminism have become institutionalised.¹ Angela MacRobbie suggests that post-feminism can be explored through a "double entanglement":

The co existence of neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life (for example, George Bush supporting the campaign to encourage chastity among young people, and in March 2004, declaring that civilisation itself depends on traditional marriage), with processes of liberalisation in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations (for example, gay couples now being able to adopt, foster or have their own children by whatever means and, in the UK at least, full rights to civil partnership.) (MacRobbie, 2004: 256)

Post-feminism recognises those issues once central to the formation of the women's movement, such as domestic violence, equal pay, and workplace harassment as the material of readership across a diverse range of media. These *issues* are no longer protest engagement but something closer to consumer products in the way they are used to sell weekly magazines aimed at women. The daughter of a second-wave feminist is an individual who must choose the kind of life she wants to live. She is

¹The term 'second wave' feminism refers to the resurgence of feminism as a social, cultural and political movement in the 1960s and 1970s. The term is intended to include a wide variety of strands of feminism (Humm, 1992: 11). The term 'post-feminism' is used to describe a range of viewpoints reacting to feminism since the 1980s. While not being "anti-feminist," post-feminists believe that women have achieved second wave goals, while being critical of third wave feminist goals (Wright, 2000: 8). Third-wave feminism is a term for a wide body of popular and academic work of the 1990s (Code, 2000: 233)

educated, independent and is increasingly called upon to invent her “own structures.” As MacRobbie suggests: “[She] must do this internally and individualistically, so that self-monitoring practises (the diary, the life plan, the career pathway) replace reliance on set ways and structured pathways” (ibid.: 260).

I experience filmmaking as a ‘slide-show’: what do I show and what do I hide? Indeed, the digital-generated equivalent, under the propriety name “PowerPoint,” perhaps has an ironic, though entirely apt, register. The question is, and has been, one of power: who exercises it? How does resistance make it manifest? How does power produce its subjects, extract its truths, and construct its points of view? I can only make films *from* the feminine. I choose the word ‘feminine’ and not feminist to separate the political activity of the second wave of feminism from work created out of this current period of post-feminism. In the context of this project, I am investigating my feminine, and translating those insights into dramatic material for cinema. In this I am ‘acting-out’ the characteristics of post-feminism, which is to say, I am being individualistic, concerned with my own needs and making personal choices.

Research Significance

The French philosopher, Michel Foucault, once famously said that it is not that everything is interesting but that everything is dangerous. He did mean *everything*. And, by this he also meant that we so easily pass over such danger, as it remains un/concealed. Perhaps the art of a care of the self, a key theme of Foucault’s last works, is to strive to uncover the danger in everything, which might amount to an ethics of existence. In this regard, my research is my ethical instantiation of an un-concealing of dangerous works. I do this research for myself, where this *self* is a becoming-ethical of a practical life whose practices are those of feminine filmmaking. And I research for another, for emerging women filmmakers. I want to interest women filmmakers in my research. I want there to be interest, a surplus in an economy of engagements, where we see all too starkly the enormous deficits on women engaged in film. Hence my reference here to the telling research of Marian Evans (Evans, 2009). She has researched the New Zealand film industry from the vantage point of access for women and men. There is an enormous disparity between the funding opportunities for women’s work and those of men. The New Zealand Writer’s guild newsletter, reprinted from Marian Evans’s PhD thesis, provides the following statistics:

Between January 2003 and December 2007...women wrote and/or directed only two (8% or one in twelve) of our funded feature films. ... However, women directors made up a proportionately higher share of films accepted for ‘A’ list short film festivals (42% of all accepted from 37% of the allocated funding). If women do so well with short films, why are they under-represented in the features’ statistics? (Evans, 2009: n.p.)

In the most recent blog from Evans, the New Zealand Film Commission’s decisions on its short film-funding programme *Fresh Shorts* were analyzed:

Total investments in projects with male writers and directors: \$220,000 (69%) With female writers and directors \$70,000 (20%). With mixed gender writer and director \$30,000 (9%). Combine this with the most recent Premiere Shorts short-list where women wrote only 13% of the short listed projects, this seems to indicate that the short film pathway to feature filmmaking in NZ is not working for women. (Evans, 2011: n.p.)

In the United States of America, women comprised a scant 15% of all directors, writers, producers, editors, and cinematographers working in the top 250 films of 2007 (Lauzen, 2007). This same study by Lauzen found that in newspapers 70% of the individuals reviewing theatrical film releases were male. In her 2000 study of women directors in Hollywood, Christina Lane notes:

With the rise of the conservative New Right (and its heavy emphasis on economic success), and with the Hollywood trend toward blockbusters in the 1980's and 1990's, women genres hold a very precarious position. They may succeed because of their status as differential product: however, they continue to represent risky 'niche' pictures because of their failure to attract male audiences. (Lane, 2000: 66)

In a funding environment such as this the marketing paradigm is focused on developing work with little risk, using structural approaches to narrative that are recognizable to all the participants of the development process. It is against this backdrop that women filmmakers need research that allows the value of women's films to be argued more effectively. That 'argument' is a complex one, with many armatures comprising an understanding of film history, the film industry, as well as what could be understood as "feminine" sensibility or "women's" films. While the creative work component to this research, *En Abyme*, aims at working with a converging impetus for this complex, this exegesis aims at a series of indicators for the complexity of such a convergence of concerns. The exegesis does not aim to research and explicate these fields of concern in detail, not because these fields are not important, but solely because such a detailed and systematic engagement would be the topic of a PhD project.

At the beginning of this Introduction, I suggested a 'then' and a 'now' and the arc of my concern that wants to trace the trajectory that feminist engagements with filmmaking have taken since the mid 1970s. Three (at least) frames of reference have significantly shifted since 'then': the constitution of 'feminist' or 'feminine' theory; techniques and technologies of the apparatus of film production; and, finally, what constitutes a predominant philosophical-critical framework that provides a disclosure for understanding the subject-formations of feminisms and the discipline or industry formations for cinema. Hence, and in an introductory fashion, just about any commentator on feminism and film theory points to Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" published in the UK journal *Screen* in 1975, as the seminal, if not paradigmatic, inauguration of a critical industry in film theory. Even Steven Shaviro, whose critical approach in *The Cinematic Body* eschews totally any trace of psychoanalysis, refers to Mulvey's essay as "ground-breaking and still influential" (Shaviro, 1993, p. 12). In any of the book-length collected essays constituting feminism and film readers, Mulvey's text is similarly constituted. Hence, from a UK direction, it

was psychoanalysis, particularly that of Jacques Lacan that established the framework by which subject-formation was thought. If the human agency was assayed psychoanalytically, the industry and its apparatus were critically engaged through Marxist critique. Indeed, from the mid-1970s, the dynamics of an industry and its agency was engaged through myriad approaches to Marx and Freud or, for UK cultural studies, Louis Althusser and Lacan.

If, in this introduction to my concerns, I want to provide an indicator of the tail end of that arc, there is, perhaps, nothing more telling than the trajectory of Jennifer Barker's 2009, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*, a phenomenological engagement with the cinematic. Already we might sense a movement from the scopic, indeed a scopophilia defined by Freud's scopic drive, to the haptic or more precisely a synaesthetic understanding of the visual as touch, indebted to the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. I cannot say if Barker did this intentionally, polemically or completely unconsciously, but the film she most privileges, the film she most engages is Andre Tarkovsky's *The Mirror* (1975). It would have been inconceivable for anyone to discuss that film a generation earlier without invoking the specular identification contained in Lacan's "mirror stage." Indeed, it would be as if the film was simply awaiting its time on the couch. Yet Barker does not even make an oblique reference to bygone days when film was a scopic pleasure, and nothing but a scopic pleasure, where the screen and Lacan's mirror became synonymous. It is also significant that within an economy of Anglo-American appropriations of French theory, that arc has traveled westward over the past twenty-five years, from a UK whose cultural studies programs were nourished by Althusser, Lacan, Barthes, and Derrida to an American cultural studies, or film studies driven by phenomenology and the philosophical work of Gilles Deleuze. I am thinking here of Vivian Sobchack, Laura U. Marks and Steven Shaviro.

If we can pinpoint something like an exchange of significant Others when it comes to theory with this trajectory, it is more difficult to say what has happened to an underpinning of the political economy of the industry when Marxism seemed to be the ground for Left critique. Marx is a complex name to now negotiate. If we read Hardt and Negri on *Empire* or *Multitude*, we need to see the global multinational digital entertainment industry as our object, as well as a decided shift from Hegel to Spinoza in order to understand "negation". While we still use the local moniker "Hollywood" to define an industry, it has been some time since that word simply signified a singular entity. It is not regional or even particularly national. We don't even make much sense calling it "multi-national." In many respects, "nations" don't come into it. Its geo-political territory is a virtual geography. But, again, I mention this as a border post, as something essential for the scope of a questioning but too big a question to investigate here.²

² See, as a follow-up, Philip Green's *Cracks in the Pedestal: Ideology and Gender in Hollywood* (1998). Green suggests in the opening to his "Introduction": "This is a book about gender, ideology, and mainstream visual culture—the cultural commodities produced by the multifold institution we call "Hollywood." Specifically, I shall be looking at how male-dominated Hollywood (and it still remains male-dominated despite the rising number of women in executive positions) has responded to the feminist revolution of the 1970s. I focus on

However, we will touch on some aspects of the “Hollywood” industry in the United States, particularly in terms of how “Hollywood” at a particular moment complicated the genres of “independent” and “studio” filmmaking in order to strategically package audiences for risky film topics. This does have some bearing on the direct concerns of this research, as it aims to broach a genre of filmmaking that the mainstream industry does not support. I am referring to a specific approach to women’s films by women filmmakers. But surely, there is a long tradition of “women’s” films and we can point to a good number of successful women filmmakers in the independent sector and also in the mainstream commercial sector. So, what am I explicitly referring to? To commence, I want to reference the Dutch feminist film theorist, Anneke Smelik from her 1998 book, *And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory*:

My experience of cinema is marked by a distinct event which opened my eyes to an object of study that many years later would result in this book. In 1978 I saw my first feminist film and I was shocked. My sense of shock was due to the experience that this woman’s film was so different from any film I had seen before. In a sort of gynocentric epiphany...that it did make a difference whether the film was made by a woman or not. ... It addressed me as a woman and it constructed me as a feminist spectator. (Smelik, 1998: 1)

I want to explicitly emphasise these two aspects mentioned by Smelik, as they are both essential: the address and the construction. What does it mean when we say a film “addresses” me, and what is the “construction” process of film? A grounding premise is that all films constitute an addressee, someone implicit in the very receivability of a film. Equally, all films have a capacity to “construct.” By this I mean that we are essentially subjects in process, whose identity is always already “under construction.” Such identity, including “gender” identity, is not monolithic, fixed or stable. The theories of Lacan or Merleau-Ponty or Deleuze offer quite different understandings of how such addressees and constructions happen, hence film theory’s long arc across the Atlantic. Crucially, mainstream popular films with feminine leads, made for women audiences, even made by women filmmakers may well have a predominantly patriarchal addressees and an identity-construction of women along traditional understanding of gender roles within familial structures. Smelik recognized in Margarethe von Trotta’s first film, *The Second Awakening of Christa Klages*, not the occasion of encountering a film that escaped the processes of identity address and construction, but one that had considered precisely this aspect of filmmaking as a political imperative for women. That is to say, the film was liberating not because it did not work like other films but precisely because it did, but did so in a radical and considered way. One of the critical impacts of the disparity in funding filmmaking, mentioned earlier, is that the mandate of identity that is part of the governance of most public art funding, is not benefiting women.

Teresa de Lauretis commented aptly in her 1984 book-length study, *Alice Doesn’t*, that itself shifted some of the ground held by Mulvey: “In cinema the stakes for women are

Hollywood’s treatment of gender, sexuality, and the institutions, especially “the family,” within which our notions of gender and sexuality are embedded and take on active life” (Green, 1998: 1).

especially high. The representation of women as spectacle—body to be looked at, place of sexuality, and object of desire—so pervasive in our culture, finds in narrative cinema its most complex expression and widest circulation” (de Lauretis, 1984: 4). Hence, any discussion of women’s film falls initially into two parts: the filmmaker and the viewer or spectator. How is it possible that women have not been constructed by a lifetime of cinema into recognising the Hollywood picture of the feminine as the mainstay of feminine identity? Is it possible that I, as a spectator, would be challenged and not entertained by filmmakers who invest their practice with the feminine or ‘other’? It is worth mentioning John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* (1972) for its extraordinary impact on cultural studies in the UK, perhaps most of all because it was a BBC television series, aimed at popular audiences, before becoming a publication. Moreover it was “constructed” precisely as a contestatory television programme for those same audiences who had watched Sir Kenneth Clark’s extremely popular *Civilization*, a televisual production (and later, publication) that reinforced canonicity and connoisseurship of high art, class prerogative and the distinction of taste. Berger’s addressees are those same popular culture audiences who he is able to reconstruct as those capable of engaging the political and ethical dimensions of the work of art. Hence, Berger offers this view, perhaps a little reductive or a little simple, though powerful in providing recognition of the relations between power, visibility and gender:

Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relationships between men and women, but also the relations of women to themselves. The surveyor of women in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision – a sight. (Berger, 1972: 47)

During the 1970s and 80s, feminist film theorists and filmmakers fought against what seemed almost the destiny of women to be decided by this masculine view. Consider the epigraphic quote from Lyotard concerning “theory” as male sexism. Women engaged in the serious questioning of such hegemony through an experimental and experiential filmmaking practice. I am thinking particularly of filmmakers like Yvonne Rainer and Chantal Akerman. It is significant that Laura Mulvey, with Peter Wollen, made six early experimental - films engaging filmmaking practice and psychoanalytic theory, the most celebrated being *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1974). Mulvey suggests: “*Riddles of the Sphinx* was an attempt to break away from the polemical and iconoclastic spirit of ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, and struggled to find ways of looking at film and pleasure in the cinema that would challenge an assertion of the male gaze in or through the camera’s work” (Mulvey, 2009: xxix).

Feminist film theory has a history of favouring the experiential over narrative realistic drama. Such experiential and experimental work, while essential, diverges by its very genre from popular audiences. It is *this* cinema around which theory gravitates, this difficult and obscure cinema. The result of this is that theory becomes rarefied, focusing on films very few women have seen and dismissing the Hollywood system as patriarchal and, by inference, redundant. This practice set up an “either/or” divide, along gender lines and along a political understanding of the hegemony of capital when it comes to mainstream audience satisfaction. Smelik notes:

The suspicion of collusion cast on realist or narrative film has resulted in either a concentration of critical efforts on classical Hollywood cinema or in a largely unjustified acclaim of experimental women's cinema among the elected few who get to see it. This has resulted in what I consider a paradoxical neglect of contemporary popular films made by women for a wider audience. (Smelik, 1999: 12)

As we will see, this neglect has been addressed by some women film theorists, or film culture historians, in looking explicitly at films made by women within the "Hollywood" system or outside the independent and experimental film circuit.³ However, in keeping in mind those statistics on film funding with respect to gender, we see that women in the industry have an access barrier, irrespective of the identity constructions of their product. My argument is that both issues go together, and need to go together: a strategy for developing mainstream access for women and a filmmaking practice that significantly addresses how film constructs women's identities, such that the "addressee" of film finds the question of gender construction embedded in conventional realist narrative rather than construed in a narrative structure that ostensibly challenges conventional film narrative. The second part of this exegesis is concerned with a close reading of sections of my screenplay in order to reflect on the "how" of this embedded construction within a conventional realist narrative. What follows next is a brief, though I hope comprehensive, engagement with that historical episode I have referred to as the emergence of feminism and film theory in the UK and the United States.

Historical Narrative of Feminine Film Theory

The 'Two Feminisms'

The late 1960s was a period of protest and activism: the Civil Rights movement in the United States, the peace movement in much of the Western world in reaction to the Vietnam War, and the women's movements. These overlapped in a period of great social turmoil. One of the many impacts of the women's movement was to reveal the inadequacies of feminine representation in cinema. The early seventies saw film periodicals such as *Screen* take a more active role in forwarding the critical discourse around feminist film theory. In 1972, The New York International Festival of Women's Films began and the following year a programme began in Toronto, The Toronto

³ See, for example, B. Ruby Rich, *Chick Flicks: Theory and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement* (1998); Christina Lane, *Feminist Hollywood: From Born in Flames to Point Break* (2000); and Sharon Lin Tay, *Women on the Edge: Twelve Political Film Practices* (2009).

Women and Film Festival. Much of the women's art and film work made during this period became protest work. The work was individualistic in tone and the effect of this activity was an awakening to the possibilities of feminine work and a galvanising of theorists into looking at what was and what could be. There are many current publications that provide a detailed account of this historical period with respect to the emergence of feminist film practices and film theory.

In her 1998 *Chick Flicks*, B. Ruby Rich somewhat wryly notes the extent to which this "history" is dominated by its own "feminist" canonicity: "This book has been prompted by my conviction that the present landscape of feminism and film has been deprived of its own history, substituting a canon of texts for a set of lived experiences" (Rich: 1). She goes on to mention Mulvey's 1975 essay in *Screen* and again notes wryly: "The thousands of subsequent articles that footnoted Mulvey soon constituted a veritable cottage industry and effectively transformed the nature of the field, once so varied, into one concerned with the controlling power of the male gaze, the fetishization of the female body, and the collusion of narrative cinema with gender subjugation" (ibid.: 2). As a result, Rich's 'history' is a kind of auto-ethnographic engagement predominantly with the 1970s and 80s, that details encounters with institutions, discourses, practices and politics of feminist filmmaking in the United States. Perhaps the canon-scribes across the Atlantic would find Rich too chatty, too anecdotal, too descriptive, dare say too journalistic to count as 'theory'. Though, we need to recognise the foregrounding of the experiential over the critical in this genre. And, again perhaps, a predominance of the pragmatism for describing the experiential offers as some clue as to why American women film theorists today seem to veer towards a phenomenology of lived experience, a *haptos* rather than *eidos*.

We may turn to the publications of Sue Thornham to put our papers in order. Thornham's 1999 *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader* provides the canons, one salvo after another, if I can mix 'metaphors' for a moment. The *Reader* is an important collection for the comprehensive trans-Atlantic coverage it provides, commencing with the American journal *Women and Film*'s first publication in 1972 (later to be reformed as the influential journal *Camera Obscura*). Thornham quotes Mulvey in her introduction. She also references Rich in the next paragraph:

For the past twenty-five years, then, cinema has been, in Laura Mulvey's words, 'the crucial terrain' on which feminist debate about culture, representation and identity have been fought. This book seeks to chart the history of those debates, as feminist theory has engaged both with theoretical currents from outside its own political borders — from structuralism and psychoanalysis in the 1970s to post-colonial theory, queer theory and postmodernism in the 1990s — and its own internally generated conflicts. ... The first three readings in this section date from 1972-4, and exemplify what B. Ruby Rich calls the 'two voices' of feminist film criticism during this period: the 'originally American, so-called sociological approach' and its British counterpart, the 'so-called theoretical approach'. (Thornham, 1999: 2)

Thornham's *Reader* is a millennial publication, closing at the end of the 90s and importantly referencing the work of Judith Butler on gender difference, a critical feminist position that has benefitted from twenty-five years of wrangling over Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, Irigaray and Cixous. Butler does not read like Mulvey; the question

of sexual difference is more complex than the hegemony of a male gaze. As well, Thornham includes critical texts that widen the concerns of feminist politics to embrace important questions of race, as well as issues of queer theory. This anthology was Thornham's second publication. In 1997 she had published her own monograph on feminist film theory, *Passionate Detachments: An Introduction to Feminist Film Theory*. The trajectory of this earlier publication coincides, in many respects, with the 1999 Reader, and resonates with my own arc of concern from UK-based psychoanalysis of the 1970s to US-based phenomenology of the current decade. *Passionate Detachments* opens with a short quote from Mulvey, a quote worth quoting again: "The first blow against the monolithic accumulation of traditional film conventions ... is to free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics and passionate detachment" (ibid.: ix). The Mulvey quote is from her celebrated essay of 1975. It is not so much the commitment to historical materialism, to a Marxist engagement with the materiality of forces of production and relations of production that engaged Thornham. Rather it was the power of the rhetorical trope "passionate detachment" and the repetition of this very phrase in another time and another place, across the Atlantic:

When, in 1973, Laura Mulvey sought a phrase to describe the stance which she felt should be adopted by the feminist engaged in a critical reading of cinema — whether as film critic, as filmmaker, or as audience member — the expression she chose was 'passionate detachment'. In 1991, the same phrase was adopted by the postmodernist feminist philosopher, Donna Haraway, to describe her own ideal of a 'critical vision' required of theorists engaged in what she calls 'the politics of visual culture'. 'Passionate detachment', she writes, should characterize the feminist critic, who must counter the claims to 'unlimited disembodied vision' of the dominant culture with her own 'situated knowledge' as a woman. (Thornham, 1997: ix)

In the 1999 anthology Thornham includes a 1978 essay by Rich, published originally in the journal, *Jump Cut*. In this essay, Rich approaches the 'two feminisms' she had earlier defined in terms of finding a convergence of approach, a convergence that accounts for the critical import of structuralist and poststructuralist thinking but as well the chronicle of lived experiences of women. They should not be antithetical, oppositional or contradictory engagements. One senses that this too is Thornham's trajectory, to recognise that within the frame of a 'two feminisms' feminism repeats precisely the mind / body duality that marked a crucial moment for rupture with respect to a politics, ethics and practice of feminism. And precisely in this sense my filmmaking practice, that embodies my screenplay, aims for that 'passionate detachment' whose modulation or modifications invent from the situated knowledge of this woman.

Re-visioning Hollywood

In 1982, the then Editor of the *Millennium Film Journal*, Noël Carroll, published an important and lengthy essay in the journal *October*. It was titled "The Future of Allusion: Hollywood in the Seventies (and Beyond)." The essay is not ostensibly one

that engages with feminism or references feminist theory or politics in film. Rather, it references the emergence in the 1970s and after of a screenwriting, directing and film production process that self-consciously and reflexively engages with Hollywood's own film history, genres and productions. What emerged in the 1970s were directors who approached film critically as historical production that can be quoted, becoming pastiche, simulation, and repetition in order to play with the very invention of film itself.

We recognise, of course, this is American catch-up in a sense of French New Wave engagements in the 1960s. During the early 60s, filmmakers such as Jean Luc Godard, Jacques Rivette or François Truffaut not only wrote seriously on the critical and political practices of film and its histories but, radically, engaged with the avalanche of American Hollywood films screening in France as serious work for analysis. What, for Americans, was popular culture without any particular cultural merit, became, under the banner of 'auteur' cinema, works of art. French critical film theory transformed John Ford or Anthony Mann from studio directors of American Westerns to authors of important works to be engaged with seriousness. In many respects Carroll recognises that a similar reflective practice began to happen in the United States, with directors such as Martin Scorsese or Paul Schrader, who in many respects were reflecting on the European cinema of Luchino Visconti or Michelangelo Antonioni, though Carroll focuses particularly on the recirculation of Hollywood cinema.

There are two key issues I want to touch on here. One is the emergence of an understanding of the 'auteur' in cinema, precisely at a moment when a political critique of cinema production should have been emphasising the collective practices of film production. The second concerns what is significant in Carroll's analysis: his attention to the political economy of Hollywood. French 'auteur' theory ostensibly constituted an 'authorial' voice, a singular vision for a work almost at the same time that Roland Barthes was writing his celebrated "Death of the Author." For Barthes, the author-death was symbolic: it liberated the reader as the one who in reading constructs a text-in-process always inter-textually, according to the life world situatedness of that reader. There is no idealised, and in that sense, correct reading of a text that would coincide precisely with an author's intentions, as if such intentions could be every fully discerned.

The irony of this was not lost on early 70s UK film theorists, who embraced Barthes and Godard coincidentally. The import of French reception of American cinema was politically powerful, thinking back to that little televisual skirmish between Clark and Berger over the work of art. Popular culture was not forever severed from the serious concerns of Culture, with a capital 'C'. Rather, the work of structuralism, psychoanalysis, and Marxism enabled a radical revisioning of what constituted cultural production per se. In this sense, auteur theory promoted class analysis, while yet requiring itself a critical engagement with collectivisation of production.

These became the concerns of feminist film theory on both sides of the Atlantic. In her "Introduction" to *Feminism and Film Theory* (1988) Constance Penley notes one of the

'groundbreaking issues' that commenced feminist film criticism was Pam Cook and Claire Johnston's 1974 essay "The Place of Woman in the Cinema of Raoul Walsh." Walsh, along with Ford were two particularly discussed American 'auteur' directors. This was the first text that set out to apply the theories of Lacan for feminist critical thinking (Penley, 1988: 4). Penley points to where Johnson distinguishes herself from other feminist critics of Hollywood, suggesting: "Claire Johnson's work stands as a notable exception to the wholesale repudiation of Hollywood and its forms by feminist film theorists in the 1970s. Not only did she urge feminist filmmakers to study Hollywood as a negative example, she also stressed, in a more positive vein, the need to incorporate into feminist films Hollywood's mechanisms of pleasure" (ibid., p. 5). She goes on to quote Johnston from her 1973 *Screen* pamphlet, *Notes on Women's Cinema* (London: SEFT): "In order to counter our objectification in the cinema, our collective fantasies must be released: women's cinema must embody the working through of desire: such an objective demands the use of the entertainment film (p. 31)" (ibid.) As Penley suggests, counter to this was a feminism that recognised the strategic importance of documentary film production or avant-garde productions with political approaches to subversion of film languages. Hence we see on the one hand a refusal of Hollywood, and on the other a revisioning (and thus political subversion) of Hollywood.

As I mentioned earlier, Carroll develops an account of an American revisioning of Hollywood by young cinéophile directors in the early 1970s. Their project was not ostensibly political but rather economic. Carroll notes:

The industrial conditions that led to the rise of the new Hollywood and its allusionist auteurs are complex, overlapping, and causally interconnected. In rough sequential order they include: the steady decline of the movie audience since 1946, the industry's final divestiture of its theatre holdings, its overinvestment in production in the mid-sixties, the disappearance of the studio system's experienced leaders, and the takeover of the industry by huge corporate conglomerates. ... Around the same time, however, the condign success of low-budget "youth" films, notably *Easy Rider* (1969), suggested a possible avenue of retrenchment. Hollywood focused its energy on special-interest audiences, especially youth. ... Just outside the gates of the old Hollywood in the sixties were a number of those who would become lords and ladies of the new Hollywood. They were encamped and waiting at a small studio called American Independent Pictures. Among those who passed through AIP were Bogdanovich, Coppola, Scorsese, Milius, Hellman, Hopper, Demme, Robert Towne, Jack Nicholson, Robert De Niro, Bruce Dern, John Alonzo, Lazlo Kovacs, and Vera Fields [note one woman on the list]. For financial reasons, AIP gave many young cinéphiles an opportunity to work—they were dirt cheap and they labored unstintingly for the love of cinema. (Carroll, 1982: 74-75)

It might have seemed as if AIP was well equipped to respond precisely to the special-interest and youth markets that grew dramatically in the 1970s as an alternative to mainstream cinema and television, with risky and politically adventurous projects. It did fulfil such a production demand, though the development of a women's cinema that was, in Thornham's terms, passionately detached, or critically entertaining, did not emerge. We need to look at Christina Lane's *Feminist Hollywood* to get a better sense of how serious and 'revisioning' women directors managed to get productions happening during this same period. I have headed this section of the exegesis "revisioning Hollywood," Lane says explicitly why I have done this in the opening to

her Introduction: "In her book *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, Teresa de Lauretis highlights the act of revision in relation to women directors. According to de Lauretis, revision "refers to the project of reclaiming vision, of 'seeing difference differently'" (Lane, 2000: 11).

Such reclamation is not simply repetition, mimesis, re-presentation but essentially contestatory, questioning the originality of a 'claim', of ownership, possession, property, the proper. Reclaiming is not installing a new 'proper' but offering a subversive modulation that calls into question the sure ground of any proper, any claim in the name of the masculine or the feminine. Lane engages with five Hollywood directors, discussing their independent projects as well as their "Hollywood" films: Martha Coolidge, Kathryn Bigelow, Lizzie Borden, Darnell Martin and Tamara Davis. If the demise of the Hollywood moguls and the emergence of AIP set the production possibilities for a new kind of cinema, Lane stresses at the conclusion of her study that by the 1990s there was no neat line that divided studio funded production from independent, or what she otherwise names mainstream cinema from 'counter-cinema':

The dissolution of the boundaries between mainstream and independent is evident in a number of ways. For one thing, many directors move back and forth between studio projects and independent productions. ... From the 1970s to the 1990s, counter-cinema techniques have become much more common in studio films. Self-conscious or reflexive narration has emerged as a "trendy" characteristic of those big-budget and/or classically plotted films that cater to highly film-literate audiences and those spectators who are willing to be tested in a mass entertainment setting. (Lane, 2000: 222-223)

However, in spite of the close attention that Lane has given to specifically women directors in the industrial milieu of Hollywood, her analysis does not go far enough in explaining the continual disparity in gender representation in the industry. We recognise that the industry has learnt to be responsive to the genre codes of cinema reception, that 'enlightened' producers such as Harvey and Bob Weinstein at Miramax can recognise how transgressions of cinema syntax or semantics builds audiences. Yet, there is no acute engagement with sexual difference and what earlier I referred to in relation to the feminist film theory of Smelik as the address and construction of a reception, what de Lauretis calls a revisioning as re-claiming. It might have seemed as if the film industry in the US in the early seventies, coincident with the growing strength of feminist filmmaking, film theory and criticism, was precisely the milieu for the grounding of serious production potentials. Yet that did not happen. I want to briefly return to an analysis of particularly French film theory to see, perhaps, why such a possibility did not eventuate, and what I am aiming for with my own creative project, *En Abyme*.

Shots and Words

As we have discussed earlier, over the last forty years the making and reading of 'feminine' work has been studied and theorised by: art historians, feminists, feminist film theorists, film theorists and, more recently, cultural studies theorists and visual studies theorists and theorists of postmodern culture. Each of the feminine film theorists whose work is discussed in this project implicates her discourse from out of a number of philosophical movements. The most significant of these philosophical frameworks have come from structuralism, post-structuralism, semiotics and psychoanalytic theory.⁴ Each of these frameworks is 'exported' into the arenas of feminine film theory by a number of critical theorists: most significantly, Lacan, Christian Metz and Louis Althusser.⁵ More recently there is phenomenology, particularly that developed from the work of Merleau-Ponty and the philosophical work of Deleuze and Guattari. In order to engage these philosophical frameworks, systems of analysis such as those of narrative structure, textual analysis and ideological analysis are used to allow the text and the language of the image to be theorised. Roland Barthes's notion of 'narrative code' that was used to analyse structure: "concluded that in linear narrative 'women' operate conventionally to signify an enigma, obstacle or prize for a male protagonist and, by implication, a male or masculinised spectator" (Butler, 2002: 4). "Textual Analysis aims to break down the text into individual segments to allow for a reading of the underlying ideological operations at work in meaning production" (McCabe, 2004: 17). Textual analysis is founded on an understanding of texts as constructs, as structured by the work of ideology, while at the same time naturalising that work – embodying, in other words, denial or effacement of the operation of ideology (Kuhn, 1985: 84).

⁴ Structuralism can be defined in broad terms as an attempt to unify the human sciences by applying a single methodology derived from the model supplied by Saussurean linguistics (Barthes, 1964). The basic unit of Saussurean linguistics is the sign, defined as a psychical entity consisting of a 'signifier' (an acoustic image) and a 'signified' (a concept). A common core to all the tendencies that have been described as *poststructuralist*, lies in a reluctance to ground discourse in any theory of origin. The existence of the Semiotic implies that the unconscious is structured not like a language, but like the archaic and preverbal traces of a narcissistic relationship with the mother, what can be termed a Psychoanalytic Semiotic. Psychoanalytically based approaches to literature and the other arts take a wide variety of forms. All are grounded or based upon Freud's descriptions of the workings of the unconscious and they usually claim to uncover or work with material that is not consciously present in the mind of the author or artist in question. See Macey (2000) for key definitions of these terms.

⁵ Jacques Lacan was a French psychoanalyst (1901-81). Ann Kaplan notes that Lacan's psychoanalytic apparatus is different from Freud's in important ways that make his work on a text less of a violation in New Critical terms. Firstly, Lacan does not move back from the text to the author; where the Freudian method is ultimately biographical, Lacan's is textual. Secondly, the centrality of language, and particularly the devices of metaphor and metonymy, in Lacan's system, bring him closer to the specifically literary qualities of the texts he handles. See Kaplan (1990). Christian Metz's early work represents an attempt to establish a semiotics of cinema. Metz's work changed direction largely under the influence of Lacan, as he began to elaborate a psychoanalytic theory of film. His later work influenced discussions of the 'gaze'. Louis Althusser (1918-90) was a French Marxist philosopher whose work attempted to conceptualize a theoretical link between Marxism and psychoanalysis. See Macey (2000)

Analysis within feminist film theory is focused on shots, an element of the film made from the text of the screenwriter. Christian Metz's 1991 comparison of shots and words reveals their differences and how they might be viewed:

Shots are infinite in number, unlike words (since the lexicon is in principle finite) but like statements, an infinity of which can be constructed on the basis of limited number of words. Shots are the creations of the filmmaker, unlike words (which pre-exist in lexicons) but like statements.

The shot provides an inordinate amount of information and semiotic wealth. The shot is an actualized unit, unlike the word, which is a purely virtual lexical unit to be used as the speaker wishes. The word "dog" can designate any type of dog, and can be pronounced with any accent or intonation, whereas a filmic shot of a dog tells us, at the very minimum, that we are seeing a certain kind of dog of a certain size and appearance, shot from a specific angle with a specific kind of lens. While it is true that filmmakers might "virtualize" the image of a dog through backlighting, soft-focus, or decontextualization, Metz's more general point is that the cinematic shot more closely resembles an utterance or a statement ("here is the backlit silhouette image of what appears to be a large dog") than a word.

Shots, unlike words, do not gain meaning by paradigmatic contrast with other shots that might have occurred in the same place on the syntagmatic chain. In the cinema, shots form part of a paradigm so open as to be meaningless. (Signs, within the Saussurean schema, enter into two kinds of relationship: paradigmatic, having to do with choices from a virtual, "vertical" set of "comparable possibilities" – e.g. a set of pronouns in a sentence – and syntagmatic, having to do with horizontal, sequential arrangement into a signifying whole. Paradigmatic operations have to do with selecting, while syntagmatic operations have to do with combining in sequence. (Stam, 2000: 111)

Janet McCabe suggests that the 1980s "saw feminist film criticism focused on the spectator as constituted in the film text, cultural studies feminists were far more interested in the empirical audience" (McCabe, 2004: 41). Attempting to develop an understanding of specific forms and how they are enjoyed by women, Tania Modleski's studies of the soap opera "reveal a female viewer engaging with a surrogate extended family beyond her own isolated nuclear family" (1994). Charlotte Brunsdon recognises that 'women's' films aimed directly at female audiences "are the culturally constructed skills of femininity – sensitivity, perception, intuition and the necessary privileging of the concerns of the personal life" (Brunsdon, 1981: 36). "These feminine texts position the subject within an ideological and institutional framework defined by family life and its attendant rituals – birth, engagement and marriage – which in turn assume that the imagined female viewer has the relevant cultural understanding" (McCabe, 2004, p. 45). These factors at least in part explain "a post-feminist return to where women freely choose traditional romance and social roles" that "has placed pressure on the academy to locate different analytic tools" (McCabe, 2004: 63).

We recognise a tension during the 1980s between close film-text analysis, along psychoanalytic lines (the unconscious is structured like a language as Lacan famously pronounced). Or, with the emergence of Cultural Studies as a discipline more-or-less in its own right, there was the emergence of discourse theory constituting a methodology for analysing audiences as responsive addressees to filmic constructs. The 1990s saw a movement towards Cultural Studies as an environment that was seen to encompass a

textually based analysis as part of a wider field of criticism that included the socio-historical context, an industrial context, the filmmaker context, and the spectator context. Returning to Smelik who we earlier referenced, contributing to this, “the neglect of the female spectator, as individual or as social group has resulted in a feminist endorsement of alternative cinema and, simultaneously, in a dismissal of mainstream cinema” (Smelik, 1999: 24). As well: “this has resulted in what I consider a paradoxical neglect of contemporary popular film made by women for a wider audience; a lack of academic attention which continued long into the 1980s and even the 1990s” (ibid.: 12). As we have already mentioned from her 1998 publication, Smelik notes that the field of theory has focused too much attention on films that have not achieved commercial exhibition and distribution. She complains further about the “largely unjustified acclaim of experimental women’s cinema among the elected few who get to see it” (Smelik, 1998: 12).

A Feminine Manifesto

The Manifest and the Latent

In the course of my research into the writings of feminist film theorists, I have noted many times the distance between theorists and practitioners. It was this disconnection that led me to writing a feminine manifesto. I anticipated that working with a manifesto drawn from feminist film theory would assist me in challenging the cinematic conventions of scriptwriting and filmmaking. And further, that using the manifesto would promote an engagement with the theory that had the potential to move the symbolic nature of theory as I was experiencing it, into an active discourse. How is a ‘manifesto’, constituting a series of propositions, any different to a ‘theory’, as a discursive formation that constitutes a series of propositions? Is not the very notion of ‘manifesto’ now a little arcane, a little ‘hysterical’ even, particularly a ‘feminine’ manifesto? Manifestos are grand and public pronouncements that constitute the crux of a disputation over the course of action one takes. They are action-orientated, ethically driven rather than conceptually driven, locating the *agon* of difference: the

Communist Manifesto, the *Futurist Manifesto*, even the *Dogma Manifesto* concern not so much how one understands things but more how one should live one's life, encountering the dangers associated with a care of one's self as existent.

Manifestos describe a practical philosophy, what Aristotle might have called *Phronesis*, a practical wisdom, to be differentiated from *Sophia*. To 'manifest' is to make evident, to show. The manifest is what is open to view, what is evident. To manifest is to proclaim as to what is evident, to make an open statement. In psychoanalysis, the manifest content is to be differentiated from the latent content, for example, of a dream. What is evident, what is on show is the rebus, the riddle or puzzle to be deciphered with respect to what is latent, the dynamic and unconscious structure of desire. Film theory's swerve to psychoanalysis, in particular feminist film theory, too readily encountered what is manifest as something simply to work through in the labour of analysis. The ironic pleasure of the cinematic became the disclosure of the false promise of pleasure at the level of what is shown, leaving the terrain of genuine pleasure to the theorists who cracked the riddle, or made difficult cinema that precisely concerned the structuration of the rebus itself. This left narrative realism, the stuff of popular culture, in the lonely role of 'usual suspect' when it came to patriarchy and the false promise of cinematic pleasure. Steven Shaviro echoes this in his 1993 *Cinematic Body*:

The Lacanian film critic, like the Platonic philosopher, warns us not to be deceived by the apparent immediacy of what we see in the mirror, for no visual presentation can capture the complex textual play of absences and mediations; none can be adequate to the severe demands of dialectical comprehension. The word is the death of the thing, and the falsity of the image is a necessary consequence of the truth of discourse. Percept and affect must be subordinated to the textuality and the Law of the signifier. Film theory endeavours to subdue and regulate the visual, to destroy the power of images, or at least to restrain them within the bounds of linguistic discursivity and patriarchal Law. (Shaviro, 1993: 16)

Hence, a Feminine Manifesto is a tactical ploy as much as a rhetorical figure and a play with the specifics of a history of feminist film theory. I want to redress or at least address in some way the sheer emphasis that has been given to *latent* content at the level of film analysis and viewing pleasure. In doing so, I want my manifesto to address the manifest in film as site of another encounter with an audience. As Smelik has emphasised, women's strategic engagements with cinema need to address the mainstream at the very level of the styles, tropes and narrative realisms of 'Hollywood'. If a 'manifesto' is a declaration of principles and intentions, it is not a new phenomenon in the history of film endeavour. The most recent example is 'Dogma 95' a manifesto written by a group of Danish filmmakers lead by Lars Von Trier.⁶ That manifesto was written in response to a number of factors affecting cinema in 1995. Richard Kelly, in his book *The Name of the Book is Dogma 95*, writes: "roughly a century after the invention of cinema, the USA had succeeded in colonising the global market in film. Fat, foolish, ruinously expensive and ideologically hateful, Hollywood movies were the world's dominant cultural product" (Kelly, 2000: 3). Add to this the arrival of digital video, bringing reductions in budget, the ability to shoot in low light

⁶ Lars von Trier is a Danish filmmaker, born 1956.

and a more direct interface with emerging post production techniques such as computer generated imaging (CGI) and the receptiveness of many filmmakers to the 'Dogma 95' manifesto is explained.

The 'Dogma 95' manifesto set out the following ten rules:

- Shooting must be done on location. Props and sets must not be brought in.
- The sound must never be produced apart from the image or vice-versa.
- The camera must be handheld. Any movement or mobility attainable in the hand is permitted.
- The film must be in colour. Special lighting is not acceptable.
- Optical work and filters are forbidden.
- The film must not contain superficial action.
- Temporal and geographical alienation are forbidden.
- Genre movies are not acceptable.
- The film format must be Academy 35 mm.
- The director must not be credited.

Filmmakers all over the world wishing to focus their practise towards social realism used these ten rules. The most successful of these is the Danish film, *Festen* or *The Celebration*, by filmmaker, Thomas Vinterberg, which was critically acclaimed and won the Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 1998. Many of the filmmakers who used the manifesto acknowledged that the manifesto operated most effectively as a guide, not as a rigid set of rules.

This feminine manifesto is focused towards women filmmakers who are investigating ways to strengthen their films for a female audience. Unlike the Dogma 95 manifesto, which dealt with the material nature of filmmaking, the feminine manifesto is a set of guiding principals whose objectives are more interpretatively open. If Dogma set about a guiding series that had a particular inflection on *techne*, on a know-how in *poesis*, in the making of a work, this Feminine Manifesto, engages in that other of Aristotle's practical virtues that I have already mentioned, *phronesis*, or 'practical wisdom'. The 'rules' or 'propositions' I am professing, or manifesting, proclaiming as an 'open statement' are not easily definable in terms of film technique, apparatus or form. The feminine manifesto includes the following:

- To show feminine conditions of representation
- To shift terms of representation
- To investigate feminine narratives
- To give space to the feminine
- To embrace a place of desire
- To create in a boundless space—the feminine auteur

In order to 'test' this manifesto for the purposes of this research project, I have written a script entitled *En Abyme*. As a writer-director, I view the script as a story and as a design project. The story encompasses theme, characters, plot, dialogue and many other elements. The design involves visual approaches, sets, locations, costumes,

cinematic approaches and many other elements. The way in which I have applied the feminine manifesto to my project is as 'subjective' as the script and design decisions that I have taken. In the following sections I will show how working with the feminine manifesto has informed the development of the feature script *En Abyme*.

It would be inaccurate to say the film script arrives as a 'mechanical' illustration of the six propositions of the manifesto. When I say the application of my manifesto to my project is 'subjective,' I fully mean it is provisional, contingent, without the ground of rational certainty. The manifesto itself is contingent, open, interpretable, situated, provisional but by all of these I mean 'lived', something that enables a living thinking existence. The script, too, is invented, evented, contingent on situated encounters over the past twelve months with texts, conversations, university requirements, industry aspirations, shifting economic climates, my age, my gender and so on. If the manifesto 'tests' the script, I understand this to mean that the script, in what it gives, what I want to understand as its potentials, is a promise to some future. The manifesto presents another genre of a discursive promise to a future. My 'testing' is in reckoning how those futures align, how those promises keep the faith, how a woman might recognise a differential agency in what might happen because it is *this* legacy from which she is working and not some other. The propositions and the script emerged as a series, not so much in parallel, but perhaps as a braid, thickening up a dispositional capability according to two kinds of writing, neither oppositional nor coincident, each with differing inflections and intensities but also differing temporalities or durations. It so happens, the manifesto folds the script within its borders just as the script envelopes the manifesto as a practical wisdom.

To Show Feminine Conditions of Representation

En Abyme has developed into a story of a friendship between two women in their early forties, Darcy and Sarah. Darcy is a composer with a synesthetic condition that allows her to see a particular colour with a particular musical note and Sarah is a litigator in the Maori Land Court. Darcy is the protagonist and at the start of the story she is diagnosed with a terminal brain tumour whose advancement she can detect in the way the tumour is affecting her synaesthesia. Her colours and musical notes are no longer in the pattern of their code. The following scene attempts to interrupt 'the gaze':

INT. DARCY'S STUDIO - DAY

Darcy is so deeply focused on her playing, that she doesn't notice a man DAVID enter her studio.

She looks up through the colour and shapes that surround her music making and sees him, she turns her head to her own reflection in the glass of the window, she looks down at her hands and continues to play. She catches sight of him again and looks at

him before returning her eyes to her hands on the keyboard. She glances at her reflection in the window and reaches up to adjust her hair.

She continues to play as he moves towards her, he straddles the piano stool beside her and kisses her naked arm, he slides another hand up the back of her T-shirt. She stops playing and repositions herself so that she is straddling him and kisses him deeply.

In this scene Darcy sees herself and David in the reflection and then she watches her hands as they play, she looks at herself again in the reflecting window. The scene shows a series of gazes, which I am suggesting are 'feminine'. We don't see Darcy from David's point of view, ever. We introduce David into the scene through Darcy's gaze. Her response is to turn to her own image, her masquerade. She then returns to herself watching her hands play as she retreats again into the subjectivity of her own desires. She catches sight of him again and again, responds by turning to her own image, adjusting herself as if making herself ready for a performance.

One of my key areas of interest is how to construct *En Abyme* to provide recognition and identity for a female audience. To return, for a moment, to the psychoanalysis of feminist film theory, how a woman watches and what has influenced her gaze was first written about by Mulvey in her seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in which she theorised that women are conditioned to a screen that reflects a dominant cultural ideology of patriarchy and that to create material for a female audience outside that ideology would risk the destruction of a women's pleasure in cinema. This essay represented "a jump from the ungendered and formalistic analysis of semiotics to the understanding that film viewing always involves gendered identities" (Humm, 1997: 17). Mulvey, with Claire Johnston, are the UK theorists who first galvanised the discourse of feminist film theory as a critical field of its own. B. Ruby Rich, the American cultural theorist and feminist film critic, wrote of them:

According to Mulvey, the woman is not visible in the audience, which is perceived as male; according to Claire Johnston, the woman is not visible on the screen. She is merely a surrogate for the phallus, a signifier for something else, etc. As a woman going into the movie theatre you are faced with a context that is coded wholly for your invisibility, and yet, obviously, you are sitting there and bringing along a certain coding from outside the theatre. (Rich, 1978: 87)

On the Hollywood screen, women are seen as 'other', as an object not a subject. 'She' represents the unconscious of male, voyeuristic, scopophilic looking and identifying processes, which are crucial in constituting visual pleasure for a male gaze.⁷ Mulvey identified three 'looks' that serve to sexually objectify women on screen. The first one is the look of the male character at the female character on screen. The second one is the male spectator looking at the female character on screen. The third look joins the first

⁷ Such essential grounding of the male gaze implies a 'phallocentrism', a tendency to focus all discussion of sexual difference on the primacy of the phallus, as symbolic register of castration. The predominance of the scopic drive engages desire in a scopophilia. In popular imagination the term is used in a more general sense to refer to someone who habitually observes others without their knowledge, with no necessary implication of sexual interest. In this sense, scopophilia is the pleasure in looking at other people's bodies as objects. See Macey, (2000) for key term definitions.

two together allowing the male spectator to view the male character looking at the female character. This perspective allows the male spectator to place himself into the place of the male character and create his own relationship with the female character. McCabe suggests: "This gendered active/passive divide structures film narrative with the male hero advancing the story and the women as image disrupting narrative movement to freeze the flow of action moments of erotic contemplation" (McCabe, 2004: 30).

How is what I have construed to be thought any differently? It reads, certainly, like narrative realism, a scene we might have seen a hundred times in variation: He enters; she notices him without demonstrative recognition; the cinematic apparatus manifests, or shows, the encounter from her perspective. However, let me be a little more nuanced here in unpacking what I am calling the feminine conditions of representation. Perhaps one of the most celebrated feminist films that directly engages 'the gaze' as a feminine condition of representation, a 'gaze' that subverts the closure of speculative identification of a male viewer, is Chantal Akerman's *Je Tu Il Elle*, her first feature film (1975). The film is in three segments, the most sustained being the first segment where we encounter a woman (Akerman) secreted in her tiny apartment for some months on end. Crucial to this segment is the *Je-Tu* relation, the I-You relation, split between the auto-affection of a self to oneself, self-as-other and the recognition of the camera as Other to oneself. The most intensive modulations in this segment were specular reflections from the bedroom glazing, glass doors and windows that constituted at once a mirror for an auto-affective encounter and the subjecting of a naked self to the views of vicarious passers-by. I am emphasising this relation to the other via a specular reflection, a mirror gaze that precisely does not fit neatly within the economy of masculine identification. I also emphasise that Akerman's film is precisely what Smelik refers to as production that does not include a mainstream.

My filmic syntagms aim to resonate here with that trajectory of subverting or reverting the male 'gaze' we recognise with Akerman, but in a context where we are completely 'at home' with a scenario we see hundreds of times in mainstream cinema. It is not that we can ignore a question of 'the gaze' even if we attenuate Mulvey's pronouncements a little. But we can, as with more recent feminine film theorists, recognise seeing more as a concern with touch than strictly a scopic drive. We see, for example, with Akerman's film, that while we are startled by the viscosity of things, a perennial concealing thwarts our scopic desire. It happens at those moments where masculine desire would want to unfold everything. In the place of a pleasure of looking, is recognition of surfaces that touch us, and that are touched. Surfaces of glass touch a body image producing moments of (mis)recognition; or in my film, hands touch a piano keyboard producing sound and so on. We remember the extent to which current dominant strands of feminine film theory emphasise the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty on the chiasm of one's flesh and the world, but also in this, a synaesthesia of senses: a touch that is seeing; a hearing that becomes haptic and so on. I have aimed not so much to make a didactic film about the riddle of manifest content, as with early feminist cinema, nor, like Akerman, revert the return to masculinity of a pleasure of the gaze in a radical cinematic content. Rather, I aim for a mainstream, and yet

continually fold into the everyday the extraordinary possibility of showing how a cinema for women might be encounterable.

Hence, the scene corrupts 'the gaze' while playing out a conventional scene of lovemaking without preamble, in the following ways. The audience does not see David alone in the introductory framework but rather he is seen first from Darcy's point of view as a figure at the back of the images she manifests out of her synaesthetic condition when she plays the piano. He is a background trace in the manifestation of her poetic subjectivity. The images of Darcy show her manifesting her subjectivity and turning towards her own image. The last part of the scene is driven by Darcy's need to see herself in the performance of love making and her interest in David's ability to be with her in that moment. The images when shot would favour her point of view of his body and movement and her own body, keeping all the parts separate. Has Darcy become 'masculine' by taking the protagonist role in a lovemaking scene? Ann Kaplan, in discussing the work of Mulvey on the male gaze, writes: "the important question is whether, when women occupy a position of dominance in the cinematic process, they necessarily occupy a masculine position" (Kaplan, 1983: 28). Kaplan argues that the gaze is neither male nor feminine "but to own and activate the gaze, given our language and the structures of the unconscious, is to be in the masculine position" (ibid.).

It is important to emphasise that much of feminist writing that discusses the essentialism of the masculine, or phallic, at an unconscious level, emphasises the ambivalence of the very notion of 'position' that is used, and hence ambivalence with how 'essential' is here thought. Indeed, Mulvey, herself, recognised this after encountering research by Miriam Hansen on cinematic pleasure:

When I first came across Miriam Hansen's work on Rudolf Valentino, in *The Cinema Journal* (Summer 1986), I was struck by her ability to combine film theory and film history. ... Theoretically, she demonstrates that Rudolph Valentino's spectacular image on and off the screen was constructed for a desiring female gaze. Here, theory is carefully placed in a thoroughly elaborated historical context, suggesting that the 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' polemic clearly needs to be reconfigured to acknowledge that the erotics of the cinematic look are not uniform across the history of Hollywood cinema." (Mulvey, 2009: 213)

But we already recognise such ambivalence in the extraordinary cinema of Akerman from the 1970s. The scene I am referencing here from *En Abyme* counters a potential to revert to a masculine gaze precisely by showing Darcy naked in the scene. The series of shots, which reveal her feminine form, need to be photographed for realism and reveal a synaesthetic tactility of the eye, without the objectification that often comes with this type of scene in cinema. "Stories that are inhabited by women require you to think about a 'feminine gaze'," writes Jackie Stacey, in examining Susan Siedelman's *Desperately Seeking Susan*: "the film is structured by female desire, most specifically, the desire to 'be like' another woman" (Stacey, 1987: 10). Stacey notes that some women's films "produce narrative desire by the difference between two women, by women wanting to become the idealised other. Many films by women deal with conflicts and mutual fascination between women" (ibid.). To construct *En Abyme* as a film structured

by female desire, Sarah and Darcy's characters have been developed to reveal their differences and the circumstances around their close friendship. The 'postmodern' woman has the possibility of living many lives. She may be a provider, a mother, a creator and so on. These lives exist as latent potentials, until change comes. The potential for change focuses the feminine gaze towards a desire to be desired by other women. Darcy and Sarah constitute or enact each other's desires.

To Shift Terms of Representation

Representation conveys the ways in which women can be narrated. Judith Butler writes:

Representation serves as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects; on the other hand, representation is the normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women. (Butler, 1990: 1)

Butler directs me to think about *En Abyme's* women characters from a political perspective. By 'political' perspective I mean the necessity for me to consciously reflect on what it means for me to create characters that give voice to my feminist principles through their plot lines and character traits, and what is revealed of their characters when residing in their personal/ private places. I am also interested in showing what happens to their behaviour when they become involved with men either in intimate or professional relationships or friendships. How we create our identity and to what degree that identity is constructed from our male 'objectification' of ourselves are uneasy questions to answer. Catharine MacKinnon writes about the duality involved in our identity creation:

Socially, femaleness means femininity, which means attractiveness to men, which means sexual attractiveness, which means sexual availability on male terms. What defines women as such is what turns men on. Good girls are 'attractive', bad girls 'provocative'. Gender socialisation is the process through which women come to identify themselves as sexual beings, as beings that exist for men. It is the process through which women internalise (make their own) a male image of their sexuality as their identity as women. It is not an illusion. (MacKinnon, 1982: 530)

There is some distance to straddle between Butler's framework and that of MacKinnon, less than a decade earlier. We recognise with MacKinnon something of the essentialism of a desiring production constituting gender identifications situated within the fixing and fixated grounds of heterosexual desire. Particular approaches to psychoanalytic theories reinforced such essentialisms rather than, for example, emphasising the splitting of the subject that confounds any sense of closure to representation, identity or gender identification. Within theoretical frameworks that recognised the radicality of subject formations as processual rather than arriving fully-formed, the very grounds of representation were assailed. *En abyme* in fact became the *leitmotif* for a whole radical

politics of subject formation that emphasised the abyssal without-ground of an egoistic self as centre of the stable re-presentation of sensations to a rational "I think." *En abyme* is the condition of reversion of the gaze, or the chiasm of a synaesthetic encounter with sensate being. Hence, we find in Butler's 1997 *The Psychic Life of Power*, after accounting for a body of French theory from the 1970s and 80s, a chapter titled "Refused Identification" in which she deliberately unravels some of the basic tenets of Freud's understanding of gender formation to pose heterosexual gender identity as constituted on a prohibition and melancholic loss of homosexual desire: "Heterosexuality is cultivated through prohibitions, and these prohibitions take as one of their objects homosexual attachments, thereby forcing the loss of those attachments" (Butler, 1997: 136-137). The argument is complex and well sustained though cannot be reproduced here.

I work between the legacies of a 'normalisation' of identity through mechanisms of essential masculine desire, and what theorists such as Butler point to, in subversions and refusals of identification. I want my audience to recognise the ambivalence that constitutes their selves-in-process in this. The 'new woman' struggles in her conflict between models of socialisation that see her existing for men and being independent women. Darcy and Sarah are both on their own. Darcy shows us in the scene with David, previously discussed, that she watches herself but that she presents herself to this man without a field of adjustment. We are aware of a degree of performance on Darcy's part designed for her own viewing. In scenes with Sarah we observe levels of change as she prepares to encounter Peter, the man she meets during the course of the story. Sarah makes certain adjustments to match her own notion of what a man might find attractive about her. She is engaging in a degree of self-objectification. Yet her way of viewing herself is through her idea of what a man sees. Each woman engages in a *performance* of herself, the *en abyme* of her becoming-self without ground.

In the following scene, Darcy offers strategic advice to Sarah on how to present as a 'sexual being'. This scene challenges the audience's understanding of Darcy and Sarah. The story has directed them to see Darcy as androgynous, expressive in her dress and having a quality of performance that creates the image of someone who is unconstructed in her dealings with people. In this scene she reveals that she is capable of re-identifying herself in a calculated way to appeal to men. Sarah reveals her masquerade as being just that, a masquerade for. Although she wears the costume of her masquerade, she lacks the behaviour that will make it effective. Many theorists have discussed 'masquerade'. Anneke Smelik expresses it most simply: "by wearing femininity as a mask, the female spectator can create the necessary difference between herself and the represented femininity on the screen" (Smelik, 1999: 4).

INT. DARCY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Darcy is lying on her side in a large bed watching Sarah. Sarah is sitting in the overstuffed chair by the window, she is wearing last night's sexy little dress and her long stocking covered legs are resting on the window sill in front of her. Darcy notices

Sarah's hands, her fingers caught in her unruly mass of hair. She watches Sarah shake a little as if she is cold. Sarah meets Darcy's gaze.

DARCY – You woke me up. You have to talk to me.

Darcy continues to watch Sarah. She glances down at Sarah's perfect stilettos discarded on the floor.

DARCY - Where have you come from?

SARAH - A hotel.

DARCY - Who else was there?

SARAH - (Smiling) A Lovely Irish man.

They exchange glances.

DARCY - You couldn't wake up with him could you? But you really liked him and now you're wondering how he'll know.

SARAH – It's pathetic isn't it?

DARCY – Little bit.

I hope that this scene will cause the audience to speculate on whether Darcy is cynical or wise about the business of 'getting a man'. The decisions I have taken in characterising Darcy and Sarah are influenced by political objectives and objectives of realism relating to behaviour. The story implicates Sarah as a litigator in the Maori Land Court, characterising her as a woman of independent thought and significant ability. Her field of advocacy—indigenous land rights—operates in political resonance with issues of feminism. We recognise, for example, that feminist film theory in the 1970s particularly concerned gender construction and the marginalisation of women. By the 1980s, with theorists such as Homi Bhabha, those concerns widened to include political representation of race. Race and gender politics in film expanded to be concerned with the normalisation of gender in heterosexual constructions and the marginalisation of gay and lesbian cultures.

We recognise the current synchrony of political registers in Sharon Lin Tay's recent *Women on the Edge: Twelve Political Film Practices* (2009). There is something worth mentioning with respect to Tay's methodological approach to assaying women's cinema. Like many current theorists, she draws away from the legacies of Mulvey and psychoanalysis altogether, offering a comment from the American film theorist, Patricia Mellencamp. In relation to Mulvey's earlier insistence on an unassailable male gaze, Tay suggests: "As a result, feminist film theory got led down what Patricia Mellencamp described as 'the garden path of theory' with psychoanalysis and lost its focus on women's filmmaking as a political practice in film culture" (Tay, 2009: 8). She is quoting Mellencamp from "Five Ages of Film Feminism," (in Jayamanee, 1995: 24). It is not that Tay escapes a theoretical path. She exchanges Deleuze for Lacan, but in doing so suggests something interesting. Women's cinema does not need to constitute itself on the basis of a 'new' ground or essentialism. Rather, she borrows what Deleuze has defined as a 'minor' cinema or a 'minor' literature or a 'minor' philosophy. Within the frameworks of a dominant cinema, literature or philosophy, there are those whose practices sit neither quite outside nor quite inside. Those practitioners do not particularly aim to 'write' or 'make' outside the tradition but their works are

uncomfortably accommodated within. Referring to the work done by Alison Butler, Tay notes: “In her survey of women’s cinema, Alison Butler applies Deleuze’s notion of minor cinema to feminist filmmaking practices. In order to circumvent the difficulties of difference (or the dangers of marginalisation), Butler writes that ‘women’s cinema is not “at home” in any of the host cinematic or national discourses it inhabits, but that it is always an inflected mode, incorporating, reworking and contesting conventions of established traditions’” (Tay, 2009: 24). Tay concludes with a quote from Deleuze’s *Cinema 2 — The Time-Image*:

Female authors, female directors, do not owe their importance to a militant feminism. What is more important is the way they have produced innovations in this cinema of bodies, as if women had to conquer the source of their own attitudes and the temporality which corresponds to them as individual or common gest. (Deleuze, 1989: 196-197, quoted in Tay, 2009: 25)

With respect to the screenplay, issues of indigenous cultures and women’s identity have a history of marginalisation from mainstream political concern. Thus, Sarah presents herself in the workplace in a costume involving the feminine, the sexual, and the authoritative. This characterisation plays out Joan Rivière’s psychoanalytic research: “that women who find themselves in a male position of authority put on a mask of femininity that functions as compensation for their masculine position” (Smelik, 1999: 5) Darcy, as a character, operates in an opposite way to Sarah. She is concerned with her own imaginative outcomes as a pianist and composer in advance of her relationship with her child. She views the needs of her daughter, Zoe, in a clinical and non emotive way thereby challenging the essentialist notion of mothering — that women are born to do it. Darcy wasn’t.

To Investigate Feminine Narratives

I would like to write like a painter. I would like to write like painting.
The way I would like to live. Maybe the way I manage to live, sometimes. Or rather:
the way it is sometimes given to me to live, in the present absolute.
In the happening of the instant.
Just at the moment of the instant, in what unfurls it, I touch down then let myself slip
into the depth of the instant itself.

This is how I live, this is how I try to write. The best company for me is she or he who
is in touch with the instant, in writing. (Cixous, 1991: 104)

If I *dream* of writing like painting, then screenwriting is action-painting, concerned essentially with the time, movement, power of language to dissolve its own substantial matter or perhaps, more accurately, to become ‘dross’ in the making of masterpieces, eclipsed in its auto-transmutation as cinematic instants. Such transmutation would be that ‘it is happening’ of the eventing of existents in their becoming-cinematic bodies.

One senses writing for Cixous harbours not simply a sensibility of such 'happening' but more acutely, a political necessity of the instant of (my) becoming. I want to say something about narrative, structure and the making of a screenplay in the light of what is more generally cited as *Écriture Feminine*, a locale of feminist writing we recognise particularly with Cixous but also with the French philosopher Luce Irigaray. French Feminism, particularly Irigaray, Cixous and Julia Kristeva challenge women to write their *unconscious* knowledge and their desires. The feminist theorist and authority on *écriture féminine*, Susan Sellars, writes:

That a new language will come through women's desire, inscribing the proximity, fluidity and multiplicity characteristic of the exchange between women rather than the masculine insistence on 'identity-to-self'. Irigaray believes that through this means women's writing will resist and explode the 'proper' terms and 'well-constructed forms' of conventional structures ... (Sellars, 1991: 135)

In her "Introduction" to *To Speak is Never Neutral* (2002), Irigaray notes with respect to writing's bodily enactments, in the face of a 'scientific' discourse of neutralised passivity: "And my formation as subject results from the impact of other bodies, of matter foreign to me. In refusing the imperialism of the 'I' that is the paradigm of all speaking subjects, or of the neuter 'one,' or an impersonal 'it,' I acknowledge the ways in which I have been affected" (Irigaray, 2002: 3). To originate in the ways of the French feminists means working outside conventions of film script writing and dramatic form. *En Abyme* is not constructed around a three-act structure but rather in a circular shape where each quarter finishes with a dialogue between Sarah and Darcy and the beginning and the ends are the same. The story momentum, forward or backwards, comes out of the daily habits and the habits of a friendship between the two women. The events of the story do not collide to create conflicts that propel the plot. Rather, the inner conflicts of the characters are revealed in the decisions they take and it is the impact of these decisions that constitutes the plot's developments. The story offers events that are connected to the revelation of character desire and subjectivity. The context of the narrative is a domestic world inhabited by women, creating a picture of the long-term friendships between women being of equal importance as those of kinship connections.

The women characters are independent and live without men. Darcy, the protagonist, is a musician, who lives inside the synaesthetic imagery that her mind creates to accompany the music she plays. This image layer reveals her inner 'poetics'. Darcy is not an easy person to like. She offers none of the accoutrements of the conventional women's lead. She is neither beautiful nor charming. At the beginning of the story, Darcy is diagnosed with a terminal brain tumour. She takes the decision to tell no one and to make provision to take her own life through a fatal overdose. Darcy wants to repair her relationship with her daughter, Zoe, but she is not a woman for whom mothering is 'natural'. She is an anti-heroine and she is both the narrative's protagonist and antagonist.

The following is a scene between Darcy who is 44, and her 25 year-old-daughter, Zoe, a medical student in her final year of study.

INT. DARCY'S STUDIO - DAY

Darcy's fingers move across the keyboard.

A wood pigeon flies slowly and majestically across the window, the sound of the bird's heavy wings catches Darcy's attention. The door opens and ZOE enters carrying a steaming coffee cup.

Zoe places the cup on the table and their eyes meet.

Zoe goes to leave the room.

DARCY - My shapes are changing?

A look of fleeting curiosity passes over Zoe's face as she turns back to Darcy.

ZOE - Your 'C' looks different?

DARCY - They're menacing.

Zoe moves towards Darcy and looks at her.

ZOE - Any headaches?

Darcy shakes her head.

ZOE - Do changes of light affect you?

DARCY - I never go out without dark glasses.

ZOE - How long has it been happening?

DARCY - Couple of weeks.

ZOE - Why didn't you tell me?

DARCY - I don't know Zoe. Don't take it personally.

ZOE - I think you should see a specialist. I'll find someone.

DARCY - I've got an appointment.

ZOE - (irritated) Then you're really just telling me, aren't you?

DARCY - Maybe.

ZOE - (over shoulder) Keep me in the loop.

DARCY - Don't be like that Zoe. (Under her breath) Fuck.

This scene is about establishing some of the subtext that exists in the relationship between Darcy and Zoe. I want to emphasise the bonds between language structures and identity structures, between, for example, narrative closure and identity confirmation, and between narrative fractures or dislocations and how we come to recognise institutional, even hegemonic forces, such as the family, as fragile rather than monolithic entities. Hence, the narrative arc of *En Abyme* does not aim to present a dislocation to narrative structure, just as it does not offer a radical alternative to our generally understood family structures. The alternatives are not breaks but fissures, what Cixous, perhaps, would call 'wounds'. In *Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing*, Cixous engages in an extended interview with Mireille Calle-Gruber. In response to Calle-Gruber's questioning concerning how, in Calle-Gruber's words, Cixous 'breaks' in the force of her writing, Cixous comments:

I did not follow you about the word *breaking*. Here is the end of language; it is a word that does not fit what I feel. Because in breaking I sense: irreparable. But there is wounding. The wound is what I sense. The wound is a strange thing: either I die or a kind of work takes place, mysterious, that will resemble the edges of the wound. A marvellous thing also: that will nonetheless leave a trace, even if it hurts us. It is here that I sense things taking place. The wound is also an alteration. Breaking, for me, remained in the domain of a less fleshy material. I see a stick being broken ... of course, one can also break one's bones, but then the sticks of the body repair themselves, and there is no scar ... I like the scar, the story. (Cixous, 1997: 16)

"The scar, the story" ... the wounds are storytelling. Theirs is a work of movement and reparation but also of further inflictions. This is how *En Abyme* progresses, from one working on the edges of a wound to another, not as a pessimistic or tragic account of familial turmoil but as everyday disjunctions of the ideality of orthodox realism. The movements and counter-movements between Darcy and Zoe, the woundings and reparations constitute a familial and narrative impetus that recalls the force of genealogical structures that at once enact and counteract gender imperatives as to the decidability of lines of descent. In a book-length engagement with the work of Irigaray as it relates to cinema, Caroline Bainbridge discusses women filmmakers from both mainstream and experimental sites of production. Concerning maternal genealogy, she suggests:

The need to trace a female or maternal genealogy is linked to the difficulty that Irigaray perceives in women acceding to subjective specificity on and in their own terms. She argues that women are trapped within the maternal function by the symbolic order and that this is partly due to the fact that they have no means of symbolising the relationship between mothers and daughters. (Bainbridge, 2008: 101)

Zoe is constantly looking for signs that her mother, Darcy, loves her. This scene shows that Darcy doesn't discuss her life with her daughter. Rather, she tells her about things that are going to happen after she has taken the decision. This is the way she has conducted her relationship with Zoe all of Zoe's life, leaving her for long periods. Darcy's relationship with Zoe is one based on a one-sided discourse and without any of the behaviour normally associated with the maternal function of this relationship.

My scripting approaches are not only focused toward originating material from a place of my situated encounter (or what Cixous might register as the 'instant'), but also towards an appropriation of approaches that will assist a female audience to find pleasure in the film and withstand some of the challenges that the script offers. To do this I have written my version of the 'wedding-scene', using cinema wedding scene conventions to increase a sphere of emotional response to the romantic iconography. As I have mentioned earlier from Claire Johnston: "In order to counter our objectification in the cinema, our collective fantasies must be released; women's cinema must embody the working through of desire: such an objective demands the use of the entertainment film (Johnston, 1973: 31). Johnston argued for women to "assert their own discourse in the face of the male one, by breaking it up, subverting it and, in a sense re-writing it" (ibid.: 4). Notwithstanding our encounter with Cixous's sensibility when it comes to "breaking up," in this she anticipates a certain postmodern preoccupation with appropriation, citation and rewriting. Her definition of women's cinema is based on the same methodological presuppositions as Anne Freadman's definition of women's writing (Butler, 2002: 11):

That any text is a re writing of the field or fields of its emergence, that to write, to read, or to speak is first of all to turn other texts into discursive material, displacing the enunciative position from which those materials have been propounded. I mean that 'use' can always do something a little different from merely repeating 'usage'. In an attempt to do something towards specifying 'women's writing', I shall suppose that it is

in the business of transforming discursive material that, in its untransformed state leaves a woman no place from which to speak, or nothing to say. (Morris, 1988: 3)

The story of *En Abyme* is one of a community of women and their concerns. The story is also one of a wider cultural perspective of indigenous peoples and the postcolonial process of reconciliation. Tessa de Lauretis describes alternative films: “which engage the current problems, the real issues, the things actually at stake in feminist communities on a local scale, and which, although informed by a global perspective, do not assume or aim at a universal, multinational audience, but address a particular one in its specific history of struggles and emergence” (de Lauretis, 1984: 17). Hence, *En Abyme* positions the issues around Maori land rights within a big law firm whose views on the issues move to accommodate their current client’s agenda. In this scene Sarah argues with a senior lawyer, Simon:

INT. SIMON’S OFFICE - DAY

Simon looks up over his bifocals as Sarah enters.

SIMON - We can’t argue Treaty principals in this situation. How would our other clients feel about that? It’s a can of worm’s, Sarah.

SARAH - It’s not a can of worm’s Simon, it’s the Treaty and its not going away.

SIMON - That’s my point, it’s not our constitution and we shouldn’t be arguing it.

SARAH – We need to be investigating these arguments vigorously. If we don’t we will have absolutely no credibility.

SIMON - I accept that. Where I have a problem is the development of arguments that have the potential to cost our clients.

SARAH - You can’t stop it.

SIMON – Maybe not, but I can rein it in here and make strong representation to you that you run the Maori department and not any other litigation.

SARAH - My clients can’t be defined by your rather narrow view of the needs of indigenous folks.

SIMON - This isn’t getting us anywhere Sarah and I resent it when you patronize me.

SARAH - (smiling) I resent it when you patronize me.

Sarah leaves the room.

This scene between Simon and Sarah shows the conflicts of ideology and commerce in an environment of mediating law. The issue provides additional context to the story and operates as a serial structure that opens to larger political and ethical issues, at once local, national and global. Professional and private worlds bleed one into the other, just as familial structures and those of non-familial relations fold, suggesting the fragile and wounded vulnerability of identities. Language, too, is not the assured of a having said, guarantee of communicative action, but a labile attempt at saying. Sarah appears in the above scene as both authentic voice and as becoming-masquerade of coquettish women. Ambivalence is part of her *modus operandi*. Indeed, the challenge referenced at the beginning of this section, for women to write their unconscious knowledge, is difficult because of the degree of awareness we each have about our ‘unconscious’ operations. Or, more acutely, the degree to which we contest the binary

of latent and manifest content in the first place, or the extent to which we say or contest that the 'unconscious' is structured by the phallus, by the locus of the signifier, like a language.

I have tried to work from another site or scene of meaning production, another *affective* location of the signifier. After some reflection, I have decided that my 'unconscious' has to do with mood and domestic landscape. By 'mood' I do not simply mean a reactive sentiment to a situated encounter: how I feel because this has happened or that has failed to happen. Rather, 'mood' in this case is that which discloses my situation to me: I am bored with the world, melancholic, ecstatic, passionate, full of longing, tranquil and so on. These profound moods constitute my plane of existence such that my world is disclosed here and now in such and such a way. Tomorrow this same world seems altogether different. The domestic is not simply the habitable to which I habitually return. It constitutes, before all else, the site of my mother, my longing for return, the site of all otherness that constitutes me as separated, opening me to difference. The domestic is the scar tissue of my historic journeying, sojourning my existence. As a mother, I create sets and installations that are used to 'facilitate' a mood, an exchange, or a performance. They are prostheses to the reparations of wounds, simulated sites of longing or return. I have written this into *En Abyme*. All the 'rooms' are relatively small sets, involving one wall of window joinery of various function and design. In the space beyond the window, a rear-projected world brings imagined wood pigeons in trees and large beds of summer flowers just beyond our touch. The sets are dressed with a layering of objects redolent with story meaning.

To give space to the feminine

My feminine is a visceral experience. It is how I frame up the world: what I choose to see and what I cut out. My feminine is a making room; it is how I construct aesthetic sheltering places in which to live and reflect. This seems to resonate with something Chantal Akerman says, quoted by de Lauretis, revealing a number of her approaches:

I do think it's a feminist film because I give space to things, which were never, almost never, shown in that way, like the daily gestures of woman. They are the lowest in the hierarchy of film images...But more than the content, it's because of the style. If you choose to show women's gestures so precisely, it's because you love them. In some way you recognize those gestures that have always been denied and ignored. I think that the real problem with women's films has nothing to do with the content. It's that hardly any women really have confidence enough to carry through on their feelings. Instead the content is the most simple and obvious thing. They deal with that and forget to look for formal ways to express what they are and what they want, their own rhythms, their own way of looking at things. A lot of women have unconscious contempt for their feelings. But I don't think I do. I have enough confidence in myself. So that's the other reason I think it's a feminist film – not just what it says but what is shown and how it's shown. (De Lauretis, 1987: 132)

Akerman wants to give space to the feminine in the daily gestures of women. All of her films have an acute encounter with habitable space, how it is occupied, gestures and

rituals of that occupation and visceral moods that reveal a time of spatial encounter. Her 1972 films, *Chambre* and *Hotel Monterey* are extended filmic 'meditations' on the details of spatial encounter, while her 'masterpiece' in this is her 1975 *Jeanne Dielman 23, quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles*. For three hours and twenty minutes we encounter the detailed and highly repetitive rituals of living of Jeanne. Following on from *Je Tu Il Elle* (1975), the film engages in the border region of performance and living, depicting, for example, in real time the preparation and consumption of a meal. Ivone Margulies notes:

What is familiar and domestic, the film reveals as strange. In public appearances, the filmmaker has often discarded any direct equation of Jeanne's quotidian chores with "woman's repression under patriarchy," explaining that these were loving gestures she was familiar with as she observed intently her mother and aunt making a bed, preparing food. Despite this statement, protective of her own familiar memories, in the film Akerman insists on a haunting contamination of scene by ob-scene. (Margulies, 2009: n.p.)

While my cinema does not engage the same structures as Akerman's with respect to how she works with extreme duration and blocks of time, radical stasis and repetitions, my styles of engagement have a similar attention to gestures that conventional realist narratives bypass. The accumulation of these gestures describes the contours or isobars of a feminine intensity expressive of plot movement. In this sense, and like Akerman, I aim less for a psychology of character as motivating driver than the surface touches of gestures, less interior monologues, turmoils or psychic encounters than somatic registers of manifesting a way of existing. Akerman is not afraid to show these gestures of the everyday with an emotional recognition. As Mary Ann Doane notes: "Femininity is constructed as closeness, as an overwhelming presence – to – itself of the female body" (Doane, 1991: 22). Most interesting for me is that Akerman directs women to find formal ways of expressing feminine 'essences' where 'essence' is recognised as material substantiality that undergoes infinite modifications and not some ideal form as permanent mould.

With *En Abyme* I incorporated as a pivotal locale or 'room', a swimming pool built by Darcy's father as his grand gesture to the sub-tropical paradise he found himself in. The pool is now old, scar tissue or memory trace of a small utopia or idyllic world, crossing generations and genders. In many respects it is immersive and tactile restitution of patriarchy's legacy for Darcy. Nearly thirty years after his death, his daughter and granddaughter and their friends use this place to share with each other their most personal thoughts. The women in the story use the pool exclusively. It is a woman's world. In the following scenes Darcy uses the pool, which is the habit of her every morning. The first scene is the first in the film, and the second, the last scene.

EXT. POOL - SUNRISE

A night sky lightens over a lush green garden. The green reflects into the black water of the pool. Darcy wrapped in a white robe sits in a chair listening to the dawn chorus of birds and watching the light change. She stands up and slips out of her robe, she walks to the edge of the pool and dives in.

She swims up and down the pool.

EXT. DARCY'S POOL - SUNRISE

Darcy admires the dawn as she walks around the pool, listening to the birds. She dives into the pool and swims up and down.

The birds are singing as she swims. Darcy slides her arms into her large white robe and pulls the belt tightly around her.

Two wood pigeons fly across the garden.

Darcy pulls the robe closer still as she settles into her chair.

She looks around the garden.

Time passes.

Darcy is motionless in her chair.

The water and the women's bodies merge at the surfaces of skin. This place is epidermal, a chiasmatic cross-over of sensations, sensibility and the plastic contours of the temporality of cinema. The plane of the skin tells of age, ethnicity and beauty and as the water laps up against the skin, the water reacts to the quick movements of the young or of emotion caught in the water, and then seen in the ripples as they move further and further away, creating great portals like an eye to the soul. I love looking. I love my eye. I love the frame that I compose around what I see. That is my feminine. Yet I do not recognise in this love of the eye a scopophilia, a contained and obsessive look. This love of the eye is a caress of things, coming from a fundamental mood that opens my horizons, opens my hands.

To embrace the other — a place of longing

Feminist film theory, in its arc of investments in psychoanalysis and phenomenology, has had to come to terms with competing definitions of the constitution of otherness. In some respect, both psychoanalysis and phenomenology in their own ways serve to complicate Hegelian dialectics in its understanding of identity coming from the place of the other. For psychoanalysis, that 'place' is split as the subject of enunciating never coincides with the enunciating subject. This split constitutes the economy of a lack or loss never fully recuperated, though managed by recognition of the difference between others and the Other, between the Other as a symbolic dimension of language as law, as "The Name of the Father and phallic signifier, and an other, whose primary encounter is one's mother. The phallus is precisely the signifier without signified, the constitution of the formation of the logic of desire as that which can be never filled.

Hence "I" am most fully realised as a signifier in language before I am myself bodily realisable. Phenomenology will come to encounter another way of passing to the real of existence than through the true word of the Symbolic dimension of language. It will not maintain the distinction of drives, localised somatically as scopic, oral, anal and so on. It will complicate further how a psychoanalytic economy defines the psyche/soma relation. Hence the synaesthesia emphasised by Merleau-Ponty, and an affective world

of sensations as surface libindial expenditures rather than drives internal to an organism. We recognise in the writings of Sobchack and Marks a rethinking of the empiricism of film experience: "Experimental filmmakers have been exploring the relationships between perception and embodiment for years, offering a mimetic alternative to the mainstream narrativisation of experience" (Marks, 2000: 215).

Cinema is a mimetic medium, capable of drawing us into sensory participation with its world even more than is written language (Marks, 2000: 214).⁸ By appealing to one sense in order to represent the experience of another, cinema appeals to the integration and commutation of sensory experience within the body (ibid.: 222). I want to briefly discuss two important scenes in the film that show how 'otherness' constitutes itself in a longing that is divided between an "I" that is fragile and unstable and a "you" that is met as sensate touch rather than as scopic fulfilment. The first involves Darcy; the second involves Sarah. In the following scene, the connection between Darcy hearing and seeing her music is shown.

INT. DARCY'S STUDIO - DAY

Darcy is at the keyboard. She appears troubled, she continually stops and starts, her hands floating above the keyboard as she stares at nothing. We now see from Darcy's point of view. She begins to play again and when she looks up from the keyboard the room in front of her is filled with a sea green filter, that she sees when she is playing in the key of B flat. As Darcy plays, opaque forms in various shapes appear in the sea green mist, one for each of the notes she is playing. They sharpen and then fade as notes are replaced with others. Darcy reacts sharply to the ink blue shapes that are infiltrating her normal gentle opaque forms. She repeats the notes that are producing these rogue shapes and watches as they multiply. She begins to play with an increasing focus and strength, creating a wall full of blue ink shapes.

Behind her screen and shapes a seven year old girl, ISSY, who seems to have come out of nowhere, is watching. Darcy, now aware of Issy, keeps playing, allowing the tempo and emotion to lighten. The notes become sparer and sparer. Until finally the emotion is gone and the notes exist around Darcy's voice as she now speaks to Issy.

DARCY - Does your mother know you're here?

Issy nods. Darcy now begins to punctuate her words with notes.

DARCY - Are you sure?

Issy nods again showing no expression.

DARCY - Are you really sure?

Issy nods, now looking cross.

DARCY - Just to make absolutely sure, why don't you go and tell her that you and I are having lunch together.

ISSY - (thinking it over) Okay.

Issy runs out of the door. Darcy smiles to herself.

⁸ Mimesis, from the Greek, *mimeisthai*, to imitate, suggests that one represents a thing by acting like it. Mimesis is thus a form of representation based on a particular, material contact at a particular moment (Marks, 2000: 138).

This last scene was written to be interpreted across sound and image and to encompass a performance that takes Darcy from panic, as she sees the impact of her tumour on the workings of her mind, to calm as she reacts to the presence of Issy in the tumultuous world of her music. Darcy brings the music and herself back to a place from which she can emotionally deal with a young child. The relationships between the characters and the context of the story set up an exploration of desire. In the following scene, Sarah watches Peter sleep.

INT. SARAH'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Sarah is standing at the end of the bed holding a peach watching Peter sleep. She's paying close attention to him, to his body, his arm is outstretched across the crisp white of the sheet, she follows the line of his arm up to his shoulder as if she wants to remember this moment forever.

He opens his eyes to find her watching him, he holds out his hand to her. She takes it and they fold into a kiss.

PETER - What are you thinking?

She looks into his eyes and she moves closer, they kiss again. He smiles at her and they say nothing. Peter gets out of bed and grabs a kimono hanging on the door.

PETER (over shoulder) I'm going to look at your kitchen now.

He leaves the room in the dusky pink silk gown.

Sarah stays in the bed thinking about the moment – it came and now it's gone, what does it mean?

In this scene we see Sarah for a moment leave herself as she shows herself capable of love. This is a fleeting moment and is designed to show the poetic moment of Sarah in this film. It is the only one. A 'poetic' approach to the writing of film texts and the making of a film would well encompass Cixous's concept of *écriture féminine* which describes: "a writing ... without you, without I, without law" (Cixous, 1991: 138). Sellers comments further on this: "The writer's attempts to deconstruct his all powerful, all-knowing 'I' and to include the other — of the signifying function, the body, objects, other people — will explode conventional notions of character as a stable, unified construct whose actions and behaviour can be predicted, manipulated and made use of" (Sellers, 1991: 144). The articulation of longing needs to be integrated into the writing of any feminine script. One aims to create material that may be reviewed, as Anneke Smelik reviewed Marlene Gorris's *Antonia's Line*: "the life of the mind — mathematics, music, philosophy is erotised in the film. This is matched by the different kind of female desires" (Smelik, 1999, 14). This film speaks of a desire to have children, shows a women meeting the love of her life, and uses a cherry tree as allegory for an older woman's sexuality.

To create in a boundless space: the feminine auteur

The notion of female authorship is not simply a useful political strategy; it is crucial to the re invention of the cinema that has been undertaken by women filmmakers and feminist spectators. (Mayne, 1999: 97)

Auteurism privileges individualism and personal expression ... This particular aspect of auteurism is paradoxically close to a fundamental feminist belief in the importance of self-expression and its emphasis on the personal. (Cook, 1981: 272)

In discussing the constructions of identity and otherness, we recognise the political, ethical, even aesthetic value given to fracturing or 'wounding' the notion of an 'I' as egoistic self, as unproblematic space of intentional consciousness, as fully encountered to itself. Such a 'subject' has been the rational and micro-fascist encounter of masculinity, relegating 'woman' to the sphere of emotion, intuition and the irrational. Both psychoanalysis and phenomenology show the fragile construction that builds this masculine 'hero' of rational intentionality. Yet, in the face of all of this, as we mentioned earlier in this exegesis, is the emergence of 'auteur' theory, the attribution to a singular vision, identity, subject, to a particular 'I' the sole responsibility, ability and capability for a work's accomplishment. In the face of Barthes's authorial death and Cixous's poetics of a wound, there is a strategic or tactical recognition of authorial prestige. We mention Akerman by name, without actually providing the complexity of a situation, a collective, a collaborative group, a particular time, temperament, audience reception, distribution networks, critical articulations, journal sites and so on whose inter-textuality have constituted whatever we come to understand from time to time as 'Akerman'. In this sense, 'auteur' is a convenient fiction yet a necessary one that plays with the hegemonic sites of the naturalisation of cinematic celebrity as if the canons fell from the sky. This 'convenient fiction' construes a space of becoming, opens locales for women to belong, constitutes groups, movements, styles and receptions, all of which are fluid encounters, as minor cinemas with mainstream fields, names, institutions and economies.

There are many 'auteurs' who are conflicted over the hybridised relationship they have with their own personal cultural history and many whose work is shaped by a postmodern and postcolonial thinking. Pratibha Parmar, a British filmmaker and feminist critic, writes: "We are creating a sense of our selves and our place within different and sometimes contradictory communities, not simply in relation to..., not in opposition to..., nor in reversal to..., nor as a corrective to..., but in and for ourselves (Parmar, 2000: 377). 'Transnational' cinema is a term used to describe the work of filmmakers whose personal cultural experiences are hybridised and whose film product crosses cultural boundaries. Ann Kaplan describes the nature of a feminine home: "Women do not inhabit a space of the State as home; women rather inhabit a space of their family as home, a space of much more local relations" (Kaplan, 2004: 119). Transnational films are almost exclusively the product of a National Cinema, whose funding arrangements are a transnational medium, where production funds, casting arrangements, representational talent arrangements, location decisions and distribution are decided by the co-production agreement.

The films of women filmmakers, whether reflecting transnational, postcolonial or Diaspora, have much in common with those of the cinema of exile: "issues of

displacement, dispossession ... and a tendency for everything to take on a collective value" (Delueze & Guattari, 1986: 17). The cinema of women and the cinema of exile have both been described as minor cinema. For Butler, the advantages of this positioning is that "to call a women's cinema a minor cinema ... is to free it from the binarisms (popular/elitist, avant-garde/mainstream, positive/negative) which result from imagining it as a parallel or oppositional theatre" (Butler, 2002: 21). I am a transnational filmmaker with postcolonial experience of the emerging settler culture of New Zealand and of a childhood in Denmark. Within the film, my particular hybridisation is reflected in Darcy's relationship to Catholicism and her own secular position. In the following scene, a young Darcy speaks to Sarah about why she wants Zoe to go to a Catholic school:

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

A five- year old ZOE is playing on a summer lawn with another little girl, LUCY. They are playing with a big pile of dolls, placing them on top of each other as if they were building blocks, into a big doll tower. When the Doll tower topples they laugh and start again.

Beside the lawn Darcy and Sarah in their mid twenties stand watching and talking. We can't see them clearly but we hear their conversation over the little girls playing.

SARAH - If you don't want to go with her then why send her there?

(Pushing) Why are you sending her to a convent school of all places?

DARCY - Because I went and my mother went and her mother went and I want Zoe to know the same stuff as us.

SARAH - Okay, (thinking about it). What do I have to do?

DARCY - Take her to chapel on family days. (Hesitates)

I don't want her to go alone.

The little girls run to the scattered dolls and pick them up and comfort them.

DARCY - Are you watching this?

SARAH - Yeah...not sure what to think about it. I kind of like it.

DARCY - Me too.

The little girls are building a new doll tower with the comforted dolls.

I have made reference to a 'boundless' space of feminine auteurism. By 'boundless' I do not mean utopic or infinite but rather an understanding of 'space' that comes from a feminine/feminist sensibility as an horizontal opening to an affective cinema. I used the expression earlier of 'making room' in the sense that Akerman expresses a spatial encounter of women's gestures, what masculine 'spaces' of orthodox cinema overlook, find irrelevant or unwarranted in cinematic momentums driven by psychological crises, overt action or conflict. The 'boundless' is recognition of the everywhere of an everyday of women's existence as sensate materiality for a female gaze and a female pleasure. This recognition is neither radically other than realist narrative nor strangely obscure as in experimental cinema's syntactical and semantic structures. Rather, it is a cinema of the commonplace that opens another economy and sensibility of seeing.

Conclusion

A Feminine Vision

In beginning this 'Conclusion', I want to start with a fairly lengthy quotation from the American film theorist Vivian Sobchack from her 1992, *The Address of the Eye*. In this she wants to sum up 'contemporary' film theory in terms of what it fails most tellingly to address. For all its focus on the gaze and the scopic, it fails in a crucial way to address the eye. This citation, in a nutshell, comprises much of the trajectory of concern with feminist film engagements over the past twenty-five to thirty years:

That is, contemporary theory (most of it feminist and/or neo-Marxist in approach) has focused on the essentially deceptive, illusionary, tautologically recursive, and coercive nature of cinema, and on its psychopathological and/or ideological functions of distorting existential experience. Such theory elaborately accounts for cinematic representation but cannot account for the originary activity of cinematic signification. Thus, it is hardly surprising, if poignant, that, attempting to liberate female spectatorship and spectators of color from linguistically determined psychic structures and colonial discursive structures, psychoanalytically based feminist film theory and ideologically based film theory so often bemoan the impossibility of a "new" language to express the specificity of their excluded experience and the lack of an uncolonized "place" from which to speak. Articulated in various ways and amid a number of highly sophisticated arguments, what contemporary film theory stresses and decries in its variations on the metaphor of the mirror is the totalitarian transcendence of either psychic or ideological structures over the signifying freedom of individual viewers in their concrete, contingent, existential freedom. As perception and expression are confused with each other in the deceptive processes of the cinematic apparatus and the seamless and conventional unfolding of a privileged (if reviled) "classical narrative cinema," the possibility of dialogue and dialectical communication is suppressed and the film experience is seen as grounded in a false and sophistic rhetoric that essentially distorts the possibility of any "real" communication. (Sobchack, 1992: 17)

Sobchack is herself a little guilty in the summation of a totalising of what had been for twenty years a genuine series of debates by women theorists precisely on and as 'dialogue' and 'dialectical communication' concerning the counter-measures to a male 'gaze'. We recognise, for example, the chapter in the Australian feminist, Terry Threadgold's *Feminist Poetics* (1997) that details the critique of Mulvey developed by de Lauretis in her 1987 *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics and Cinema*:

This, then, was the position de Lauretis was contesting in *Alice Doesn't*. It explains her desire to demonstrate again the basis of psychoanalysis in sexual difference, the ethics of this discourse which positions and locates Mulvey's account, its inadequacy as a theoretical tool to deal with the very complex issues Mulvey's paper had raised. It also explains de Lauretis's need to demonstrate that meaning was nowhere near as fixed, positions of enunciation (the telling) and announced (the told) not so binary, the cinematic apparatus and narrative no so monologic, and the question of visual pleasure not so clear-cut (not so inevitably masculine and based on biology) as the psychoanalytic story would have it. (Threadgold, 1997: 41)

Notwithstanding Sobchack's totalising collapse of previous debate into its own seamless discourse, her point was to emphasise how phenomenology's understanding of 'perception' and 'expression' opens a space for understanding a subject's encounter of her world that does not pass through the hegemony of ideological formation or the Symbolic order, but operates according to something like the singularity of one's lived world, or experiential life-world. This reappraisal of the subject of experience has itself opened a myriad of new understanding of the affective possibilities of film encounter as liberating politics. In as much as the central concept of my project has been to study the texts of the feminist film theorists and to use this knowledge to inform the writing of a feminine feature film script, I have attempted to develop an 'affective' writing style that works against the grain of conventional screen writing, attempting to avoid a plot driven by conflict.

My approach was to have an initial and immersive period of study and writing with feminist film theory. I aimed to then write a first draft of the feature project, but by

every means to not write a creative work that translates theory into narrative dialogue. I wanted to avoid at all cost a didactic storyline as thinly veiled illustration of theory. Yet I did not want to lose sight of what I had gleaned from the developments of feminist film concerns at the level of theory and at the level of filmmaking practice. I then returned to feminist film theory to write the first draft of the exegesis, engaging in the exegesis with a close reading of segments of the film script. I then went back to the feature project to polish the first draft and then returning lastly to polish the exegesis and to write the conclusion. Out of this methodology came the writing of a feminine manifesto after the first period of study. This feminine manifesto went on to inform my own engagement with the theory, and to elucidate the process of the feminine script writing. My interest lay in integrating feminist film theoretical texts into feminine film practise discourse. I was also motivated to influence a post-feminist environment with second wave feminist activism in highlighting the lack of funding for women in global feature film production and to produce a project whose value would be in the discourse it created around that issue.

I have approached these feminist film theorist texts in the same way that Luce Irigaray suggests her texts be read, as noted by Margaret Whitford: "she is initiating a possible discourse between herself and her readers ... her work is offered as an object, as discourse, for women to exchange amongst themselves, a sort of commodity" (Whitford, 1991: 51). It is through the making of films with feminine influences and about things feminine that women begin to engage with feminist cinematic discourse. Alison Butler writes on discourse, citing Christine Glenhill: "the history of women as sign leads to a dead end as far as cultural struggle is concerned, whereas the notion of women's discourse allows for contestation and negotiation. The usefulness of the concept ... derives from the way that it cuts across the division between text and society and in so doing 'draws discourse circulating in society and in other cultural forms into the fabric of the film'" (Butler, 2002: 13). Janet McCabe views feminist theory as discourse: "that is, a discursive formation made from a series of statements within which, and by which, debates related to gendered representation, female subjectivity and spectatorship can be known" (McCabe, 2004: 118). McCabe goes on to say that as one particular theoretical position develops and refines thinking, another comes along to discredit and render its findings questionable if not irrelevant. It is through discourse that something becomes known (ibid.: 118).

My key focus was personal and involved challenging my practice as a filmmaker involved in feature film development. I had been in a six year period of development with a feature film project that had \$150,000 of public investment in development and then failed to achieve full production funding. The reasons for this are partly due to the collapse of the American Banks in September 2008. There was, as well, a change of management at the New Zealand Film Commission that involved a reversal of position in regards to the project. What I learnt from the experience of collaborating with producers, developers, script editors, distributors and many more, is that if your motivation is to make feminine work you will receive very little support for the developmental and experimental nature of the endeavour and that some of this work is

well suited to an academic environment where it can be discussed for what it is trying to do, and not for its failures against the preferential model.

The issue of essentialism became the field in which I experienced differences between practice and theory. I wanted to find a position on 'essentialism' as it influenced my investigation into the points of difference in the making and reception of feminine cinema. I felt disadvantaged by the absence of language that acknowledged difference and felt constrained by the nature of theoretical discourse. There has been very little written about the characteristics of the feminine in art and film. Mary Ann Doane proposed: "the resistance to filmic and theoretical descriptions of femininity is linked to the strength of the feminist critique of essentialism – of ideas concerning an essential⁹ femininity, or of the 'real' women not yet disfigured by the patriarchal social relations" (Doane, 1988: 219). I share Stone's view that essentialism "does not entail returning to the traditional, misleading anatomical, definition of womanhood" and "That femininity is socially constructed in diverse ways, but that all these constructions are united in that they build upon and interact with an individual's biologically female characteristics" (Stone, 2005: 142).

I became interested in understanding female audiences. This became a consideration of the space between the audience and me. My personal cinema tastes encompass art-house, the avant-garde and the mainstream. I am able to anticipate most genre patterning. Yet, it is precisely in this that a feminine film struggles for lack of a recognisable genre patterning to make connection with its female audience. An approach may be found in the creation of mythologies, in the case of *En Abyme*, a mythology around a friendship between two women, which informs the voided space between my audience and me. This could operate as another 'double entanglement' where a recognisable mythology around friendship between two women sets up an expectation of a film without genre patterning. The mythology of *En Abyme* could be expressed in the endless nature of dialogue between women friends.

It has been a challenge to write into this 'boundless space' of a feminine cinema, in foregoing my deeply ingrained conventions of script writing. *En Abyme* has a circular structure broken up by long *undramatic* dialogues between the two friends, Darcy and Sarah. There is no conflict; the characters accept each other's differences and inadequacies. Creating a dramatic piece without the driving force of conflict leaves the reader with the impression that it is strangely underpowered. This more observatory approach allows the opportunity for complexities of meaning being developed into a multiplicity of fields: character, theme, aesthetics, photographic, spatial concerns. One thinks of the cinema of Akerman here, and the ways that an 'underpowered' observational cinema of deliberate slowness, without the drama of conflict opens an audience to the recognition of gestures, details of colour, small embodied rituals, how a self is tactile before it is a thinking substance. Darcy is a very un-fundable heroine; she

⁹ Philosophically, essentialism is the belief that things have essential properties, properties that are necessary to those things being what they are. Re-contextualised within feminism, essentialism becomes the view that there are properties essential to women, in that any women must necessarily have those properties to be women at all (Stone, 2005: 4).

is too old, not attractive enough, big on talent and uncompromising in her feminine sensibilities. Creating real and challenging women characters for the big screen is the most fundamental part of creating cinema with difference for a female audience.

The feminine manifesto is a group of principles that can be used as a way into project research by women filmmakers wanting to strengthen the feminine in their practice. This method has provided me an invaluable interface with feminine film theory and the writing of a feature film script. The project exists as a challenge and a model of the infiltration and influence feminist film theory can have on a film project. The project should be read as discourse, and as a 'subjective' project consciously influenced to draw on feminine experience. My discourse, my commodity, is a script and this exegesis.

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