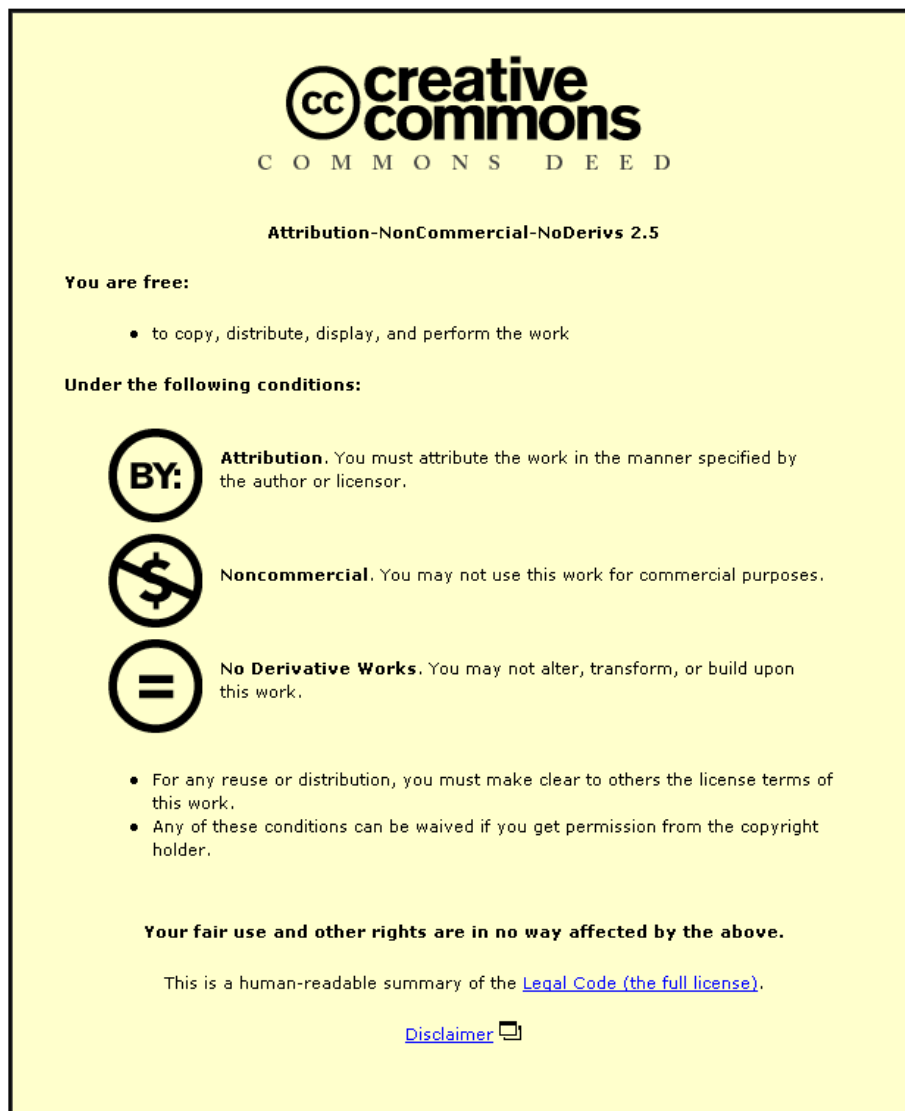


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**From Text to Practice:
Rereading Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' towards a
different history of the feminist avant-garde**

by

Mary C. White

A Doctoral Thesis

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of**

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Abstract

The thesis proposes that there have been a series of responses in visual practice to Laura Mulvey's article 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975) from 1975 to 2000. As Mulvey's article was and still is an exemplary text its contribution to film and visual theory is well documented, however, this has overshadowed any contribution the article has made to visual practices.

As Mulvey, at the time of writing the article, was an avant-garde film maker the thesis examines how the article emerged from a context of visual practice. The first chapter establishes the location of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', broadly summarising its arguments and the commentaries that proceeded from it, noting that many of these commentaries failed to acknowledge its emergence from visual practices. The next chapter explores the context of Mulvey's film-making practice, its content and location amongst other film makers and groups contemporary with it. Chapter 3 looks at the work of key feminist film makers during the 'visual pleasure' moment that immediately followed the publication of Mulvey's article and re-states their importance. The following chapter broadens the argument and examines two visual practices that were not film-based, photo-text and tape-slide, but which took up Mulvey's ideas strategically to explore language and sexual difference in the 1980s. The final chapter looks at how questions of pleasure became vital for a generation of black, gay and lesbian artists during the 1990s in response to, and even in rejection of, Mulvey's earlier work.

My aim is to highlight some key practices, mostly in the UK, exploring their heterogeneous nature through context and location, to show a network of practices where Mulvey's legacy can be seen through shared concerns and approaches. This reconstitutes a history and argues that Mulvey's work is part of a framework, which has a legacy to practice, as well as to theory.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to the following who provided access to research materials and resources: iNIVA Library, London; AHRC British Artist's Film and Video Study Collection, Central Saint Martins, The London Institute; British Film Institute Library and Research Viewing Service; Lighthouse Media Centre Library, Wolverhampton; Thomas Dane Gallery, London, Harvey Kreitman Research Centre, Tate Britain; The Women's Library, London, The MAKE Archive, London and Loughborough University Library.

My thanks also to Lis Rhodes, Steve Dwoskin, Judith Higginbottom and Professor Laura Mulvey for their contribution either through interview or correspondence.

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Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 - Locations	8
Chapter 2 – Contexts and Practices	22
Chapter 3 - Feminist Pleasures	40
Chapter 4 - Technologies	58
Chapter 5 - Embodied Others	79
Conclusion	104
Bibliography	109
Appendices:	
I Citation Index	147
II Correspondence with Lis Rhodes	148
III Interview with Steve Dwoskin	150
IV Interview with Judith Higginbottom	161
V Correspondence with Judith Higginbottom	163
VI Interview with Laura Mulvey	164

Illustrations (Chapter 4)

Figure 1 (between p. 64-65)

Marie Yates, *Image-Woman-Text* (detail), 1980

Colour photographs, photocopies, text

In RECKITT, H. *Art and Feminism*, New York and London, Phaidon Press, 2001, p.118

Figure 2 (between p. 66-67)

Susan Trangmar, *Untitled Landscape* (extract), 1985

Photographs

In Cambridge Darkroom, *re-visions: Fringe Interference in British Photography in the 1980s*, exhibition catalogue, Cambridge, 1985

Figure 3 (between p. 68-69)

Victor Burgin, *Possession*, 1976

Poster 43" x 33", original in colour

In GREENE, D. 'Burgin & Sekula, *Ten.8 International Photography Magazine*, No.26, 1987, p.31

Figure 4 (between p. 70-71)

Karen Knorr, *Belgravia* (extract), 1982

Photo-text

In TAYLOR, J. 'The Stamp of the Breed', *Ten. 8 International Photography Magazine*, No.29, 1988, p.28

Figure 5 (between p.73-74)

Yve Lomax, *Open Rings and Partial Lines* (extract), 1983-84

15 black and white/colour photographs

In LOMAX, Y. *Writing the Image: An Adventure with Art and Theory*, London and New York, IB Tauris, 2000, p.34

Media Resources Available on the Internet (Chapter 5)

Isaac Julien

<www.luxonline.org.uk>

go to 'artists', to 'Isaac Julien', to 'Looking for Langston(extract)'

go to 'artists', to 'Isaac Julien', to 'Territories (extract)'

Trihn T. Mihn-ha

<<http://kicon.com/taleoflove/preview.html>>

go to 'movie'

Introduction

When I first came to reconsider Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' it was as a result of my work as an artist working in video and photographic media. I had been aware of the article for many years being one of that generation of feminists who was informed by this as part of an approach to feminist art practice. An interest in the relationship between theory and practice which underpinned this position had brought me to return to Mulvey's article more than once over the years. Whilst at times not always convinced by aspects of Mulvey's thesis I was always convinced by the importance of the article and my interest then developed into a fascination with its endurance and its status within the field. What this thesis became was a way to uncover the relevance Mulvey's work has held for me as a practitioner.

My initial proposal was to look at how the article had moved on and affected theoretical work in visual culture. In order to gauge the textual response to 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' I formulated a search strategy which looked at electronic databases, paper indexes, CD Rom's and subject gateways. The most useful of these was the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (ISI Web of Science). Accessing this information proved to be a key stage in the research. The citation index for Mulvey's essay was in the region of nearly 1,000 references in journals alone and although I did not intend this to be a quantitative study it indicated the scale of the task of interpreting the accumulated textual effects of this material.¹ It confirmed for me that Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' is still widely influential and its place in the canon is assured. It suggested that the essay has remained sufficiently contemporary to still invite current debate and critique but, as Victor Burgin noted, it had also been 'idealized, fetishized' and 'reduced' to represent a set of ideas used for the most part in their diluted version as some of the journal articles referenced in the citation index briefly revealed.²

¹ Citation Index, 2006, Appendix I

² 'Idealized, preserved in the form in which it first emerged, Mulvey's argument has itself been fetishized', in BURGIN, V. 'Perverse Space'. In COLOMINA, B (ed). *Sexuality & Space*, Princeton, Princeton Architectural Press, 1992, p.220.

In the first instance it became necessary to establish and locate Mulvey's argument and the textual responses that had emerged from the article. This became the first chapter which is an overview of Mulvey's argument and familiar though it may be, reminds us of the main points of the article. This is discussed further by looking at the ways in which the main points of Mulvey's argument were taken up and developed in the debates on film and feminism that followed. At the same time I was carrying out a second strand of the search at the British Film Institute viewing films that Mulvey had made in collaboration with Peter Wollen over a nine year period from 1975 to 1984. Initially this was a task which I saw as providing background information however this then presented itself as a possible way to open up the debate around Mulvey's article. Mulvey and Wollen's films are not generally well known, nor in some quarters particularly well thought of and they had always been regarded quite separately from Mulvey's written texts. This was an important stage in the research and I now shifted to the view that in order to fully examine Mulvey's article a key element in the research was going to be the use of the filmic context. The material practice, and importantly the context, of Mulvey and Wollen's film making activity is less cohesive than the trajectory of Mulvey's article appears to be. It became clear that taking this into account could provide an approach to reading Mulvey's article that had not been previously considered.

As I began to search the material on film practices of the period it emerged that there was no single historical source of reference. A recent history of avant-garde film practice in the UK by Al Rees³ had left feminist film practice *in absentia* and it then became imperative that I reconstitute this history. I set about using archives in the BFI Library, London; the Women's Library, London; the MAKE archive, London; The British Artist's Film & Video Study Collection, London and at Lighthouse Media Centre Library, Wolverhampton to do this.

Rees's perspective was compounded by a revival of interest in this period of avant-garde

³ REES, A.L. *A History of Experimental Film and Video*, London, British Film Institute, 1999.

film making in the retrospective programme 'Shoot Shoot Shoot; The First Decade of the London Film-makers Co-operative & British Avant-Garde Film 1966-1976' in May 2002 at Tate Modern, London.⁴ In this forum many of the elisions previously committed in print were perpetuated verbally. This is not surprising given its precedents. For example, a triple page broad sheet spread copy of *Cinema Rising* of 1972 where of 26 photographs of film makers only 2 are women and formed a 'Directory of U.K. Independent Film-Makers'.⁵ These recent attempts to historicise avant-garde film making in Britain during this period present a unified narrative that overlook any problematic that existed and have continued to exist, their central focus seemingly to establish the credentials of members of this avant-garde.⁶ Interesting and repressed views, for example, the revolutionary ideals of Mike Dunford⁷ and the questionable political connections of Harvey Matusow⁸, an early chairman of the Film makers Co-op, are amongst those in Chapter 2 where the context of Mulvey and Wollen's film practice is explored.⁹

What emerged is that the film context in which Mulvey was actively engaged had never fully informed commentaries on the text of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. While this context has escaped the notice of many commentators it is an important one. Laura Mulvey confirmed this in my later interview with her where she agreed that her involvement in film practices had informed her views on the nature of avant-garde film that she had described in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'.

⁴ Curated by Mark Webber with Gregory Kurcewicz and Ben Cook. A Lux project, funded by the Arts Council of England, the British Council, British Film Institute and Esmée Fairburn Foundation.

⁵ CURTIS, D. et al. 'Directory of U.K. Independent Film-Makers', *Cinema Rising*, No.1, 1972, p.6-8.

⁶ There are other current approaches although they relate to film in the USA, for example, for Wheeler Winston Dixon, 'through a critical lens, common-sense reconstruction of the past dissolves into a melange of competing perspectives, a multifaceted, polysemic representations of scenes, actors and events' in DIXON, W. W. *The Exploding Eye: A Re-visionary History of 1960s American Experimental Cinema*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1997, p.4.

⁷ DUNFORD, M. 'Experimental/Avant-Garde/Revolutionary/Film Practice', *Afterimage*, No.6, 1976, pp.96-112.

⁸ 'Interview with Stephen Dwoskin', 2002, Appendix III.

⁹ Much of the contextual material used resonates with Mulvey's experience, as detailed in an interview that took place with Laura Mulvey in the last stage of this project. 'Interview with Laura Mulvey', 2006, Appendix VI

As the locus of my interpretation of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' had shifted from its response in texts to its emergence from and responses in practice I now approached the article with the notion that it had accumulated effects beyond those reflected in its position as an exemplary text within theory. The way in which 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' had informed visual practices that followed has failed to be noticed by all but a few commentators, Peggy Phelan¹⁰ and Patricia Mellencamp¹¹ being exceptions. Both Phelan and Mellencamp hint at the precedence set by Mulvey's work because it 'made possible' much of the work that followed, although neither fully explicate this.¹² This part of Mulvey's legacy to practice is described in Chapter 3 where a number of key feminist film makers whose work was identified with Mulvey's ideas is restated and revalued to become part of a 'visual pleasure' moment.

Following this logic of this interpretation I then set out to explore further examples of responses to Mulvey's work which by that time had begun to be embedded in a critical framework. Chapter 4 identifies a series of key practices and practitioners who took up Mulvey's ideas to explore sexual difference in the 1980's. The practices that are examined here broaden the debate to include photographic practices, both of which declined or disappeared after that period. The chapter observes tape-slide and photo-text, both of which were practices of transformation. The discussion returns to film in Chapter 5 to look at the work of a number of key black, gay, lesbian and queer artists and film makers to explore how Mulvey's ideas were hybridized in an approach and used to respond to questions of identity and pleasure in the 1990's. It is here that the project distinguishes itself from others, by proposing that Mulvey's legacy is to visual practice as well as to theory, and that it can be seen through several generations being first embedded and then hybridized into contemporary visual practices.

¹⁰ PHELAN, P. 'Survey', in RECKITT, H (ed). *Art and Feminism*, London, Phaidon Press, 2001, p.22

¹¹ MELLENCAMP, P. *Indiscretions: Avant-Garde Film, Video & Feminism*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1990, p.17

¹² PHELAN, P. 'Survey', *op. cit.* p.20

Methodology

Reading the majority of texts which commentated on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' it was clear that they had addressed only a limited interpretation of the article where thesis and anti-thesis unfold in a well documented trajectory. It became apparent that little consideration has been afforded Mulvey's simultaneous visual practice and how this may have been inflected in the article. At the time of writing 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Mulvey was equally engaged in a film practice with her collaborator Peter Wollen and so text and practice must be considered in fully locating Mulvey's ideas. 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' had not offered up its own context and so it has been necessary to reconstitute what Phelan has called theory's 'blind spot', the framework that exists beyond the object of the text.¹³ This contrasts with previous commentaries whose preference is to regard 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' as a free floating object. What is provided here is the context; the events and visual practices which surrounded the emergence of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'.

Here Michel Foucault's notion of genealogy is a useful way to think about these dispersed events. Foucault's genealogy is a notion that he developed, following Nietzsche, in the middle period of his work after the 'archaeologies' of his earlier work in *Madness and Civilization* (1961) and *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973) and was demonstrated in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality* (1976-1984). Foucault's genealogy is a way to look at histories which dispense with the search for origins, documenting events which may occur 'outside of any monotonous finality' and above all those that do not conform to any linear development.¹⁴ A genealogy can reveal events and factors that no longer observe a unified trajectory but show 'the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself' as Foucault describes.¹⁵ It is this consistency which has surrounded

¹³ PHELAN, P. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, London and New York, Routledge, 1996, p.1.

¹⁴ FOUCAULT, M. 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' (1971) reprinted in RABINOW, P(ed). *The Foucault Reader*, London, Penguin, 1984, p.76

¹⁵ *ibid.* p.82.

previous accounts of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' that this thesis speaks against. Adopting Foucault's method proves relevant to the task of accounting for the practices and events which not only contextualise the emergence of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' but those that characterise the key moments where responses to the article can be seen. This method suggests not least that its origins are numerous and animated beyond the text but go further to suggest that the text can animate a framework beyond its place in a body of theory. A Foucauldian approach that 'conceives of history in terms of plurality' is applied here to a history which offers a different version of events with which to reflect upon Mulvey's article.¹⁶

The question why one would return to reflect upon Mulvey's work when its effects on theoretical work are so well documented is a valid one. To offer yet another textual revision or critique of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' would be merely repetitive. Rather, an account which demonstrates its context and its legacy to visual practice can observe the elisions of previous accounts and, as above, offer a different way to think about this exemplary text. In the introduction to her collected essays *Imaging Desire*, the artist Mary Kelly comments that her exhibition '*Post-Partum Document*' (1976) was surrounded with difficulty and confrontation. When returning to look at her own archive she sees, twenty years later, a history that is 'taken for granted' and one wherein an elision has taken place around the 'effective force of that moment and, crucially, its repression'.¹⁷ Kelly's thoughts are specific to her own history but pertinent to the task of rereading Laura Mulvey's essay. The contribution that Mulvey's essay has made to film and visual theories is substantial, however this has overshadowed any contribution it may have made to the field of visual practice. Mulvey's own concurrent practice as a film maker is little mentioned in ensuing commentaries which have responded largely to 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' as an isolated text. This thesis sets out, in the first instance, to establish that context of practice and to begin to locate the 'force' of the

¹⁶ DANAHER, G. SCHIRATO, T. WEBB, J. *Understanding Foucault*, London, Sage, 2000, p.100

¹⁷ KELLY, M. *Imaging Desire*, Cambridge and London, MIT Press, 1996, p.xv.

moment.¹⁸ A way of establishing that 'moment' has been to talk to Laura Mulvey, in the Interview that forms Chapter 6, in order to answer some of the points of this thesis and to allow for her contemporary voice to be included. A number of other interviews and correspondences are collected in the Appendices, all of which provide specific information which are discussed as they occur in the chapters.

Following a Foucauldian model Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd have recently pointed out that bringing the past to bear on the present we can 'think our present differently'.¹⁹ The past examined here is a recent one and a full account of this period waits to be discussed, one which confronts many of the 'blind spots' that are in operation in the present. Mulvey's practice as a film maker is not highly regarded and frequently overlooked in preference to her theoretical work. The results of this research demonstrate how inextricably linked Mulvey's practices as both film maker and writer were and are. This project provides a model of that relationship between theory and practice, or more precisely between text and practice, and maps itself onto a broader and always contested field.

¹⁸ Ibid. p.xv.

¹⁹ GATENS,M and LLOYD,G. *Collective Imaginings: Spinoza, Past and Present*, London, Routledge, 1999, p.8.

Chapter 1 - Locations

'The exemplar instantiates "what the field is about": if it progressive, it shapes future work; if it has been superseded, it still must be acknowledged, attacked, quarrelled with. Essayistic and academic critics write in the shadows of exemplars.'¹

In 1973 Laura Mulvey gave a paper in the French Department of the University of Wisconsin called 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. It was published in *Screen* in 1975 and thereafter reprinted several times in anthologies in America and Britain before being published as part of Mulvey's collected essays *Visual and Other Pleasures* in 1989.²

Some thirty years later 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' occupies a central place as a key text in Film, Media Studies and Gender Studies reading lists. It is also seen widely as a pivotal essay in the Humanities and cited in disciplines as diverse as Art History, History, Literature, Theatre, Music, Lesbian and Gay Studies and Theology.³

¹ BORDWELL, D. *Making Meaning: Influence and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1989, p.25

² MULVEY, L. 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, Vol 16, No. 3, 1975, p.6-18; Reprinted in KAY, K. PEARY, G (eds). *Women and Cinema*, New York, Dutton, 1977; BENNETT, T. et al (eds). *Popular Film and Television*, London, British Film Institute, 1981; WALLIS, B(ed). *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, New York, The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984; MAST, G. COHEN, M(eds). *Film Theory and Criticism*, Third Edition, New York, Oxford, 1985; NICHOLS, B(ed). *Movies and Methods*, Volume II, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985; PENLEY, C(ed). *Feminism and Film Theory*, London and New York, Routledge, 1988; in GAINES, J.M. 'Review Article', *Screen*, Vol 32, No. 1, Spring, 1991, p.109; Collected in MULVEY, L. *Visual and Other Pleasures*, London, Macmillan, 1989.

³ For example see, BERDINI, P. 'Women under the gaze: A Renaissance Genealogy', *Art History*, Vol 21, No.4, 1998, p.565-590; ROSENMAN, E.B. 'Spectacular Women: The 'Mysteries of London' and the female body', *Victorian Studies*, Vol 40, No.1, 1996, p. 31-64; EDMUNDS, S. 'Through a glass darkly: Visions of integrated community in Flannery O'Connor's 'Wise Blood''. *Contemporary Literature*, Vol 37, No.4, 1996, p.559-585; KLAVER, E. 'Spectatorial Theory in the Age of Media Culture', *New Theatre Quarterly*, Vol 11, No.44, 1995, p.309-321; REEVE, K.K. 'Primal Scenes, Pleyel and Liszt in the Eyes of Berlioz', *Nineteenth Century Music*, Vol 18, No.3, 1995, p.211-235.; JACKSON, E. 'Death Drives across Pornotopia - Cooper, Denis on the Extremities of Being', *GLQ - A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol 1, No.2, 1994, p.143-161; LEYERLE, B. 'Chrysostom, John on the Gaze and a Term denoting the Subordinated Position of Woman as Spectacle and the Subject of Scrutiny: A new perspective on the writings of Chrysostom on

As well as being a work that has been frequently and widely cited, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' is a work to which there have been a series of responses, counter-responses, criticisms and counter-criticisms and one whose position is constantly being assessed. Amongst major film commentators Mulvey's work has great significance. Bordwell, for example, finds that her work on 'gendered representation' is exemplary, for McDonald it is singularly 'influential', while for feminist scholars like Kaplan it provided a point to 'follow' and for Kuhn was the impetus for much of her early thought on an emerging feminist cinema.⁴ Mulvey had begun what for many has come to be seen as the start of feminist film theory itself and Judith Mayne later concluded that much feminist work on cinema had been a response to Mulvey's work.⁵ As Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' is an exemplary text it frequently invites further acts of revision and, as noted by Tudor, the importance of Mulvey's argument is demonstrated by the fact that the 'literature is replete with attempts to summarise it and draw out its implications'.⁶

The project being undertaken here seeks not to reduce or undermine the importance of Mulvey's text but rather to cast it in a different light. It is necessary to begin by providing a broad summary of Mulvey's arguments in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' without attempting to offer yet another textual interpretation. A further discussion of the salient points of the article will then serve to illustrate the responses to 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' before suggesting how this project can be distinguished from them.

In summary then, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' used psychoanalytic theory to analyse film and Mulvey immediately declares that this is an approach that can be used

spiritual marriage', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, Vol 1, No.2, 1993, p.159-174.

⁴ BORDWELL, D. *Making Meaning, op.cit.* p.25; MacDONALD, S. *Avant-Garde Film: Motion Studies*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.81; KAPLAN, E.A. *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, New York and London, Routledge, 1983, p.2; KUHN, A. *Women's pictures: Feminism and cinema*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982. Kuhn's introductory chapter is titled 'Passionate detachment' (p.3), a quotation from Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'.

⁵ HUMM, M. *Feminism and Film*, Edinburgh University Press, 1997; MAYNE, J. *The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women's Cinema*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1990

⁶ TUDOR, A. *Decoding Culture: Theory and Method in Cultural Studies*, London, Sage, 1999, p.140

politically. Mulvey states that she intends to use psychoanalysis to show how film is structured in the patriarchal unconscious and to uncover the fascination that cinema holds for the individual subject, one which Mulvey constitutes as the male spectator. Central to her argument is that woman's place in the symbolic order is enshrined in representation and as a result her image is bound up in instinctual drives. In Mulvey's scheme the male spectator always bears the look while the woman on the screen is always subject to that look. The forms of pleasure at work in the cinema are identified by Mulvey as scopophilia, an erotic pleasure in looking, and an ego identification, one with the controlling characters on the screen. This is applied by Mulvey to examples from classic Hollywood film where an active male spectator looks at the passive 'to-be-looked-at-ness' of the female star. The 'male gaze' is therefore bound up in these cinematic pleasures; the look of the camera and the look of the audience at the screen are subjugated to the looks exchanged between the characters on the screen with which the spectator identifies. For Mulvey these filmic conventions invited intervention and the pleasures of mainstream cinema needed to be destroyed in order to resist patriarchy. I will now move on to a more detailed account of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'.

Psychoanalysis, Scopophilia, Identification

Initially, Mulvey proclaims her intention to use psychoanalytic theory as a 'political weapon' as a way of showing how 'patriarchal society' has affected film.⁷ Mulvey finds that previous writing about psychoanalysis and cinema in the journal *Screen* had not paid sufficient attention to the representation of women, and refers to the work of Christian Metz and Stephen Heath, whose work on language and film observes how meaning is produced.⁸ This is followed by a brief explanation of the Freudian conceptualisation of women's place in the symbolic order as man's 'other'. Mulvey points out the importance of Freud's analysis for feminists as a description of women's oppression. Following Lacan,

⁷ MULVEY, L. 'Visual Pleasure', *op. cit.* p.6

⁸ See METZ, C. *Film Language*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1974; METZ, C. 'The Imaginary Signifier', *Screen*, Vol 16, No.2, 1975, p.14-76; HEATH, S. 'Film and system: terms of analysis, Part II', *Screen*, Vol 16, No.2, 1975, p.91-113.

she also suggests that Freud's concept of the unconscious is structured like a language and can be used to examine patriarchy, language being a 'tool' which patriarchy itself has provided. Mulvey proposes that this might 'get us nearer to the roots of our oppression'. It was this aspect of Mulvey's thesis that Kaplan characterised as polarising the feminist film community, many finding the use of Freudian methodology unacceptable.⁹

Mulvey goes on to examine spectatorship which she had links to the scopophilia that Freud describes in *Three Essays on Sexuality* and later in *Instincts and their Vicissitudes*. Mulvey argues that while scopophilia at its extreme is a 'perversion' the conditions for viewing in the cinema conform to the scopophilic drive described by Freud. Viewers are magically suspended and separated from the screen, so allowing the viewer to become a voyeur 'looking in on a private world'.¹⁰ For Mulvey, this is a world in which viewers project their repressed desires onto the performers in the film. Mulvey aligns this with 'scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect', citing Lacan's ideas about how the child's recognition of himself in the mirror is based on mis-recognition and how this leads both to the formulation of the self-as-subject and to future identification with others.¹¹ Mulvey proposes that this is the start of an intense relationship between self and others which finds expression at the cinema, reinforced by the similarities between the mirror and the cinema screen. The experience of cinema, for Mulvey, suggests both 'the temporary loss of ego while simultaneously reinforcing the ego'.¹² The film also offers the viewer a series of ideals where stars of the screen act out ordinary situations. For Mulvey these two ideas, of scopophilia and identification are linked as structures in creating an 'imagined, eroticised concept of the world', one which can exist in the cinema, as opposed to one

⁹ KAPLAN, E.A. *Women & Film*, op. cit. p.31-33. Kaplan went on to rework the use of psychoanalytic theory in order to address the question 'Is the gaze male?' resisting other critical commentaries to follow Mulvey's article.

¹⁰ MULVEY, L. 'Visual Pleasure', *op.cit.* p.9

¹¹ *ibid.* p.9

¹² *ibid.* p.10

which is experienced in real life.¹³ These ideas, for Rodowick, became the start of questions of sexual difference and identification in film theory and although Kaplan them found difficult to prove, they were ideas that she continued to speculate about.¹⁴

Mulvey states that the illusion of reality in the cinema is based on a fantasy but that 'the phantasy world of the screen is subject to the law which produces it'.¹⁵ Returning to Lacan's concept of the symbolic order she argues that it is this that articulates desire - and that desire is born with language. The moment when desire and language are born is also the moment that the castration complex is born. This 'traumatic' moment is associated with the look which 'pleasurable in form, can be threatening in content, and it is woman as representation/image that crystallises this paradox'.¹⁶ Mulvey demonstrates this with examples of women in classical Hollywood to reinforce her point about pleasure in looking. In this schema women on screen will always connote a 'to-be-looked-at-ness'.¹⁷ Mulvey supports this claim by looking at Marilyn Monroe in *The River of No Return* and Lauren Bacall in *To Have or Have Not*. Both women have a sexual impact unified by two looks, that of the film viewer and the male character in the film. For Mulvey, the male characters 'controlling gaze' moves the narrative forward and represents 'the bearer of the look of the spectator'.¹⁸

Spectatorship, Pleasure

Arbuthnot and Seneca criticised Mulvey for ignoring strong female film characters and denying the pleasures of both the female and the male viewer.¹⁹ This was one of many

¹³ *ibid.* p.10

¹⁴ RODOWICK, D.N. *The Difficulty of Difference: Psychoanalysis, Sexual Difference and Film Theory*, London, Routledge, 1991; KAPLAN, E.A. *Women & Film*, op. cit.

¹⁵ MULVEY, L. 'Visual Pleasure', *op.cit.* p.11

¹⁶ *ibid.* p.11

¹⁷ *ibid.* p.11

¹⁸ *ibid.* p.12

¹⁹ ARBUTHNOT, L. SENECA, G. 'Pre-text and text in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*', *Film reader*, No.5, 1982,

later readings which attempted to reassert the importance of strong women on screen and female gaze for pleasurable identification.²⁰ As De Lauretis later observes, 'the notion of spectatorship has been central to the feminist critique of representation' and has continued to be an area of fierce debate in gender studies and lesbian and gay studies.²¹

Suarez notes the 'dominant heterosexual codification of spectatorship' in his analysis of Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* (1963), where he points out that a decade prior to Mulvey's essay Anger had represented male characters primarily as spectacle.²² Mulvey's argument for the centrality of the active male protagonist resists any contradictory examples. Where a woman is the main protagonist, Mulvey footnotes this or notes the homo-erotics of the 'buddy movie' in parenthesis thus signifying by her own admission her desire to present a discussion limited by points of closure.²³

Mulvey further describes the scopophilia of the viewer and his identification with the male protagonist, referencing *To Have and Have Not* and *Only Angels Have Wings* as examples of how the (male)viewer can 'possess' the female star in these films.²⁴ Mulvey's discussion then turns to the work of Sternberg and Hitchcock, contrasting the two directors to show how they illustrate both these aspects of representing woman. For Mulvey Sternberg presents woman as a fetish object, always displayed for the male viewer, but more importantly she finds an 'absence... of the controlling male gaze'.²⁵ In *Morocco* and *Dishonoured*, the dangerous fate of the female leads are displayed for the viewer while the male hero exhibits misunderstanding or lack of awareness. The opposite occurs in

p.13-23

²⁰ For example, STACEY, J. 'Desperately Seeking Difference', *Screen*, Vol.28, No.1, 1987, p.48-61

²¹ DE LAURETIS, T. 'Sexual Indifference/Lesbian Representation' (1988), reprinted in ABELOVE, BARALE, HALPERIN, eds. *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, Routledge, New York and London, 1993, p.151.

²² SUAREZ, J. 'Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising*: Avant-Garde Textuality and Social Performance', *Cinefocus*, Vol 2, No.2, 1992, p.23

²³ MULVEY, L. 'Visual Pleasure', *op. cit.* p.11

²⁴ *ibid.* p.13

²⁵ *ibid.* p.15

Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, *Marnie* and *Rear Window*, which for Mulvey not only employ voyeurism but position the woman sadistically as subject to the will of the male lead. Mulvey notes how Hitchcock's use of the 'subjective camera', particularly in *Vertigo*, allows the viewer to see the action through the male lead's eyes so that as the narrative unfolds he 'finds himself exposed as complicit, caught in the moral ambiguity of looking' as the male lead pursues his power over an increasingly passive woman.²⁶ For Mulvey, these films encapsulate sexual difference and demonstrate how 'active/looking, passive/looked-at' has been applied to man/woman.²⁷

Much of the initial critical response to 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' was directed at Mulvey's omission of the active female position. Mulvey famously followed her original essay with a reconsideration of some of her points in a response to this criticism. Her contention, in an 'afterthought' was that the female viewer can adopt a male viewing position but it is one which is in conflict, 'restless in its transvestite clothes'.²⁸ This view was supported by Doane, who offered a further analysis of female spectatorship, arguing that the female spectator is *consumed* by the image rather than consuming it, unable to distance herself from the image of 'woman'.²⁹ Ruby Rich argued for a less essentialist view, one which did not eliminate women beyond screen and audience, finding in Leontine Sagan's *Maedchen in Uniform* (1932) an 'exemplary work' of lesbian cinema.³⁰ Others were equally resistant to Mulvey's essentialist view of woman, which can exist only negatively in relation to patriarchal society.³¹ As already noted, during the 1980s the

²⁶ *ibid.* p.16

²⁷ *ibid.* p.16

²⁸ MULVEY, L. 'Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946)', *Framework*, 1981, p.37

²⁹ DOANE, M.A. 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator' (1982), reprinted in *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis*, New York and London, Routledge, 1991, p.17-32

³⁰ RUBY RICH, B. 'From Repressive Tolerance to Erotic Liberation: *Maedchen in Uniform*' (1981), reprinted in DOANNE, M. MELLENCAMP, P. WILLIAMS, L (eds). *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*, Los Angeles, American Film Institute, 1984, p.101

³¹ For example; HADDAD, L. 'A Visual Pleasure of their Own: A Critique of Laura Mulvey', *Cinefocus*, Vol 2, No.2, 1992, p.32-37 and WHITE, P. 'Female Spectator, Lesbian Spectator: *The Haunting*', In COLOMINA, B (ed). *Sexuality and Space*, Princeton, Princeton Architectural Press, 1992, p.131-161

question of spectatorship had become central for feminist film commentators.³² Further work on this by Stacey found the positions suggested for the female viewer of 'masculinisation, masochism or marginality' to be inadequate. In response Stacey proposed a complex model for female spectatorship arguing for a homo-erotics for the female viewer through readings of *All About Eve* and *Desperately Seeking Susan*.³³ De Lauretis argued for a female subjectivity which is not fixed, taking to task the centrality of male desire in Mulvey's work and laying the ground for questions of spectatorship in Queer theory in the 1990's.³⁴ Spectatorship remained central 'to the feminist critique of representation and the production of different images of difference' for De Lauretis as she cautioned against the 'impossible masculinization' of Mulvey's later 'transvestite' viewer.³⁵ This was also an issue for scholars working from a black perspective. Kobena Mercer found that 'the limitations of an aesthetic of "passionate detachment" prescribed as the antidote to the sordid filigree of voyeurism, fetishism and scopophilia' was hard to equate with the ambivalent pleasures of representations of black identity which cannot be dealt with adequately by psychoanalytic readings of sexual difference.³⁶ In 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Mulvey discussed alternatives to mainstream cinema and famously proposed 'the destruction of pleasure'.³⁷ Pleasure, for Mulvey, meant mainstream cinema and Hollywood, as she felt that this kind of film does nothing but perpetuate dominant ideas. For Mulvey this was not a moralistic statement but one which suggests her desire to intervene in ways which would uncover how 'psychical obsessions' are reflected in

³² Collected articles in *Camera Obscura*, 'The Spectatrix', No 20-21, 1989

³³ STACEY, J. 'Desperately Seeking', *op. cit.* p.51

³⁴ For example, DE LAURETIS, T. *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984. Later work included, for example, BAD OBJECT CHOICES(eds), *How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video*, Seattle, Bay Press, 1991; WHATLING, C. *Screen Dreams: Fantasising Lesbians in Film*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1997 where Whatling criticises Mulvey's approach as evidence of 'the heterosexual imperative of the psychoanalytic formulation', p.41

³⁵ DE LAURETIS, T. 'Sexual Indifference', *op. cit.* p.151-154.

³⁶ MERCER, K. 'Sexual Identities: Questions of Difference' (1988), reprinted in DICKINSON, M. *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain 1945-90*, London, British Film Institute, 1999, p.199

³⁷ MULVEY, L. 'Visual Pleasure', *op.cit.* p.8

mainstream film.³⁸ This point was pursued later by Jameson and other commentators unwilling to disengage themselves from the moral implications of Mulvey's view.³⁹ Mulvey felt that the Hollywood system was responsible for the 'manipulation of visual pleasure' and encoded to reflect the language of patriarchy.⁴⁰ Moreover Mulvey placed the image of woman at the centre of the 'erotic pleasure' of mainstream film and it is this 'pleasure' that she intends to destroy.⁴¹ In its place Mulvey sought 'a new language of desire' which would challenge the easy pleasures of mainstream cinema and new cinematic forms which would provide intellectual pleasure in transcending it.⁴² Mulvey celebrated the decline in mainstream film, suggesting that the 'passionate detachment' encouraged by avant-garde film would further that decline.⁴³ Some commentators, like Flitterman, did not share this optimism for the interventions of radical cinema, suggesting that 'the look' is part of the cinematic apparatus itself.⁴⁴

Mulvey distinguished her work from that which had preceded it by looking at images of women presented on screen for male viewer's enjoyment. She also defined cinema as 'the place of the look' as distinct from other kinds of voyeuristic entertainment because it can interpret 'the look' within various cinematic codes.⁴⁵ It is the way in which these cinematic codes are used and 'broken' that become crucial for Mulvey.⁴⁶ She concludes that there are three looks in the cinema; the look of the camera, the look of the audience and the exchanged looks of the characters in the film. Mulvey was not alone in her

³⁸ *ibid.* p.8

³⁹ JAMESON, F. 'Pleasure: A Political Issue', in BENNETT, T (ed). *Formations of Pleasure*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983.

⁴⁰ MULVEY, L. 'Visual Pleasure', *op.cit.* p.8

⁴¹ *ibid.* p.8

⁴² *ibid.* *op.cit.* p.8

⁴³ *ibid.* p.18

⁴⁴ FLITTERMAN, S. 'Woman, Desire and the Look: Feminism and the Enunciative Apparatus in Cinema', *Cine-tracts*, Vol 2, No.1, 1978, p.63-68.

⁴⁵ MULVEY, L. 'Visual Pleasure', *op. cit.* p.17

⁴⁶ *ibid.* p.17

optimism regarding the emergence of 'a new language of desire'. This was a view which was held by many of her contemporaries, among them Johnston , Kuhn, Kaplan, Cook and Gledhill.⁴⁷ Gledhill is convinced, as is Mulvey. of 'the possibility of radical representation for women's cinema', one which explores women's existence.⁴⁸

The way in which these debates continued to unfold are documented in detail elsewhere however the points above suffice to characterise the broad textual responses to 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'.⁴⁹ This serves to confirm that Laura Mulvey's article became an exemplary text of feminist film criticism and made a contribution to the development of debates on film, feminism and psychoanalysis, being cited either directly or indirectly throughout the literature both in, and beyond the field. However my intention here, as I have stated, is to move beyond providing yet another textual revision of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' and explore other ways to interpret its effects.

Practice

This thesis now begins to move toward a consideration of material practices, both those from which 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' emerged and those upon which it had an effect. As Peggy Phelan has observed in her discussion of performance, 'it may be possible to construct a way of knowing which does not take surveillance of the object, visible or otherwise, as its chief aim'.⁵⁰ In this way, by regarding Mulvey's essay as an object, one can explore the context surrounding the object, its effects and how it functioned. In doing so it may be possible to offer an interpretation of 'Visual Pleasure

⁴⁷ See JOHNSON,C. 'Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema', *Screen Pamphlet:Notes on Women's Cinema*, No.2, 1973; JOHNSON,C. 'Towards a Feminist Film Practice: Some Theses', *Edinburgh '76 Magazine*, Fall 1976, p.50-59; COOK,P. JOHNSON,C. 'The Place of Women in the Cinema of Raoul Walsh', in HARDY,P(ed). *Raoul Walsh*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh Film Festival, 1974; KUHN, A. *Women's Pictures* , *op. cit.*; KAPLAN, E. A. *Women & Film*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁸ GLEDHILL, C. 'Developments in Feminist Film Criticism' (1978), reprinted In, DOANNE,M et al, *Re-Vision*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁹ SMELIK,A. *And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory*, London, MacMillan, 1998

⁵⁰ PHELAN,P. *Unmarked*, *op. cit.* p.1-2

and Narrative Cinema' which hitherto has been submerged and, indeed, has been 'unmarked'.

In 1983 Frederic Jameson sought to reframe debates surrounding the issue of 'pleasure'⁵¹. Jameson points out that 1973, a date which is synonymous with the inception of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' is one which is 'charged with significance'.⁵² In Jameson's thesis this historical moment signified that the 1960s had ended and a revision of the period set in and produced a number of 'statements and disguised manifestos which all in one way or another repealed that period and its values and urgencies'.⁵³ Here Jameson reads Mulvey's essay as a statement which like Roland Barthes 'Le Plaisir du texte' (1975) reintroduces the 'problem of pleasure for the Left'.⁵⁴ Later in the same publication Mulvey is in conversation with a number of contemporary women film makers. The discussion is chaired by Griselda Pollock, who in her introduction to the discussion clearly places 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in the matrix of practices which address the question of pleasure. For Pollock, 'because of its author's simultaneous engagement in film making...(the essay) belongs in a network of practices beyond the purely theoretical and critical'.⁵⁵ At the start of her essay Mulvey described the role of alternative film as providing 'a space for a cinema to be born which is radical in both a political and an aesthetic sense and challenges the basic assumptions of the mainstream film'.⁵⁶ In 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' there are passages where Mulvey's knowledge of film making informs her understanding of the conventions of mainstream film. Kuhn also draws attention to the 'cinematic apparatus' and refers to how

⁵¹ JAMESON, F. 'Pleasure', *op. cit.*

⁵² *ibid.* p.5

⁵³ *ibid.* p.5

⁵⁴ *ibid.* p.7

⁵⁵ GLASS, D. MULVEY, L. POLLOCK, G. WILLIAMSON, J. 'Feminist Film Practice and Pleasure' in BENNETT, T. et al (eds). *Formations of Pleasure*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983, p. 158

⁵⁶ MULVEY, L. 'Visual Pleasure', *op. cit.* p.7

Mulvey evokes this to discuss its psychic structures.⁵⁷ This concern is one which makes a connection between her practices as writer and film maker, and reflects a contemporary body of theory about ideology and institutions. The concern with the 'cinematic apparatus' is described as by De Lauretis and Heath as not only the technical aspects of film making but its 'attempts to understand and describe cinema as a particular institution of relations and meanings'.⁵⁸ The Milwaukee conference (1978) brought together Jean-Louis Comolli, Stephen Heath, Christian Metz, Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, seeking to address the problems of film practice and theory by bringing both together in the same programme. What is notable about this event is that its gathering of film makers - Mulvey and Wollen, Comolli, Steve Fagan and Aimee Rankin and Peter Gidal - were also its theorists.

At the end of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Mulvey returns to exalt 'radical film makers' who are working to break down the 'monolith' of mainstream film.⁵⁹ This is the statement of a radical film maker and provides a context against which the main points of Mulvey's argument are made. Without her knowledge of and involvement in avant-garde film culture Mulvey's essay may not have taken the form of a polemic and may not have crystallised that historical moment. The essay described a *praxis* to which Laura Mulvey adhered in both making films and in writing texts. As MacDonald briefly observes of Mulvey and Wollen, 'the making of films has functioned as a means of demonstrating and elaborating speculations they have explored in written texts'.⁶⁰ This is an approach also described by Wollen as 'a cultural counter-strategy', which seeks to bridge the divide between theory and practice.⁶¹ The importance of this strategic position which both Mulvey and Wollen adopted can be found in some contemporaneous debate on the relevance of Brecht to the cinema. The debate took place in the journal *Screen* and

⁵⁷ KUHN, A. *Women's Pictures*, *op. cit.* p.79

⁵⁸ DE LAURETIS, T. HEATH, S (eds). *The Cinematic Apparatus*, London, MacMillan, 1980, p.ix; the following essays in this collection also describe these concerns, 'Discussion with Laura Mulvey', p.166-171 and WOLLEN, P. 'Cinema and Technology: A Historical Overview', p.14- 22

⁵⁹ MULVEY, L. 'Visual Pleasure', *op. cit.* p.18

⁶⁰ MacDONALD, S. 'Avant-Garde Film', *op. cit.* p.79

⁶¹ WOLLEN, P. *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies*, London, Verso, 1982, p.vii

continued at the conference, 'Brecht and Cinema/Film and Politics', at the Edinburgh International Film Festival in 1975.⁶² The Society for Education in Film and Television's journal *Screen* had become established as a major critical journal in the UK and, given what it saw as 'the undeveloped state of film theory', was at this point casting some doubt on the use of psychoanalytic theory having recently published articles by Mulvey, Metz and Heath.⁶³ The debate explored Brecht's relevance, as his work on film had been translated into French and English a few years earlier, and continued *Screen*'s search for methodologies to apply to film analysis. For example, the film *The Nightcleaners* (1975) had been seen by Claire Johnson and Paul Willeman as a clearly political film, one using Brechtian aesthetics which raised 'theoretical questions when compared to the dominant mode of making political films'.⁶⁴ However, the film was seen equally clearly by its makers primarily as a political 'tool' leading to action and they resisted its reading as an illustration of Brechtian aesthetics. Against this backdrop Mulvey and Wollen adopted a counter-strategy, one that worked on making films and writing texts, exploring the relationship between both practices.

While there is little direct reference in the text of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' to suggest Mulvey's practice as a film maker it is clear that she wishes to see a film practice which produces new languages and new pleasures producing a film viewer that looks 'with passionate detachment'.⁶⁵ It seems that Mulvey's intention in writing this essay is not just to produce new theory but also to produce new practices. However, whilst Mulvey's work has been seen in film theory as the 'springboard for much feminist film criticism', it has not generally been accepted that her work also had an effect upon visual practices.⁶⁶ This is

⁶² *Screen*, Vol.15, No.2, 1974 ; *Screen*, Vol.16, No.4, 1975/6

⁶³ BUSCOMBE,E. GLEDHILL,C. LOVELL,A. WILLIAMS,C. 'Statement:Psychoanalysis and Film', *Screen*, Vol.16, No.4, 1975/6, p. 124

⁶⁴ JOHNSON,C. WILLEMAN,P. 'Brecht in Britain: The Independent Political Film (on *The Nightcleaners*)',*Screen*, Vol.16, No.2, 1975/6, p.115-116

⁶⁵ MULVEY, L. 'Visual Pleasure', *op. cit.* p.18

⁶⁶ STACEY, J. 'Desperately Seeking' , *op. cit.* p.48

not so much an absence in Mulvey's argument but an oversight in commentaries which proceed from it. There are some exceptions; Annette Kuhn in attempting to answer questions about what women's cinema will look like uses Mulvey's idea of passionate detachment to suggest 'a "feminine" approach'.⁶⁷ Griselda Pollock also follows Mulvey's suggestion that the 'new visual pleasures' that have been generated by feminism are prompted by Mulvey's work to occupy a place on 'the other side of theory'.⁶⁸

It is clear that most commentaries on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' refer only to its emergence from and effect on other texts. The task here is to show that 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' emerged from within a context of film practices and that it then had an effect on film and other visual practices. Part of the task is to unravel the difficulties, confrontations and complexities of the moment out of which emerged 'the single most influential (and most frequently anthologised) theoretical article of the past twenty five years'.⁶⁹ Importantly then, for this we can no longer refer to the text itself to examine this 'network of practices'.⁷⁰ Instead the text must be regarded as the visible object and using Phelan's proposition uncover 'the blind spot within the theoretical frame'.⁷¹ It therefore becomes crucial now to look beyond the text to find where these contexts and practices are located. The next chapter looks at the context of avant-garde film making in London during the 1970s and at Laura Mulvey's practice as a film maker. With this, the work of genealogy begins to uncover a different history out of which 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' emerged.

⁶⁷ KUHN, A. *Women's Pictures*, *op. cit.* p. 65

⁶⁸ GLASS, D. MULVEY, L. POLLOCK, G. WILLIAMSON, J. 'Feminist Film Practice', *op. cit.* p. 158

⁶⁹ MacDONALD, S. *Avant-Garde Film*, *op. cit.* p.81

⁷⁰ GLASS, D. MULVEY, L. POLLOCK, G. WILLIAMSON, J. 'Feminist Film Practice', *op. cit.* p.158

⁷¹ PHELAN, P. *Unmarked*, *op. cit.* p. 1

Chapter 2 - Contexts and Practices

Having established the main points of Mulvey's essay in the previous chapter it has become clear that most commentaries failed to note that it had emerged from a context of visual practice. That Laura Mulvey was always a practitioner is not in doubt. Alongside her theoretical work Mulvey collaborated with film maker and writer Peter Wollen from 1975-1984, directing six films during this time. This chapter sets out to establish the context and content of Mulvey's film practice and starts to uncover a history of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' that has been overlooked.

Few histories provide an overview of avant-garde film making in the UK during the period with the exception of Rees and on the whole scant attention has been paid to Mulvey and Wollen's film practice.¹ It has been necessary to construct this context from archive material in order to tease out some of the strands of practice that were current during the period where this has been unavailable in secondary sources. In identifying the moments that preceded and were contingent with the emergence of Mulvey's paper 'Narrative Cinema and Visual Pleasure' in 1973 I will be examining 1970s avant-garde film making in London and observing the practices that provided a context for Laura Mulvey's visual *and* textual practice. The important point here is that Mulvey was *both* a theorist and a practitioner and *both* these aspects of her practice must be examined in order to fully explicate the context and emergence of the essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'.

Contexts

The question of audience and spectatorship can be seen as a defining theme in the development of avant-garde cinema in Britain and the development of audiences became

¹ REES, A. *A History of Experimental Film and Video*, London, British Film Institute, 1999. Other chapters on the period in the following; DICKINSON, M. *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain, 1945-90*, London, British Film Institute, 1999, pp. 41-45; CURTIS, D. *Experimental Cinema: a Fifty-year Evolution*, London, Studio Vista, 1971; LE GRICE, M. *Abstract Film and Beyond*, London, Studio Vista, 1977; DWOSKIN, S. *Film is...*, London, Peter Owen, 1975; O'PRAY, M (ed). *The British Avant-Garde 1926 to 1995: An Anthology of Writing*, Luton, John Libbey Media/ Arts Council of England/University of Luton, 1996, pp.101-121.

crucial for the emerging independent film network that began in the 1960s, as noted by John Ellis.² Increasingly the commercial availability of 16mm film production and projection equipment had a democratising effect on the establishment of an independent film culture in Britain and the development of an 'art cinema'.³ In the early 1970s there were broadly two strands of activity in British avant-garde film; the London Filmmakers Co-op, with its allegiances to the American and European avant-garde and the more directly political work of Cinema Action and the Berwick Street Collective, who were later represented by the Independent Film Makers Association.⁴ This latter activity was not restricted to London, as Amber Films, Independent Cinema West, the Merseyside Communications Unit, the Newsreel Collective and the North East Co-op all recognised what Dickson describes as 'the pressing need for new models of production and new styles of film-making' throughout the UK.⁵

The Independent Film Makers Association sought to establish a base for independent film-making in Britain and are described by Rees as a loose association of artists, political activists and intellectuals.⁶ Their concerns were broadly with the growth of an independent film industry, the distribution of film and funding policies. While being highly critical of funding institutions such as the British Film Institute and the Regional Arts Associations who were funding much of their initial activity, the Independent Film Makers Association sought to carve out a role as 'a group of activists working with and within cinema'.⁷

One of the groups the IFA represented, Cinema Action grew out of ideas generated by the

² ELLIS, J. *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982, p.262

³ *ibid.* p.256-258

⁴ REES, A. *A History*, *op.cit.*

⁵ DICKSON, M. *Rogue Reels*, *op. cit.* p.133.

⁶ CURLING, J. McLEAN, F. 'The Independent Film Makers Association, Annual General Meeting and Conference', *Screen*, Spring, 1977, p.107-117; REES, A. *op.cit.* p.91

⁷ CURLING, J. McLEAN, F. 'The Independent', *op.cit.* p.108

political cinema of Jean-Luc Godard and produced films which were shown in the workplace and alongside trade union activity.⁸ Cinema Action began in 1968 with Ann Guedes and Gustav Schlake, who had recently arrived from France, and toured venues with projection equipment in a van. The first film that Cinema Action showed to a group of workers at Ford's in Dagenham was a French student film of the May 1968 events. Godard, along with Chris Marker and Alan Resnais, had made a series of *Cine-tracts* (1968) filmed during the May 1968 riots in Paris which were subsequently shown to student and workers groups as a 'political organising tool'.⁹ Godard was developing a 'cinema that would embrace political action above all other considerations', and was part of the Dziga Vertov Group which made *Pravda* (1969) using the writings of Bertolt Brecht to illustrate footage shot surreptitiously in Prague.¹⁰ Similar strategies were adopted by the Film Work Group, Liberation Films and the Newsreel Group who sought to develop specific audiences for their films.¹¹ Their existence prompted the British Film Institute, very often seen by the film groups as their adversary, to comment on the dawn of 'a new cinema'.¹² Claire Johnson commented on the Berwick Street Collective's *The Nightcleaners Part 1* (1975) that it 'redefined the struggle for revolutionary cinema' bears out this optimism.¹³ *The Nightcleaners* is an account of the campaign to unionise women cleaners and used documentary footage intertwined with aesthetic devices to radical effect. Of the three versions made, *Nightcleaners 36-77* (1978) is credited to the Collective's members of Marc Karlin, Jon Saunders, James Scott and Humphrey Trevelyan.¹⁴ The film is divided into sections using the device of fading to black, over

⁸ BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE PRODUCTIONS, *Catalogue 1951-1976*, London, BFI, 1977, p.39

⁹ DIXON, W. W. *The Films of Jean-Luc Godard*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1997, p.103

¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 89, p.114-117.

¹¹ LELLIS, G. *Bertolt Brecht, Cahiers Du Cinema and Contemporary Film Theory*, Michigan, UMI Research Press, 1976, p.3

¹² BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE PRODUCTIONS, *Catalogue*, *op. cit.* p.63

¹³ JOHNSON, C. 'The Nightcleaners Part 1', *Spare Rib*, No.40 (1975), reprinted in DICKSON, M. *Rogue Reels*, *op.cit.* p.153

¹⁴ The only version available in BFI viewing services

which the next part of the soundtrack begins before the visuals are faded in. The film combines still shots of a woman cleaner, her home environment, footage of the picket line and the cleaner's family life with a voice-over by the cleaner, a union official and trade union songs. The film's pace is slow and much of the soundtrack is not synchronised however the film is a powerful portrayal of a black woman reminiscing about the night cleaners strike and how the experience affected her.

At the same time *Screen* was attempting to find a model British political film and *The Nightcleaners* served to become something of a 'cause celebre' for the journal.¹⁵ *Screen* was also largely responsible for exploring the relevance of Brecht's work for film analysis and was involved in a conference held in Edinburgh in 1975.¹⁶ During the conference Claire Johnson and Paul Willeman presented a reading of *The Nightcleaners* culminating in the view that *The Nightcleaners* is 'the most accomplished example of political cinema' in Britain and found that *The Nightcleaners* is a 'properly' political film when compared to Mulvey and Wollen's *Penthesilea*.¹⁷ Dickinson later concludes that both films were important, emerging from different concerns and being released within months of each other, both becoming 'enthusiastically' debated by theorists which was a rarity for British independent films.¹⁸

The London Filmmakers Co-op is seen, notably by Rees, to occupy a central place in the history of British avant-garde film of the period. Founded in 1966 by Stephen Dwoskin, David Curtis, Simon Hartog, Ray Durnat and growing from ideas about the Co-op ideal borrowed from New York, the early years of London Film Makers Co-op was influenced by the inclusion of ex-Andy Warhol Factory artists, Dwoskin and Peter Gidal.¹⁹ The Co-op

¹⁵ DICKINSON, M. *Rogue Reels*, *op.cit.* p.53

¹⁶ As discussed in Chapter 1, p.19-20

¹⁷ JOHNSON, C. WILLEMAN, P. 'Brecht in Britain: The Independent Political Film (on *The Nightcleaners*)', *Screen*, Vol.16, No.4, 1975/5, p.111

¹⁸ DICKINSON, M. *Rogue Reels*, *op.cit.* p.51-53

¹⁹ REES, A. L. *A History*, *op.cit.*

developed from a series of events and happenings which took place in the mid-1960s as part of London's developing underground culture. Films were shown at street festivals, in club venues and more regularly in an underground book shop, Better Books.²⁰ The London Film Makers Co-op developed its own structure and existed without funding until 1975. Reekie observes that the Co-op transformed itself from being part of underground culture to become part of the established 'fine arts' avant-garde with it acquiring a permanent base in premises in Camden in 1971.²¹

The Co-op fostered a heterogeneity of filmmaking practices and by the early 1970s filmmakers Peter Gidal, Anne Rees-Mogg, Malcolm LeGrice and Annabel Nicholson were prominent members. Parsons describes how filmmaking practices at the time differed between Europe and America, suggesting that there was a less didactic approach in Europe.²² The Co-op's concern was with structural film making; one that is defined as 'reflexive film, film about film, its own processes and structures'.²³ Many of these concerns were being simultaneously mapped out by North American avant-garde film makers, Michael Snow and Stan Brakhage. These experiments were added to by their developing concern with audiences, viewing, distribution and the relationship of the mechanisms of independent cinema to mainstream cinema. In keeping with their counter-cultural position as keepers of the avant-garde they made frequent invectives toward mainstream cinema.²⁴

Peter Gidal, an American filmmaker who came to London in 1960s, became a key member of the Co-op during the 1970s. Gidal recalls the 'chauvinism' of the context for

²⁰ REEKIE, D. 'From the circus to the office', *filmwaves*, No.1, 1997, p.4-6

²¹ *ibid.* p.5

²² PARSONS, D. 'Picture Planes', *filmwaves*, No.2, 1997, p.10-12

²³ WOLLEN, P. 'Ontology' and 'Materialism' in Film', *Screen*, Spring, 1976, p.7-23

²⁴ See also further detailed chronology of the period CURTIS, D. 'English Avant-Garde Film: An Early Chronology', In Arts Council of Great Britain/British Council, *A Perspective on English Avant-Garde Film: A Touring Exhibition*, catalogue, London, 1978.

independent filmmakers in the USA and their relationship to Hollywood, believing that in England a context existed for 'advanced film practice' without the pressures of the industry or the marketplace.²⁵ Gidal's polemical essays, both at the time and his recent retrospective views, are disputed by other accounts which cite the strong influence of North American film makers such as Brakhage and Kenneth Anger.²⁶ Essays by both Gidal²⁷ and Le Grice²⁸ document this period of avant-garde film making practice at the Co-op where their activity was exploring 'a simultaneous political and formal avant-garde practice'.²⁹ Gidal explored a film making practice that was reflexive while Le Grice's strategy was to present 'a radical state of cinematic language (that gave) the spectator an affirmation of his own reality'.³⁰ Gidal frequently sought to add weight to his film practice by aligning critical theory to define 'structural / materialist film', a version of materialism that was lengthily refuted by Wollen.³¹ In Gidal's *Room Film* (1973), he confronts the viewer with their assumptions and illusions showing precisely what the title describes. Made in grainy and tinted film stock the work succeeds, for Rees, only in producing an aesthetic film comparable to the work of Stan Brakhage, though this was a comparison resisted by Gidal.³² Malcolm Le Grice's description of film making practices at the London Film Makers Co-op was that 'process and material become a significant part of their content'.³³ More recent commentary on the period by Le Grice indicates however that the film makers 'anti-commodity characteristic' was only made possible by the Co-op

²⁵ GIDAL,P. 'Peter Gidal', *filmwaves*, No.8, 1999, p.18

²⁶ CURTIS,D. 'English Avant-Garde', *op.cit.* p.9-18

²⁷ GIDAL,P. 'Theory and Definition of Structuralist/Materialist Film' (1976), reprinted in O'PRAY,M(ed). *The British Avant-Garde . op. cit.*

²⁸ LE GRICE, M. 'Thoughts on Recent Underground Film', *Afterimage*, No.4, 1972, p.78-95

²⁹ PENLEY,C. 'The Avant-Garde and It's Imaginary', *camera obscura*, No.2, 1977, p.4-6

³⁰ LE GRICE,M. *Abstract Film*, *op. cit.* p.153

³¹ WOLLEN, P. 'Ontology', *op.cit.*

³² REES, A.L. *A History*, *op.cit.* p.86

³³ LE GRICE, M. 'Thoughts', *op. cit.* p.89

providing resources.³⁴ An example of this approach is 'Expanded Cinema' where work is a combination of film and performance. For example, Gill Eatherley's *Hand Grenade* (1971), a triple-screen projection of hand painted film; Lis Rhodes *Light Music* (1975-77) where projectors of horizontal bars face each other and respond in movable sections of varying lengths to music and Le Grice's work *Castle One* (1966) in which a light bulb suspended directly in front of the screen is intermittently switched on making the viewer aware of the performance aspect of film.³⁵

However useful Le Grice and Gidal's documentation of this period their views dominate in a way which is seen by other commentators as unrepresentative. Deke Dusingberre comments that their essays tend to 'complicate and/or obfuscate the immediate issues'.³⁶ This is borne out by Stephen Dwoskin, an American film maker, who came to London in 1964 on a Fulbright Scholarship and stayed to become a founding member of the Co-op. Dwoskin, in an interview I conducted with him recalls those early stages of the Co-op and particularly those conflicts that have been otherwise overlooked.³⁷ Dwoskin recollects the important stage in the development of the Co-op during the late 1960s when a split occurred between those who wanted primarily to show films and those who wanted set up a production house.³⁸ The latter group, which included Le Grice, were predominant and the Co-op became a 'school' which ran counter to some of original ideals under which the Co-op had been set up. Dwoskin saw this as a strategy for the Co-op to develop its avant-garde credentials; one he disagreed with. Like other film makers he felt he no longer 'fitted' with this new group.³⁹ Dwoskin's testimony is a useful counter narrative to other material documenting this period and suggests that for film makers like him working on the

³⁴ LE GRICE, M. 'Shoot Shoot Shoot', *Filmwaves*, No.18, 2002, p.15

³⁵ All 3 'Expanded Cinema' films among those performed during *Shoot Shoot Shoot: The First Decade of the London Film Makers Co-operative & British Avant-Garde Film 1966-76*, exhibition, Tate Modern, 3 May 2002.

³⁶ DUSINBERRE, D. 'St George in the Forest', *Afterimage*, No.6, 1976, p.17

³⁷ 'Interview with Stephen Dwoskin', Appendix III, 2002.

³⁸ *Ibid.* p.179-80

³⁹ *Ibid.* p.181

margins of the Co-op they were as much a part of the avant-garde.

Another issue which arose at the Co-op during a later period was that it was male-dominated as Lis Rhodes remembers. Rhodes had been a member of the Co-op since the early 1970s and my correspondence with her about this period confirms the marginalization of women at the Co-op.⁴⁰ Rhodes recalls that there was a 'division of labour along gender lines – between the workshop and the office', however the Co-op also provided a resource where women could make films without private capital.⁴¹ The 'political problem' which Rhodes describes led women film makers involved in the Co-op, including Mary Pat Leece, Felicity Sparrow, Tina Keane, Jo Davis, Annabel Nicholson and Rhodes, to set up a Women's Group in 1979.⁴² Members of the group were amongst those women film makers who initially took part in and then resigned from the *Film as Film* exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in 1979, objecting on the grounds of their 'token' inclusion.⁴³ As Rhodes writes, this response by the group of women was opposed to the narrow view of the history of women and film that the exhibition organisers had taken and took place in the context of the growing feminist movement.⁴⁴

Activity by women film makers had begun earlier in 1972 with the founding of the London Women's Film Group with Claire Johnston among it's members.⁴⁵ The group also included Esther Ronay, Linda Dove, Barbara Evans and Sue Shapiro, and campaigned for equal opportunities in the industry. They organised a season of Women's Cinema at the National Film Theatre in 1973 and started to put debates about women's film onto the broader agenda.

⁴⁰ Correspondence with Lis Rhodes, Appendix II, 2002

⁴¹ Ibid. p.143.

⁴² Ibid. p.; TAYLOR, M. 'Cinenova', *filmwaves*, No.8, 1999, p.17.

⁴³ RHODES, L. 'Whose History?' (1979), reprinted in O'PRAY, M. *op. cit.* p.193-197.

⁴⁴ 'Correspondence with Lis Rhodes', *op. cit.*

⁴⁵ DICKINSON, M. *Rogue Reels*, *op.cit.* p.53

'The image of women in the cinema has been an image created by men. The emergent women's cinema has begun the transformation of that image'.⁴⁶ With this declaration Claire Johnston began a *Screen* pamphlet on Women's Cinema. It coincided with the NFT season and set the parameters of the retrieval project undertaken by women critics, cinema organisers and film makers. It became increasingly important to growing feminist film networks and part of a strategy to build audiences for contemporary work to rescue 'the work of forgotten or neglected women of film history'.⁴⁷ This also drew attention to discriminatory practices long prevalent in the film industry. A particular 'cause celebre' was Alice Guy, an early film pioneer, whose work was dispensed with as investment in the film industry grew and many of her films lost. Larger women's film festivals followed, in both New York(1972) and Toronto (1973). These were ambitious undertakings where, for example in Toronto, it took six months to research the festival where eventually over 400 films were screened.⁴⁸ This became part of a widely accepted international 'three pronged mandate; recovery of lost women film makers throughout the history of cinema, exhibition of current films by women and ...fostering critical and theoretical work on women's films'.⁴⁹ There was however, as Claire Johnson noted in 1973, as yet no 'consolidated' theory of women's cinema.⁵⁰

In 1972 as distribution of women's film became increasingly important Cinesisters became Cinema of Women which had emerged from the London Women's Film Group and began to distribute independent feminist films, campaigning films and videos, and international feminist feature films.⁵¹ In 1979 another distribution group, Circles, emerged from the Co-

⁴⁶ JOHNSTON,C.(ed), 'Notes on Women's Cinema', *Screen*, Pamphlet 2, 1973.

⁴⁷ MERZ,C and PARMAR,P. 'Distribution Matters:Circles', *Screen*, Vol.28, No.4, 1987, p.67.

⁴⁸ Women & Film Festival, catalogue, Toronto, 1973.

⁴⁹ KUHN, A. RADSTONE, S (eds). *The Women's Companion to International Film*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1990, op.cit, p.430

⁵⁰ JOHNSTON, C. 'Notes on', *op.cit.* p.2

⁵¹ ROOT, J. 'Distributing *A Question of Silence*: A Cautionary Tale', in BRUNSDON, C (ed). *Films for*

op largely due to the efforts of Felicity Sparrow. Circles distributed work by early women film makers alongside contemporary avant-garde work by women film makers, many of whom were members of the Co-op.⁵² After a series of funding crisis which affected both groups Cinenova was launched in 1991 inheriting the Circles distribution catalogue and much of the Cinema of Women catalogue.⁵³

Another important distribution group in London was The Other Cinema which was founded in 1970 as a non-profit making independent film distribution company.⁵⁴ By the mid 1970s Laura Mulvey, Steve Dwoskin and Marc Karlin were amongst its Council of Management.⁵⁵ The Other Cinema operated from a relatively commercial base distributing political documentary and independent film, and built a cinema which screened British avant-garde film including work by Mulvey and Wollen, Dwoskin and the Berwick Street Collective's *The Nightcleaners*.⁵⁶ The Other Cinema's complex development from distributing Latin American and new French film to acquiring and running a cinema in London's West End which was shortly forced to close is well documented elsewhere by Sylvia Harvey. Suffice it to say that in spite of the failures of the BFI to support The Other Cinema its role as a key institution in promoting and developing audiences for radical film was significant. The closure of its cinema building dealt a blow to independent cinema in the UK, although it has continued to maintain a presence as a distribution company.

During this period there were also debates about status and position which involved the avant-garde film communities. Peter Gidal, a prominent member of the Co-op,

Women, London, British Film Institute, 1986, p.213-223

⁵² MERZ,C. PARMAR,P. 'Distribution Matters', *op.cit.*; KUHN,A. RADSTONE,S(eds). *Women's Companion*, *op.cit.* p.84; Correspondence with Lis Rhodes, *op. cit.* ; TAYLOR,M. 'Cinenova', *op.cit.*

⁵³ TAYLOR, M. 'Cinenova', *op. cit.*

⁵⁴ http://www.contemporaryfilms.com/other/other_mid.htm. 9/6/02

⁵⁵ DICKINSON,M. *Rogue Reels*, *op.cit.* p.42-43

⁵⁶ 'Interview with Stephen Dwoskin', Appendix III, 2002; HARVEY,S. 'The Other Cinema - A History: Part 1, 1970-1977', *Screen*, Vol.26, No.6, 1985; HARVEY,S. 'The Other Cinema - A History:Part 11', *Screen*, Vol.27, No.2, 1986.

disparagingly polarised what he called the theoretically over-determined 'Screen gang' against the vibrant atmosphere for film production taking place at the Co-op.⁵⁷ Both Mulvey and Wollen were members of the editorial board of Screen at the time. Peter Wollen had identified two distinct avant-garde's and their distinguishing histories in which each claimed the unique status of the avant-garde.⁵⁸ The movement of which Gidal was a part had its origins in a mainstream European avant-garde with affinities to Cubism through to Gertrude Stein, the films of Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy. This led Gidal to 'structural' film-making where the concerns of film 'about' film were uppermost. Wollen defines this avant-garde as being concerned with 'abstraction/reflexiveness/Greenberg-modernism' as against the other more consciously political movement which sought a mass, popular audience.⁵⁹ This latter movement with which Wollen, and by extension Mulvey in their collaborative film making practice, identified themselves with the avant-garde Soviet directors of the 1920s who had an effect upon the film-making of Godard and Straub-Huillet. For Wollen, this movement expressed the possibilities of 'making new types of meaning' by reordering old meanings and juxtaposing sign systems. This, Wollen felt, was much less limiting and essentialist than the work of the other avant-garde.⁶⁰ Wollen concluded that the difference between the two movements was 'one of the film-makers frame of reference, the places from which they come and the culture to which they relate'.⁶¹ While Gidal and the Co-op group were involved in every aspect of their production, the other group were involved with the film industry and in the values of production and distribution, and of gaining access to a mass audience. The latter point, was crucial to Mulvey and Wollen and denotes the importance of audience, spectatorship and viewing in their work. As Laura Mulvey had been involved as a member of The Other Cinema, this stresses the difference in approach. Wollen, however, remained optimistic at the end of his 1975 essay where he perceived avant-garde cinema as a 'system' which

⁵⁷ GIDAL, P. 'Peter Gidal', *op.cit.* p.19

⁵⁸ WOLLEN, P. 'The Two Avant-Gardes', *Studio International*, December, 1975

⁵⁹ WOLLEN, P. *Readings and Writings, op. cit.* p.101-102

⁶⁰ WOLLEN, P. 'Ontology', *op. cit.*

⁶¹ WOLLEN, P. *Readings and Writings, op.cit.* p.103

can embrace a number of aims.⁶² This 'optimism' overlooks the disjunctures and differences which fuelled much of this debate at the time of which Gidal's earlier point reminds us.

An aspect of Rees otherwise meticulous catalogue of the avant-garde which is notable by its absence is the history of the development of feminist film in Britain and the USA. Individual women film makers are included in his chronology but they are not related to debates which took place beyond the films he notes. By the late 1970s both E. Ann Kaplan and Mulvey amongst others had identified a movement of women film makers and as Mulvey had noted, 'the consciousness is there, and the body of work is sufficient'.⁶³ Lis Rhodes had previously questioned the classification of 'formalist' film as a method of reconstructing history from a 'commonly accepted and understood approach'⁶⁴ however Rees uses this approach and chooses to find much feminist film of the period elusive. For example, the withdrawal from the *Film as Film* exhibition by women members of the Co-op and the London Women's Film Group is listed by Rees but its context is not explored further.⁶⁵ This begs the question of Rees, why can't feminist cinema also be avant-garde cinema? Feminist film makers had exhibited work in less formal contexts, circumventing both mainstream cinema and the established avant-garde of the Co-op, which suggests a fluidity of approach to exhibition and distribution. *The Nightcleaners* is a good example of this, being shown at Trade Union meetings as an aid to discussion and debate. The London Women's Film Group too, were involved in Film Festivals as well as screenings to raise consciousness and promote an awareness of women's issues. Film performed a different function in these contexts. Clearly there is a history of avant-garde women's film making; contemporary avant-garde women film makers who describe themselves as

⁶² WOLLEN, P. *Readings and Writings*, op. cit. p.104

⁶³ KAPLAN, E. 'Avant-garde Feminist Cinema: Mulvey and Wollen's Riddles of the Sphinx', *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, Spring, 1979; MULVEY, L. 'Film, Feminism and the Avant-Garde' (1978), reprinted in MULVEY, L. *Visual and Other*, op. cit.; DOANE, M. MELLENCAMP, P and WILLIAMS, L. *Revision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*, Los Angeles, The American Film Institute, 1984; B. RUBY RICH, *Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1998.

⁶⁴ RHODES, L. 'Whose History?', op. cit. p. 195

⁶⁵ REES, A. L. *A History*. op. cit. p.96

feminists as well as those who make feminist films. Enough, one would have thought to qualify for Rees to include a separate chapter if not a separate heading in 1999.

This brief overview of the debates and differences provides the background to Mulvey and Wollen's film practice which this thesis can now discuss. It is in this historical context described above; being avant-garde yet not located in the avant-garde of the Co-op and concerned with feminist issues and not being thought of as political film makers that Mulvey and Wollen are awkwardly located.

Practices

Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen made six films together during the period from 1975 to 1984; *Penthesilea* (1975), *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977), *Amy!* (1980), *Crystal Gazing* (1982), *Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti* (1982) and *The Bad Sister* (1984).

Mulvey and Wollen had made *Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons* (1974), a self funded film made in Northwestern University, Chicago. The film had emerged from Mulvey's interest in male fantasy which she had written about in *Spare Rib* and Mulvey and Wollen set out to challenge the myth of the Amazons, a fantasy they claimed was much less a female mythology than a male fetish.⁶⁶ Their next film *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977) followed the publication of Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Screen*. Wollen stated that Mulvey's work on voyeurism and spectatorship was a primary impetus for making the film.⁶⁷ *Riddles of the Sphinx* is an essay film which uses the mythological story as a starting point to present a narrative which unfolds in a formal structure of seven

⁶⁶ MULVEY, L. 'Fears, Fantasies and the Male Unconscious or 'You Don't Know What is Happening, Do You, Mr Jones?' (1973) reprinted in MULVEY, L. *Visual and Other, op. cit.* p.6-13

⁶⁷ RANVAUD, D. 'An Interview with Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen', *Framework, No.9*, 1978/79, p.30.

parts or 'chapters'.⁶⁸ The film opens after the initial 'pages' on which there are images of women, ending with an image of the Sphinx. This leads into the next section where Laura Mulvey is seated at a desk speaking directly to the camera and providing a commentary on the film that she and Wollen are making. She recounts the myth of the Sphinx in the story of Oedipus, prefacing this by explaining that 'the Oedipus myth associates the voice of the Sphinx with motherhood as mystery and with resistance to patriarchy'.⁶⁹

The third part is a montage of found footage of the Egyptian Sphinx, filmed with a rostrum camera. The fourth part, the apex of the pyramidically structured film, tells the story of Louise and follows her from being a wife and mother to entering employment, finding a nursery for her child, her growing awareness of the role of Trade Unions and nursery provision in the workplace, and her relationship with her mother and her female friend. The conclusion of this part ends with Louise and her child Anna, now no longer dependent, in the British Museum Egyptian Room. In the next part women acrobats perform an act which suggests that Louise/Anna have freed themselves within patriarchy and are flying 'through the air'. The penultimate part, to mirror the introductory 'Laura Speaking' sequence, Laura Mulvey is seated at a desk and listens to herself on a tape recorder rehearsing the introduction. Finally, the film ends with a maze game with mercury balls.⁷⁰

On the film's release through the BFI distribution network, it was shown at the Other Cinema, London, in addition to a round of film festivals. Its critical reception has to be seen in the context of a dynamic avant-garde and some of the press commentary at the time indicated high expectations of *Riddles of the Sphinx* after the debates that were generated around the release of *Penthesilea*.⁷¹ Reviews of the film were varied, some

⁶⁸ FORBES, J. 'Riddles of the Sphinx', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, June, 1977, p.128

⁶⁹ MULVEY, L. WOLLEN, P. 'Riddles of the Sphinx: A Film by Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen', *Screen*, Summer, 1977, p.62

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ For example, 'Penthesilea...was regarded as a step forward for the European avant-garde, and by others as completely incomprehensible', Review, *The Guardian*, 1977.

expressing mystification but they were not entirely unfavourable and generally noted its feminist content. Further analysis of *Riddles of the Sphinx* is found in film journals, including those that interviewed Mulvey and Wollen about the film.⁷² Kaplan comments that the film's attempt to integrate Marxism and psychoanalytic theory places *Riddles* at the forefront of feminist avant-garde cinema, and that it will 'have an effect on political practice'.⁷³ Mulvey states that *Riddles of the Sphinx* is a film which was 'designed to bring out a series of problems, which are problems for feminist politics' and both she and Wollen were engaged in a strategy of 'building both a new type of audience and a new type of film'.⁷⁴ Mulvey and Wollen's formal use of the camera's 360 degree pans was much commented on by reviewers as part of the films 'extraordinary lyricism'.⁷⁵ For the viewer there are pleasures to be had, as Nowell-Smith suggests, but the pleasures are of a different order than for those of the viewer of a Hollywood film.⁷⁶ This viewer must instead be familiar with the developments in film theory and be an avid reader of the journal, *Screen*, as is also pointed out by Kaplan.⁷⁷

Considering the examples of film making contemporary with *Riddles of the Sphinx* it is not difficult to see how the film was described as combining 'elements of the Co-op tradition with ideas of work on narrative'.⁷⁸ However, the careful description and contextualisation of the film for its audience in interviews given by Mulvey and Wollen provide a more illuminating insight. In a later interview Mulvey lucidly describes how she and Wollen's

⁷² See FORBES, J. 'Riddles of', *op.cit.*; NOWELL-SMITH, G. 'Riddles of the Sphinx', *Sight and Sound*, Summer, 1977, p.188; KAPLAN, E. 'Avant-garde Feminist', *op.cit.* and RANVAUD, D. 'An Interview with', *op.cit.* p.31

⁷³ KAPLAN, E. 'Avant-garde Feminist', *op. cit.* p.143

⁷⁴ RANVAUD, D. 'Riddles of', *op.cit.* p.31; MULVEY, L. WOLLEN, P. 'Written Discussion', *Afterimage*, No.6, 1976, p.33

⁷⁵ FORBES, J. 'Riddles of', *op. cit.* p.128

⁷⁶ NOWELL-SMITH, G. 'Riddles of', *op.cit.* p.188

⁷⁷ KAPLAN, E. 'Avant-garde Feminist', *op cit.* p.135

⁷⁸ BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE, *Catalogue*, *op. cit.* p.63

strategy at the time of *Riddles of the Sphinx* was 'an aesthetic confrontation, an exploration of an alternative aesthetic...a real commitment to confrontation with dominant cinematic codes'.⁷⁹ The film's relatively high profile meant that it had become an important film for film commentators; Kuhn (1982), Fischer(1989) and MacDonald(1993). For Fischer, *Riddles* is an oppositional film in both form and content which takes forward Mulvey's work on feminist theory in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' because it 'noted this interplay between film theory and production'.⁸⁰ MacDonald offers the most incisive account of the experience of viewing *Riddles of the Sphinx*, one that is added to by studying its structure to reveal its full implications as an example of a progressive new cinema.⁸¹

MacDonald, as well as earlier commentators, had noted the reflection of the female cinematographer and sees this as one of the film's 'stunning moments' which addressed the issue of a traditionally male dominated industry.⁸² A less obvious strategy and one which eludes comment was Laura Mulvey's direct address to the camera at the beginning and end of *Riddles*. This was a strategy that had been used by Jean-Luc Godard in *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (1966) where the director's voice on the soundtrack confirms his agency and as Bordwell suggests, the presence of the director confirms Mulvey's 'authorial persona role'.⁸³

Riddles of the Sphinx assumes the relationship between Mulvey and Wollen's film and writing practices. Kaplan says of the film's relationship to 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' that it makes clear Mulvey's insights about the place of the look in cinema.

⁷⁹ DANINO,N. MOY-THOMAS, L. 'Interview with Laura Mulvey', *Undercut*, No.6, 1984, p.11

⁸⁰ FISCHER, L, *Shot/Countershot: Film Tradition and Women's Cinema*, BFI/MacMillan, London, 1989, p. 50, p.14; Claire Johnson also notes that " If film criticism...is to have any use...it should provide a greater understanding of how film operates which will ultimately feed back into film itself", JOHNSON, C (ed). 'Notes on', *op. cit.* p.3

⁸¹ MacDONALD, S. *Avant-Garde Film*, *op. cit.* p.81

⁸² *ibid.* p.89; and FORBES, J. 'Riddles of', *op.cit* NOWELL-SMITH, G. 'Riddles of', *op.cit.*

⁸³ BORDWELL,D. *Making Meaning*, *op. cit.* p.159

Kaplan notes that the female protagonist, Louise, is *not* the object of the viewers gaze but is active in moving the film's narrative forward.⁸⁴ Similar cinematic counter-strategies and concerns were being explored by other avant-garde film makers.⁸⁵ Stephen Dwoskin had made films in the 1970s which cinematically addressed 'the look' that Mulvey had written about in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. Among these, *Moment* (1970) and *Trixie* (1971) both examine the direct gaze of a woman at the camera, as Paul Willeman describes.⁸⁶ *Moment* is a continuous fixed rostrum camera shot observing the face of a woman while she masturbates. In *Trixie*, the observing camera is seen to have effects upon the woman who both evades the look of the camera and becomes aggressive toward it in a game with the camera and in a later film *Girl* (1974) Dwoskin uses the same strategy where 'a naked woman returns the camera's gaze to challenge it'.⁸⁷ Willeman closely relates Dwoskin's films to Mulvey's essay and points out that Dwoskin had used a 'fourth look', adding to Mulvey's three looks, where the actor had returned the look to the camera. Willeman reiterates this point in a later essay commenting on the largely overlooked exchange of looks in film practice in which Dwoskin's work stands as an example of the problematic that Mulvey had identified and addressed.⁸⁸

MacDonald wants to make clear the relationship between film practice and theoretical text in Mulvey and Wollen's work. Mulvey had given a precise idea of her intentions in making *Riddles*, to 'discover things that the story itself suggested through its mode of telling and then through the theoretical work on narrative that could be brought to bear on narrative structures; and to consider...whether certain kinds of material demanded certain modes of

⁸⁴ KAPLAN, E. 'Avant-garde Feminist', *op. cit.* p.142

⁸⁵ LE GRICE, M. 'Abstract Film', *op. cit.* p. 128-129 for discussion of William Raban's *Angles of Incidence*(1973) and Mattijn Siep's *Double Shutter*(1971), films structured around movements of the camera.

⁸⁶ WILLEMEN, P. 'Dwoskin & Zwartjes', in Hayward Gallery, *British Avant-Garde Film*, catalogue, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1977.

⁸⁷ REES, A.L. *A History*, *op.cit.* p.86

⁸⁸ WILLEMEN, P. *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory*, London, BFI/Indiana University Press, 1994, p.105

telling'.⁸⁹ This strongly suggests that her film practice was an experiment to see if theoretical ideas could be practised in film and indicates a clear relationship between Mulvey's textual and visual practices at the time of writing 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'.

In describing both Mulvey's film practice and its context I have shown a complex and discontinuous series of events which took place around the 'effective force of the moment' from which 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' emerged.⁹⁰ This supports the argument that I am establishing; that 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' emerged from visual practices as well as textual practices. This has uncovered a genealogy around the object of the article; revealing a history of discontinuous events which show that its origins are not located in the singular place of the text but can be located in moments beyond it. These moments have been reconfigured in this way to constitute a contribution to the genealogical reading of Mulvey's essay. I will now go on to demonstrate how Mulvey's work during this period, and 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in particular, produced in its wake an effect not just upon theory, as is broadly recognised, but on a series of key visual practices that followed it.

⁸⁹ MULVEY,L. 'The Oedipus Myth:Beyond the Riddles of the Sphinx', in MULVEY,L. *Visual and Other*, op.cit,p.178

⁹⁰ KELLY,M. *Imaging Desire*, op. cit. p.xv

Chapter 3 - Feminist Pleasures

In the previous chapter I have argued that Mulvey's film practice must be considered alongside her writing to fully locate the moment out of which 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' emerged. Having established this genealogical approach to reading Mulvey's essay the discussion can now be extended. This will follow the development and dissemination of Mulvey's ideas and adds weight to this genealogical reading. In the following chapters three key moments in the subsequent decades are identified where a response in visual practice to Mulvey's essay can be seen. The first of these moments is a distinctly feminist response in the period that immediately followed the publication of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' and the circulation of Mulvey and Wollen's films.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, at a high point of early feminist film theory the work of a number of avant-garde feminist film makers came to be allied with Mulvey's essay. They were Sally Potter's *Thriller* (1979), Yvonne Rainer's *Lives of Performers* (1978), Michelle Citron's *Daughter Rite* (1978), and Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975). Mulvey had left her readers in no doubt as to why the 'satisfying manipulation of visual pleasure' of Hollywood films needed to be destroyed. She had, however, said little about the 'new language of desire' that would replace it.¹ By the time Griselda Pollock came to discuss this in 1983, with a group that included Mulvey, the question had become about 'new visual pleasures'.² Whilst in that context Pollock had failed to define these pleasures closely she had offered the work of Akerman, Potter and Rainer as examples of it. At the same time E. Ann Kaplan was describing the tenets of a new feminist avant-garde and defining what these new pleasures might be. The tenets Kaplan described were a focus on the cinematic apparatus, distancing of the spectator from the film, a refusal of Hollywood film pleasures and a mixture of documentary and

¹ MULVEY, L. 'Visual Pleasure', *op.cit.* p.8

² POLLOCK, G. 'Feminist Film Practice and Pleasure (Introduction)', In BENNETT, T. et al. *Formations of Pleasure*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983, p.158

fiction so as the two forms cannot be distinguished as filmic models.³ Kaplan suggested that films which use these strategies 'deliberately refuse the pleasure that usually comes from the manipulation of our emotions...they try to replace pleasure in recognition with pleasure in learning, with cognitive processes as against emotional ones'.⁴ These points resonated with Mulvey's essay. Kaplan recognised that these avant-garde feminist film makers were seeking different experiences for audiences and that these did need to be accounted for. Kaplan had also noted that a collaboration took place between feminist film makers and feminist theorists in the U.K. Closer to the source of that collaboration Annette Kuhn's account reflects that this relationship was problematic. Kuhn states that while Mulvey and Johnson had advocated a deconstructive counter-cinema, this is not specifically a feminist strategy.⁵ However, counter-cinema was useful for feminism, Kuhn notes, as it resisted illusionism but this was not the only way to define feminist cinema.⁶ Kuhn goes on to raise the problematic status of these films as feminist rather than feminine film texts saying that they cannot become 'feminist' merely as a matter of 'pure chance'.⁷ Uncertainty about one of these film makers, Yvonne Rainer, actually being a feminist at the time of making her film, *Lives of Performers* (1972), gave rise to the question of whether or not her film could be seen as feminist.⁸ Kuhn concludes that whatever a film makers intentions, as in Rainer's case, films that are taken up by feminists become 'feminist film'. Above all, for Kuhn the institutional conditions of distribution dictate whether a film can be feminist. In placing such an emphasis on the context of spectatorship Kuhn had definitively shifted the onus from film makers to critics and audiences to declare whether a film was 'feminist' or otherwise. However for Ruby Rich Yvonne Rainer's work was central to feminism because the narrative conventions her films

³ ANN KAPLAN, E. *Women & Film*, *op. cit.* p.138

⁴ *Ibid*, p.138

⁵ JOHNSON, C. 'Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema', *op. cit.*

⁶ KUHN, A. *Women's Pictures*, Counter- cinema defined as one which takes 'realist forms and deconstructs them by means of fragmentation and interruption', *op. cit.* p.166

⁷ *Ibid*. p.176

⁸ *ibid*. p.176

used were feminist strategies. This had shifted the ground slightly for Ruby Rich who argued that the work of Chantal Akerman was also 'profoundly feminist', defining this through themes, style and representation.⁹ Ruby Rich had wondered why, after a decade of feminist film practice and theory phrases such as 'films by women' or 'images of women in film' were still in circulation. She set out a five point glossary by which feminist films could be defined; validative, reconstructive, medusan, corrective realism and projectile.¹⁰ These terms are now obscure but their implications were revisited later by Elizabeth Grosz to reflect on their methodologies and assumptions.¹¹ Grosz called into question the tenets that Ruby Rich and other feminist critics had been arguing for earlier. Grosz offered instead a number of 'contingencies' and 'provisions' that could define a feminist text. For Grosz, the provisional status of texts where 'prevailing norms and ideals which govern its *milieu*' are those that must be explored.¹²

The playing out of many of these debates and the 'theoretical antagonisms' in the late 1970s and early 1980s have been recounted by Ruby Rich as a period in which a 'new canon of feminist films' emerged.¹³ This remains partly obscured as feminist film theory established itself within the academy at the same time and turned its attention to mainstream cinema and television.¹⁴ Mulvey had previously acknowledged that an avant-garde cinema did exist, one which she described as 'alternative' and one which denied the

⁹ RUBY RICH, B. 'In the Name of Feminist Film Criticism', In STEVEN, P (Ed). *Jump Cut: Hollywood, Politics and Counter Cinema*, Toronto, Between the Lines, 1985, p.215

¹⁰ *ibid.* p.221-226. These terms in summary refer to; work which validates women's lives, work which reconstructs basic forms from a feminine perspective, work which is medusan in its use of comedy to disrupt patriarchal narratives, films which correct a traditional realist cinema by focusing on women's stories, and the rewritten matinee melodramas for women projecting male fantasies onto female characters.

¹¹ GROSZ, E. 'Sexual Signatures: Feminism after the death of the author', In GROSZ, E. *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*, London, Routledge, 1995, p.9-24

¹² *ibid.* p.22

¹³ RUBY RICH, B. *Chickflicks, op.cit.* p.166

¹⁴ MULVEY, L. 'British Feminist Film Theory's Female Spectators: Presence and Absence', *Camera Obscura*, Nos.20 & 21, May - September 1989, p.68-81.

easy pleasures of narrative film.¹⁵ The new pleasures that emerged from avant-garde feminist film makers in the 1970s and 1980s suffered from the same criticisms from the audiences of any avant-garde films. As McDonald surmises, they do not provide a 'conventional movie experience'.¹⁶ However feminist films were greeted with enthusiasm by audiences who had a 'political necessity' invested in them as Brunsdon notes.¹⁷ These films existed in a specific cultural *milieu* and were successful because they created an audience which understood and was a part of that *milieu*. In examining these 'new pleasures' that proceeded from Mulvey's work it is *now* possible to look not only at how these films were assessed at the time but at their long term legacy to film and visual practices. As Fowler has recently suggested, these films and their makers should now be reconnected to the moment where 'pleasures' were proposed and beyond that moment as they continued to negotiate pleasure.¹⁸ The task in this chapter is to re-examine the work of these avant-garde feminist film makers in their context and by doing so re-establish and restate their work as forms of feminist pleasure.

Sally Potter's *Thriller* is often quoted as a 'classic of feminist independent film'.¹⁹ Filmed in black and white *Thriller* deconstructs the classic text of Puccini's opera 'La Boheme' from the viewpoint of Mimi. The film shifts between stills of a performance of the opera and a room where the film's performance takes place. In the room, the story of the opera is told with a narration by Mimi and Musetta retelling the story from Mimi's position as the victim of the tragedy. This was Potter's first feature film made while she was a member of the London Film Makers Co-op. Much has been made of *Thriller* as a reading of various feminist texts. Mellencamp attributes the content of *Thriller* to Mulvey's essay and Humm

¹⁵ MULVEY, L. 'Visual Pleasure', *op. cit.* p.7

¹⁶ MacDONALD, S. *Avant-Garde Film*, *op. cit.* p.1-2

¹⁷ BRUNSDON, C (ed). *Films for Women*, London, British Film Institute, 1986, p.54

¹⁸ FOWLER, C. *Cinefeminism*, *op.cit.* p.60

¹⁹ KUHN, A. RADSTONE, S (eds). *The Women's Companion to International Film*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1990, p.322

attributes the cinematic style of *Thriller* to Mulvey's *Riddles of the Sphinx*.²⁰ Potter's concern with text and textualising is apparent in a sequence where Mimi reads from *Tel Quel* articles and in doing so directly references psychoanalytic theory which, for Kaplan, became the reason for the film's importance to feminist discourses.²¹ Mimi is both the object of the story and its subject, reflecting on her position in the narrative where she 'searches for a theory to explain her life and her death'.²² The film was welcomed by most feminist commentators including Mellencamp, Kaplan and Swanson and greeted as a success.²³ Potter's next film, *The Gold Diggers* (1983), was equally complex in its narrative structure but not celebrated in quite the same way. *The Gold Diggers* is a musical, shot in Iceland with an all-women crew who were all paid the same, including the film's star Julie Christie (Ruby). Potter structures the narrative in a similar way to *Thriller* where the characters are confronted with a riddle and then must search for an answer. The film follows the two female characters through their relationships to money (Celeste) and their representation in the cinema (Ruby). It is Celeste's task to decode a computer containing information of an economic conspiracy at the same time as to free Ruby from a series of performances she is trapped in. Mellencamp points out that *The Gold Diggers* failed to be lauded by feminists in the way *Thriller* had been, as she recounts the criticism of 'puritanism'.²⁴ The issue of pleasure had been foregrounded by Potter at the beginning of the film stating "I go to the pictures for leisure, please give me back my pleasure".²⁵ In spite of her intent and the complex formal strategies Potter had used the film was not well received. Following its bad reviews Potter's next film *Orlando* (1993) was greeted with a fanfare, particularly by feminist audiences. *Orlando* was an adaptation of Virginia Woolf's

²⁰ MELLENCAMP, P. *Indiscretions: Avant-Garde Film, Video, & Feminism*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1990, p.153; HUMM, M. *Feminism and Film*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1997, p.25

²¹ SWANSON, G. MOY-THOMAS, L. 'An Interview with Sally Potter', *Undercut*, No.1, 1981, p.41-44; ANN KAPLAN, E. *Women & Film*, *op.cit.* p.154-161

²² POTTER, S. *Thriller*, 1979

²³ SWANSON, G. 'Psychoanalysis and Cultural Practice', *Undercut*, No.1, 1981, p.36-39

²⁴ MELLENCAMP, P. *Indiscretions*, *op.cit.* p.161

²⁵ POTTER, S. *The Gold Diggers*, 1983

1928 novel where Orlando (Tilda Swinton) is alternately male and female throughout his and her 400 year history, transcending gender binaries in what was seen as a post modern text.²⁶ Whilst being concerned with history, British colonialism and gender, *Orlando* was also seen as lush and 'fun'.²⁷ Hailed as Potter's 'breakthrough' film, *Orlando* reached a mainstream audience and became associated with a generation of successful British independent films which included Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* (1992) which similarly foregrounded gender and sexual identity. Molly Nesbit is something of a lone voice in criticising the film's 'surface' which did not fully address the implications of its cross-dressing hero/ine.²⁸ In spite of it being hailed as such, Potter stated that she was not making a feminist work and saw the term as problematic; one likely to encounter resistance. She described her position as 'moving out of a ... ghetto mentality and away from didacticism' and one of trying to use more subtle ways to look at these ideas.²⁹ *Orlando* did represent a renewed interest in narrative for Potter. The film also used strategies such as the direct address to the camera by Orlando which placed the character outside the film and complicit with the audience.³⁰ Julianne Pidduck suggests it was in these subversive looks that much of the pleasure for a feminist audience lay.³¹ Pidduck also finds a utopian aspect in *Orlando's* narrative which becomes a 'drive of feminist journeying'. This had been suggested earlier by Potter who intended that the audience would feel both 'hope' and 'the possibility of change'.³² The ending of *Orlando* brought the film into the present and Potter writes Orlando as mother to a girl, thereby establishing a 'female genealogy' which Florence notes had much in common with contemporary

²⁶ HUMM, M. *Feminism and Film*, *op.cit.* p.152

²⁷ INDIANA, G. 'Spirits Either Sex Assume', *Artforum*, Vol.31, No.10, 1993, p.88

²⁸ NESBIT, M. 'Apart without a Face', *Artforum*, Vol.31, No.10, 1993, p.93

²⁹ FLORENCE, P. 'debate: A conversation with Sally Potter', *Screen*, Vol 34, No.3, 1993, p.280

³⁰ INDIANA, G. 'Spirits Either', *op. cit.* p.89; DONOHUE, W. 'Immortal Longing', *Sight and Sound*, Vol.3, No.3, 1993, p.10-12

³¹ PIDDUCK, J. 'Travels with Sally Potter's *Orlando*: gender, narrative, movement', *Screen*, Vol.38, No.2, 1997, pp.172-189

³² DONOHUE, W. 'Immortal Longing', *op. cit.* p.12

women's writing.³³ Florence also points out that the Sapphic elements of the novel are resisted by Potter.³⁴ Any lesbian sub-texts had been dismissed by Potter as 'stated at an angle'.³⁵ Potter never had entered the pantheon of lesbian, gay or queer cinema that Mellencamp had previously claimed for her when reading lesbian sub-texts in both *Thriller* and *The Gold Diggers*.³⁶ Potter saw this in *Orlando* as not wanting to 'resort' to a contemporary identity politics which was not in keeping with the spirit of Woolf's novel.³⁷ Whilst Potter saw *Orlando* as leaving the feminist 'ghetto' behind both her audiences, Florence and Pidduck thought otherwise. Both *Thriller* and *The Gold Diggers* remain as films which sought to experiment with languages of desire and Pidduck's view that *Orlando* was part of the same feminist 'project' is, with similar hindsight, hard to resist.³⁸

The mother-daughter relationship in *The Gold Diggers* is easily overlooked amidst its complex dance and theatrical staging. The mother-daughter relationship was one which Mellencamp had noted was 'uncharted territory' for the avant-garde.³⁹ Michelle Citron's *Daughter Rite* (1978) covers precisely this subject matter and broke new ground in its approach to documentary film making. Kaplan found Citron's *Daughter Rite* and Mulvey and Wollen's *Riddles of the Sphinx* to be comparable films both in terms of strategy and subject matter.⁴⁰ In *Daughter Rite* Citron used home-movie footage with a voice-over by the film maker along with interviews which examine the mother-daughter relationship. Citron reads extracts from a diary and alternates this with documentary sections in which the two sisters discuss their mother. The sisters talk directly to the camera and interact in

³³ FLORENCE, P. 'debate: A conversation', *op.cit.* p.281

³⁴ *ibid.* p.283

³⁵ HUMM, M. 'Feminism and Film', *op.cit.* p.168

³⁶ MELLENCAMP, P. *Indiscretions*, *op.cit.* p.162

³⁷ INDIANA, G. 'Spirits Either', *op. cit.*

³⁸ PIDDUCK, J. 'Travels with Sally Potter', *op. cit.* p.173

³⁹ MELLENCAMP, P. *Indiscretions*, *op.cit.* p.35

⁴⁰ ANN KAPLAN, E.A. *Women & Film*, *op.cit.*

a convincing *cinema verite* style. At the end of the film the credits reveal that roles of the sisters are played by actors. With *Daughter Rite* Citron challenged earlier feminist documentary films by representing the mother indirectly and only in relation to the daughters. As Ruby Rich suggests, Citron replaced 'unitary "representation of" with multiple, overlapping, and contradictory relations to'.⁴¹ Kaplan also argues that *Daughter-Rite* is an important film which overcame the 'stylistic polarity' of both realist and avant-garde films.⁴² Kuhn commented on the kind of emotional address of the film to which Feuer had referred; its 'emotive power'.⁴³ Fauer had suggested that this is a film which 'speaks to' women and recommends that 'every woman who has a mother ought to see this film'.⁴⁴ This could be seen as a problem for the film's formal intentions. As Kuhn, Ruby Rich and Kaplan agreed, this inhibits the film's Brechtian distancing and means it cannot be read simply as an example of deconstructive cinema.⁴⁵ Ruby Rich and Linda Williams accord the film an importance for several reasons. Firstly, it criticises the documentary form within a documentary; secondly, it redeems the documentary form making it both accessible and meaningful; and finally, it validates the personal documentary with a synthesis of characters providing a multiple approach where Citron has broadened the individual experience to a social experience.⁴⁶ For Ruby Rich and Williams, *Daughter Rite* is 'self-explanatory' in its critique of existing film forms and clear in the priorities it examines; the aspects that provide pleasures, particularly for feminist audiences.⁴⁷ This can account for its popularity as it so clearly claimed the mother-daughter relationship, with its contradictions and pleasures, for feminism.

⁴¹ RUBY RICH, B. *Chickflicks*, op.cit. p.214

⁴² ANN KAPLAN, E. *Women & Film*, op.cit. p.171

⁴³ FEUER, J. 'Daughter Rite', op.cit. p.30

⁴⁴ FEUER, J. 'Daughter Rite: Living with Our Pain and Love' In BRUNSDON, C (ed). *Films for Women*, op.cit. p.30

⁴⁵ KUHN, A. *Women's Pictures*, op.cit. p.172

⁴⁶ RUBY RICH, B (with Linda Williams). 'The Right to Re-Vision: Michelle Citron's *Daughter Rite*' (1979/1980), reprinted in RUBY RICH, B. *Chickflicks*, op. cit. p.212-219

⁴⁷ *ibid.* p.219

Citron writes that her intention with *Daughter Rite* was to 'critique film language itself and also to open it up to non-avant-garde audiences'.⁴⁸ This was possible at that moment in the 1970s and early 1980s where a dialogue between film maker, audience and film theorist could exist in the context of the Women's Movement. Citron went on to use a similar strategy to make a further film, *What You Take For Granted...*(1983) where authentic and scripted documentary footage narrates six women describing their work experiences. In this film Citron looked again at 'the private truths we tell ourselves and the public truths we tell others', using the documentary form to interrogate itself.⁴⁹ While Citron's work and *Daughter Rite* were acclaimed at the time and did indeed have a wide audience, the later loss of context has led to it being buried as a feminist film.

The definition of feminist film was a question that was high on the agenda in 1979 at the Edinburgh Film Festival, as Ruby Rich reminds us.⁵⁰ Citron's *Daughter Rite*, Potter's *Thriller* and Chantal Akerman's films were shown at this event amidst debate and argument. Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975) claimed particular attention and came to be seen as defining feminist film aesthetics 'single-handedly'.⁵¹ Although Akerman's film had been shown at the Edinburgh Film Festival in 1975 it had received a less enthusiastic reception. It was in this later feminist film context that it achieved notoriety. The film has since been unanimously hailed by commentators as important in the development of feminist film. Given Kaplan's earlier definition of feminist avant-garde film as failing to distinguish between documentary and fictional forms, *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* was seen to

⁴⁸ CITRON, M. 'Women's Film Production: Going Mainstream' In PRIBRAM, E.D. *Female Spectators*, op. cit. p.52

⁴⁹ CITRON, M. *Home Movies and Other Necessary Fictions*, London & Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p.165

⁵⁰ RUBY RICH, B. *Chickflicks*, op.cit. p.156-168

⁵¹ *ibid.* p.159

render these genres as both irrelevant and reductive.⁵²

Jeanne Dielman is over 3 hours in length and follows three days in the life of Jeanne Dielman, a mother and prostitute living alone in a middle-class apartment in Brussels with a teenage son. The film shows her going about her everyday routine of domestic tasks, caring for her son and seeing male clients; many of these scenes shot in real time showing 'the awful life led by the woman'.⁵³ Jeanne Dielman's routine is disrupted when on the final day she has an orgasm with a male client and then kills him with a pair of scissors. The duration of the scenes and the lack of techniques, such as zooms and close-ups, to emphasize the action taking place had generated much comment. Instead Akerman had presented a visual style to equate 'with her own view and the field observed by the camera'.⁵⁴ For Bergstrom, *Jeanne Dielman* is important to feminist film for the centrality of the woman's voice and asked of the film 'Who speaks when she speaks?'.⁵⁵ Given that much of the film is conducted in silence Akerman had constructed a film not of the voice but of looks. Akerman's medium distance camera defines the character, Jeanne, as separate from herself and the director and, as Margulies suggests, also objectifies the spectators experience.⁵⁶

'Can a film maker who claims not to be a feminist make feminist film?' is one of a series of questions asked by Angela Martin, adding to speculation about Akerman's status.⁵⁷ Akerman had answered by stating that *Jeanne Dielman* 'is a feminist film' on the grounds

⁵² BERGSTROM, J. 'Keeping a distance', *Sight and Sound*, November 1999, p.26

⁵³ KUHN, A. RADSTONE, S. *The Women's Companion*, *op. cit.* p.8

⁵⁴ BERGSTROM, J. 'Keeping', *op. cit.* p.28

⁵⁵ BERGSTROM, J. 'Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles by Chantal Akerman', *Camera Obscura*, No.2, 1977, p.116

⁵⁶ MARGULIES, I. *Nothing Happens: Chantal Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1996, p.69

⁵⁷ MARTIN, A. 'Chantal Akerman's Films: Notes on the Issues Raised for Feminism (1979)', In BRUNSDON, C (ed). *Films for Women*, *op. cit.* p.63

that it showed the daily life of a woman.⁵⁸ This, for Martin, makes Akerman's film pleasurable and while Martin notes that audiences do not want to see a film about housework they are 'impelled to watch and reflect' on the processes the film shows.⁵⁹ Ruby Rich is emphatic in her praise for *Jeanne Dielman* which 'does what feminist cultural theory has called for: she (Akerman) invents a new language capable of transmitting truths previously unspeakable'.⁶⁰ While Akerman's own relationship to feminism at the time of *Jeanne Dielman* was ambivalent, her continued refusal to be 'ghettoised' later surfaces with her refusal to have her film *Je tu il elle* screened at the New York Gay Film Festival in 1984.⁶¹ In *Je tu il elle* (1974) Akerman plays the main character who, during the course of the film, masturbates a truck driver and has sex with her female lover in a way that is frequently described as both 'frenetic' and 'uncomfortable'.⁶² As McRobbie comments, Akerman has frequently let down several interest groups. This is something which is seen by McRobbie as a strength which 'sidestepped theory and in a moment of didactic film making resisted the pressure to pontificate'.⁶³

Of all the film makers in this discussion Akerman has been the most prolific and celebrated. She has made films which have negotiated both 'independent' and 'mainstream' sectors; funding her films from government agencies, TV and film studios. The list of financial support for one film (*Nuit et Jour*) runs to seven sources and this is not atypical. Since *Jeanne Dielman*, Akerman's filmography has included *News from Home* (1976), *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* (1978), *Toute une Nuit* (1982), *Golden Eighties* (1985), *American Stories* (1988), *Nuit et Jour* (1991), *D'Est* (1993) and *La Captive* (2000) as well

⁵⁸ BERGSTROM, J. 'Jeanne Dielman', *op. cit.* p.118

⁵⁹ MARTIN, A. 'Chantal Akerman', *op. cit.* p.67

⁶⁰ RUBY RICH, B. *Chickflicks*, *op. cit.* p.171

⁶¹ Martha Gever discusses this incident at some length seeing Akerman's refusal to be 'ghettoized' as 'entirely consistent' with the content of the film. GEVER, M. 'The Names We Give Ourselves', in FERGUSON, R. GEVER, M. MINH-HA, T. WEST, C (eds). *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Culture*, Massachusetts, The New Museum of Contemporary Arts & MIT Press, 1990, p.198-200

⁶² BERGSTROM, J. 'Keeping', *op. cit.* p.26

⁶³ McROBBIE, A. 'Passionate Uncertainty', *Sight and Sound*, September, 1992, p.29

as videos and films for TV.

Akerman's most recent film *La Captive (The Captive)* (2000) was heralded as an endorsement of 'a truly cinematic world' unlike that explored in her previous films.⁶⁴ It would seem that Akerman had returned to conventional forms of narrative in *The Captive* and definitively abandoned avant-garde film making. However, this had followed Akerman's return to a documentary style with *D'Est*, a film work for multimedia installation which was shown in galleries and at film festivals. '*Bordering On Fiction: Chantal Akerman's "D'Est"*' (1995) was initially a collaboration between the Walker Arts Centre, Minneapolis and Galerie National Du Jeu de Paume, Paris and describes a journey across Eastern Europe from Germany to Russia at a time of social and political change. The film moves through fields, interiors and roads and is, as Ivone Margulies suggests, a geography which 'moves in time just as it has moved with history'.⁶⁵ In 1998 Akerman made '*Self portrait/Autobiography: a work in progress*', a work for the gallery. Akerman merged extracts from *D'Est* (1993), *Toute une Nuit* (1982), *Jeanne Dielman* (1975), *Hotel Monterey* (1972), and accompanied it with a narrative text, 'A Family in Brussels'. It was exhibited at Frith Street Gallery, London; Musee d'art Moderne de la ville de Paris, Paris, and Sean Kelly, New York. The text spoken by Akerman 'describes her father's final illness and death from her mother's point of view'.⁶⁶ Akerman merges her personal history and a 'documentary about movies as seen by the film maker herself'.⁶⁷ While Akerman had said earlier that she had moved away from the mother-daughter relationships that feminists had praised in her earlier work (*News from Home*, 1976) this exhibition marked something of a return to this concern.⁶⁸ Akerman has continued to show work in galleries

⁶⁴ JAMES,N. 'Magnificent Obsession', *Sight and Sound*, May, 2001, p.20

⁶⁵ MARGULIES, I. *Nothing Happens*, op. cit. p.202

⁶⁶ FRITH STREET GALLERY, Chantal Akerman, *Self portrait/Autobiography: a work in progress*, Gallery Notes, London, 1998.

⁶⁷ BELLOUR,R. 'The Moving Image-A Battle of Ways and Means', *Modern Painters*, Vol 14, No.1, 2002, p.68

⁶⁸ McROBBIE,A. 'Passionate', op. cit. p.29

and took part in Documenta 11 in Kassel, Germany, whose theme was 'transnational, transgenerational and transmedial' - exhibiting work in a year where a higher number of women artists were exhibited than in previous Documenta.⁶⁹ In *'From the Other Side'* (2002) Akerman presented a multi screen installation of footage filmed on the border of the United States and Mexico which was inspired by news of American ranchers hunting down illegal immigrants crossing the border.⁷⁰ That Akerman moves now between the worlds of cinema and gallery with apparent ease is testament not just to the singularity of her concerns but to the recent slippage between these modes of presentation, which Bellour sees as the reinvention of cinema as a 'pure' art form.⁷¹ The change in context from cinema to gallery suits Akerman's work, which has long avoided conventional narrative devices, the 'pure' cinema allowing the space for reflective and pleasurable contemplation for the viewer.⁷² These are issues which become important in the 1990s when film began to be exhibited in the gallery space and will be discussed later in Chapter 5.

Ivone Margulies compares Akerman with Yvonne Rainer as both filmmakers are inscribed in their films and therefore 'problematize authorial inscription'.⁷³ Margulies argues that Akerman's strategies bypass the need to represent a collective identity whilst Rainer seeks out the collective voice, undermining the individual voice through 'reallocating texts, genres, and voices'.⁷⁴ Rainer's *Journeys from Berlin/1971* (1980), her fourth feature film, is a good example of this approach. Rainer had trained with Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham and had been well-known both as a dancer and choreographer in New York's avant-garde dance scene before becoming a film maker.⁷⁵ *Lives of Performers*

⁶⁹ 'Women Artists at Manifesta 4 and Documenta 11', *n.paradoxa*, Vol.10, 2002 pp.44-48

⁷⁰ HEARTNEY, E. 'A 600-Hour Documenta', *Art in America*, Vol.90, No.9, pp.86-95

⁷¹ BELLOUR, R. 'The Moving Image', *op. cit.* p.69

⁷² *ibid.* p.67

⁷³ MARGULIES, I. *Nothing Happens*, *op. cit.* p.103

⁷⁴ *ibid.* p.105

⁷⁵ KUHN, A. RADSTONE, S (eds). *The Women's Companion*, *op. cit.* p.333-334.

(1972), *Film About a Woman Who...* (1974), *Kristina Talking Pictures* (1976) had preceded *Journeys from Berlin/1971* and had marked out a territory where Rainer was producing 'complex and challenging statements' in film.⁷⁶ Rainer's film work reflected her concerns with dance combined with a Brechtian legacy of disjuncture and distancing along with the influence of European counter-cinema. This was at odds with Rainer's own location in the USA and the contemporary American avant-garde cinema of film makers who were then being celebrated both in America and Europe.

Journeys from Berlin/1971 became synonymous with Rainer's shift from dancer to filmmaker and was, as Ruby Rich comments, Rainer's most risk-taking cinematic work so far.⁷⁷ The film is multi-layered; involving not least a psychoanalysis session and a conversation about political violence. The psychoanalysis session casts Annette Michelson, the film critic, as the patient describing relationships, motherhood, equality and politics. Much of the footage of the analyst session is shot from behind the therapist's head. At intervals throughout these sessions Rainer recasts the therapist as a woman, a bearded man and a nine-year boy who barks. The conversation about political violence takes place on the soundtrack between two 'Soho' types who are preparing a meal in a kitchen and are played by the artists Amy Taubin and Vito Acconci while the camera tracks along a domestic mantle piece. The conversation on political violence uses texts by Emma Goldman and Kropotkin comparing these to the Baader-Meinhof group, whose story is told by scrolling inter-titles. The film continually moves back and forth between these 'voices' so that no singular voice is authoritative and 'meaning must be wrested from the interrelationship of contrasting voices'.⁷⁸ In *Journeys from Berlin/1971* Rainer continued the theme of her previous films and explores the relationship between public and private spaces. The film is not only an experiment in narrative but in languages, where spoken language and printed text compete for and represent different forms of

⁷⁶ STORR, R. 'The Theoretical Come-On', *Art in America*, Vol.74, No.4, 1986, p.158.

⁷⁷ RUBY RICH, B. *Chickflicks*, op. cit. p.148

⁷⁸ CARROLL, N. RAINER, Y. 'Interview', In STONEHAM, R. THOMPSON, H (eds). *The New Social Function of Cinema*, Catalogue, London, British Film Institute, 1981, p.79

authority.

Whilst Ruby Rich maintains that woman is 'at the centre of this film', as had previously been noted by Kuhn, concerns over Rainer's status as a bona-fide feminist had been raised.⁷⁹ In a discordant interview with the *Camera Obscura* Group where an attempt to unpack Rainer's 'radical formalism' ends in Rainer stating that she wishes to portray women as reflected in the reality of her own experience as - 'being courageous, being terrified, getting excited, getting outraged...'.⁸⁰ Ruby Rich defines melodrama as including woman at the centre of the film and so concludes that this much derided area of women's film must include Rainer's work.⁸¹ Rainer, in a later interview, uses this in her defence in reply to the complaint that *Journeys from Berlin/1971* had no position on feminism. She argues that it explores the 'internalised object hood' for middle class women while dealing with political repression by the State.⁸² At the end of the film, Rainer intervenes in its formal play by making a statement directly to the camera. She tearfully regrets the loss of pre-war Berlin, briefly showing her individual voice. In doing this, Rainer had broken her 'allegiance to an infinite play of meanings' and her avant-garde credentials.⁸³ This strategy is no less risky than those Rainer continued to use in the films that followed; *The Man Who Envied Women* (1985), a much acclaimed critique of masculinity in the guise of a 'Marxist progressive academic who is a philanderer'; *Privilege* (1992), and more recently *MURDER and murder* (1997), which follows the relationships of older lesbians.⁸⁴

In *The Man Who Envied Women* Rainer had used texts by Foucault and Lacan which led

⁷⁹ RUBY RICH, B. *Chickflicks*, *op. cit.* p.152

⁸⁰ CAMERA OBSCURA, 'Yvonne Rainer: Interview', *Camera Obscura*, No.1, 1976, p.96

⁸¹ RUBY RICH, B. *Chickflicks*, *op. cit.* p.139

⁸² CARROLL, N. RAINER, Y. 'Interview', *op. cit.* p.81

⁸³ RUBY RICH, B. *Chickflicks*, *op. cit.* p.153

⁸⁴ GOODEVE, T.N. 'Rainer Talking Pictures', *Art in America*, Vol.85, No.7, 1997, p.60
STORR, R. 'The Theoretical Come-On', *op. cit.* p.158-165; MELLENCAMP, P. 'Images of Language and Indiscreet Dialogue: *The Man Who Envied Women*', *Screen*, Vol.28, No.2, 1987, p.87-101 and REYNAUD, B. 'Impossible Projections', *Screen*, Vol.28, No.4, 1987, p.40-52, for commentary on this.

Barbara Kruger to comment on Rainer's 'pleasurable ambiguity' where the women characters wittily disrupt these master narratives.⁸⁵ Mellencamp agrees that Rainer's aim in *The Man Who* is not anti-theoretical but one which grounds contemporary debates in ways that are archly ironical, critical and funny.⁸⁶ Rainer's films have been seen as containing elements of autobiography where she intertwines the personal and political and this becomes more apparent in her recent work.⁸⁷ In *MURDER and murder*, described both as a 'slapstick comedy' and a 'lesbian soap opera' Rainer reveals her own mastectomy to the camera to talk directly about breast cancer. With this film, Rainer had changed her handling of the narrative form to a traditional telling of the story of a lesbian relationship which reflected her own change of status from being a 'political' lesbian to becoming a lesbian.⁸⁸

Conclusion

Fowler's recent assessment of the work of these film makers is that they were all 'visual pleasure' films that not only engaged with Mulvey's article but with the 'moment' that it represented in feminist film history.⁸⁹ This is a moment that must remain distinguished as one where different forms of feminist pleasure were explored. Kuhn notes these films as pursuing ideas of pleasure through 'relations of looking, narrativity and narrative discourse, subjectivity and autobiography, fiction as against non-fiction and openness as against closure'.⁹⁰ These pleasures are decidedly intellectual and similar to Potter's definition that

⁸⁵ KRUGER, B. 'Yvonne Rainer: *The Man Who Envied Women* (Review)', *Artforum*, Vol.XXIV, No.10, 1986, p.124

⁸⁶ MELLENCAMP, P. 'Images of Language', *op. cit.* p.99

⁸⁷ RUBY RICH, B. *Chickflicks*, *op. cit.* p.155

⁸⁸ GOODEVE, T.H. 'Rainer Talking', *op. cit.* p.104; RAINER, Y. 'Working Round the L-Word', *op. cit.* p.12-20. NADEAU, C. 'Review', *Screen*, Vol.39, No.1, 1998, p.87-91. *MURDER and murder* was also shown, to acclaim, at the 9th New York City Lesbian and Gay Film Festival 1997.

⁸⁹ FOWLER, C. 'Cinefeminism', *op. cit.* p.51-61

⁹⁰ KUHN, A. *Women's Pictures*, *op. cit.* p.169

her earlier work contained 'a pleasure in analysis, in unravelling, in thinking'.⁹¹ Potter later states that she has always worked in the 'pleasure mode', which she describes as ideas, complexity and layering.⁹² These films placed woman at the centre of a 'familiar' art cinema', as Brunsdon had argued, at a time when pointing a film camera at women subjects was 'equivalent to a terrorist act' as Mary Anne Doanne describes.⁹³ The impact that these films then had on the theoretical concerns of both film makers and spectators cannot be over-estimated. Brunsdon, describing the events of the 'Feminism and Film' programme at the Edinburgh Film Festival, notes that these films 'can only be successfully approached with some acceptance of the political necessity for interrogating film form'.⁹⁴ It becomes clear that these avant-garde feminist film makers produced work that existed in a context where film practice and film theory were intimately related.

These films are admittedly difficult to look at now and it is an impossible task to evaluate them without reference to their context and to commentaries that proceeded from them. Brunsdon, Citron and Ruby Rich have all described the difficulties, debates and antagonism's which were played out around the films reception and which contribute to that historical moment. In reconstituting this moment I have illustrated the importance of these films and reinstated their connection to Mulvey's work. The case that was argued by both Kaplan and Kuhn can be seen to have supported this. I have suggested that what can be seen now is the importance of the new pleasures that were explored and their status as feminist films. Whilst some of these film makers had great difficulty in describing themselves as feminist, it was in this critical context that their film's were both important and successful. During this relatively short period Mulvey's essay had provided a

⁹¹ HUMM, M. *Feminism and Film*, *op.cit.* p.173

⁹² FLORENCE, P. 'debate: A conversation', *op.cit.* p.278

⁹³ BRUNSDON, C (ed). *Films for Women*, *op.cit.* p.55. Brunsdon borrows from Bordwell and Neale and describes 'art cinema' as the use of 'subjective voice, interior realism, unresolved narrative, marked formal self-consciousness. DOANNE, M.A. 'Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body' (1981) reprinted in MICHELSON, A. KRAUSS, R. CRIMP, D. COPJEC, J. (eds). *October: The First Decade, 1976-1986*. MIT Press, 1987, p.327

⁹⁴ BRUNSDON, C (ed). *Films for Women*, *op.cit.* p.54

theoretical context for feminist audiences to view these films as experiments in visual pleasure. This relationship is revalued here and adds to the genealogical reading of Mulvey's essay in showing the effect on practices that was produced.

As Mulvey herself comments, by the end of the 1980s 'feminist film theory (had) lost touch with feminist film making, that which had hitherto acted as its utopian other', noting at the same time that the concern with female spectatorship had broadened into other cultural arenas.⁹⁵ Fowler's argument that the development of these film makers practices 'needs to be reconnected to the feminist film history that was once its interpreter' is a valuable one.⁹⁶ As the film makers under discussion here did continue to negotiate visual pleasure, as noted, so too did other film makers and artists who sought to establish new languages of desire. In this chapter I have begun to establish a legacy of Mulvey's essay in visual practice and noted a visual pleasure moment. The task that unfolds now is a broadening of the discussion to include other visual practices where work can be examined in the context of the legacy of that moment.

⁹⁵ MULVEY, L. 'British Feminists', *op. cit.* p.77

⁹⁶ FOWLER, C. *Cinefeminism*, *op.cit.* p.60

Chapter 4 - Technologies

The work of the last chapter identified a visual pleasure moment as one where Mulvey's work is central. This has formed a further part of a genealogical reading of Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' where I am arguing for effects that have been produced beyond its own theoretical location. At a time when debates had begun to form around representation rather than realism, as had been the case in the 1970s, Mulvey's work continued to be crucial. This chapter identifies a further key moment and broadens the discussion to examine the work of artists, rather than film makers. Looking at developments in photographic work during the 1980s in the UK, this chapter sets out to establish a number of practices in which Mulvey's theoretical work is embedded - tape-slide and photo-text.

Tape-slide had emerged in the late 1970s and whereas photo-text work had emerged earlier in the 1970s, both forms had all but disappeared from gallery contexts by 1985. These practices were used in what Victor Burgin describes as 'the way in which images and words mesh together into what we might call a 'scripto-visual' discourse'.¹ This meshing of photographs and text as much as the commandeering of an otherwise educational and presentational tool, the slide-projector, led to a moment when avant-garde art practices explored the separation of photographs and text, and images and sound.

The main commentators of the period, Burgin, Kelly, Pollock and Tickner, acknowledge that these artists were responding to a legacy of ideas formulated in *Screen* in the 1970s, including Mulvey's. The importance of theory, as Lisa Tickner stresses, which has 'always transformed and exceeded in the production of art - as part of the very texture and project of the work itself' came to the fore in the work of these artists.² The period is seen largely

¹ GODFREY, T. 'Sex, Text, Politics: An Interview with Victor Burgin', *Block*, No.7, 1982, p.9. This is distinct from Mary Kelly's use of the term 'scriptovisual practice' to describe 'the notion of "writing" as an aesthetic device' as noted in KELLY, M. *Imaging Desire*, *op. cit.* p.xxiv.

² TICKNER, L. 'Sexuality and/in Representation: Five British Artists' (1984) in PREZIOSI, D (ed). *The Art of Art Theory: A Critical Anthology*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1998, p.357

by practitioners and critics alike as one which is still concerned with language and driven by content. That technologies participated in this work is always implicated but never fully examined. While Mulvey commented on the 'simple exploitation of ...words and photographs in juxtaposition' when discussing photo-text work and Judith Higginbottom recounting her experience of using tape-slide maintained that she 'never thought too much about the medium', both the medium and the technologies did have a presence.³ What can be done here is to shift the ground by defining the work of these artists around the technologies used and suggest another basis for examining this work offering a slightly different view of the period. Further, looking at this work now provides an opportunity to re-evaluate some aspects of the period, a task that has been little undertaken since Mary Kelly and Griselda Pollock's contemporaneous assessments, and one not aided by the lack of archives and holdings of this work which are now largely available only in reproduction.⁴

The selection of artists chosen to discuss here suggests a different way to address well-rehearsed arguments about the period. For this reason, I have moved away from the individuals who are seen to represent and articulate dominant feminist ideas of the period, for example, Kelly. In keeping with a genealogical approach, attention is drawn towards lesser known practitioners so that a differentiated and more heterogeneous view of the period can be offered.⁵ In this way the period can be seen to contribute to a genealogical reading of Mulvey's essay and included in its legacy to practice.

³ MULVEY, L. 'Dialogue with Spectatorship: Barbara Kruger and Victor Burgin' (1983) in *Visual and Other op. cit.* p.127; Correspondence with Judith Higginbottom, Appendix V, 3/11/04.

⁴ Both LUPTON, C. 'Circuit-breaking Desires: Critiquing the Work of Mary Kelly' and EVANS, J. 'Victor Burgin's Polysemic Dreamcoat' in ROBERTS, J (ed). *Art Has No History! The Making and Unmaking of Modern Art*, London and New York, Verso, 1994, provide recent valuable re-evaluation of the period. Earlier assessments of the period include POLLOCK, G. *Vision & Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*, London and New York, Routledge, 1988 and KELLY, M. 'Beyond the Purloined Image' (1983) and 'On Representation, Sexuality, and Sameness' (1987), both reprinted in KELLY, M. *Imaging Desire*, *op. cit.*

⁵ See Catherine Lupton who says of Kelly's role 'the particular formation of Mary Kelly's art practice at the conjunction of certain paradigmatic moments in the history of second-wave white Western feminism'. LUPTON, C. 'Circuit-breaking Desires', *op. cit.* p.230.

Tape-slide/ Slide-tape⁶

When Maggie Humm noted that scant attention had been paid to the intellectual context of Laura Mulvey's essay she also noted that 'practices of transformation have been under theorised' and goes on to describe one such example, a tape-slide project carried out in 1989 with Women's Studies students from the University of East London.⁷ This educational and community context is different to the gallery context described later by Chrissie Iles writing on the development of time-based media as the tape-slide 'experiments' the late 1980s.⁸ The period in which tape-slide work circulated in galleries is marked by two key exhibitions; *About Time: Video, Performance and Installation by 21 Women Artists* (1980) and *Signs of the Times: A decade of video film and slide tape installation* (1990). After this tape-slide no longer existed as a practice either in educational and community settings or in studios and galleries. It was overtaken by developments in technology and fell by the wayside when changes took place in the making of 'visual political theory'.⁹

As a medium, tape-slide was a series of projected 35mm slides synchronised with a tape soundtrack and was technically crude, cheap and eccentric.¹⁰ Tape-slide has not offered itself up to be collected, archived or even adequately documented making the task of providing an accurate retrieval of its history difficult. This has been borne out in an interview I conducted with Judith Higginbottom, an artist who had used tape-slide during

⁶ The terminology to describe the technology is not consistently throughout the literature. Therefore I follow the lead of the literature I am using and how it phrases the term.

⁷ HUMM, M. *Feminism and Film*, *op. cit.* p.viii , p.184

⁸ The Independent Photography Project including local community photographers, Trish le Gal, Santoshni Perera, Linda Conboy, worked on the Women's Studies Degree at UEL in 1989, HUMM, M. 'Tropisms, Tape-slide and Theory' , In GRIFFIN, G (ed). *Changing Our Lives: Doing Women's Studies*, London, Pluto Press, 1994, p.155; ILES, C. 'Signs and interpretations: time-based installation in the eighties', In ILES, C (Ed). *Signs of the Times: A Decade of Video, Film and Slide-tape Installation in Britain, 1980-1990*, exhibition catalogue, Oxford, The Museum of Modern Art, 1990, p.20

⁹ *ibid.* p,185

¹⁰ 'Cheap', 'crude' and 'eccentric' are just three of the adjectives which Humm uses to describe tape slide, *ibid.* p.179-194

the period. Higginbottom states that the unpredictable nature of tape-slide led to much of the original material not surviving and that which did is difficult to access in archives.¹¹

The value of tape-slide, for Humm, was the way that it could exemplify feminist praxis by addressing the production of knowledge within its form. The nature of the technology meant that it was easily utilised to explore deconstructive techniques and the potential of tape-slide in these settings was its use as an analytical tool. Whilst in Humm's view tape-slide had little to do with art practices, Iles provides examples that co-existed with these educational activities which prove otherwise. Whilst Iles recognises slide-tape's use in education, its context in visual arts practices came with early support from the London Film Makers Co-op, and newer organisations, like London Video Arts. For artists, slide-tape was a relatively cheap way to produce work which could be made without the need for external funding and, as Iles pointed out, it was a financially 'self supporting practice'.¹²

When the Co-op, held a *Summer Show* in 1980 it included slide-tape as an area related to film. In this exhibition Judith Higginbottom's *Sea Dreams* (1979), a series of slides which approximate to 'lunar/tidal/menstrual'¹³ cycles accompanied by a soundtrack of waves, and Tina Keane's *Clapping Songs* (1979) were included. Both artist's work were also included in *About Time: Video, Performance and Installation by 21 Women Artists* exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, in 1980. At the ICA, Higginbottom exhibited *Water Into Wine* (1980); a slide-tape using two projectors, superimposing slides with a pulsed soundtrack. The work was based on the experiences of 27 women documenting the relationship between the menstrual cycle, dreaming and creativity.¹⁴ Keane, otherwise increasingly well-known as an artist working in film,

¹¹ Tape-slide therefore, has left no archive and there are no holdings which can be publicly accessed. Some examples of tape-slide work were transferred to video, for example, see 'Interview with Judith Higginbottom', Appendix IV, 1/11/04, talking about her 1980 work *Water Into Wine*.

¹² ILES, C. (1990) 'Signs and interpretations', *op. cit.* p.20. A view supported by Judith Higginbottom, see 'Interview with', *op. cit.*

¹³ The London Film makers Co-op, *Summer Show*, exhibition catalogue, London, 1980; HUNTER, A. 'Feminist Perceptions', *Artscribe*, No.25, October, 1980, p.28-29

¹⁴ Institute of Contemporary Arts *About Time: Video, Performance and Installation by 21 Women Artists*,

performance and mixed media installation, later developed *Clapping Songs* into the video/performance installation *Demolition/Escape* (1983), using slide-tape briefly as one of a range of technologies she has utilised throughout her practice.¹⁵

Away from the context of the Co-op, Pat Whiteread first started making slide-tape works in 1973 culminating in *Journey of Human Error* which was shown in the *About Time* exhibition.¹⁶ Whiteread was one of the organising group of *Women's Images of Men* (1980), an exhibition of painting, photography and sculpture at the ICA, which had immediately preceded and led to the *About Time* exhibition. Amongst the other 20 artists in *About Time*, Roberta Graham exhibited *Short Cuts to Sharp Looks*, a slide-tape work which mounted a critique against cosmetic surgery.¹⁷ Later, Graham exhibited light boxes, containing series of photographic and collaged images but never completely abandoned tape-slide work, producing *Fallen Angel* in 1985, a series of photographic panels and a 20 minute tape slide.¹⁸

The *About Time* exhibition served to illustrate the approaches of women artists, in disciplines that were 'beyond the traditional boundaries'.¹⁹ Given that much of the development in time-based practices had been dominated by male artists *About Time* made an important contribution to the gender-based critique and analysis in this emerging

exhibition catalogue, London, 1980, p.17

¹⁵ FISHER, J. 'Demolition/Escape', In GRANT, C (ed). *Electronic Shadows: The Art of Tina Keane*, London, Black Dog Publishing, 2004, pp.28-31.

¹⁶ Institute of Contemporary Arts, *About Time*, *op. cit.*; 'Editorial', *Art Monthly*, No.211, November, 1997, p.18; CONNARTY, J. 'Introduction', *With Your Own Face On*, exhibition catalogue, Norwich, Wild Caret Press, 1994, p.13

¹⁷ HUGHES-HALLETT, L. 'The Battlefields of Love: Insights into the Work of Roberta Graham', *Performance*, No.65/66, Spring 1992, p.19-28

¹⁸ ARCHER, M. 'Serpentine Summer Show', *Studio International*, V.196, No. 1001, August, 1983, pp.32-33; READ, S. 'The Selectors' Show', *Creative Camera*, No.240, December, 1984, pp.1618-1619; CAIGER-SMITH, M. 'Through the Looking Glass', *Creative Camera*, No. 8/9, 1989, pp.52-56; WATSON, G. 'Performance Art's Untapped Potential', *Art International*, No.7, Summer, 1989, p.43; GRAHAM, R.M. and HOLLINGS, K. 'Fallen Angel', *Ten:8 International Photography Magazine*, No.25, 1987, p.40-45; GRAHAM, R. 'Fallen Angel', *Art & Design*, V.12, September - October, 1997, pp.10-11

¹⁹ ELWES, C. GARRARD, R. NAIRNE, S. 'About Time', in Institute of Contemporary Arts, *About Time*, *op. cit.* p.1.

area of practice.²⁰ Lynn McRitchie describes the slippage between the terms which was applied to the work of women artists; Third area, Mixed Media and Live work. These had grown out of the intersection of expanded cinema and performance work in the work of Annabel Nicholson, Sally Potter and Roberta Graham that was initially supported by the London Film Makers Co-op.²¹

By the time Chrissie Iles curated *Signs of the Times: A decade of video, film and slide tape installation in Britain 1980-1990* at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, in 1990, she was able to present the idea that time-based media had clearly developed from these practices and whilst acknowledging its precedents in politicized work, had moved to a point where she considered slide-tape had become an 'illusionistic device'.²² In this exhibition Roberta Graham, Holly Warburton and Antony Wilson exhibited slide-tape works. Warburton's *Viridus* (1990) used sophisticated dissolve techniques and had become an 'installation' alongside other installations using video and film which constituted the majority of works in the exhibition. Signs offered a summary show at a point when the technology was advancing rapidly and after a decade in which when these challenges were resulting not only new forms of address but in new practices.

Tape-slide had also been used among some practitioners not associated with any of these groupings, such as James Coleman (*Slide Piece*, 1973; *The Ploughman's Party* 1979/80),

²³ Judith Barry (*In the Shadow of the City... Vampyry...* 1982/5; *Echo* 1986)²⁴ and Black

²⁰ Video Art: The Early Years - A Chronology of the First Two Decades of British Video Art, <http://ukvideoart.tripod.com/>, consulted 24/9/04, covers 1971-1993 this shows little or no involvement of women artists before the *About Time* exhibition in 1980 and is dominated by David Hall, a member of the London Film Makers Co-op.

²¹ MacRITCHIE, L. 'About Time - Historical Background', In Institute of Contemporary Arts, *About Time*, *op. cit.* p.3-6

²² ILES, C. 'Signs and interpretations', *op. cit.* p.18

²³ The Douglas Hyde Gallery, *James Coleman*, exhibition catalogue, Dublin, 1982

²⁴ The Douglas Hyde Gallery, *Judith Barry*, exhibition catalogue, Dublin, 1988

Audio Film Collective²⁵, whose work *Signs of Empire* (1983-85) and *Images of Nationality* (1983-85) were both tape-slide works which were part of a larger work *Expeditions* which was shown at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, in the exhibition *From Two Worlds* (1986). Mona Hatoum, Andrea Fisher, Marion Urch, Isaac Julien and Keith Piper were also noted by Iles as having produced slide-tape work.²⁶

By the 1990s the use of slide-tape/tape-slide had all but ceased even as part of multi-media installations and was being overtaken by digital technologies. The medium had served a brief but useful purpose. It had provided an accessible and economically viable form, particularly for women artists, and had provided a technology which could deconstruct the single masterful image, which by separating image and sound had allowed for the formal experiments into new languages that Mulvey had called for.

Photo-text

The point had been made by Laura Mulvey that in the 1980s the question of female spectatorship had moved from being centred on feminist film theory and moved into other cultural arenas, both fine art and photography.²⁷ By this time there had been three major exhibitions at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London: *About Time* (1980), *Women's Images of Men* (1980) and *Issue: Social Strategies by Women Artists* (1980), all of which had concerned themselves with these issues. Parker and Pollock documenting these activities in 1987 maintain that these practices – which included tape-slide and photo-text – had followed on from the challenges set out by Mulvey in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. In documenting the pleasures being found in deconstruction and fragmentation Parker and Pollock are clear that 'practical strategies and strategic practices' had by the

²⁵ KIRBY, R. SEROTA, N (eds). *From Two Worlds*, exhibition catalogue, London, Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1986.

²⁶ The latter 5 artists listed by Iles as having produced slide-tape work in ILES, C. 'Signs and interpretations', *op.cit.* p.18. Keith Piper using slide projection as part of multi media installations, see Ikon Gallery, *Keith Piper, A Ship Called Jesus*, exhibition catalogue, Birmingham, 1991.

²⁷ MULVEY, L. 'British Feminist Film Theory's Female Spectators: Presence and Absence', *Camera Obscura*, No.20/21, May-September, 1989, pp.69-81

mid-1980s produced exhibitions, events and publications whilst the politics of the Women's Movement were still being 'battled out'.²⁸ Besides the ICA exhibitions other shows; *Light Reading* (1982) at B2 Gallery, London, and *Beyond the Purloined Image* (1983) at the Riverside Studios, London, are key in looking at the context in which photo-text work was being developed and exhibited.

Marie Yates had previously been involved in working with the landscape in the mid-1970s, using documentary and conceptual approaches alongside elements of performance.²⁹ In *Excerpt from proposed publication* (1977) Yates juxtaposed traditional landscape photography with text using binary oppositions, for example 'Ruling Class/Working Class, Theory/Practice', to read against the pictures which are described by Crichton as a critique of capitalism.³⁰ Her work was included in *Issue: Social Strategies by Women Artists*, curated by Lucy Lippard, where she exhibited *On the Way to Work* (1980), a photo-text using montage, text and images which 'explore social preconceptions about images of women'.³¹ The same work is written about later by Pollock, titled as *Image-Woman-Text* (1980), and described as two panels of photographs of women's faces. In one panel the photographs are altered and in the other panel photographs are interrupted by text running across or at angles to the photographs (see figure 1).³² In the first panel, twenty photographs of women's faces are photocopied, enlarged and scratched to reveal the grain of the photograph. The edges of the photocopies are turned back and re-photocopied to reveal white paper which then partly obscures the reading of the face in the photograph. The second panel uses the same twenty photographs enlarged again to

²⁸ PARKER, R. POLLOCK, G. *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970-1985*, London and New York, Pandora, 1987, p.75

²⁹ YATES, M. 'Marie Yates', *Art and Artists*, Vol.8, No.7, Issue no.91, 1973, pp.34-36; YATES, M. 'Correspondence: Artists Over Land', *Studio International*, Vol.191, No.980, 1976, pp.213-214

³⁰ CRICHTON, F. 'Marie Yates', *Studio International*, Vol.193, No.987, 1977, pp.184-186.

³¹ LIPPARD, L. 'Issue and Tabu', in Institute of Contemporary Arts, *Issue: Social Strategies by Women Artists*, exhibition catalogue, London, 1980, p.8

³² POLLOCK, G. 'Feminism and Modernism' in PARKER, R. POLLOCK, G. *Framing Feminism*, *op. cit.* p.111-114. The same work, titled as *Image-Woman-Text*, one panel of which is reproduced in colour in RECKITT, H (ed). *Art and Feminism*, *op. cit.* p.118

reveal their grain and the text appears on the women's faces. Pollock surmises that this work is 'empty of meaning except of its manufacture', however Yates's notes accompanying the exhibition state her intention to involve the viewer in the production of meaning by recognising the 'location of (sexual) difference'.³³ Yates's method of treating the photographs encouraged mis-recognition and drew attention to the photographs, and womens, status as representation. Yates notes that through observing this process the viewer can become involved in deriving meaning from the image.

Pollock had previously written about Yates work as involved in the feminist project of articulating new forms of pleasure, 'producing for women a new language of desire, the other side of theory'.³⁴ Yates's photo-text work *The Time and the Energy* (1981) which was included in the publication *Formations of Pleasure* illustrates Pollock's claim.³⁵ Yates's introduction refers to Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', quoting directly from the essay. Yates goes further in her introduction to propose that current techniques in photography can intervene in the cinematic 'looks' that Mulvey had identified. Yates then instructs the reader to 'view the textual images as if they are moving across a screen with all the processes of pause, delay, repeat...'.³⁶ The work is presented as sequenced and repeated film stills, where the title of the work appears in white over two views of a woman's face. On the right of the picture a 'Voice' states that it is 'Reclaiming the artistic text'.³⁷ The work continues over 7 pages with the reordered words 'pleasure/desire/language' and 'theory/desire' appearing across the photographs and a narration of 'voices'; the statements of the 'Voice' and the conversational 'Voice 1' and 'Voice 2' appearing on one side of the images. In her use of photography to examine the conventions of cinema, Yates had anticipated that the photographic image *can*

³³ POLLOCK, G. 'Feminism and Modernism'. *op. cit.* p.113-114

³⁴ POLLOCK, G. 'Theory and Pleasure' (1982) , in PARKER, R. POLLOCK, G. *Framing, op. cit.* p.246

³⁵ YATES, M. 'The Time and the Energy' in BENNETT, T. et al (eds). *Formations of Pleasure, op. cit.* p.172-179

³⁶ *ibid.* p.172

³⁷ *ibid.* p.173

intervene in the debates generated by Mulvey.

In *Light Reading*, at the B2 gallery Marie Yates and Susan Trangmar both exhibited work which addressed the subject of sexual difference, using text and techniques of fragmentation. Trangmar's *Tattoo* (1981) was a series of nineteen panels which 'dealt with the mapping out and literal marking of the body'.³⁸ In one panel a photograph of a woman's face is overlaid with a patterned screen so that the contours of the face assume these markings, interrupted by textual marks on the forehead and cheek. Underneath the image are lines of text where Trangmar, like Yates in *Image-Woman-Text*, used the third person 'she' to drive the narrative. Appearing in white typewritten lettering on a black background are the phrases, 'she classifies...she symbolizes...she typifies...she betokens'.³⁹ Trangmar's work had been informed by structuralism, feminism and psychoanalysis and was included in *re-visions: Fringe interference in British Photography in the 1980s*⁴⁰ at Cambridge Darkroom (1985) alongside Yve Lomax, Mari Mahr, Olivier Richon, Karen Knorr, Mark Lewis, Sharon Kivland and Helen Chadwick. Trangmar exhibited *Untitled Landscapes* in this exhibition, a series of 'strictly photographic' images shown as a slide installation (see figure 2).⁴¹ The work is accompanied in the catalogue by an essay which tells a rhetorical tale about a search for truth. The photographs show the back of a female figure in various locations; for example, in a car park, in a zoo, against shrubbery, and in front of Andy Warhol's painting 'Mao'. In this work Trangmar invited the viewer to 'complete a story in which the individual pictures appear fragmentary, mysterious, as clues'.⁴² The teasing way in which both Trangmar and Yates used narratives that are partial and 'offered and then withdrawn' to the viewer, are part of this

³⁸ TRANGMAR, S. 'Untitled Landscapes', *Ten.8 International Photography Magazine*, No.25, 1987, p.26

³⁹ PARKER, R. POLLOCK, G. *Framing, op. cit.* p.51. This was Trangmar's only photo/text work as such. Slide projection installation work followed as in South Bank Centre, *Outer Space: 8 Photo and Video Installations*, exhibition catalogue, London, 1991.

⁴⁰ CAMBRIDGE DARKROOM. *re-visions: Fringe interference in British photography in the 1980s*, exhibition catalogue, Cambridge, 1985

⁴¹ TRANGMAR, S. 'Untitled', *op.cit.* p.26

⁴² *ibid.* p.28

constructed approach, as Tickner suggests.⁴³

At this point in the early 1980s photography had grown in stature to represent critically informed practice and occupied a key position on the Left in the UK. Previously, there had been the grassroots presence of *Camerawork*, a London based magazine, and later a workshop and gallery. This had grown from the establishment of an educational group, the Photography Workshop in 1975, with its core members Terry Dennett and Jo Spence. *Camerawork* magazine had included work whose ethos was Marxist and humanist with a legacy of 1960s counter-culture.⁴⁴ Faithful to its grassroots and socialist origins *Camerawork* published photomontage work by John Heartfield and contemporary photomontage work by Peter Kennard. On the other side of these grassroots and community activities Victor Burgin commented that his theoretical output was part of the same discursive space as Mulvey's.⁴⁵ This indicates how these allegiances were being formed and institutionalised across the cultural Left in the UK. It is no coincidence that Mulvey chose to write about Victor Burgin and the Polytechnic of Central London student group, which Burgin taught and who later became associated with his work. Mulvey's writings on Burgin and the PCL group demonstrate her interest in this work which occupied a similar territory to her own. Mulvey notes that the legacy of the 1970s avant-garde, in which she includes herself, had meant that 'theory' had become part of practice and 'established the possibility of a word/image juxtaposition'.⁴⁶

Burgin's practice as an artist and a writer has continued from the late 1960s to the present. However, it is the period at the turn of the 1980s that his influence is most pertinent here and when he and his group occupied a central position in the development of

⁴³ TICKNER, L. 'Sexuality and/in Representation', *op.cit.* p.365

⁴⁴ EVANS, J. 'Introduction', in EVANS, J (ed). *The Camerawork Essays*, London, Rivers Oram Press, 1997, p.21

⁴⁵ BURGIN, V. 'Art, Common Sense and Photography', In EVANS, J (ed). *The Camerawork Essays, op. cit.* p.74

⁴⁶ MULVEY, L. 'Magnificent Obsession': An Introduction to the Work of Five Photographers'(1985), in MULVEY, L. *Visual and Other, op. cit.* p.138

photographic practices in the UK. Burgin's earlier critique of the high modernism of Clement Greenberg had led him to use photography in his practice as an artist and his endorsement of the socialist formalism of Rodchenko led him to engage with the mass media and advertising.⁴⁷ His work *Possession* (1976) famously parodied the visual clichés used in advertising where Burgin revealed its 'hidden mechanism' using a textual message which is at odds with the photograph (see figure 3).⁴⁸ A young white heterosexual couple are pictured in an embrace with text which refers to economic wealth and possession. The work was shown as a poster outside the gallery context, an exception in Burgin's career as a gallery-based artist. This photo-text illustrated a method that was used and elaborated on by the generation of photographers closely associated with Burgin at PCL. At the same time Burgin sought to establish photography theory in his writing, using the work of Marx, Althusser, Barthes, Benjamin, Lacan, semiotics and structuralism to move beyond photography 'history' and 'criticism' and deal with 'representation'.⁴⁹ Burgin frequently acknowledged the contribution made to these debates by Mulvey and the Women's Movement on the 'politics of representation', although Burgin's own use of feminism later became subject to criticism.⁵⁰ Burgin had claimed earlier that 'reading' photographs using semiotics had radical implications for art theory, with 'the potential of transforming art practice', and to choose to do otherwise left photography as an 'approximate' art form.⁵¹ Photography, for Burgin, had become an everyday text seen in newspapers, billboards and magazines; one operating within 'discourses' and becoming the 'site of a complex 'intertextuality'.⁵² Burgin had established

⁴⁷ BURGIN, V. 'Photography, Phantasy, Function', in BURGIN, V. *Thinking Photography*, *op. cit.* p.177-216; BURGIN, V. 'Socialist Formalism', *Studio International*, Vol.191, No.980, March/April 1976, p.146-154

⁴⁸ THOMPSON, J. 'Critical Attitudes', in *The British Art Show: Old Allegiances and New Directions 1979-1984*, Arts Council of Great Britain, exhibition catalogue, London, Orbis Publishing Ltd, 1984, p.56

⁴⁹ BURGIN, V (ed). *Thinking Photography*, *op. cit.* p.1-14

⁵⁰ BURGIN, V. 'Looking at Photographs', in BURGIN, V(ed). *op.cit.*; Jessica Evans quoting Claire Pajaczkowska 'the object feminism becoming the stakes in a displaced rivalry between men' in EVANS, J. 'Victor Burgin's Polysemic Dreamcoat' in ROBERTS, J(ed). *Art Has No History!*, *op. cit.* p.210

⁵¹ BURGIN, V. 'Photographic Practice and Art Theory', *Studio International*, Vol.190, No.976, July/August 1975, pp.39-51

⁵² BURGIN, V. 'Looking at Photographs', *op. cit.* p.142-153

what has been described as a 'philosophical approach' to photographic practice. It was an approach which relied on its own 'theoretical self-consciousness', a position Burgin defended as part of his critique of modernism.⁵³ It does seem to some critics that the point at which Burgin tried to bring Marxist materialism and psychoanalytic theory to bear on photography his project foundered and became impossible to reconcile.⁵⁴

Burgin's work had formed the intellectual framework for a group of ex-PCL students, Andrew Cameron, Karen Knorr and Olivier Richon to describe the function of image and text work as 'the space between the caption and the picture...operating on each other to produce the third meaning, at the level of the whole'.⁵⁵ The group collaborated to make *Milton and Keynes - Outopia* (1984) which was exhibited alongside Knorr and Richon's *A Comedy of Modern Manners in Models* (1984) at the Pentonville Gallery, London.⁵⁶ *Milton and Keynes - Outopia* combined documentary photography and text to explore Milton Keynes, a new city. These works were triptychs with texts which were 'convoluted' using irony to expose the 'high-tech disregard for the place of process and consultation in the growth of a city' and critiqued the Keynesian economic policies of the Thatcher government.⁵⁷ Knorr had previously been one of the five women artists exhibiting together in the exhibition '*Light Reading*' (1982) at the B2 gallery, London, along with Yve Lomax, Mitra Tabrizian, Susan Trangmar and Marie Yates. The exhibition 'took issue with the 'rules' of representation' and Knorr was singled out as taking 'women's art out of the closet and into the streets' by an otherwise unimpressed critic.⁵⁸ More importantly, the

⁵³ EVANS, J. 'Victor Burgin's Polysemic', *op.cit.* p.200-201. During the course of an interview Burgin states that 'Modernism... has become equated with unselfconsciousness.', GODFREY, T. 'Sex, Text', *op. cit.* p.19

⁵⁴ For example, EVANS, J. 'Victor Burgin's Polysemic', *op. cit.* p.221 and GREEN, D. 'Burgin and Sekula', *Ten.8 International Photography Magazine*, No.26, 1987, pp.34-35

⁵⁵ CAMERON, A. KNORR, K. RICHON, O. 'Notes on the Fantasy of the Visual', *Creative Camera*, No.199, July 1981, p.155

⁵⁶ Pentonville Gallery, *Models*, exhibition catalogue, London, 1984

⁵⁷ TAYLOR, J. 'The Stamp of the Breed', *Ten.8 International Photography Magazine*, No.29, 1988, p.31

⁵⁸ PARKER, R. POLLOCK, G. 'Fifteen years of feminist action: from political strategies to strategic practices', in PARKER, R. POLLOCK, G (eds). *Framing, op.cit.* p.51; MORGAN, S. 'Light Reading at B2', *Artscribe*, No.34, March 1982, p.69

exhibition of photo-text work aimed 'to subvert, to invent, to experiment...(to) pleasure'.⁵⁹ In the series *Belgravia* Knorr examined the upper middle classes. These portraits are arranged in interiors which advertise their sitter's wealth and were accompanied by text which uses irony to 'point up the stereotypical look and received ideas of a class' (see figure 4).⁶⁰ Both in this series and in later work Knorr mounts a critique of a class system in its ascendancy during the Thatcher years and, with the Falklands War a current issue, her criticism was pointed. Knorr later exhibited the series *Gentlemen* alongside work by Marie Yates, Susan Trangmar, Mitra Tabrizian, Judith Crowle, Olivier Richon, Ray Barrie and Yve Lomax in *Beyond the Purloined Image* (1983), an exhibition curated by Mary Kelly. The group were described as 'depropriationists', following Heath's discussion of Brecht, where their texts were 'heterogeneous, disruptive, open, pleasurable and political'.⁶¹ Kelly saw *Beyond the Purloined Image* as an opportunity to 'situate gender within a wider network of social and aesthetic debates' and wanted to move beyond the essentialist strategy of the 'woman's show' to investigate more recent strategies in photography.⁶²

The narrative address to the viewer is common to all photo-text work. Burgin's criticism of his earlier work where the use of an authoritative voice left little space for 'the productivity of the reader' led him to use an 'ironic' voice which assumed a shared knowledge.⁶³ Later work, informed by Althusser's work on ideology, is concerned with a viewer who, for Burgin, is 'formed in the act of reading the text'.⁶⁴ An individual viewer is addressed as a 'you', 'me', 'we', and constructed by the text or, in Althusserian terms, 'interpellates' us,

⁵⁹ Publicity handout for exhibition events at B2 gallery, London, 1982 as quoted by PARKER, R. POLLOCK, G. *Framing*, *op.cit.* p.51

⁶⁰ TAYLOR, J. 'The Stamp of', *op. cit.* p.29

⁶¹ The term borrowed from HEATH, S. 'Lessons from Brecht', *Screen*, Vol 15, Part 2, 1975, p120 to mean the decolonization of cinematic languages in the films of Godard, Oshima and Straub 'a critical enterprise, exactly a destruction, a *depropriation*'; KELLY, M. 'Beyond the Purloined Image' (1983) reprinted in KELLY, M. *Imaging Desire*, *op. cit.* p.113

⁶² KELLY, M. *Imaging Desire*, *op.cit.* p.107

⁶³ GODFREY, T. 'Sex, text', *op.cit.* p.16

⁶⁴ *ibid.* p.16

producing 'us' as viewers.⁶⁵ Burgin combined this approach with one which could account for the unconscious where 'meaning, poetic, polyphonous and open-ended occurs along chains of associations' and was characterised by the use of allegory in later work, such as *Olympia* (1982).⁶⁶ Burgin's reliance on psychoanalysis became increasingly attacked. As Watson pointed out, Burgin treated the 'unconscious in altogether too conscious and controlled a way, effectively containing it before it can truly disturb and enrich'.⁶⁷ The period's concern with language had led to a denial of the image, a point made by Mulvey when later commenting on the reliance of 'the authority of the word (where the) theory of the production of meaning...can risk collapse into tautology'.⁶⁸ Evans critique of Burgin's use of psychoanalysis, again referring as did Watson, to the control Burgin exerted over readings of his work by the use of 'copious texts and commentaries' which avoid any uncontrolled interpretations by the viewer.⁶⁹ For Evans, this bears a remarkable similarity to the modernist tactics to which Burgin had once claimed an opposition. While Evans had much to say about Burgin's formalism, his visual 'style' was not something she felt distinguished his work.⁷⁰ However, the constructed mis-en-scene at work in *Hotel Latone* (1982) or *Olympia* (1982) and the use of allegory are a recognisable style also be seen in the work of Burgin's acolytes, Knorr and Richon. This had become part of 'a "look", an attitude, a style' that Solomon-Godeau observed of the post modernist photographic practice that had once thought of itself as a critical practice and can suggest a further reason for its demise.⁷¹

⁶⁵ *ibid.* p.16

⁶⁶ EVANS, J. 'Victor Burgin's Polysemic', *op.cit.* p.208

⁶⁷ WATSON, G. 'Integrating the Beast', *Performance*, No.49, Sept/Oct 1987, p.29

⁶⁸ MULVEY, L. *Visual and Other*, *op.cit.* p.xiv

⁶⁹ EVANS, J. 'Victor Burgin's Polysemic', *op.cit.* p.222. It can be noted that there is a lack of critique of Burgin's work, apart from short generalised criticism as noted in Watson and Green above, as Evans attests. The literature mostly available on Burgin is *by* Burgin.

⁷⁰ *ibid.* p.200

⁷¹ SOLOMAN-GODEAU, A. 'Critical Practices in the Age of Supply-Side Aesthetics' in SQUIERS, C (ed). *The Critical Image: Essays in Contemporary Photography*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1991, p.70

The *Difference: On sexuality and representation* (1984/85) exhibition, was seen in the USA as a summary show at a point at where 'post-structuralist readings centred on texts' were drawing to a close.⁷² Work by Marie Yates, Victor Burgin, Mary Kelly, Sherrie Levine, Barbara Kruger, Sylvia Kolbowski and Yve Lomax was included at the exhibition in the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York. The exhibition toured in the following year to the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, and was seen by Pollock as 'a major feminist event'.⁷³ For Pollock, the exhibition was a 'statement of refusal to permit (the) obliteration of the critical project of the 1970s', as these debates were now seen to be on the wane.⁷⁴ In harking back to Brechtian strategies Pollock points out a real social actor, a woman, who is implicated and to whom Kelly's work *Interim* (1984-89) is specifically addressed. Pollock also discusses Marie Yates work *The only woman* (1985) and how this work too attempts to engage 'the social viewer'.⁷⁵ Yates's work deals with the process of a daughter mourning the death of her mother and represents this through a series of photographic fragments culled from objects and family albums. Yates reframes the same photographs throughout the series in three sections; *Rage*, *Pain* and *Gaze* – reflecting on Freud's stages of mourning. In the first part, *Rage*, banner headlines cut across photographs of Yates's mother and family. In the second part, *Pain*, Yates presents a series of objects and in the third part, *Gaze*, objects from the first and second parts are presented in detail, along with texts on the pages of an open book. Yates presents a partial, fragmented and repeated narrative which, for Pollock, suggests that Yates invited the viewer to use their own experience to arrive at meaning in the work.⁷⁶

Lomax's work *Open Rings and Partial Lines* (1983-1985) was also exhibited in the *Difference* exhibition. Each photographic panel is divided into three sections where

⁷² RANKIN, A. "Difference' and Deference', *Screen*, Vol.28, No.1, 1987

⁷³ POLLOCK, G. *Vision and Difference*, *op.cit.* p.155

⁷⁴ *ibid.* p.156

⁷⁵ *ibid.* p.182-187

⁷⁶ There were precedents for this kind of work, notably Jo Spence's 'Beyond the Family Album' exhibited at the Hayward Gallery, London, 1979, as Pollock points out.

representations of women in film and television are juxtaposed with a female actor who looks into the frame. In other panels shadows behind a glass door provide clues in a constructed 'film noir' (see figure 5). Lomax produces 'an assemblage where a 'middle' or 'third' term neither unifies nor fragments or divides, which in turn calls into question the position of the two sides'.⁷⁷ Pollock later suggests that the 'refusal of oversimplification' that Lomax exemplified was part of the feminist project to explore differences amongst women rather than propose a 'positive image' for women.⁷⁸ Lomax's project has been that of both an artist and a writer. Her writing is both playful and metaphorical, as in the work *Re-visions* (1985), a text reproduced in the catalogue which becomes part of the work of the exhibition of the same name. Lomax uses fragments and quotations from other writers, philosophers and theoreticians with her responses to these to create a new text. This can resemble an autobiography, but as Pavel Buchler pointed out this always implies 'some kind of fiction', both of self and others.⁷⁹ Lomax literally writes the image, not from the position of a critic or a historian but from the position of a practitioner, working with both images and words in a way in which the two are inextricably linked. Lomax wrote *The World is a Fabulous Tale* (1985-1989), followed by making the visual work *The World is a Fabulous Tale* (1988-1990) where collages were assembled from found imagery from cinema, documentary and popular photography.⁸⁰ The written 'tale' is a series of philosophical 'pensee's' on abstraction, fiction, image, lines and middles where referring to Baudrillard and Derrida Lomax constructed a narrative on the image. The visual 'tale' is constructed in much the same way as the written tale; fragmentation and quotation are juxtaposed with shadowy images of a 'self', all of which 'avoid connotations of a whole'.⁸¹ Lomax has continued to occupy this position in her practice; one where

⁷⁷ KELLY, M. *Imaging Desire*, *op.cit.* p.112

⁷⁸ POLLOCK, G. *Vision and Difference*, *op.cit.* p.179

⁷⁹ BUCHLER, P. 'Introduction' in Cambridge Darkroom, *re-visions*, *op. cit.* p.4

⁸⁰ GRESTY, H. 'The World is Indeed a Fabulous Tale': Yve Lomax - a Practice around Photography', in WHEALE, N (ed). *The Postmodern Arts: An Introductory Reader*, London and New York, Routledge, 1994, p.150-162; TICKNER, L. 'Sexuality and/in', *op.cit.* p.356-369

⁸¹ GRESTY, H. 'The World is Indeed', *op.cit.* p.154

ethics with elements of autobiography suggest a subject-in-process. This kind of play which Lomax engages in represents, for Tickner, the 'viewers undoing' in denying (sexual) identity so that the viewer will not know where to position themselves in relation to it.⁸² This, Tickner suggests, is something in which women will have a pleasurable investment. These kinds of disruptive practices seen in the *Difference* exhibition, Tickner also suggests, had delivered the kinds of pleasures Mulvey had called for and in Lomax's strategies, the 'pleasures of play'.⁸³ However, for Rankin, Mulvey's work was held responsible for the 'frigidity' of this work and the 'virtual elimination' of the image in preference to the 'critical distance' of its interrogation.⁸⁴ Rankin went on to suggest that the *Difference* exhibition was both raising and summarising 'crucial questions' which placed the exhibition at a critical moment signalling the end of an era. As at this point Parker and Pollock were noting that feminist practices stood out in 'sharper relief' against the 'reaction and retrenchment of traditional ideologies of art', it appeared that a phase in the legacy of 1970s feminism had ended.⁸⁵

Conclusion

At this moment an overriding concern with 'sexual difference' had emerged; in defining the 'voice' in the work as that of a woman (Higginbottom, Keane, Yates, Trangmar), in occupying the space of sexual difference between the discourses of feminism and masculinity (Burgin, Lomax), in the direct address to the viewer (Knorr, Burgin, Lomax, Trangmar), and in the concern with play and pleasure (Lomax). The problematic that had been set in train by Mulvey's essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', along with other theoretical ideas formulated in the journal *Screen* during the 1970s had provided ideas of central importance to which this work responded. These concerns alone, however, cannot carry meaning where the strategies that were employed used

⁸² TICKNER, L. 'Sexuality and/in', *op.cit.* p.368

⁸³ *ibid.* p.368

⁸⁴ RANKIN, A. 'Difference', *op. cit.* p.99.

⁸⁵ PARKER, R. POLLOCK, G. Framing, *op.cit.* p.73

technologies in an experimental way.

The *Difference* exhibition, Aimee Rankin had suggested, produced work that 'resemble(d) at times a form of interrupted cinema, based on typically filmic conventions'.⁸⁶ Some of the artists concerned, such as Yates and Burgin, referred to their work as a kind of film.⁸⁷ While Burgin was reluctant to answer any questions about the technical process of making photo-text work, as he did not wish to see himself as a 'photographer', he describes the effect as 'a static film, where the individual scenes have collapsed inwards'.⁸⁸ The act of assembling images from different sources and editing them together in a series had, for Kelly, the effect of resisting the 'single essentially expressive and preferably non discursive picture'.⁸⁹ In *The Time and the Energy* Marie Yates clearly thought that the use of photo-text could intervene in film and also suggested that this new form of constructing the photographic image requires different conventions of viewing. Yates invited the viewer to 'read' this work as if looking at a film. It is worth being reminded of Stephen Heath's view that films 'specificity (lies) precisely in its *movement*', leaving Yates's view of the effectiveness of the photographic image doubtful.⁹⁰ However, Yates's proposition can be seen as far-reaching, suggesting that merging the two practices not only produces a different kind of work but produces a different kind of viewer. As Chrissie Iles has commented of the period, a lack of orthodoxy had meant that artist's work formed new relationships between different cultural practices.⁹¹ The way in which technologies were being used is inter-dependent, as photography becomes like 'film' in photo-text and still photographs become animated in a slide/tape work. Yve Lomax's *Open Rings and Partial Lines*, an assembly where Lomax 'borrows the rhetoric of film noir to manufacture a plot',

⁸⁶ RANKIN, A. 'Difference', *op. cit.* p.99

⁸⁷ YATES, M. 'The Time and the Energy', *op. cit.* p.172-179; GODFREY, T. 'Sex, text', *op.cit.* p.15

⁸⁸ GODFREY, T. 'Sex, text', *op.cit.* p.9-15

⁸⁹ KELLY, M. *Imaging Desire*, *op.cit.* p.115

⁹⁰ HEATH, S. 'Lessons from Brecht', *op.cit.* p.125. (my emphasis)

⁹¹ ILES, C. 'Signs and interpretations', *op.cit.* p.18-25

both creating and disrupting a film-like narrative.⁹² There was, as before, a strategic use of media particularly by women artists in the use of tape/slide, one which Jean Fisher points out allowed for a 'temporal component to art production and reception'.⁹³ Tape-slide allowed for the use of a literal voice which 'collaborates in the production of meaning and extends the spatial dimension of the work'.⁹⁴ In use, this now abandoned technology created a physical presence for the voice/sound where (sexual)difference is marked, one which as Owens comments, is an 'insistent feminist voice'.⁹⁵ This, for Iles, is one of the practices which became time-based art and is at the centre of the 're-writing of meaning and the creation of new cultural 'maps''.⁹⁶

For a brief moment this kind of photographic work, both in photo-text and tape/slide, had reached a high point during the 1980s after which its influence has declined. Pollock points out that due to Mulvey's legacy feminist film criticism had an easier task in clearly developing around spectatorship and sexual difference than did the visual arts.⁹⁷ While concurrent work in feminist film theory both critiqued and revised Mulvey's ideas much of the visual work in photo-text and tape/slide was underscoring it. A 'frustrating exercise' as Rankin had said of the *Difference* exhibition, being among those who had noted the influence of Mulvey's ideas.⁹⁸ However, for Kelly, this exhibition had consolidated 'the history of critical work on sexuality' and signified a unity and a common political purpose.⁹⁹ Whilst this has been seen by Pollock and others as a *working out* of the legacy of the 1970s there were already allusions in this work which betray its wholesale interpretation as

⁹² KELLY, M. *Imaging Desire, op.cit.* p.112

⁹³ FISHER, J. 'Reflections on Echo - sound by women artists in Britain', in ILES, C (ed), *Signs of the times, op.cit.* p.62; This was not exclusively a female domain although women artists do dominate, as noted before, exceptions being James Coleman, Isaac Julien and Keith Piper as Iles mentions, p.18

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p.60

⁹⁵ OWENS, C. 'The Discourse', *op.cit.* p.61

⁹⁶ ILES, C. 'Signs and interpretations', *op.cit.* p.18

⁹⁷ POLLOCK, G. 'Trouble in the Archives', *Women's Art Magazine*, No.54, 1993, pp.10-13

⁹⁸ 'RANKIN, A. 'Difference', *op.cit.* p.99

⁹⁹ KELLY, M. *Imaging Desire, op.cit.* p.117

work dominated by language. It was also a period in which experiments with new visual languages and new practices were formulated. With the benefit of hindsight the period can be seen in this way to be not so much as an ending but one where practices of transformation were taking place.

This chapter has broadened the range of visual work where the effects of Mulvey's essay can still be seen to be highly influential. For the purposes of this genealogical reading tape-slide has been reconstituted and photo-text has been reclaimed and shown to be connected to Mulvey's ideas. At a time when feminist cultural politics were being practised and ideas were being circulated in a number of high profile exhibitions Mulvey's work was embedded in the discourses that were taking place. As discussed earlier, both Yates and Lomax used aspects of autobiography in their respective works *The only woman* and *The World is a Fabulous Tale*. While, for Lomax, whose work had involved a denial of identity to emphasize a subject-in-process in order to undo the viewer, it was these issues which were later taken up and worked on.¹⁰⁰ The 'embodied' subject that Yates and Lomax began to suggest was explored in the 1990s as concerns about 'identity' and 'the body' are foregrounded. The work of artists and film makers whose concerns about identity illustrate how different kinds of pleasure unfolded will be taken up in the next chapter to explore a further stage in Mulvey's legacy to visual practice.

¹⁰⁰ TICKNER, L. 'Sexuality and/in', *op.cit.* p.368

Chapter 5 – Embodied Others

In the previous chapter a number of photographic practices that took place during the 1980s were discussed within a genealogical reading of Mulvey's essay. This chapter returns to film media to discuss specific kinds of responses to Mulvey's legacy in the late 1980s and 1990s. During this period these artists were addressing themes of identity, ethnicity and sexuality and, they were *also* responding to critical frameworks that had already been established. The genealogical approach is used to constitute a framework in which Mulvey's work is hybridized in a critical context in which artists and film makers respond to ideas of pleasure, identity and the body. Whilst Mulvey's legacy is less transparent here than in previous decades it does, I will argue, form part of a critical framework that enabled artists to visualise themselves as Other.

Duncan Petrie in his introductory remarks to the conference 'Screening Europe: Images of Post-colonialism', held by the British Film Institute in 1991, reminds us of the effects that the Thatcher years had on film culture in Britain during the 1980s.¹ Petrie commented that the traditional English values being celebrated in a resurgence of sumptuous 'heritage' films were symptomatic of a British 'identity crisis'.² The identity crisis was not based on the idea of a community out there – Europe – but one which was equally affected by its own communities. John Caughie remarks that during the 1980s the 'alienating discourse of Thatcherism', with its exclusions and metropolitan emphasis had produced dichotomised initiatives which led to post-colonial and post-metropolitan agendas being set.³ At this point, not only were these initiatives set in train but also a 'dialogic tendency' in black film practice, later described by Isaac Julien as 'the cutting edge of independent British film culture' in the 1980s.⁴ Julien had pointed out that there

¹ PETRIE, D (ed). *Screening Europe: Image and Identity in Contemporary European Cinema*, London, British Film Institute, 1992, p.1-9.

² Petrie lists Merchant Ivory productions *A Room with a View* and *Maurice* amongst others.

³ CAUGHIE, J. 'Becoming European: Art Cinema, Irony and Identity', in PETRIE, D (ed). *Screening Europe: Image and Identity in Contemporary European Cinema*, London, British Film Institute, 1992, p.42.

⁴ MERCER, K. 'Diaspora Culture and The Dialogic Imagination: The Aesthetics of Black Independent Film in Britain', in CHAM, M.B. ANDRADE-WATKINS, C (eds). *Blackframes: Critical Perspectives on Black*

was a generation of black film makers, himself included, that wanted to make oppositional film. Kobena Mercer commented that 'a new generation of cinematic activists ... symbolise(s) a new threshold of cultural struggle in the domain of black cinema and image-making'; a generation that was distinct from black film makers of the 1960s onwards.⁵ This generation of black British film makers had access to higher education and forms of cultural critique which centred around a 'politics of representation', a legacy of the discourses of which Mulvey's work was a part.⁶ It is against this background that film makers like Julien, who were members of the black film workshops in the UK which included Sankofa, Black Audio Film Collective and Ceddo, developed their film practice within the independent film circuit in the 1980s.⁷

The work of Isaac Julien has to be seen as key during this period. His work has been described as 'instrumental to contemporary independent black film making and to black diasporic theorizing generally'.⁸ Emerging from the growth in the independent film and video sector in the early 1980s a number of black organisations were established in which black artists and film makers could operate.⁹ Amongst these were Sankofa, set up in

Independent Cinema, Cambridge, Mass. and London, The MIT Press, 1988, p.57. JULIEN, I. 'Burning Rubber's Perfume', in GIVANNI, J (ed). *remote control: Dilemmas of black intervention in British Film & TV: report from the BFI African & Caribbean Unit, Black & White in Colour Conference: Prospects for Black Intervention in Television, held at the ICA, November 1992*, London, British Film Institute, 1995, p.55. Julien's conference paper forms a sharp critique of the continued racism of the major British film commissioning institution, British Screen.

⁵ MERCER, K. 'Diaspora Culture', *op. cit.* p.50. Kobena Mercer mentions Horace Ove, Lionel Ngakane and Menelik Shabazz whose work in mainly documentary film had established a framework for black film practice in the UK.

⁶ Both Isaac Julien and Martina Attille mention these factors as reasons for the formation of Sankofa Film and Video Collective in an interview with Coco Fusco. FUSCO, C. 'Sankofa & Black Audio Film Collective', In FERGUSON, R ... et al (ed). *Discourses: Conversations in post-modern art and culture*, New York, London and Cambridge, Mass. New Museum of Contemporary Art and MIT Press, 1990, p.17-28

⁷ The members of the Association of Black Film and Video Workshops were; Black Audio Film and Video Collective, Sankofa, Ceddo, Retake Film/Video and Star, all based in London, Black Film and Video Workshop based in Cardiff and Macro based in Birmingham. This is noted in the cover of a brochure for the *Association Of Black Film and Video Workshops*, (no date) (Source: AHRB British Artists' Film & Video Study Collection at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, The London Institute).

⁸ WALCOTT, R. 'Isaac Julien's Children: Black Queer Cinema After *Looking for Langston*', *Fuse*, Vol.24, No.2, July 2001, p.11

⁹ Following the establishment of Channel 4, which first broadcast in 1982, in addition to the ACCT Workshop Declaration. The workshops were Sankofa, London; Black Audio Film & Video Collective, London; Black

1983 by Julien, Martina Attile, Maureen Blackwood, Robert Crusz and Nadine Marsh-Edwards. *Territories* (1984), Sankofa's first film, was described as an 'experimental documentary' and examined the Notting Hill Gate riots of 1976.¹⁰ Made by Julien while still at St.Martin's School of Art, *Territories* weaves together footage of the Notting Hill Carnival, the riots, police resistance to the carnival, two black men embracing and a Union Jack burning, all super-imposed to produce a multi-layered film. A soundtrack of fragmented texts, voices and music are dominated by two voices, one female and one male, who repeat that they are telling 'a her story, a history of cultural forms specific to black peoples in the Diaspora'.¹¹ The use and treatment of such fragmentary and fragmented material has the effect, as Deitcher notes, of positioning 'the viewer into a more active process of constructing meanings that are no less truthful for remaining open'.¹² This hybrid approach which moved away from the formal concerns of realism was shared by this generation of black filmmakers and can be seen in films that followed by both Sankofa and Black Audio Film Collective.¹³

Black Audio Film Collective had been set up in 1983, like Sankofa, part of the number of black film workshops which were 'born directly out of the political climate created after the 1981 riots', as Julien attests.¹⁴ Black Audio Film Collective made *Handsworth Songs* (1986), a film directed by John Akomfrah, which addressed 'the contours of race and civil

Film and Video Workshop, Cardiff; Ceddo, London; Macro, Birmingham; Retake Film/Video, London and Star, London. ALLAN, V. 'Chronology 1896-1995', in *Spellbound: Art and Film*, Hayward Gallery and British Film Institute, exhibition catalogue, London, 1996, p.156; PINES, J. 'Introduction', in *Association Of Black Film and Video Workshops*, *op.cit.* p.1-3.

¹⁰ 'Sankofa', in 'Association of Black Film', *op. cit.* p.3; Media Resource available, *Territories* (Extract) at <http://www.luxonline.org.uk>, go to 'artists', to 'Isaac Julien', to 'Territories'.

¹¹ SANKOFA, JULIEN, I. ST. MARTIN'S SCHOOL OF ART. *Territories* (1984)

¹² DEITCHER, D. A Lovesome Thing: The Film Art of Isaac Julien, in *The Film Art of Isaac Julien*, exhibition catalogue, New York, Centre for Curatorial Studies Museum (Bard College), 2000, p.15

¹³ *ibid.* p.11-23

¹⁴ JULIEN, I. Sankofa Film and Video Workshop, in *Third Eye: Struggle for Black and Third World Cinema*, London, GLC Race Unit, 1986, p.60. Julien refers to the riots that took place in Brixton and Toxteth. Members of the Collective included; John Akomfrah, Reece Auguiste, Edward George, Lina Gopaul, Avril Johnson, David Lawson and Trevor Mathison. *Black Audio Film Collective (1982-98) Biography*, British Film Institute, 13/06/05 <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/502424/>.

disorder'.¹⁵ *Handsworth Songs* explored the riots in Handsworth, Birmingham, in 1985 and used an approach that Karen Alexander describes as an 'archaeological account', a multi-layered filmic approach.¹⁶ Using actuality footage, the film goes back to the sites of media coverage of events in Handsworth and mixes this with archival footage of black settlement in Britain. The film responded to the media representation of the riots by examining the legacy of colonialism and showing a 'diversity of responses' to the events.¹⁷ One response was from Salman Rushdie who claimed the film only further endorsed the media view of the riots and of black British youth by showing the negative aspects of the black community.¹⁸ Rushdie's criticism did not address the 'filmic aspects of the work', as Coco Fusco points out, rather it had demanded 'positive images' to counteract media coverage of the events and ignored the 'experimental' nature of the work.¹⁹ *Songs* used a number of voices, those from both the south-east Asian community and the black communities. For Jim Pines, the film presented a challenge to 'suggest new ways of representing Black social, political, cultural and historical realities'.²⁰ Along with *Territories*, *Handsworth Songs* was seen as setting different agendas for black film making in the UK in the 1980s and continues to make a pertinent intervention into cultural discourses.²¹ Black Audio Film Collective had adopted what Kodwo Eshun calls a 'tripartite strategy', a method of intervention given their avowedly political intentions, as

¹⁵ ALEXANDER, K. 'John Akomfrah', in CURTIS, D (ed). *A Directory of British Film and Video Artists*, London, The Arts Council of England/John Libbey Media/University of Luton, 1996, p.12-13

¹⁶ *ibid.* p.12

¹⁷ 'Black Audio Film Collective', in '*Association of Black Film*', *op.cit.* p.1

¹⁸ FUSCO, C. 'Sankofa & Black Audio', *op cit.* p.34. Kobena Mercer too notes how Rushdie's comments 'reveal a crisis for black cultural politics', MERCER, K. 'Diaspora Culture', *op. cit.* p.51, as do both Mercer and Isaac Julien in agreeing that 'black films have been so few...there has been a tendency to 'celebrate' the fact they ever got made at all', JULIEN, I and MERCER, K. Introduction: De Margin and De Centre, *Screen*, Vol.29, No.4, Autumn, 1988, p.5

¹⁹ FUSCO, C. 'Sankofa & Black Audio', *op. cit.* p.34.

²⁰ PINES, J. 'The Cultural Context of Black British Cinema', in CHAM, M.B. ANDRADE-WATKINS, C (eds). 'Blackframes', *op. cit.* p.28

²¹ *Handsworth Songs* was shown at a recent retrospective of film and debate to mark the 20th anniversary of the 1985 riots in Handsworth at the Drum, a Cultural Centre in Aston, Birmingham in October 2005 at the same time as riots were – for different reasons - taking place. The Drum, *Handsworth Evolution*, film exhibition programme, Birmingham, 2005

their work could be seen in the gallery, on television and at film festivals.²² Eshun argues passionately for the successful interventionist strategies of Black Audio Film Collective, saying that their work preceded later text-based work around postcolonial discourses and exemplified a black avant-garde film practice – as Akomfrah himself had said earlier of *Handsworth Songs*.²³

While still a member of Sankofa, Julien directed *Looking for Langston* (1989), a re-imagined biography of Langston Hughes, the black gay poet of the Harlem Renaissance during the 1920s and 1930s.²⁴ Julien set out to 'meditate' on a period in American history when a black avant-garde was patronised by white bohemians – a period which had subsequently been erased.²⁵ The film was shot in black and white, and Julien used the photographic archives of George Platt Lynes and James Van Der Zee to inform its aesthetics. The film also referred more problematically to the contemporary photography of Robert Mapplethorpe.²⁶ There is no doubt that *Looking for Langston* had a significant effect on Julien's career. In merging race and sexuality Julien had signalled a moment which forced an examination of what is at stake when questions of sexuality are raised for black histories, as Rinaldo Walcott notes.²⁷ It was also a moment which, for David Deitcher, had broken 'the longstanding silence about the queer presence in black Diaspora culture'.²⁸ *Looking for Langston* was not the only film seen at the time as

²² ESHUN, K. 'Untimely Meditations: Reflections on The Black Audio Film Collective', *NKA Journal of Contemporary African Art*, No.19, Summer 2004, p.39. For example, Black Audio Film Collective's tape-slide work from *Expeditions* shown at Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 1996, as noted in Chapter 4.

²³ ESHUN, K. 'Untimely Meditations', *op. cit.* p.39-45; FUSCO, C. 'Sankofa & Black Audio', *op. cit.* p.34

²⁴ Media Resource available, *Looking for Langston* (extract) at <http://www.luxonline.org.uk>, go to 'artists, to 'Isaac Julien', to 'Looking for Langston'.

²⁵ FISHER, T. 'Isaac Julien: Looking for Langston, Montage of a Dream Deferred', *Third Text*, No.12, Autumn 1990, p.59-70

²⁶ This problematic is eloquently discussed by Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien in the article 'True Confessions' (1986), reprinted in Centre for Curatorial Studies Museum, *The Film Art of Isaac Julien, exhibition catalogue*, New York, 2000, p.57-61

²⁷ WALCOTT, R. 'Isaac Julien's Children: Black Queer Cinema After *Looking for Langston*', *Fuse*, Vol.24, No.2, July 2001, p.10-17

²⁸ DEITCHER, D. 'A Lovesome Thing', *op. cit.* p.12

challenging ideas of masculinity in Diaspora cultures. Marlon Riggs' s *Tongues Untied* (1989) was also released at this critical moment in the AIDS crisis but addressed the issue in radically different ways, as Deitcher points out.²⁹ Importantly, while Julien and Riggs were identified as amongst the first 'wave' of Queer Cinema they were both involved in making films which reflected 'the plurality of experiences in the formation of black (British) identity – and the contradictions informing this identity'.³⁰

In *Looking for Langston*, Julien restages an 'aesthetic of the historical', imagining what might have been and coded through references to photography.³¹ This stylised approach uses tableaux vivants where Julien's camera moves through scenes using tracking shots of still figures. Tony Fisher argues that Julien fetishizes the photograph - played out in the tableaux vivants - but what is also of interest here is the '*looking*' aspect of the film as the title indicates. Julien states very clearly that he is 'trying to eroticize the gaze' in *Looking for Langston*, examining how the exchange of looks are important in gay identities and how a hierarchy of the gaze existed in the historical construction of black lesbian and gay identities gaze; of who could look at whom.³² Dietcher and Fisher both describe a scene in the film where a black man in formal evening wear faces a naked black man. The 'dream' sequence is shot from behind the naked man so that the gaze of the man in the suit can be seen by the camera, whose desiring 'look' fails in the intimacy that the scene promises, as the naked man says "I'll wait". For bell hooks this scene is not just of gay desire where 'recognition will remain elusive' but is also a scene of the black gay history that Julien has reclaimed and restaged.³³ Julien's search for Langston Hughes is by its

²⁹ *ibid*, p.12-13. As Deitcher comments, Riggs's film was 'propagandistic' and strongly linked to AIDS activism at the end of the 1980s.

³⁰ WALLENBERG, L. 'New Black Queer Cinema', in AARON, M (ed). *New Queer Cinema*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2004, p.130

³¹ FISHER, T. 'Isaac Julien: Looking', *op. cit*, p.62

³² *ibid*. p.68. In the interview Julien cites Audre Lord writing in 'Zami' about the way that black lesbians did not always look at each other in the bars of 1950s New York where 'different codes and rules which exist in the mastery of the gaze in those spaces'.

³³ HOOKS, *Yearning: Race, gender and sexual politics*, London, Turnaround Press, 1991, p.199. 'Smoke, Lillies and Jade' is the first black gay text to be published in the American journal, *Fire*.

very nature incomplete. In Julien's complex 'inter-textual' film, blues songs, poetry, photographs and archival film montage together with fictional re-staging not just to re-enact hidden histories but also to illustrate a historical present.³⁴ This is one where the social context of AIDS is indicated by the scene of policemen wearing rubber gloves breaking into the contemporary club transformed from a 'speakeasy'. Although the film addresses African American history, it also refers to the UK where the film was produced, and to Julien's own intellectual location, something suggested by the voiceover by Stuart Hall. Julien - and Sankofa who produced the film - made what Fisher describes as a 'hybrid', a political film which 'belongs to a different tradition'.³⁵ That tradition, which for Julien is itself hybridized, includes Laura Mulvey's work.

As Enwezor points out, the complexity of Julien's work is embedded in the 'intellectual traditions' that he calls on, from postcolonial theory to psychoanalytic readings of difference and feminist critiques of masculinity.³⁶ In earlier writing when Julien addressed 'questions of pleasure and desire' they were related to Mulvey's own questions, something of which he is aware.³⁷ Whilst discussing his influences in a later interview Julien cites not only the theoretical work of Mulvey and Wollen but their films as well. Although his rich cinematic aesthetic in *Looking for Langston* would seem to be opposed to much of Mulvey and Wollen's film making, Julien states the importance of their work to his generation of artists and film makers. For Julien 'the question of critical address and the politics of representation' were in the same tradition as that in which the work of Mulvey and Wollen are located.³⁸ There is a critical address that emerges in *Looking for Langston* and later in *The Attendant* where Julien uses the device of a tableaux vivant to apprehend the

³⁴ Isaac Julien in conversation with Nina Kellgren in 'Full Commentary', JULIEN, Isaac. *Looking for Langston* (1989), British Film Institute (DVD), 2005.

³⁵ FISHER, T. 'Isaac Julien: Looking', *op. cit.* p.59

³⁶ ENWEZOR, O. 'Towards A Critical Cinema: The Films of Isaac Julien', in Grand Arts, *Isaac Julien*, exhibition catalogue, Kansas City, Missouri, 2000, p.2

³⁷ MERCER, K. JULIEN, I. 'True Confessions', *op. cit.* p.57

³⁸ ORGERON, D.A. and ORGERON, M.G. 'Interventions: an Interview with Isaac Julien', *Coil* 9/10, 2000, p.5

moving image and to refer to the photographic image. This has the effect of an intervention, a critical pause in the movement of the filmed image and a 'visual alliteration' as Julien describes it - one in which its address becomes critical due to its marked differentiation of pace.³⁹ Perhaps unusually for an artist of his generation Julien directly acknowledges the legacy of Mulvey and Wollen, particularly to the work of the Sankofa Collective, which explored language, audience identification and pleasure.⁴⁰ This followed through for Julien to later work which sought to 'invert' Mulvey's ideas about pleasure, not 'unlearning those categories but...imbedding them with hybridized aesthetic approaches'.⁴¹

While still associated with Sankofa, Julien directed *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), a commercial feature film produced by the BFI for Film Four.⁴² *Young Soul Rebels* received national distribution on the Independent film circuit and whilst never as popular as Stephen Frear's *My Beautiful Laundrette*, has since become a 'cult film' exploring black urban soul music, race and sexuality. Set in London in 1977, the film explores the friendship between Chris and Caz and the sexual relationship between Caz and white punk Billibud, all hinged around the murder of a black man who is killed while cruising in a local park. This is set against the 1970s backdrop of the Queens Silver Jubilee, Rock Against Racism, the National Front, soul funk and punk music. Julien draws attention to 'difference', as Stuart Hall comments, showing 'the relationship of blacks to the community in all its complexity of different overlapping networks'.⁴³ In spite of the fact that Hall, Gilroy and Bhabha have mixed responses to *Young Soul Rebels* they do agree that the film represented a departure from 'political' film making, one which placed Julien in a sphere where he represented the 'new' Black British film making.⁴⁴ If that were not burden enough, Julien

³⁹ FUSCO, C. 'Visualizing Theory: An Interview with Isaac Julien', *NKA: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, No.6/7, Summer/Fall 1997, p.57

⁴⁰ ORGERON, D.A. and ORGERON, M.G. 'Interventions', *op. cit.* p.1-10.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p.5.

⁴² HENRIQUES, J. 'Young Soul Rebels', *Sight & Sound*, Vol.1, Issue 5, p.55

⁴³ GILROY, P. HALL, S. BHABHA, H. 'Threatening Pleasures', *Sight & Sound*, Vol 1, Issue 4, 1991, p.18

⁴⁴ *ibid.* p.17-19

was then identified as part of the 'New Queer Cinema'. This was a movement identified by Ruby Rich and consisted of the wave of films at festivals in the US at the beginning of the 1990s. Tom Kalin's *Swoon* (1992), Todd Haynes *Poison* (1991), Jennie Livingstone's *Paris Is Burning* (1990) and Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho* (1991) were amongst those films proposed as being part of this new genre, with Derek Jarman's *Edward II* (1991) and *Young Soul Rebels* also on Ruby Rich's list.⁴⁵ Interviewed at the time Julien remained sceptical about what 'Queer Cinema' was, seeing his own work as sitting uncomfortably within a framework that did not address race whilst in black cinema, *Young Soul Rebels* was seen as 'very queer'.⁴⁶

The making of *The Attendant* (1993) signalled a change in Julien's own practice, from making feature length film to making documentaries and film installations for galleries. As Deitcher suggests, this may have been due in part to Julien's desire for a different audience but was also predicated on changes in funding and Julien's feeling that cinema 'no longer existed as an experimental cinema or art cinema'.⁴⁷ The shift from the cinema space to the gallery space taking place at that moment becomes an allegory in the film where the museum is the location of *The Attendant*. The film represents F.A. Baird's painting 'Slaves on the West Coast of Africa' (1833) as a number of tableaux vivants which parody the painting. In a series of fantasy sequences the (black) attendant of the painting goes behind scenes of the museum to enter another world where the power relations between black and white men shift as they appear in a number of sado-masochistic scenes. Julien's film uses this to 'subvert the racist and homophobic ideology of British culture' and was a response to the 'Spanner' case in the UK in 1992, where a group of middle aged gay men were convicted of engaging in consensual sado-masochistic practices.⁴⁸ *The Attendant* appears to be a very gay film, however Enwezor argues that to

⁴⁵ RUBY RICH, B. 'New Queer Cinema', *Sight & Sound*, September, 1992, p30-34

⁴⁶ SMYTH, C. 'Queer Questions', *Sight & Sound*, September, 1992, p.35

⁴⁷ DEITCHER, D. 'A Lovesome Thing', *op. cit.* p.18; RUHM, C. 'Isaac Julien, A conversation with', *Camera Austria International*, No.79, 2002, p.19.

⁴⁸ HOUSER, C. 'I, Abject', in Whitney Museum of American Art, *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art*, exhibition catalogue, New York, 1993, p.93; JULIEN, I. 'Confessions of a Snow Queen: Notes

reduce the subject of Julien's filmic concerns as just gay and black 'renders them inadequately' and goes on to argue that Julien's intellectual tradition is a broader location which offers a 'necessary accommodation of his work between theory and praxis'.⁴⁹ Julien's decision to move his work into gallery spaces had indicated that he wanted to make 'theoretical films of desire' with *The Attendant* and later, 'films which can visualize theory', with *Franz Fanon: Black Skin, White Mask* (1996).⁵⁰ In *Black Skin, White Mask* Julien mixes archival footage, interviews and restages dramatic scenes to explore the life and ideas of Franz Fanon (1925-1961), the black intellectual and revolutionary who was becoming increasingly important to postcolonial intellectuals and artists.⁵¹ Julien describes his reasons for making this film as his desire to look at the black subject in Fanon's work about the body in racist culture.⁵² With *Black Skin, White Masks* Julien not only 'return(ed) us to the site of the body' but took on the trope of genre, of documentary and fiction film, as he had in previous work.⁵³

It is here that Julien's work can be seen most clearly to occupy the same space as that of Trinh T. Minh-ha's, as Julien himself points out; one which negotiates the genres of documentary and fiction film.⁵⁴ Although Trinh's film work has not been widely circulated in the UK - her theoretical work has been more widely available - the intersection of Trinh's work with that of both Julien and Mulvey's makes a vital and interesting point here.⁵⁵ Trinh's practice includes making films, music, and installations as well as writing

on the Making of *The Attendant*', in Centre for Curatorial Studies Museum, *The Film Art of Isaac Julien*, exhibition catalogue, New York, 2000, p.79-82

⁴⁹ ENWEZOR, O. 'Towards a Critical Cinema', *op. cit.* p. 2

⁵⁰ RUHM, C. 'Isaac Julien', *op. cit.* p.19; FUSCO, C. *The Bodies That Were Not Ours and Other Writings*, New York and London, Routledge, 2001, p.99.

⁵¹ *ibid.* p.99-104

⁵² READ, A (ed). *The Fact of Blackness: Franz Fanon and Visual Representation*, London and Seattle, Institute of Contemporary Arts and Bay Press, 1996.

⁵³ NASH, M. JULIEN, I. ATTILLE, M. PECK, R. BHABHA, H. K. 'Film-makers Dialogue', in READ, A (ed). *The Fact of Blackness*, *ibid.* p.169

⁵⁴ FUSCO, C. *The Bodies that*, *op.cit.* p.99-104.

⁵⁵ Trinh T. Minh-ha's films were held and distributed in the UK by Cinenova, until recently.

and teaching. Given the way in which Trinh has established a relationship between film and theoretical work much of the useful commentary on her work is written by Trinh herself.⁵⁶ Now a familiar model amongst the artists observed here, whose practice is both visual and textual, Trinh's work seems to have avoided the criticisms levelled at others who used this strategy.⁵⁷ Trinh's body of work is substantial and beyond the bounds of this discussion, however a number of her films and her approach to film demand attention in this context.

Surname Viet Given Name Nam (1989), is Trinh's most well-known film in the UK. The film is structured around interviews with Vietnamese women, which montage with archival film and stills.⁵⁸ The filmic strategies used are described by Trinh as speaking 'from five places', where voice-overs, poetry and proverbs are sung in Vietnamese with subtitles, and interviews are conducted in English.⁵⁹ In its complex intertextuality *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* offers a hybridized filmic form. A further layer is added later in the film as the actors who played the roles of the interviewees describe their exiled lives in the US and their feelings about taking part in the film. The 'interviews' with the Vietnamese women, Ly, Cat Tien, Thu Van and Anh are re-enacted in studio settings and so a play between documentary and fictional film takes place. As Trinh has stated, this shows the way in which documentary film 'authenticates information...(and) are actually sophisticated devices of fiction'.⁶⁰ This is a reminder of the earlier strategies employed by feminist film makers, as noted in the discussion of Michelle Citron's work.⁶¹

⁵⁶ TRINH T. MINH-HA. *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1989. TRINH T. MINH-HA. *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics*, New York and London, Routledge, 1991. TRINH, T. MINH-HA. *Framer Framed: Film Scripts and Interviews*, London and New York, Routledge, 1992. TRINH, T. MINH-HA, *Cinema Interval*, London and New York, Routledge, 1999.

⁵⁷ See discussion on Victor Burgin in Chapter 4: Technologies.

⁵⁸ The interviews were extracts and translations from a book by Mai Thu Van, *Vietnam, Un People Des Voix* (1983), as noted in TRINH, T. MINH-HA. *Framer Framed*, *op. cit.* p. 50

⁵⁹ TRINH, T. MINH-HA. 'Surname Viet Given Name Nam (Script)', in TRINH, T. MINH-HA. *Framer Framed*, *op. cit.* p.49-91

⁶⁰ TRINH, T. MINH-HA. *Framer Framed*, *op. cit.* p.193

⁶¹ See discussion in Chapter 3: Feminist Pleasures

Trinh's film works with the idea that a country is seen through its subjects showing how the 'objectification of its subjects, at once equated with it, (are) subsumed as its property', as Susan Pui San Lok notes.⁶² While *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* constructs a dialogue about the social, economic and cultural position of women in Vietnam it also extends that dialogue to the country of exile and the construction of Diaspora identities. It is not a story with a 'linear intent in mind', as Trinh states, where on arrival in the US the Vietnamese women are suddenly 'liberated'.⁶³ The critique Trinh offers is as much about the commodification of ethnicity in the US as it is about the conditions for women in socialist Vietnam.⁶⁴

Surname Viet Given Name Nam had marked out a new space was in its use of languages, as Julien pointed out.⁶⁵ Trinh had previously commented that 'the relationship between images and words should render visible and audible the 'cracks' ...of a filmic language that usually works at gluing things together'.⁶⁶ This strategy becomes apparent in *Surname* where text is layered over image, not merely as an aid to translation but to give language equal prominence with the image and the acts of seeing, reading and hearing become 'three distinct activities endowed with a certain degree of autonomy'.⁶⁷ These deconstructive strategies resonate with the image and text work being made earlier in the UK and USA.

⁶² PUI SAN LOK, S. 'Staging/Translating: *Surname Viet Given Name Nam*', *Third Text*, No.46, Spring 1999, p.61. Trinh T. Minh-ha also talks about this in an interview and relates the popular tradition in Vietnam 'to the question "Are you married yet?" of a man who makes advances to her, an unwedded woman would properly imply that she is at the same time engaged and not engaged by answering, "Yes, his surname is Viet and his given name is Nam."' TRINH, T. MINH-HA. *Framer Framed*, *op cit.* p.192

⁶³ TRINH, T. MINH-HA. *Framer Framed*, *op. cit.* p.195, with Isaac Julien and Laura Mulvey.

⁶⁴ *ibid.* p.191-211

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ TRINH, T. MINH-HA. *When the Moon*, *op. cit.* p.151

⁶⁷ TRINH, T. MINH-HA. *Framer Framed*, *op. cit.* p.207

Trinh's disruption of the filmic narrative in her later work relies less on the use of text or translation. Although these films are bi-lingual to some degree they *appear* to conform more readily to narrative cinema. In *A Tale of Love* (1995) and *Night Passage* (2005) the pace and pauses in the trajectory of the films amount to what Trinh had described earlier as 'defining what is 'cinematic' and what is not' and continues her exploration of this.⁶⁸ *Tales of Love* relates the 19th century Vietnamese national poem 'The Tale of Kieu' in modern dress and examines both the representation of women and the Vietnamese migrant experience.⁶⁹ While *A Tale of Love* is a narrative film it uses a cinematographic style more akin to documentary film where 'the camera has its own pacing, and the actors are the ones to come in and out of its vision while it stays in place'.⁷⁰ In *A Tale of Love*, the spectator's experience of being a voyeur is unpacked and reflected on in the relationship between Kieu and Alikan, the photographer. These combined elements, at times close to didacticism, made for critical hostility to the film not least because it failed to conform to the cinematic expectations of a love story but because it insisted on concerning itself with 'the politics of gender and the play of certain clichés'.⁷¹

It is clear that Trinh's films can confound critics as they resist categorization in terms of genre, as does her entire practice in terms of a fixed discipline. It is also clear that films made from other ethnic, gender and sexual identities are 'almost never discussed in terms of cinema, that is, presented for their contribution to the art and language of cinema', as Trinh points out.⁷² In Trinh's work, the structure of the cinematic narrative is often laid bare, a strategy that Hamid Naficy describes as 'self-reflexive'.⁷³ It is one which is

⁶⁸ TRINH, T. MINH-HA. *When the Moon*, *op cit.*

⁶⁹ Media Resource available, 'A Tale of Love' (extract) at <http://kicon.com/taleoflove/preview.html>, go to film clip

⁷⁰ TRINH, T. MINH-HA. 'A Scenography of Love (with Deb Verhoeven), in TRINH, T. MINH-HA. *Cinema Interval*, *op cit.* p.11

⁷¹ Trinh speaks about this in interview, TRINH, T. MINH-HA. 'The Veil-Image (with Margaret Kelly), in TRINH, T. MINH-HA. *Cinema Interval*, *op. cit.* p.75-89; p.76

⁷² TRINH, T. MINH-HA. *Cinema Interval*, *op cit.* p.88

⁷³ NAFICY, H. *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, Oxfordshire and New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2001, p.70

complex and nuanced in its negotiation of genres and one which establishes both new forms of address and new languages.

While Trinh has readily addressed the problematic of visualising otherness, a younger generation of practitioners were less forthcoming about their intentions. Kodwo Eshun has argued that generational differences are apparent when comparing the work of black British artists and film makers of the 1980s with those of the 1990s such as Chris Ofili, Ellen Gallagher and, particularly, Steve McQueen.⁷⁴ Eshun, to some extent, dismisses the younger generation of black practitioners whose approach to issues of address tends to be illusory rather than directly engaged. However this sweeping dismissal obscures the way in which McQueen uses cinematic strategies which project large, silent, monochrome, sensual images of black bodies for 'the public screen'.⁷⁵ McQueen came to attention with *Bear* (1993) after leaving Goldsmiths College, London, followed by *Five Easy Pieces* (1995) and *Stage* (1996); and has continued to make film for gallery spaces since then. In *Bear* two naked black men are engaged in a 'fight', at times teasing and dancing around each other, at other times locked together in physical struggle. Filmed in slow motion, *Bear* at times recalls the homoerotic dance - between two white men - in Ken Russell's *Women In Love* (1969), but here the camera is also engaged in the 'fight' dance. The camera distinctly changes position at a point in the piece when it is underneath the two men engaged in a locked struggle, and shoots from the floor through the middle of their bodies so that their genitals occupy the centre of the screen. In *Five Easy Pieces* McQueen's cinematography becomes dominant, as the piece begins with a black tightrope walker shot from underneath, the rope and feet cutting across the screen; a shot identified by Gever as 'constructivist'.⁷⁶ This is followed by five black men playing hula-hoop, shot from above; a single black man playing hula-hoop shot from below; the tightrope walker shot from below to show her head and torso and reveal the concentration on her face; a black man, McQueen, wearing white boxers who appears to urinate on the camera; before

⁷⁴ ESHUN, K. 'Untimely Meditations', *op. cit.* p.38-45

⁷⁵ GEVER, M. 'Steve McQueen', in Hayward Gallery, *Spellbound: Art and Film*, exhibition catalogue, London, 1996, p.98

⁷⁶ *ibid.* p.93

returning once again to the hula-hoop game. As in *Bear* and *Five Easy Pieces* McQueen frequently appears in his own work ; in *Bear* he is one of the men engaged in the fight, in *Stage* he is the black man playing opposite the white woman and later, in *Just Above My Head* (1996) and *Deadpan* (1997) he is the only actor on the screen. *Deadpan* was exhibited at the 1999 Turner Prize exhibition at the Tate Gallery, London, which McQueen won. In *Deadpan*, McQueen stands still while a prop house repeatedly falls over him, the camera alternating between long, mid-range and close-up shots of him; a restaging in homage to Buster Keaton's genre classic *Steamboat Bill Jr.* (1928).

McQueen has often frustrated his commentators by *not* making an issue of his blackness. McQueen's statements show little regard for relating his work to issues of 'blackness', as he says 'I am black, yes. I'm British...But...So what?' whilst acknowledging that his position is made possible by the work of the previous generation of black artists.⁷⁷ Michael Newman suggests McQueen's intentions have a cinematic archaeology, illustrated by his concern with cinematic representation and with cinematic apparatus.⁷⁸ However, while Gever recognises McQueen's formal concerns, her overriding reading of his work 'must be revised in the light of racial politics'.⁷⁹ For Gever, McQueen's work *in toto* forms a critique of racial stereotypes and follows Isaac Julien's work, particularly Julien's critique of Robert Mapplethorpe's work in *Looking for Langston*. Gever points out that the 'actors' in McQueen's work are (mostly) *black* and the artist is *black*, and this must be accounted for. While McQueen stood 'somewhat apart' from the Young British Artist's context in which he emerged, this is not fully accounted for either.⁸⁰ Critical reflection in reviews from the art marketplace have had little time for forming complex analyses of McQueen's work around race and gender.⁸¹ A supreme example of this is Adrian Searle's comment that

⁷⁷ BICKERS, P. 'Let's Get Physical: Steve McQueen interviewed', *Art Monthly*, No.202, 1996-97, p.5

⁷⁸ NEWMAN, M. 'McQueen's Materialism', in Institute of Contemporary Arts and Kunsthalle, *Steve McQueen*, exhibition catalogue, London and Zurich, 1999, p.21-35

⁷⁹ GEVER, M. 'Steve McQueen', *op. cit.* p.94

⁸⁰ FRANKEL, D. 'Steve McQueen', *Artforum*, November 1997, p.102-103

⁸¹ See, for example, *ibid.* and HAYE, C. 'Motion Pictures', *Frieze*, No.28, May 1996, p.40-43 whose discussions of race are peripheral.

McQueen's blackness was 'of no significance' in his winning of the Turner Prize.⁸² That Kobena Mercer sees McQueen as one of a generation who are using strategies which are 'mute or evasive' and no longer 'responsible for (a) blackness' is an indication that visual strategies have changed.⁸³ This is consistent with the market-led context in which this generation of artists operate and which provides few locations to speak of race. However, Enwezor says of McQueen that he is knowingly 'subversive in his usage of political content' and that while his films *appear* to have no content, the work is suffused with 'codes which the viewer has to search for'.⁸⁴ Given the predominance of the black male body in McQueen's films and the framework within which we see them - one which bell hooks calls the 'white supremacy' of the gallery system - it is difficult to see his work as about anything other *than* blackness.⁸⁵ McQueen's work can be seen to present a similar challenge to the one that Iles claimed for Julien and Sadie Benning albeit from a different platform. Iles flagged up Mulvey's argument as having been the source of this challenge, one which broke 'down the established sexual codes not only of cinema, avant-garde film and video, but its heterosexual, usually white critical framework'.⁸⁶ The similarity ends there, as McQueen's location in critical discourse is not the same as is claimed for Julien and Benning, that of 'New Queer Cinema'.

Like Julien, Sadie Benning had been identified as part of 'New Queer Cinema' by Ruby Rich although Rich acknowledged that, for women, this was less to do with 'cinema' than with low budget film making and video.⁸⁷ Pratibha Parmar noted that Ruby Rich's essay

⁸² SEARLE, A. 'Artist finds poetry in motion', *The Guardian*, 1/12/1999, p.15. This statement was justified by the fact that both McQueen and Ofili, the previous years Turner Prize winner, 'both belong to the generation which has provided the largest number of black and Asian students to make their way through art college in post-colonial Britain', apparently.

⁸³ MERCER, K. 'Ethnicity and Internationality: New British Art and Diaspora Based Blackness', *Third Text*, No.49, 1999-2000, p.57

⁸⁴ *ibid.* p.50

⁸⁵ HOOKS, B. *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics*, New York, The New Press, 1995, p.202

⁸⁶ ILES, C. 'The Mutability of Vision', in *Scream and Scream Again: Film in Art*, Museum of Modern Art, exhibition catalogue, Oxford, 1996, p.6

⁸⁷ RUBY RICH, B. 'New Queer', *op. cit.* p.30-34

was initially prompted by the events at the Sundance Film Festival in 1992 and included only one lesbian – Benning.⁸⁸ That is not to say that there were no other lesbian film makers but they were not included in Ruby Rich's celebratory category 'new queer'.⁸⁹ As Ruby Rich noted, many of the films funded, distributed and shown were made by gay men while many of the videos were made by lesbians and were harder to find.⁹⁰ Film makers Constantine Giannaris and Parmar agree that the inequalities in financial access to production and distribution resources for lesbian film makers meant that much 'queer cinema' was gay male cinema.⁹¹

Benning is identified by Pidduck and others as producing art videos for festivals and galleries which formulate ideas around 'identity' and 'autoethnography' as well as occupying a singular place in the early pantheon of 'New Queer Cinema'.⁹² For Ruby Rich, Benning had emerged as the 'high poet of low tech' producing confessional narratives of the artist as a young lesbian.⁹³ Benning shot her work on a Fisher-Price Pixelvision camera; a toy camera marketed to children and produced a grainy low-resolution image that was only in focus within a limited field. *Living Inside* (1989) and *Me*

⁸⁸ Pratibha Parmar's reported comment in FLORENCE, P. 'We are here but are we queer? Lesbian Filmmaking versus Queer Cinema Conference, London, 12 March 1994', *Screen*, Vol.35, No.3, Autumn 1994, p.299

⁸⁹ Contemporary with this in a North American context there were independent lesbian film makers Cheryl Dunye (*She Don't Fade* 1991, *The Potluck and the Passion* 1993, *The Watermelon Woman* 1996) Barbara Hammer (*Nitrate Kisses* 1992), Su Friedrich (*Gently Down the Stream* 1981, *First Comes Love* 1991, *Rules of the Road*, 1992), Sheila McLauglin (*She Must Be Seeing Things* 1987) and in the mainstream Lizzie Borden (*Born in Flames* 1983) and Donna Deitch (*Desert Hearts* 1985).

⁹⁰ RUBY RICH, B. 'New Queer', *op.cit.* p.30-34

⁹¹ SMYTH, C. 'Queer Questions', *Sight and Sound*, September 1992, p. 34-35

⁹² PIDDUCK, J. 'After 1980: margins and mainstream', in DYER, R. with PIDDUCK, J. *Now You See It: Studies in Lesbian and Gay Film*, London and New York, Routledge, 2nd Edition, 2003, p.275-277. See also RUSSELL, C. *Experimental Ethnography*, *op.cit.* p.275-314; HOLMLUND, C. 'When Autobiography meets Ethnography and Girl Meets Girl: The "Dyke Docs" of Sadie Benning and Su Friedrich' in, HOLMLUND, C. FUCHS, C (eds). *Between The Sheets, In The Streets: Queer, Lesbian, Gay Documentary*, London and Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p.127-143. Pidduck also uses Jose Munoz's definition of autoethnography as a method that '(seeks) to reclaim the past and put it in direct relation with the present. Autoethnography is not interested as searching for some lost and essential experience, because it understands the relationship that subjects have with their own pasts as complicated yet necessary fictions'. PIDDUCK, J. 'After 1980', *op. cit.* p.276

⁹³ RUBY RICH, B. 'The Authenticating Goldfish: Re-Viewing Film and Video in the Nineties', in Whitney Museum of American Art, *1993 Biennial Exhibition*, exhibition catalogue, New York, 1993, p.97

and *Rubyfruit* (1989) are described by Cherry Smyth as 'rough', confessional-to-camera pieces that 'jerk and buzz with in-camera edits'.⁹⁴ The jerkiness and characteristic window frame which were qualities of the Pixelvision camera were emphasised when enlarged and transferred to videotape. These films are presented by Benning as a series of 'coming out' narratives.⁹⁵ Benning's bedroom became her 'studio', where she performed and invited friends to act out in front of the camera. Benning narrates the video's in the first-person; often to camera and with additional written messages which Catherine Russell finds 'rhetorical and playful'.⁹⁶ Benning was prolific, producing *Jollies* (1990) and *If Every Girl Had a Diary* (1990) in the same vein, all of which were shown in a 1991 retrospective at Museum of Modern Art, New York, when Benning was 18 years old. This was followed by *It Wasn't Love* (1992), which Benning exhibited at The Whitney Biennial in 1993 - along with Barbara Hammer, Julie Dash, Cheryl Dunye, Shu Lea Cheang and Trinh T. Minh-ha - and was then awarded a Rockefeller Foundation Grant.⁹⁷ The media-friendly story of Benning being given the toy camera for Christmas by her film maker father, James Benning, highlights Benning's early introduction to film making and her work emerging at a 'lesbian chic' moment this contributed to her apparent immediate success.⁹⁸ Benning's

⁹⁴ SMYTH, C. 'Girls, Videos and Everything (after Sarah Schulman): The work of Sadie Benning', *Frieze: International Art Magazine*, No.8, January/February 1993, p.22

⁹⁵ HOLMLUND, C. 'The Films of Sadie Benning and Su Friedrich', in WINSTON DIXON, W. FOSTER, G (eds). *Experimental Cinema: The Film Reader*, New York and London, Routledge, 2002, p.301.

⁹⁶ RUSSELL, C. *Experimental Ethnography*, *op.cit.* p.291

⁹⁷ Julie Dash exhibited *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), which Ruby Rich calls 'intermittently narrative, continuously beautiful, unapologetically spiritual', RUBY RICH, B. 'The Authenticating Goldfish', *op.cit.* p.90, tells the story of an African American family preparing to leave an island to go to the mainland at the turn of the twentieth century. Dash says of the film that it had the qualities of types of ethnographic film but importantly constructs 'an imaginative universe around the question of blackness and black identity' which is situated historically. DASH, J. *Daughters of the Dust: The Making of an African American Woman's Film*, New York, The New Press, 1992, p.28. Ruby Rich says of Shu Lea Cheang's multi-monitor video installation *Those Fluttering Objects of Desire* (1992) that is 'makes eroticism available to women as sexualized agents', RUBY RICH, B. 'The Authenticating Goldfish', *op.cit.* p.86-99. In this collaborative work of Cheang's, which offers 'feminist and multicultural readings of sexuality and desire', women artists and writers from diverse backgrounds were asked to record their experiences of inter-racial sex, amongst whom were bell hooks and Marguerite Duras, FURLONG, L.B. 'Shu Lea Cheang's Genre-Bending Affirmations', *Art Journal*, Vol.54, No.4, Winter 1995, p.65-68. PALEY, N. *Finding Art's Place: experiments in contemporary education and culture*, New York and London, Routledge, 1995, p.65-113

⁹⁸ Benning's father, James Benning, is described by Scott MacDonald as a critical film maker on a par with Mulvey and Wollen, MACDONALD, S. *Avant-garde Film*, *op.cit.* p.93-101; to which Sadie Benning's 'highly developed' aesthetics are attributed, RUSSELL, C. 'Experimental Ethnography', *op.cit.* p.292. Benning's film

media appeal meant that her work overshadowed that of other lesbian film makers in the US, as she was bestowed with what Pidduck wryly calls a 'Wunderkind' status.⁹⁹

Both Russell and Holmlund examine the work of Benning and Su Friedrich, Holmlund forming a direct comparison between the two. Holmlund compares Benning's coming out "dyke docs" with Friedrich's examinations of kinship, lesbian relationships and the context of heterosexuality.¹⁰⁰ As Kotz noted, Friedrich had a lengthy involvement in avant-garde film making.¹⁰¹ Kotz suggests that Friedrich's work is 'loosely autobiographical... (and refuses) to fetishize "the personal" as the locus of meaning', when discussing her earlier films, from *Gently Down the Stream* (1981), *The Ties That Bind* (1984) to *Sink or Swim* (1990).¹⁰² Rather, Kotz maintains that Friedrich examines a network of histories, events and narratives centred around her relationship to her German Catholic background. In her discussion, Holmlund uses 'autobiography' and 'ethnography' as interchangeable terms, failing to use the term 'autoethnography', as Catherine Russell later does in defining it as posing 'the problem of identity through a location of "self" within image culture'.¹⁰³ Holmlund suggests a reason for Benning and Friedrich's mixed reception in their own communities where their films were seen as 'self-absorbed subjectivity and uninvolved

making 'heritage', for want of a better description, is alluded to by Carl, Kendall and Swenson in their survey of 1990s, noting that Benning's 'references to the history of video art, such as the work of Acconci, are indeed learned, conscious choices'. CARL, K. KENDALL, S. SWENSON, K. 'Video Art in the '90s', *Art Criticism* (USA), Vol.14, No.2, 1999, p. 84; HERRIGAN, B. 'Sadie Benning or the Secret Annex', *Art Journal*, Vol.54, No.4, Winter 1995, p.26-29. Herrigan describes how Benning's work was part of 'the mainstream's momentary acceptance of the cultural trend', when lesbians became fashionable in the media.

⁹⁹ PIDDUCK, J. 'After 1980', *op.cit.* p.277

¹⁰⁰ HOLMLUND, C. 'The Films of Sadie', *op.cit.* p.299

¹⁰¹ KOTZ, L. 'An Unrequited desire for the Sublime: Looking at Lesbian Representation across the works of Abigail Child, Cecilia Dougherty, and Su Friedrich', in GEVER, M. GREYSON, J. PARMAR, P (eds). *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*, New York and London, Routledge, 1993, p.86-102

¹⁰² *ibid.* p.95. In addition, Scott MacDonald's commentary on *The Ties That Bind* view this film as a 'process of psychic exploration', even as he describes the film as being about Friedrich's mother, the context for German American's, the Holocaust and journey's Friedrich makes 'having directly to do with her mother's history', in MacDONALD, S. 'Avant-garde Film', *op.cit.* p.102-111

¹⁰³ RUSSELL, C. *Experimental Ethnography*, *op. cit.* p.291

with others'.¹⁰⁴ However for Holmlund, this overlooks the 'advocacy' in their films and, in particular, Benning's concern with homophobia and racism which is often ignored in the surrounding media.¹⁰⁵

In her essay accompanying the 1993 Whitney Biennial in New York, Ruby Rich asserts that the most targeted response to the years of 'repression and marginization' by the Reagan-Bush administrations in the US were by artists 'of colour, gay and lesbian people, feminist women, and white men of conscience'.¹⁰⁶ Michelle Parkerson also celebrated the emergence of a new generation of black lesbian and gay film and video makers - amongst whom were Cheryl Dunye, Julien, Jennie Livingston, Parmar and Riggs - who at that time represented a legacy to Parkerson's own earlier work.¹⁰⁷ Cheryl Dunye's *Watermelon Woman* (1996) articulates a territory similar to Julien's *Looking for Langston*, in searching for a black lesbian actor, Faye Reynolds (The Watermelon Woman), of the 1930/40s, and uncovering the 'disappointing encounters of the archives' - indeed Dunye is described, by Walcott, as one of Julien's 'cinematic children'.¹⁰⁸ A strategy of *faux* documentary is used where Dunye states in the film's closing titles that 'The Watermelon Woman' is fiction. Ruby Rich compares Dunye with Benning in presenting 'serial pleasures of a new kind' where each film is a successive instalment in an unfolding narrative.¹⁰⁹ Like Benning, Dunye also appeared in her own films. In *She Don't Fade* (1992) Dunye is the character "Shae" who narrates the plot and Dunye also plays the main character "Cheryl" in *The Watermelon Woman*, exploring aspects of a fictional autobiography. Dunye's cinematic strategies are many; in *She Don't Fade* the diegetic realism is disrupted with - while acting

¹⁰⁴ HOLMLUND, C. 'The Films of Sadie', *op. cit.* p.308

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.* p.307

¹⁰⁶ RUBY RICH, B. 'The Authenticating Goldfish', *op. cit.* p.88

¹⁰⁷ PARKERSON, M. 'Birth of a Nation: Towards Black Gay and Lesbian Imagery in Film and Video', in GEVER, M. GREYSON, J. PARMAR, P (eds). *Queer Looks*, *op.cit.* p.234-237. Jennie Livingston's *Paris Is Burning* (1990) was amongst these and as Pidduck importantly points out Parkerson's film *Stormé: The Lady of the Jewel Box* (1987) prefigures Dunye's approach. PIDDUCK, J. 'After 1980', *op.cit.* p.265

¹⁰⁸ WALCOTT, R. 'Isaac Julien's Children', *op. cit.* p.12

¹⁰⁹ RUBY RICH, B. 'The Authenticating Goldfish', *op.cit.* p.97

in the film - Dunye issuing instructions to her crew, as well as ironic addresses to the camera and scrawled inter-titles which interrupt the narrative.¹¹⁰ Dunye's films did spawn bad imitations, as Ruby Rich laments in a more recent evaluation of New Queer Cinema.¹¹¹ Ruby Rich marks the passing of New Queer Cinema's 'moment', which although not based on 'cinematic developments', did produce in excess of a hundred film festivals where exclusively queer films were shown in the late 1990s.¹¹²

Undoubtedly the context in the US is different, although Gever, Greyson, and Parmar note that lesbian and gay film and video 'exploded' in the US, Canada and the UK in 1989.¹¹³ Ruby Rich's notion of queer cinema may have been a strategic construct but it is more useful than the differentiations made recently in Pidduck's recent survey. Distinctions are made between art video and film, like that of Benning and Richard Fung, new queer cinema and popular or mainstream cinema.¹¹⁴ While the latter is not of concern here, there is a connection between all these types of film made in the contemporary literature through both the small number of productions and the issue-based activism that bound them together.¹¹⁵ Throughout the period from the end of the 1980s, in both the US and the UK, a great deal of work from lesbian and gay film makers focused on AIDS education which was both documentary and activist.¹¹⁶ There was a political shift to the Right in both countries, with Section 28 in the UK and closures of funding streams in the US.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ JUHASZ, A. 'Our Auto-Bodies, Ourselves: Representing Real Women In Feminist Video', *Afterimage* (USA), Vol.21, No.7, 1994, p.14

¹¹¹ RUBY RICH, B. 'Queer and present danger', *Sight and Sound*, Vol 10, No.3, 2000, p.22-25. For example, Marjorie Kaye's short film *Top of the World* (1997), references if not copies scenes from Dunye's "Dynementaries", except that here the potluck is an all-white affair and the passion is non-existent. Collected on *Teaser: 5 lesbian shorts*, Millivres Multimedia, 1999

¹¹² *ibid.* p.23

¹¹³ GEVER, M. GREYSON, J. and PARMAR, P (eds). *Queer Looks*, *op. cit.* p.xiii

¹¹⁴ PIDDUCK, J. 'After 1980', *op.cit.*

¹¹⁵ RUBY RICH, B. 'New Queer', *op. cit.*

¹¹⁶ Relevant examples here are Isaac Julien's *This is Not an AIDS Advertisement* (1987) and Pratibha Parmar's *Reframing AIDS* (1987)

¹¹⁷ Section 28, formally Section 2a of the Local Government Act 1986 'prohibited local authorities in England and Wales from "promoting" homosexuality', was repealed by both Houses of Parliament and taken off the

Subsequently there developed what Stuart Marshall has described as a 'liberal opposition'; the opening up of spaces for film makers in the UK to make challenging work.¹¹⁸ Liz Kotz's reflection that lesbian and gay media's 'often deeply reductive focus on content' to the exclusion of any avant-garde or experimental practices had begun to change.¹¹⁹ For lesbians in the US and the UK, there had been an emergence from the 'sex wars' of the 1980s, something Ruby Rich was convinced could lead to a vibrant and energetic culture.¹²⁰ Penny Florence's report on the first conference for lesbian film makers held in London in 1994 failed to reflect the same optimism.¹²¹ Discussions at the conference again raised the point that access to resources was greater amongst gay men than lesbians. The work of lesbian film makers in the UK in this period negotiated a different terrain, one of documentary film, which had a lower profile and was largely under funded.¹²² One of the few lesbian film makers to gain a visible presence was Pratibha Parmar, whose first two videos *Sari Red* (1986) and *Emergence* (1988) were self-funded.¹²³ Parmar went on to direct documentary films for TV and was involved in

statute books on 18th September 2003. *Section 28*, 2005, Stonewall, 22/07/05

http://www.stonewall.org.uk/stonewall/information_bank/education/Section28/.

In the US, Ruby Rich talks about this context, RUBY RICH, B. 'The Authenticating Goldfish', *op. cit.* p.86-87, as does Yvonne Rainer in GOODEVE, T.N. 'Rainer Talking', *op.cit.* p.63. FURLONG, L.B. 'Shu Lea Cheang's', *op.cit.* p.65, also describes the changes in the funding landscape in the US in 1995, where the Republican House of Congress voted to phase out the NEA. Coco Fusco also, usefully, points out that the 'implosion' of the NEA had started to happen at an earlier point, at the end of Cold War, during the Reagan era, see FUSCO, C. *The Bodies That*, *op. cit.* p.3

¹¹⁸ Stuart Marshall's comments on Channel 4's Gay TV slot, *Out on Tuesday*, in CHAMBERLAIN, J. JULIEN, I. MARSHALL, S. and PARMAR, P. "Filling the lack in everyone is quite hard work, really...", A roundtable discussion with:', in GEVER, M. GREYSON, J, PARMAR, P (eds). *Queer Looks*, *op. cit.* p.54. Marshall further comments that decision makers in Channel 4 and the BFI have a leftwing, independent film background.

¹¹⁹ KOTZ, L. 'An Unrequited desire', *op. cit.* p.100

¹²⁰ As Pidduck writes, of feminists in the US where 'fraught public debates around the regulation of pornography, sexuality and prostitution...split between the 'anti-porn' position, and an emergent 'sex-positive' or 'anti-censorship' feminism', in PIDDUCK, J. 'After 1980', *op.cit.* p.273, as does RUBY RICH, B. 'The Authenticating Goldfish', *op.cit.* p.96

¹²¹ FLORENCE, P. 'We are here', *op. cit.* p.297-300

¹²² Pratibha Parmar (*Khush* 1991) and Inge Blackman (*Raga Gyal D'bout*, 1993) were making documentaries and films for TV, as indeed were Ruth Novaczek (*Cheap Philosophy* 1993), as noted in by Penny Florence, *ibid.*

¹²³ Parmar discusses this in KAPLAN, E. A. 'Interview and Excerpts from a Master Class with Pratibha Parmar', in LEVITIN, J. PLESSIS, J. RAOUL (eds). *Women Film makers Refocusing*, New York and London, Routledge, 2003, p.297-311

Channel 4's 'gay slot' magazine programme *Out on Tuesday*.¹²⁴ Parmar's approach to documentary, like that of other black Independent film makers, combined 'non-fictional sections with dramatized episodes'.¹²⁵ Parmar's early films include *Reframing AIDS* (1987), which along with her publishing activities suggest her context as part of the group of black-British intellectuals which included Julien and Stuart Hall.¹²⁶ Parmar's extensive output during the 1990s included *Khush* (1991), *Warrior Marks* (1993), *Wavelength* (1997) and *Brimful of Asia* (1998) and focused broadly on British Asian Culture and diasporic South Asian lesbian and gay culture.¹²⁷ One of the problems for lesbians and feminists in the UK context was the long history of political activity in the feminist movement against male violence in general, and pornography in particular.¹²⁸ A visible lesbian presence *did* exist in photographic practices to challenge this, notably from Tessa Boffin and Della Grace, but this too was problematic. That some of this problematic was attributed to Mulvey's work may come as no surprise. As Cherry Smyth attests, it had led to a suspicion of all cinematic pleasure, particularly that focused on the female body and its pleasures.¹²⁹

While the case that Smyth and others had made was a valid one, I am suggesting with the benefit of hindsight, that the relationship to Mulvey's ideas was ultimately a productive

¹²⁴ PRINCE, T. 'The Post of Colonial in the Works of Pratibha Parmar: Kiss My Chudies', in LEVITIN, J. PLESSIS, J. RAOUL, V (eds). *Ibid.* p.291-297

¹²⁵ KAPLAN, A.E. 'Interview and Excerpts', *op. cit.* p.300

¹²⁶ Parmar was a co-editor of *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in Britain* (1982), one of the books to emerge from The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham where Parmar was a post-graduate student.

¹²⁷ PRINCE, T. 'The Post of Colonial', *op.cit.*

¹²⁸ Valerie Mason-John goes some way to summarising this, noting the activities of Women Against Violence Against Women during the 1980s, MASON-JOHN, V. 'The bitter debate', *Feminist Arts News*, Vol 3, No.8, 1991, p.19-21

¹²⁹ SMYTH, C. 'The Pleasure Threshold: Looking at Lesbian Pornography on Film', *Feminist Review*, No.34, Spring 1990, p.152. Smyth adds that 'theories have almost denied the possibility of retrieving pleasure at all...had led in some cases to a reactionary 'feminist' politics which...created a suspicion of all pleasure promoted by cinema', *ibid.* p.153. This was a view that Stuart Marshall also held. Marshall, when commenting on the 'suspicion of cinematic pleasure' which emerged when the 'problem of pleasure' collapsed the project of deconstructive practice in the late 1970s and early 1980s, of which Mulvey was a part. See CHAMBERLAIN, J. JULIEN, I. MARSHALL, S. and PARMAR. P. 'Filling the lack', *op. cit.* p.43

one. Much of the work of the artists and film makers described throughout the chapter is both embodied and about the body; seemingly completely at odds with Mulvey's ideas about languages of desire and pleasure. The work discussed has been reconstituted in a genealogical reading of Mulvey's essay that suggests a framework where those ideas, while often oblique, continued to have effects. New approaches to narrative cinema; where the boundaries between documentary and fiction were critically questioned (Sankofa, Black Audio Film Collective); forms described as inter-textual, hybrid and multi-layered were used (Julien, Akomfrah, Trihn, Benning); and pleasures explored (Benning, Dunye, Julien, McQueen), have been identified throughout this chapter. This work had formed a response to cinema's 'heterosexual, usually white, critical framework' of which Mulvey's work was a part and as such Mulvey's ideas were hybridized in a new critical framework.¹³⁰

These artists have produced new cinematic pleasures that did not avoid the body. The same 'iconographic representations of the black male body' that are present in Julien's work are further elaborated in Steve McQueen's film installations and invite the same desire to 'look' and to eroticize that look, a risky act given that which preceded it.¹³¹ They self-consciously address a viewer with work which, as noted by Julien of his own and Steve McQueen's work, return us 'to the site of the body'.¹³² As Gever suggests, these visual sensations offer 'a new compass that points in more than one direction at a time'.¹³³ Enwezor describes viewing McQueen's work as one where his own physical experience is a haptic one; a bodily experience and one which is allied to the 'embodied artistic gesture' on the screen.¹³⁴ This hints at the pleasures to be found in these works. The same haptic interpretation has been suggested of Benning's work in video. Laura Marks's commentary

¹³⁰ ILES, C. 'Mutability', *op. cit.* p.6

¹³¹ GEVER, M. 'Steve McQueen', *op. cit.* p.98

¹³² READ, A (ed). *The Fact of Blackness*, *op. cit.* p.169

¹³³ *ibid.* p.99

¹³⁴ ENWEZOR, O. 'Haptic Visions: The Films of Steve McQueen', in Institute of Contemporary Arts and Kunsthalle, *Steve McQueen*, exhibition catalogue, London and Zurich, 1999, p.38

on Benning's work suggests that it becomes an 'erotics' due to the partial nature of the images of the body and the intimacy it creates between the viewer and the video image.¹³⁵ This is a cinema that is resistant to textuality, as it is an erotics that requires the viewer to 'give up her or his own mastery'.¹³⁶ Through this and other examples that have been described in this chapter, Mulvey's 'new pleasure' and 'new language of desire' are one and the same thing.¹³⁷ Mulvey's own wish that this could be conceived has been surpassed - and in this framework her work has contributed to a fruitful exchange between text and practice.

¹³⁵ MARKS, L.U. 'Video haptics and erotics', *Screen*, Vol.39, No.4, Winter 1998, p.331-348

¹³⁶ *ibid.* p.347

¹³⁷ MULVEY, L. 'Visual Pleasure', *op. cit.* p.8

Conclusion

Over 30 years after its initial publication Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' is seen as an exemplary text and required reading in the field. Its place in the canon is assured and the 30th anniversary of its publication has recently been celebrated.¹ The essay has produced a specific body of knowledge, however this knowledge has resided largely on the side of theory and the essay is seen to have had little effect on visual practices. This project set out to challenge that assumption and with it my own antipathy toward the essay.

The influence of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' on film theory and visual culture can most clearly be seen in the first decade after its publication. Chapter 1 established the content of the article and revisited the main points on which later commentaries were founded. Mulvey's use of psychoanalytic theory to examine spectatorship and pleasure had served to produce a gendered analysis of cinematic looks in Hollywood film. The many commentaries that immediately followed addressed the question of spectatorship that then became central for feminist film commentators. Mulvey's contribution to the development of debates on film and feminism is without question, being cited throughout the literature in the field over the last 30 years. Patricia Mellencamp's comment that the form that 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' took in using dialectics, where 'rhetorical opposition was a strategy, not an error...to serve a political purpose', is a valuable point.² The essay's form as a polemic had arrived as one decade, the 1960s, became another and was based on liberation and counter-cultural practices. That moment for Mulvey had become a 'pivot', one of which she was a part, as she said in an interview I conducted with her at a later stage in the research.³ Mellencamp's later warning that 'without history, pure, eternal theory can be extracted; the descent into clichéd platitudes is not far behind'

¹ The Politics of 'Visual Pleasure' 30 Years on: The Work of Laura Mulvey, 18th June 2005, Emmanuel College, Cambridge

² MELLENCAMP, P. *Indiscretions*, *op. cit.* p.21

³ 'Interview with Laura Mulvey', 2006, Appendix VI.

becomes an accurate summary of the trajectory of Mulvey's ideas.⁴

'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' has become a free-floating object, one that ceased to be rooted in a historical context and a practice. Existing commentaries that refer to the article have largely overlooked both Mulvey's practice as a film maker or noted any effect that the article may have had on visual practices. Using a genealogical method this project set out to distinguish itself from these commentaries. This began by looking beyond the essay to Mulvey's own film practice and its location in the British avant-garde of the 1970s. The development of avant-garde film in the UK, through the establishment of the Independent Film Makers Association, the Other Cinema and the London Film Makers Co-op, had formed the backdrop for Mulvey and Peter Wollen's collaborative film practice during the 1970s. Concurrent with this were the strategies of women film makers, of archival work, and the critical and theoretical work that took place in the context of a growing Women's Movement. As well as their involvements in some of these activities Mulvey and Wollen produced six films from 1975 to 1984. Scott McDonald says that *Riddles of the Sphinx*, the most highly regarded and well known of these, both 'critique the commercial cinema and ...other film practices'.⁵ As McDonald maintains, Mulvey and Wollen were 'elaborating speculations' in film that were developed in text, or as Mulvey would have it, answering a text with a film.⁶ A relationship between the two forms of practice can be seen to exist, albeit an indirect one, by virtue of their co-existence. This has eluded note in most commentaries and produced a biased view of the article by removing it from its context. In addressing this by providing that context, and what Mary Kelly had earlier described as the 'effective force of the moment', it becomes clear that an examination of practices can reveal a hitherto repressed interpretation of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'.⁷

⁴ MELLENCAMP, P. *Indiscretions*, op. cit. p.157

⁵ MacDONALD, S. *Avant-garde*, op. cit. p.102

⁶ *ibid.* p. 79 and 'Interview with Laura Mulvey', op. cit.

⁷ KELLY, M. *Desire*, op. cit. p.xv

The problems that were set in train by Mulvey were taken up immediately following its publication and its effect on practice begins to unfold. How pleasure and desire could be imagined was being addressed by a number of feminist avant-garde filmmakers and was considered in Chapter 3. At the time several writers, Kaplan and Kuhn amongst them, identified Chantal Akerman, Michelle Citron, Sally Potter and Yvonne Rainer as privileging the feminine voice and exploring new forms of pleasure. This moment when woman was placed at the centre of avant-garde film where, more usually 'the mythic struggles of white men' were predominant is now easily forgotten as is the importance of the role of that these films played in contemporary feminist debate.⁸ The questions of what a feminist film should look like and how women should appear were being asked with the same urgency as responses to 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' were being formed. More recently, Catherine Fowler has seen these avant-garde films as being connected to feminist film theory that had acted as its interpreter.⁹ At the same time as Mulvey and Wollen's films were being seen, Mulvey's article had provided the theoretical context for feminist audiences to view the work of these avant-garde filmmakers in what could be called the visual pleasure moment.

The debate is broadened in Chapter 4 to look at photographic work during the 1980s in the UK and at two strategies in particular - tape-slide and photo-text, both of which set out to work around the politics of representation. The tape-slide work of Tina Keane, Roberta Graham and Judith Higginbottom are briefly discussed revealing as much the temporary nature of the medium as the lack of archival resources of this work, suggesting that further work needs to be done in this area to reverse its current status. Parker and Pollock had been clear that the work of these artists was a working out of the legacy of the 1970s and responding to the challenges of Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'.¹⁰ A concern with language, sexual difference and feminism marked out and dominated the content in the work of artists such as Victor Burgin, Marie Yates and Yve Lomax. That the experimental and strategic nature of much of this work on gender is overshadowed by Burgin's domination of the period does not undermine its transformative potential. Moving

⁸ MacDONALD, S. *Avant-garde*, *op. cit.* p.102

⁹ FOWLER, C. 'Cinefeminism', *op. cit.* In addition to other recent evaluations of this period alongside contemporary work in PETROLLE, J. WEXMAN, V.W (eds). *Women & Experimental Filmmaking*, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2005

¹⁰ PARKER, R. POLLOCK, G. *Framing Feminism*, *op. cit.* p.54

away from this and forming a more heterogeneous view, by looking at the work of Marie Yates and Yve Lomax, finds that this work was on its way to other practices, something frequently forgotten in proclaiming the impasse it seems to have led to. Later in the 1980s both these practices were abandoned in the wake of a different political landscape and developing technologies that made way for later time-based work.

As the effects of Thatcherism and the withdrawal of state funding were being felt by both artists and filmmakers, the establishment of Channel 4 initially provided opportunities for them. The black film workshops that were formed in the wake of Channel 4 fostered the emergence of artists such as Isaac Julien and John Akomfrah. This complex period is explored in Chapter 5 where the over-riding themes of identity and sexuality are of concern. The explosion of New Queer Cinema had produced experiments in cinema and pleasure, in the work of Cheryl Dunye and Sadie Benning in the USA and to a lesser extent in the UK. Work by Steve McQueen and Benning, as well as Julien, whose pleasures engaged the viewer in an embodied and haptic experience, followed this. The same questions of 'critical address and the politics of representation' were of concern for Julien, the most vocal of these artists, in claiming that a visual pleasure is also a critical pleasure.¹¹ What becomes clear for artists of this generation is that the critical framework, of which Mulvey's work is a part, had become embedded in a hybridized approach.

Whilst Julien has continued to acknowledge the importance of the legacy of Laura Mulvey's work there is a more precise statement which throws further light on these sentiments and reveals the complexity of its employment. Julien states very clearly that he has 'never seen' Mulvey's *Riddles of the Sphinx*. However he acknowledges the importance of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' and says that 'her pleasure is not the same as the kind of pleasure we're (Sankofa) talking about and articulating'.¹² Here, it was Mulvey's writing, more so than her films, that had formed the basis of a response, an 'inversion' - as Julien later commented - that had a productive effect on visual practices for a later generation of artists.¹³ Such an exchange shows how 'Visual Pleasure and

¹¹ ORGERON, D.A. and ORGERON, M.G. 'Interventions', *op. cit.* p.5

¹² FUSCO, C. 'Sankofa & Black Audio', *op. cit.* p.22

¹³ ORGERON, D.A. and ORGERON, M.G. 'Interventions', *op. cit.* p.5

Narrative Cinema' continued to be situated within a number of seemingly opposed discourses and perpetually re-invested importance in aspects of Mulvey's work. The framework in which Mulvey's work is hybridized for later practices also shows, not least, how feminist thought has had ramifications for and resonances with contemporary art practices, and how this exchange has been, and continues to be, a fruitful one.

In summary, this work reveals a reading of Mulvey's 1975 essay, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' that has been overlooked, and has examined the effects that the essay has had on some key visual practices in the thirty years since its publication. I have demonstrated, through this genealogy, that a network of practices exist where a series of shared concerns and approaches can be seen to respond to Mulvey's text. This then proposes, importantly, that Mulvey's work exists as part of a framework which has a legacy to practice, as well as to theory. On this basis any further assessment of Mulvey's essay should refer to this and widely recognise that her legacy in and to practice is as valuable as that to theory.

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Appendix I – Citation Index

A Cited Reference Search for Mulvey, L. 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', 1975 was carried out in 2000 as part of the literature search in the first stages of the PhD programme.

This produced the following results; 38 citations from the paper index of the Arts & Humanities Citation Index (1977-1983), 223 citations from the A& HCI electronic database (Web of Science) (1981-1991), 510 citations from the A & HCI electronic database (Web of Science) (1992-2000). A printed copy of these results is available.

A current duplication of the search was carried out as follows:

Electronic database

Athens username/password entry

Web of Science, Arts & Humanities Citation Index

Cited Reference Search

√ Arts and Humanities Citation Index (A & HCI) 1975-present

- From 1975 to 2006

Cited author Mulvey L

Cited year 1975

Produces 'Cited Reference Index'

Select results

Finish search

This produced 646 results.

It is noted that this differs from the results of the search carried out in 2000 when the interface and database search engine operating system was markedly different.

(26th June 2006)

Appendix II - Correspondence with Lis Rhodes

(Letter)

9/7/2002

Mo White: At the 'Shoot Shoot Shoot' seminar at Tate Modern in May you said that the work and efforts of women film makers were marginalized in the early period at the Co-op. Can you say more about this?

Lis Rhodes: Yes – I phrased my remarks at the seminar to reveal this political problem. There was a division of labour along gender lines – between the workshop (production facilities) and the office (distribution); but also a degree of co-operation between film makers that I think is rare now (economics – I suspect). It is in later writing of histories that – I think – marginalization tends to be confirmed.

MW: The *Film as Film* exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in 1979 would seem to be a turning point for women film makers. Did this represent as big a rift in politics at the Co-op as it would appear from the documentation in the exhibition catalogue?

LR: No. If there was a 'turning point' I think that it emerged from the wider feminist movement; the groups of women opposing a narrow definition of history in many areas of life as well as film.

As for the occurrence of a 'rift' – certainly there were changes at the Co-op. Changes that were due to the interventions of Sandra Lahire, Tania Syed, Sarah Turner, Anna Thew, Alia Syed – just to name a few, in the late 70s and early 80s. Therefore I would suggest the phrase 'necessary change' would be more appropriate than 'rift'.

MW: Did Circles emerge directly from the events of *Film as Film*?

LR: No, I don't think that Circles could have happened without a combination of the feminist movement, the expertise and unpaid work of Felicity Sparrow, and the existence of films made by women artists/film makers since 1897. The Co-op was also important to the creation of Circles in that it was, perhaps, the only place where women could make

films without private capitalisation. The formulation of capital to make film is a critical factor viz Alice Guy's remark that when the studios were enlarged – she was out. That is power is concentrated in fewer and fewer hands – a consistent tale today?!

MW: Did you have any involvement with The Other Cinema or the IFA, or any other groups at that time?

LR: Not directly. I did some work for the IFA, was a member of Four Corners Film Workshop and worked with Lynn Alderson (founder of Sisterwrite) at the feminist section of Compendium; therefore knew the Women's Research and Resources Library – which became the Feminist Library. From 1982-5 I worked as an Arts Advisor (Film and Video) for the GLC. I would suggest that the records of the Community and Ethnic Minority Funding Committees would provide a very interesting picture of artists and film groups at the time.

MW: Looking at your essay of 1979, 'Whose History?' many of the points you made then about film history as a chronology of formal developments still seem valid now. Do you think this is the case?

LR: Yes, I think it is, with the caveat implied in the question of the title of the essay – which needs asking in all contexts – all the time.

Appendix III – Interview with Steve Dwoskin

27/8/02

Mo White. Can you talk about the start of the Independent Film makers Association and the first meeting that took place in November 1974 with people like yourself, Laura Mulvey and Peter Gidal. What prompted that meeting?

Steve Dwoskin. There were many factors. The IFA was an attempt to form a union of independent film makers from many different disciplines, so a cohesive group could have delegates that would represent it to institutions like the British Film Institute. At that time there was no other representation for film makers in the independent sector. It was in principle a broad range of film makers and included Marc Karlin and some of the more political film makers, like the Newsreel Group. I became a delegate representing the IFA on the BFI board with Anna Ambrose. Other members would go and lobby in other sectors, like the Edinburgh Film Festival, to get representation for the filmmakers.

I remember one meeting which was the catalyst for the IFA. The National Film Archive were destroying lots of films they were given to store. There were big meetings to protest against the BFI's refusal to look at independent work and their refusal to preserve the films. The IFA formed a pressure group to convince official institutions that independent work had some value. Also, for ten years I was teaching film at the Royal College. Students who graduated couldn't get a job because they couldn't get in the union. So the IFA was going to be a new union to represent new filmmakers. These are some of the reasons in my mind why the IFA was formed and what it was trying to do.

MW. Can you talk about how the Other Cinema formed in 1976?

SD. It started before that, as a distribution organisation. In fact, it started out as a commercial venture because people like Albert Finney were involved in the very first Other Cinema. It was initially to bring in a lot of alternative cinema into Britain and it was set up as a distribution collective.

MW. Was this to bring French Cinema into this country?

SD. It got indirect support from Godard after the showing of *One plus One* on the outside of the NFT. So it was partly linked to some of the groups in France at the time, like Chris Marker's group, but also to Cinema Action here.

At that time one has to imagine that film existed outside of the arts, it was a highly politicised activity because of censorship and licensing . This is where the English model, the London Filmmakers Co-op, begins to differ from all the other film activity. Even the New York Co-op was forced into a position of political activity. It ran into trouble getting licenses to show films, and the need to find venues and ways of distributing these films. This was regulated, because the institutions would not recognise or be associated with all this activity they thought to be anarchist or communist.

MW. So would the London Filmmakers Co-op not have shown these films at the time? Was there a problem there?

SD. There was a problem there. The very early Co-op when it started in '66 would show any film because the original principle of the Co-op was to show any film and let the audience decide which was good and which was bad. Any film that was made independently whether it was a structuralist film, a political film or a documentary film or a home movie, any of those formats would fit the original Co-op credo. That changed because there was a big split at the Coop between people who were following Malcolm Le Grice and it also had to do with the difference between the Americans and the others. The Co-op became highly nationalistic and that's reflected now, as you can see in the 'ShootShootShoot' screenings. It was an attempt to make a sort of school of film making rather than being open and idealistic. The other group principally from Malcolm Le Grice's side which wanted the Co-op to be a production house - not a distribution house. They wanted to buy - which they did - printers and laboratory facilities and become a production

facility place and the two schools of thought didn't go together - there were enormous conflicts and that's where the split began.

MW. When did that happen?

SD. It happened fairly early on, around 1969. There were conflicts of interest to do with the Arts Lab which housed one London Co-op and there was the Better Books Co-op. There were two Co-ops at one point, mainly in name, because the Arts Lab had a cinema run by Dave Curtis who was a friend of Malcolm Le Grice and they established their own Co-op. There were conflicts between the two Co-ops. The Arts Lab and David Curtis was the one to develop the principle of production facilities, that meant that the film makers working there were interested in having optical printers and the work developed a certain way. The other type of film making, like the Newsreel group, were documenting events, making political statements and much more free form but it wasn't dependent on production facilities. They still used traditional labs to process the film so the concern was much more to do with distribution. The Co-op started its own magazine to promote the work. That was modelled after the New York Co-op which at the time was publishing a magazine called *Film Culture*. Jonas Mekas was the figurehead for the New York Co-op but it was really an open forum, there was no house style. It was a place for all the film makers in the area to show their films, raise money and there wasn't any criteria or critical analysis of the kind of films being made.

MW. This bears out what David Curtis was describing at the 'ShootShootShoot' seminar, that here there was an art school aesthetic at the Co-op.

SD. Yes, but that caused the division because again at that time most of the film makers in London happened to be Americans, including myself, and there was a big influence from the New American cinema. In 1964 films started touring Europe with P.Adams Sitney and it begin to cause controversy not only in England but around Europe. Yoko Ono and Fluxus were in London and the 1964 exposition of American film on tour from New York

Co-op where films by Brakhage, Maya Deren, Jack Smith and Harry Smith were seen.

There was a very big impact from the experimental film festival at Knokke-le-Zoute in Belgium on the British film makers. In 1967 it gave prizes and brought film makers from all over who were doing experimental work, and that is when Michael Snow's *Wavelength* appears. In 1967 the only films which were British were from BFI with lots of people walking through parks and bird song, which were hardly experimental, compared to films like *Wavelength*. The next festival in 1971, I believe of the 10 prizes given 4 went to British film makers. So between 1967 and 1971 this whole British structuralist became more evident influenced by *Wavelength*. A lot of English film makers went to the festival, certainly all my students from the Royal College went to the festival. All the film makers were there bore witness to all these experimental films and had a very big impact on how people worked here.

MW. Al Rees says that the British felt that American cinema was too emotional and described it as 'psycho-drama'.

SD. Yes, American film was a lot of psycho-drama. Brakhage was, some of Maya Deren's - it was connected more to the cinema language of Hollywood rather than an art language. Yes, if you think of the avant-garde films of the 1920's, the Cocteau films had a big influence on the American film makers. The *Song of the Poet* (Cocteau) had that sense of freedom and making films outside of the industry but nevertheless having a narrative structure to do with people. Gradually the London Co-op got involved in their particular strand of film making - conceptual minimalism and film as its own material - which really evolved out of the optical printer and so film becomes its own language. In a sense the Co-op evolves from this stage. After the initial break there was a group of film makers, including myself, who really didn't fit this new group. I remember the first meeting in Better Books to form the Co-op in October 1966 and there was group of young English film makers there. They asked Simon Hartog, who was one of those that had called the meeting, "Why should we join the Co-op? What can the Co-op give us?". Simon was

trying to explain that the idea is that everyone collectively gives to each other but they wanted to know what kind of facilities would be provided. They didn't understand the idea that the Co-op is a way of people getting together to do something, to have some presence in the world. Because of this the Other Cinema began to have a presence. Nick Hart-Williams was running the Other Cinema and decided to open it up and have discussions with people like Marc Karlin. Marc Karlin ran the Berwick Street Collective and made films like *Nightcleaners*. There was quite a lot of that kind of film making going on in Britain, coming out of the political and historical documentary tradition going back to Grierson. The Co-op ignored all that type of film making. The Other Cinema at that point was the only place to distribute these types of films.

MW. How long did the Other Cinema show films in cinemas? Am I right in thinking It had a couple of cinemas and then became a distributor?

SD. No, what caused the collapse was it's adventure into trying to open a cinema - this is the first Other Cinema. The Other Cinema then was run by a management committee of people like Laura Mulvey, Marc Karlin, Andi Engel and myself, about 8 people in all. The Other Cinema¹ had a cinema built and started showing films. It was previously just a shell and the BFI had promised to underwrite this new cinema but never came up with the money. The Council of Management were liable for the debt of about £25,000 for the building work done. We had to dissolve the Council of Management and therefore resolved the responsibility of debt.

During the 1970's, the Co-op is going in one direction, the film schools like the RCA and the Slade developing very radical film school activity, the Other Cinema and the Newsreel Collective. You had so many different aspects of film activity going and they were all seeking money from the BFI and government institutions to make their productions so the IFA was going to connect all these disparate groups of film makers to present one voice to

¹ This period is covered in more detail in interviews with Tony Kirkhope, Paul Marris and Peter Sainsbury in, HARVEY, S. 'The Other Cinema-A History:Part 1', *op. cit.*; HARVEY S. 'The Other Cinema-A History :Part 11"', *op. cit.*

the establishment.

MW. It does seem that there were other organisations who had equal importance with the London Co-op, like the IFA who existed on an equal footing.

SD. In the Co-op Simon Hartog and Ray Durnat, who was president at one time, involved many diverse people in the broader idea of cinema but as the Co-op became more interested in one style of filmmaking it became more introspective.

In 'Shoot Shoot Shoot' they were excluding a lot of types of film that were made in Britain at the time to remake their own history and to make the Coop exclusively that kind of film making. They are making a very selective history of the films that represent England at the time but it's certainly only part of the picture. 'ShootShootShoot' was showing a very obvious collection for the most part of things that look experimental and look manicured to fit a certain type of thinking and never showed the broader picture.

MW. It seemed to me that 'ShootShootShoot' was trying to monopolise film culture of the period and present a unified history of what it was all about, one which doesn't take into account its complexities and debates.

SD. If you did a proper 'ShootShootShoot' of the '60's you would have different films by Jeff Keen and John Latham, as well as some of the political films of the time. Of my films, I would never have chosen *Dirty* to put in I would have chosen *Dynamo* or *Chinese Checkers* - which are my really experimental films with subject matter and concepts.

I went to film shows in New York where films were taken away by the police and burnt, but here it was much more an idea that you need to get money from the establishment to make films. If you got money from the BFI your film would be more acceptable. These two aspects didn't exist in New York. In America there was no official organisation to give

money so the idea of going to them is impossible. There were hardly any film schools in America at the time. When I got to Britain in the 1960's I was so surprised that Britain had 96 art schools in the country and American only had about 10 art schools so the cultural background is very different.

MW. The national differences between the US and the UK at this time were quite distinct and had a real effect on the development of film cultures in the UK .

SD. Yes, I think there were such obvious differences. The type of cinema that the Other Cinema were interested in is less connected to the other arts. It's part of the cinematic language which is to do with narrative, propaganda and the kind of theory that was produce by Eisenstein about montage. For example, I used to teach a course called 'New Narrative Forms' looking at Yvonne Rainer and feminist film makers like Chantal Akkerman who started to develop new narrative forms. In pure structural minimalist films, film is its own material so there's a subjective split going on. I think that's the thing that Laura Mulvey keeps trying to resolve in her theories, these two very different but also seemingly similar approaches to cinema.

MW. I'm interested in what Willeman had to say about the Fourth look, as this leads on from my interest in Mulvey and what your thoughts are about that. Paul Willeman wrote quite soon after Laura Mulvey's article was published , in *Afterimage* in 1976, and specifically cited your work as a textbook example of what Mulvey was writing about.

SD. Laura Mulvey and I were neighbours. Laura disliked my films mainly because a lot of feminists had a block on my films because there are so many women in them. A lot of people thought it was exploitative of women. In my films it's actually switched around, the viewer becomes part of the engagement and no longer a voyeur in that narrow frame of reference. The audience is not passive but voyeurism in Laura Mulvey's context is the passivity of the viewer. I think her discussion on this really comes out of the notion of film itself being a kind of theatre where the audience is passively watching things as they are

presented, the way the camera looks at them and the way the performers look at each other. The audience is voyeuristic because they are never involved in the film visually. The shift occurs, particularly with my film *Dynamo*, which is the one Paul Willeman always uses as a major reference. The people performing in the film look out at the camera and in turn at the audience when the film is presented in the theatre. The performer therefore is no longer looking at someone inside the film but looking out towards the audience. This means the audience is engaged on a different level than they are in other films. That switch makes the audience active in that they have to refer themselves to what's looking at them. Suddenly the viewer no longer watches from a distance, they are being forced to look into the frame of a film and not from a wall but almost as a mirror.

MW. So the gaze is returned...

SD. It has to be returned otherwise it doesn't work and it has to be returned with my films! That is basically the Fourth look.

MW. The term Paul Willeman coined ...

SD. Yes, I didn't coin the term. He coined the term. There was a documentary made about my films in the mid 80's where Laura talks about it as well. She talks about the look, the kind of position - she sums up what the four looks are and refers to my films as changing the relationship of the viewer to what they're watching therefore breaking the kind of distance and changing the way people look as well as the way the film looks to them.

MW. You agree with Paul Willeman's analysis of your films then?

SD. Yes, I do and he's very articulate about it. I am doing a lot of this instinctively. I'm a very untheoretical film maker. I never had a theory I worked by. I had a particular idea of film making that relates much more than painting and the way people should look and be

engaged in what they look at and what they look at begins to tell them how they feel about what they look at which is why I think a lot of my films have been both disturbing and difficult for people.

MW. Were your films received well in this country in the late 1960's and early 1970's?

SD. They were never received well in this country! They were received very well on the continent. Films like *Dynamo* are considered classic films - it would never get a screening in this country and they still don't. They are in opposition to the kind of structuralist idea of not having any involvement in the emotional content of a film. Films they do show of mine, like *Dirty* are very different to the bigger films I was making. They rely very much on peoples own subjectivity and maybe I don't give enough clues. I don't use narrative, I don't use dialogue either - so its a very visual engagement and that's not easy for people. They can't understand the narrative, they don't understand why they are looking. There's no text to follow, there's no literary logic. Its a purely visual experience and also to do with the fact that film being a photographic medium makes images of people that seen both real and dreamlike, like photography.

MW. I've seen 2 of your films, one was *Moment* and the other *Dirty*, quite contrasting films. Although I haven't seen *Dynamo* I have read about it, and that seems to bear more of a similarity to *Moment*.

SD. It does, the performer in *Dynamo* at different points refers to the camera and this is what gets disturbing because the viewer is no longer allowed to be completely voyeuristic. For example, in *Moment* the movement of the eye changes the whole position of the audience. I did that on a different scale and in a different way in other films. *Moment* is also considered a structural film because it's one shot, there no edit. It's one take, no cutting, no manipulation of the film, what you see is in real time. Also, I called the film *Dirty* because it's refilmed film. You see the dirt on the film, the things that are normally hidden. Film in traditional sense was creating illusion. People watching a movie don't

know about the material that makes it, an idea that is almost simplistic today.

The fact that I was a male making films with women as my key subject was one of the reasons why people wouldn't watch it here. *Dynamo* was put in the first women's film festival in Paris - they thought I was Stephanie Dwoskin and the film was made by a woman. I was interested in the sense of the subject and the time and space they were involved in echoes my own feelings. When I started making films I never thought of the gender difference but it did make a difference. In Britain I was always severely attacked by feminists. *Moment* was shown on Scottish TV for the Edinburgh film festival as an introduction to my work when they were showing my first feature film. When it was seen on TV there were protests and my other films were banned from the festival. The police banned it because of the inference of the work of seeing a woman masturbating. In a sense a lot of people responded to *Moment* - particularly men - as pornographic. It became quite clear that there was a woman having a orgasm and the fact that the woman was having an orgasm was much more disturbing than a standard pornographic film. What they saw aroused them to such a level that they would consider it pornographic, voyeuristic, and a misuse of the woman yet all they saw was a face and it could have been acted. With feminists it was a very severe criticism because I was a male making a film of a woman having an orgasm. From the male point of view it was pornographic because they were seeing it as a sexual thing in front of them. That made them feel vulnerable because it's one of the few films that displays a woman's sexuality so openly. Feminists were thinking more of me making it, being there, watching this woman with the camera. Aside from how it was made, I think it is a very strong statement for women rather than one against women - not turning a woman into an object but giving her an enormous presence.

My argument is that people in front of the camera are not being ordered what to do. Its like documenting something. I'm directing the camera position but I'm not directing the action. The action is coming from the women themselves. In most films everyone is directed how to behave, but there is an agreement and collusion in my films rather than them being paid to do a job. This aspect of the making was never taken into account , but

the argument the early feminists had was that it was my point of view and that was a male point of view. Its over simplistic. As a result, I had to look to other places for audiences, which was mostly in France and Germany. I continued to live here but almost all the films I made between 1970-80 were made with foreign money. Most of the performers in the films during this period are European and the films were made with a European audience in mind. After all, films don't exist unless they're projected - you need someone to look at them or they just stay on a shelf.

Appendix IV - Interview with Judith Higginbottom
(Telephone)

1/11/04

Mo White: I know of one work of yours, 'Sea Dreams', using slide/tape shown at the London Film Makers Co-op Summer Show in 1980. Was this the only slide/tape work you made?

Judith Higginbottom: No, 'Water into Wine' was shown in *About Time* at ICA in 1980 is also a slide/tape. I made both Sea Dreams and Water into Wine at about the same time. 'Water Into Wine' uses 2 projectors, with superimpositions and a pulsed soundtrack. I was a member of the Film Co-op - but semi-detached, as I lived in Reading and had to go up to London to do printing.

MW: What prompted you to use slide/tape?

JH: For a brief period it was a viable medium. It was also accessible, cheap and practical. It was very important politically - if you were using images of yourself in the work or it was about your own experience, which many of us were at the time. When you were the subject of your own work it was a medium you could use on your own. You didn't need anything apart from a camera, a film and a cable-release. It was cheap, low-tech and you didn't need a grant.

MW: What dissuaded you from using slide/tape further?

JH: It was a very cumbersome and unpredictable medium, and it was clear at the time it was going to be very short lived. It was very hard to show in galleries. It had a tendency to break down or the slides got stuck and burnt! It was also difficult to maintain when the show is in Liverpool and you live in Devon. And then film and video became more accessible and the content of the work I was making demanded a moving image.

MW: Is any of your slide/tape work still in existence or archived anywhere?

JH: 'Water Into Wine' still gets shown but on video, it hasn't been shown as a slide/tape for 20 years. I still have all the original slides. It is currently archived on video at the South West Regional Film Archive, it was held at Cinenova but since their prospective move up to Glasgow I have withdrawn it - I'm a founding member of Circles along with Lis Rhodes and Felicity Sparrow, Cinenova's predecessor - and I'll resubmit to Cinenova once they are settled and accessible.

Archive material is also held at the AHRB British Artists Film and Video Study Collection at Central St. Martins College, London.

Appendix V – Correspondence with Judith Higginbottom

(e. Mail)

3/11/04

Mo White: Is there anything you would like to add to the telephone conversation?

Judith Higginbottom: One thing it might be useful to add, is that there is a good summary of *Water Into Wine* in Peter Redgrove and Penelope Shuttle's wonderful book, *The Wise Wound*. I think it is on p.108-109 but I can check this. What I like about their account is that it is not written from a straightforward critical theory perspective. I found it really useful.

About being the subject of one's own work, which was a really strong current at the time. Other artists you might want to check out in this respect; Kate Elwes, Annabel Nicholson, Hilary Moody, Lulu Quinn, Mona Hatoum, Bobby Baker, Rose Garrard, and above all, Carolee Schneeman.

MW: That is useful although I am specifically looking at tape-slide and I'm not sure those artists did use that medium.

JH: I think it's just that one never thought too much about the medium one used then, and certainly did not define oneself by it. It was the work and the content that was important.

Appendix VI - Interview with Laura Mulvey

15/6/06

Birkbeck College, Gordon Square, London

Mo White. Do you think your practice as a film maker had any inflection on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', as you have just said you felt *Riddles of the Sphinx* was an answer to 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'?

Laura Mulvey. Yes, *Penthesilea* which Peter and I made and thought of as a 'scorched earth', negative aesthetics movie and very much an essay film, a film about ideas. I remember Peter used to say you could have all kinds of movies, you could have poetic movies, documentaries, so why shouldn't there be essay movies. *Penthesilea* was pure essay and very much pure negative aesthetics. Have you seen it?

MW. No, that was the one I couldn't locate a copy of to view.

LM. The only copy in the world is mine and I left it months ago at the British Film Institute where someone was looking at it.

Coming back to the question, I don't think it was so much the fact that Peter and I had made this first movie; it was the spirit of the times. Let me put it like this, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' represents a kind of turning point, a pivot. In the first instance the thought and the ideas in it came from my great love and involvement with Hollywood. It was only really towards the very end of the 1960s with the decline of Hollywood on the one hand and the coming of new cinemas, Godard and radical cinema it seemed as though cinema was changing for good. Cinema itself was changing with the arrival of 16mm, it was possible to think about making films because 16mm was available and not too costly both in terms of the production. As a final point, bringing it back to home, during the 1970s there were the beginnings of a self-conscious movement of avant-garde film and of independent film makers, which became the Independent Film makers Association.

MW. Yes, and you had some involvement as well in the London Women's Film Group I understand?

LM. Not so much no, my involvement was with the Other Cinema. I was on the management board for the Other Cinema during the 1970s and it was out of the Other Cinema that the Independent Film makers Association emerged and that also brought in people from the Co-op, documentary collectives as an umbrella group. I certainly knew the people at the Co-op well but I wasn't actively involved. That was much more of a post art-school, artisan way of thinking about film and working with film. It was hands-on which wasn't appropriate either for Peter or me. We always worked with a cinematographer and an editor.

MW. I had understood that you were involved with the London Women's Film Group, with Claire Johnson and others?

LM. No, not at all. They were all friends of mine but I wasn't actually involved with the group. The only thing I was involved in with Claire was Edinburgh Film Festivals Women's Event in 1972, which I co-organised with Claire Johnson and Lynda Miles. This was partly because I wasn't living in London at this time. I was mainly living in the US and Peter and I often felt that if we had stayed in London we would have pursued a very different trajectory. We were in Chicago in a Film Department that had a practice side, that's one reason why my collaboration (with Peter Wollen) developed in the way that it did, out of the accident of being abroad. Then having made *Penthesilea*, coming back and going straight into making *Riddles of the Sphinx* was a very intense period of thought and planning and so on. That established our collaborative way of working.

MW. Coming back to the question, do you feel that the practice had any inflection on the way that you wrote 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'?

I am thinking of passages about making new languages of desire and the invectives to film makers.

LM. Yes, absolutely. That was definitely coming out of involvement with the avant-garde and new cinemas. Though what I was saying about *Penthesilea* is that it wasn't film that tried to evoke a new language of desire so much as to put down a manifesto, a negation of existing conventions and ways of seeing with cinema. I think when I wrote 'Visual Pleasure' it was this kind of turning point, moving out of Hollywood and at the same time very conscious that a new cinema was beginning to happen. So even if it wasn't my direct practice that was in my mind I assumed that cinema was actually going to change and that this cinema was going to be a cinema of the future. It might seem very strange that we thought that at the time as it turned out to be not the case. It was a kind of utopian moment.

I think at a certain point I say, near the beginning of 'Visual Pleasure' that I talk about the possibility of film practice and the coming of 16mm. This was an important plank in establishing the argument but it was also very conservative because I'm still thinking in terms of negative aesthetics. If you look at the article I did later, 'Film, Feminism and the Avant-garde' written in 1978, that is still very influenced by the idea of a negative aesthetic and of only being able to discover a new language out of negating the dominant one.

MW. That can bring us on to the next question, about a feminist avant-garde. I'm referring to your article about British cinema and the feminist spectator, the Spectatrix issue of *Camera Obscura*, and at that point you felt that feminist film theory had left behind feminist film practice. This is a point that has been made since by others, that much of the work in feminist film theory had become more about subverting male genres and less about current feminist film practices. I wondered what your thoughts are about what had happened at that point?

LM. For me, the Hollywood genre that returned was the melodrama, as a woman's genre that was addressing woman spectators and that was a key

point of feminist film theory. I think that you also have to realise that during the 1980s the possibility of an avant-garde practice more or less disappeared completely. Someone like Sally Potter for instance made *Gold Diggers* in the mid 1980s, which was a BFI production. After that the BFI was going to have to look for co-production and work more with Channel 4. One might almost say that funding disappeared practically overnight with the coming of the Thatcher government. The whole shift in emphasis at the time had been towards Channel 4 because it was the only source of money. It became much more professionalized and when Peter and I made *Amy* in 1980 it had to move up the scale into a much more ambitious movie. Before this it had been perfectly possible to make films and be an academic at the same time but this became harder and harder. Sally Potter was one of the few people who managed to make a career but as you can see it has been an enormous struggle. There are very few people who have moved from that avant-garde world into the professionalism of the 1980s. It was a direct offshoot of Thatcherism but at the same time it meant that Channel 4 was a very rich area for experiment in television. For example, people like Tina Keane had their work shown but there was a huge culture shift which meant that certain people, of whom I was certainly one, retreated into academic world just because you had to make a living somehow or other. I'd never thought of myself as an academic but when it came along it seemed sensible to pursue it.

MW. Coming back to the split between feminist theory and practice, as Catherine Fowler recently suggested in her chapter in 'Women Film makers Refocusing' where she says that the theorists and practitioners aren't speaking to each other. What do think of this?

LM. From my point of view there wasn't very much to speak to. Chantal Akerman went on working, Sally Potter very occasionally. When it came to *Orlando* for instance it wasn't the kind of movie I was very engaged with. What was Catherine Fowler thinking of?

MW. I think Catherine Fowler is looking at Sally Potter's post *Gold Diggers* movies, *The Tango Lesson*, for instance and suggests that here Potter had attempted to regain pleasure but it just underlines Fowler's point that feminist film theory had ceased to look at contemporary women film makers work.

LM. Yes, I think there was a kind of academic retrenchment into the whole film theory world. I think the interest in melodrama became specifically out of feminism but then of course lots of people then diversified to create a new kind of academia which doesn't have much connection with the old days. When we were working in the 1970s we would have assumed that by the end of the 1980s, and certainly by the turn of the century, you would have had fifty per cent women film makers in all areas of the industry. One of the great disappointments is that it didn't happen. The avant-garde collapsed in the way that I've described and instead of Hollywood opening its arms to very talented women a few women managed to make a couple of films. For example, Susan Seidelman made the great *Desperately Seeking Susan*. The neo-liberalism of Thatcherism in the 1980s was a very arid and depressing period in which all hope died, whether for the continuation of an avant-garde or for a flourishing women and film culture. I'm putting this in an exaggerated way! But it was really very depressing and you felt a sense of historic defeat. As for current feminist film theory, I don't really follow that anymore unless there is something that specifically interests me.

MW. You seem to be interested in Trinh T. Minh-ha's work.

LM. Yes, I did an interview with Isaac Julien but that was quite casual. I most recently saw Minh-ha at a conference in Leeds last year where she had been especially invited over by Griselda Pollock. It was a tiny conference, which doesn't undermine your point, but Griselda is someone who was trying to maintain these links. As was the conference as it tried to reach back and make links with the past because Mary Kelly was there as well and myself and Elizabeth Cowie. It was a gathering of the ghostly aspirations of some time ago! Minh-ha is someone again who has really struggled and is still

producing interesting work. I think those women who did try and get through that period are heroic.

MW. If we can move to the next question, about Judith Halberstam's comments about your work in 'A Queer Time and Place' where she has spoken about 'Visual Pleasure' being a 'somewhat sensible' view of gender relations which is added to her earlier discussions that Queer Cinema is a site of the new cinematic languages that you had called. I find it odd that a leading queer theorist is recuperating 'Visual Pleasure' for contemporary audiences given the resistance that there was to 'Visual Pleasure' by earlier gay and lesbian writers where it was seen as heterosexist view of relations in the cinema.

LM. Certainly it was a heterosexist view from a male point of view, not so much from a female point of view. I was arguing the case that the heterosexual male gaze was aligned and how it dominated. The female gaze is not directed at the male protagonist at all. There's no heterosexual relationship on the female side but there is on the male side, and that's the way the language of the cinema worked. I was just analysing what was there. Of course, one can now find lots of aberrant looks once you start to look for them but in 1975 when we were making the first steps to find a theory, it was theorising the obvious. One of the things that I thought was odd about 'Visual Pleasure' being taken up so much was that it seemed to me to be stating the absolute obvious. There's an erotic look in the cinema – so what! 'Visual Pleasure' was a polemical piece, it wasn't supposed to say "but on the other hand", and it doesn't make concessions. Of course the fact is anyone watching a movie especially when greater self-consciousness came in can play around with gender positions, queer or not queer. Of course, 'Visual Pleasure' has been criticised from every point of view, but that's interesting that Judith Halberstam has looked back at it from another point of view.

MW. In your new book you mention Douglas Gordon and this reminded me of scenes in Isaac Julien's *Looking for Langston* which have an interest in the same kind of play between the still and the moving image. Julien also

acknowledges your influence on his work and it's interesting that he says it's the article that influenced him rather than your movies, which he hadn't seen.

LM. Yes, he always does acknowledge that. It's very nice. I think that comes from when he was at Central St. Martins in the early 1980s and very possible that someone assigned 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' as reading and the movies weren't so easy to see at that time, not that they are now.

MW. My final question is about your legacy to film practices, as I think your legacy to film theory is clear and my conclusion with the work that I have been doing is that you also have a legacy to film practices and I wonder what your view of this is?

LM. The way I might doubt that is as we were saying, the movies aren't that easy to see but tell me what your perception is

MW. Yes, the fact that you were a film maker as well as a writer at the time that you wrote 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. I look at what happened immediately after its publication at the 'visual pleasure' moment to feminists like Sally Potter and Chantal Akerman where the ideas had then formed part of the immediate landscape. I also look at photo-text and slide-tape as attempts to find different strategies to generate new languages of desire, some of which failed or were transitional like slide-tape, which has since disappeared. Finally, I look at later practices, those of black film makers and gay and lesbian film makers and their concerns with pleasure. I suggest that they can be related back, not in any linear way, and that 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' became part of a framework of ideas for these practices.

LM. Yes, a framework, that's a very interesting way to look at it. What I always liked about 'Visual Pleasure' is it has a very careful pattern so it is almost something you can visualise because the parts all exist in 1, 2 and 3, and A and B, and then a beginning and an end. I thought of it very much as a

visual object with a specific pattern. Yes, the beginning is in 2 parts, then there's an A, B, C and then A, B and then C1 and C2 which exemplifies what's gone before, and a bit at the end. It was that kind of symmetry that I was very keen on. That it should all fit together and makes sense across each other.

MW. So the question of the legacy...

LM. Yes, even the academic legacy seems a bit weird in that it's often taken out of context in that I was really writing about a very specific cinematic convention which I didn't even think went for all cinema. There's a tendency wherever there's a camera to have an inscribed look and I was interested in this particular kind of Hollywood cinema. Anyone who's ever been to art school or film school has had to read it. It's only 3,000 words so its influence word for word has been enormous!

