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# Every Frame Counts: Creative Practice and Gender in Direct Animation

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Plymouth University

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**Every Frame Counts: Creative Practice and Gender in Direct Animation**

by

Kayla Parker

A thesis submitted to Plymouth University  
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

School of Art and Media  
Faculty of Arts and Humanities

January 2015



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# Abstract

Kayla Parker

## Every Frame Counts: Creative Practice and Gender in Direct Animation

This thesis interrogates the ways in which the body-centred practices of women film artists embrace the materiality of direct animation in order to foreground gendered, subjective positions. Through the researcher's own creative practice, it investigates how this mode of film-making, in which the artist works through physical engagement with the film materials and the material processes of film-making, might be understood as feminine and/or feminist. Direct animation foregrounds touch as the primary sense. Its practices are process-based and highly experimental, because images are made through the agency of the body operating within restrictive parameters, making results difficult to predict or control with precision. For these reasons, direct animation has not been embraced by mainstream, narrative-focused, studio-based models of production, unlike other forms of two and three dimensional animation. It has remained a specialist area for the individual artist and auteur, and, to date, there is a paucity of commentary about direct animation practices, and what exists has been dominated by male voices.

In order to develop ideas about the ways in which women represent themselves in an expanded film-making praxis that is focused on the body and materiality of process, this PhD inquiry, encompassing a body of films with written contextualisation, is situated in the context of the direct animation practices of three artists (Caroline Leaf, Annabel Nicolson, and Margaret Tait); and informed by conceptual frameworks provided by Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous. This thesis proposes, via

interaction between these three axes of research, that women film artists, operating independently, are able to create a female imaginary that represents women and is recognised by them, by constructing positions of practice outside the dominant symbolic modes of patriarchy, which evolve through the maternal body and the materialities of the feminine.



## **Acknowledgements**

Liz Wells and Roberta Mock have provided invaluable guidance and advice throughout the production of this body of work and thesis, with Plymouth University providing institutional support.

Thanks to Liz Nicol and Michael Punt for their support, and to Malcolm Miles for his guidance in the early stages of this thesis. I am grateful to colleagues, in particular Sally Waterman for her advice, and to my mother, Joanna Parker for her contribution.

Special thanks to Stuart Moore for all his assistance.

## **Author's Declaration**

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Graduate Committee.

This study was financed with the aid of fee remission from the Faculty of Arts, Plymouth University, from October 2008.

Relevant seminars and conferences were regularly attended and art exhibitions and film screenings were visited for the purposes of research and an awareness of contemporary developments. Several papers were prepared for publication and artworks were regularly exhibited throughout the doctoral study.

## Publications

2008/2011. 'White Body' [film, with research statement and peer reviews] in Jon Dovey (ed.) *Journal of Media Practice* vol. 9 no. 3 (November 2008) 'AVPhD issue' [DVD, showcase of practice-based doctoral research in screen media - moving image work on film, video and new media platforms]. Republished in Charlotte Crofts (ed.) *JMP Screenworks* [online] vol. 2 (Summer 2011). Bristol: Intellect. doi: 10.1386/jmpr.9.1.5/2. Available: <http://jmpscreenworks.com/page/vol2>

2010. 'Memories wanted' [written response to film frame no. 29, with photographs and video, 16 December 2010], in Nick Rombes (ed. and curator) *REQUIEM // 102 minute #29* (2010-2011) Detroit: University of Detroit Mercy. Available:

<http://requiem102.tumblr.com/post/2337419526/post-29>

2011. 'White Body' [film, with artist's written statement] *HerStory* [DVD, publication for exhibition, 8 June-8 July 2011, Link Gallery, University of Winchester]. Winchester: Women's Work.

2011. 'White Body: animating feminine pleasure' [paper, written critical reflection, and still from film; with film embedded online] *Body, Space and Technology Journal* vol. 10 no. 2 (Summer 2011) [print and online]. Brunel University, West London. ISSN 1470-9120. Available:

<http://people.brunel.ac.uk/bst/vol1002/home.html>

2012. 'Making Glass' [video essay, and video art], with Stuart Moore, in Annette Arlander, Yvon Bonenfant, and Mary Agnes Covey-Krell (eds. and curators). *Ex-trauma: the opposite of the traumatic*, 'Experiments and intensities' series vol. 2 (November 2012). Winchester: University of Winchester Press. ISBN 978-1-906113-04-9. Available:

<http://www.experimentsandintensities.com/published/vol-2/>

2013. 'Jamming the machine: The personal-political in Annabel Nicolson's *Reel Time*' [chapter] in Rebecca Emmett (ed.) in *The arts and popular culture in history: proceedings of The Role of Arts in History cross-disciplinary conference*. Plymouth: University of Plymouth Press (UPP). ISBN: 978-184-102-355-7. Publication date: 1 September 2013.

2014. 'Blobs in tartan colours: Margaret Tait's *Painted Eightsome*' [essay] in Eileen Rositzka and Amber Shields (eds.) *Frames Cinema Journal* vol. 5 'Framing animation' issue (November 2014). Fife: University of St Andrews. Available: <http://framescinemajournal.com/>

## Presentations

### Papers Presented

23 January 2008. 'The material and the maternal', Media and Photography research seminar; Plymouth University.

29 April 2008. 'These restless hands', research seminar; Plymouth College of Art and Design.

19 February 2009. 'Shape-shifting, slutswool, and spaces between', *f-word* feminist research symposium, organised by James Daybell, Mairie Mackie, Roberta Mock, Kayla Parker, and Liz Wells; Plymouth University.

1 April 2009. 'Feeling for nature', Land/Water and the Visual Arts research seminar; Plymouth University.

9 March 2010. 'Seeing the vulva: adopting strategic essentialism as a means of disrupting phallogocentrism, finding a subjective voice, and picturing difference', *f-word 2* feminist interdisciplinary research symposium, organised by James Daybell, Mairie Mackie, Roberta Mock, and Kayla Parker; Plymouth University.

5 May 2010. 'Aerial visions: touching the seen and unseen', Land/Water and the Visual Arts research seminar; Plymouth University.

13 July 2010. 'Verge 360: beyond the frame', with Stuart Moore, *Animation deviation symposium*, School of Creative Arts, University of the West of England; Bower Ashton, Bristol.

3 September 2010. 'The moving image screen as a site for feminine pleasure', *Radical British screens symposium*, School of Creative Arts at University of the West of England and Screen Studies South West Network; Bush House, Bristol.

19 January 2011. 'Direct animation: Margaret Tait, Caroline Leaf and Annabel Nicolson', Land/Water and the Visual Arts research seminar; Plymouth University.

16 November 2011. 'Looking through *Glass*', art + sound research seminar; Plymouth University.

9 February 2012. 'Making *Glass*: towards a creative research methodology', Theatre, Dance and Performing Arts research seminar; Plymouth University.

14 March 2012. '*STITCH* in process: a reflection on practice-as-research', Land/Water and the Visual Arts research seminar; Plymouth University.

25 March 2012. '*Welcome to the Treasuredome*: immersive experience, or on the threshold?', with Stuart Moore, *Exhibiting video conference*, session 6: 'Expanded video'; University of Westminster, London.

15 June 2012. 'Jamming the machine: the personal-political in Annabel Nicolson's *Reel Time*', *The arts in history* crossdisciplinary postgraduate conference; Plymouth University.

24 January 2013. 'Sewing film: materiality and mimesis in *STITCH-es*', Theatre, Dance and Performing Arts research seminar; Plymouth University.

19 March 2013. 'I walked with a zombie: what the living dead can teach us about performance', Plymouth University Festival of Research, School of Humanities, Music and Performing Arts (HuMPA) Research Showcase Lecture by Lee Miller, Roberta Mock,

Kayla Parker, and Phil Smith; Plymouth University.

20 March 2013. 'Choreographies of the mind: thinking about the performance of animation', *The lure of the new*, Cognition Institute annual conference, symposium 2: 'Imagery, dance and creativity'; Central Methodist Hall, Plymouth.

13 April 2013. 'Trancing the white darkness: cinematic resurrection and animation', *Zombies: walking, eating and performance* symposium organised by Lee Miller, Roberta Mock, Kayla Parker, and Phil Smith; panel 2B: 'Shocks, cracks, flicks'; Plymouth University.

8 May 2013. '*These Restless Hands*: animating the place of memory', Land/Water and the Visual Arts research seminar; Plymouth University.

24 May 2013. 'My mother's voice: animating the place of memory', *Unfolding narrative: from middles to beginnings to endless loops*, symposium organised by Anya Lewin, Heidi Morstang, Kayla Parker, and John Sealey; Jill Craigie Cinema, Plymouth University.

28 May 2013 'Reading silence: a performance with film and light' [performed lecture, with screening] *Textually active*, an evening of provocation and speculation on 'art - text - space' that includes performances, readings, and interactive artefacts by Kim Charnley, Naomi Cristofoli, Sally Hall, Mark Leahy, Kayla Parker, Maddy Pethick, and Pylon Press. *Textually active* provides a critical space for debate and performative practices in Plymouth and the South West of England. It is curated and run by Driftingspace; The Plymouth Athaneum.

22 June 2013. 'Going under: entranced and embodied spectatorship', *Time around space*: 360 conference, organised by Matthew Emmett, David Hilton, David Hotchkiss, Kayla Parker, and Martin Woolner, Plymouth University.

13 July 2013. 'Her dark materials: conjuring the feminine imaginary in practice' *Dialogues at the interlude: between body, artifact and discourse* Conference, session 3: 'Imaginary materialities: hypnosis as a medium for artistic and creative practice', presented by Transtechnology Research with Plymouth University, and Plymouth Arts Centre; Plymouth Arts Centre.

16 October 2013. 'Her dark materials: conjuring the feminine imaginary' [video essay], *Living film: films, installations and performances*, programmed by Vicky Smith and Karel Doing; no.w.here, London.

11 December 2013. 'Alleyways as 'other' spaces', with Gursewak Aulakh and Stuart Moore, Land/Water and the Visual Arts research seminar; Plymouth University.

30 January 2014. 'This is how it begins: origins of practice in direct animation', Theatre, Dance and Performing Arts research seminar; Plymouth University.

9 April 2014. 'Her dark materials: conjuring the feminine imaginary' [video essay], *Approaching animation: critical enquiries into the art, artists and industry* symposium, screening programme, Department of Film Studies, University of St Andrews; Fife, Scotland.

14 June 2014. 'Making Glass' [video essay, with film], *Image Movement Story* symposium focusing on practice as research and practice based research, screening programme; Journal of Media Practice, MeCCSA Practice Network, The Centre for Research into Film and Audiovisual Cultures, University of Roehampton; London.

## Exhibitions and Screenings

5 October 2007. 'Unknown Woman', *Freedom and Dream*, curated and presented by Zata Kitowski for National Poetry Month; Tate Britain, London.

29 November 2007. 'Verge: Flux', and 'Small World' [with Stuart Moore], 'Night Sounding', *Oddfellows: Collective Film Night*, curated by Paula Orrell, Plymouth Arts Centre; Ker St Social Club, Devonport.

11 January 2008. 'Blue Window Drawing' [improvised drawing performance, blue crayon moistened with spit on glass pane, 15 minutes]; *Critical Spaces* workshop, with Daniela Kostova, Plymouth University.

5 March 2008. 'Resubjection' [durational film-drawing performance, with projection, and film screening, 2 hours 30 minutes], *Moving Out*, exhibition of postgraduate work by Nicola Gilmour, Melanie Morrell, Kayla Parker, and Sally Waterman; Theatre, Dance, and Performance research event; Plymouth University.

7 May 2008. 'Verge: Flux', and 'Night Sounding' [with Stuart Moore], *Night: A Time Between*, artists' film programme curated by Janette Kerr for Royal West of England Academy exhibition; Arnolfini, Bristol.

26 June-2 July 2008. 'White Body' [digital film loop, silent, projected onto gallery floor], *Immersion* exhibition of postgraduate work by Nicola Gilmour, Melanie Morrell, Kayla Parker, and Sally Waterman, for *Landscape and Beauty*, Land/Water and the Visual Arts symposium; Plymouth University.

5 December 2008. 'Sunset Strip', *CineCity*, 'Artist Cinema: Circle-Line' programme, Sallis Benney Theatre, Brighton.

14 January 2009. 'Sunset Strip', *Animated Exeter* 10th anniversary launch event; Exeter.

31 January 2009. 'Sunset Strip', *FilmCraft: Framework*, curated and presented by Matt Hulse, a 'Thinking through craft' event, IC: Innovative Craft, Edinburgh.

1 and 2 April 2009. 'Sunset Strip', *Animate* Britu animācijas īsfilmu programma; Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art (LCCA), Liepaja and Riga, Latvia.

2 April-2 May 2009. 'Sunset Strip' [single screen loop with wall-mounted lightbox display of 35mm filmstrips], exhibition for *Framing Time and Place: Repeats and Returns in Photography*, Land/Water and the Visual Arts conference (15-17 April 2009); Plymouth University.

22 April 2009. 'Unknown Woman', *PoetryFilm Party*, presented by Zata Kitowski; Curzon Soho, London.

5-16 May 2009. 'Poppies' [single screen loop, with triptych of photographic prints], *Trace and Transience* exhibition, Land/Water and the Visual Arts, Triangle Gallery; Chelsea College of Art, University of the Arts London.

2009-2013 'White Body', and 'Verge: Nocturne' [with Stuart Moore], *One Minute* vol. 3, programme of artists' moving image curated by Kerry Baldry; screenings include: *Contemporary art Ruhr*, Germany; all UK Big Screens; Marseille Project Gallery, France; Castlefield Gallery, Manchester; presented by Lumen for *Art in Unusual Places*, Leeds; Peloton Gallery, Redfern, Australia.

3 December 2009. 'Teign Spirit' [with Stuart Moore], *AnimateTV*, with Stuart Comer, Starr Auditorium, Tate Modern, London; other screenings include: *Seascape*

conference, Skegness; *Aurora: Common Ground*, Norwich; London Short Film Festival, 'Leftfield and Luscious' programme, ICA; *Spring Screen*, artists' film at Spacex Gallery, Exeter; Haifa International Film Festival, 'Start Making Sense' programme, Israel; *23rd International Panorama Conference*, 'Kultur+Kongress Forum' [as 'Teign Spirit 360'], Altötting, Germany.

9 January 2010. 'White Body', *London Short Film Festival*, 'Femmes fantastique' [sic] programme; ICA, London.

11-29 January 2010. 'The Measure of It' [TV monitor on plinth: HD documentation, with sound, followed by four 16mm filmstrips running at 12 frames per second, without sound], *Exchange*, Land/Water and the Visual Arts exhibition; Avenue Gallery, University of Northampton.

3-26 February 2010. 'Glass' [large TV monitor on plinth, at chest height], *Finding Place*, exhibition of recent work by arts research students; Scott Building, Plymouth University; exhibition organiser, and co-curator.

26 February-1 April 2010. 'White Body' [loop, flatscreen monitor], *The Women's Art Show*, exhibition; Fairfields Art Centre, Basingstoke.

2010-2013 'Twenty Foot Square' [with Stuart Moore], *One Minute* vol. 4 programme of artists' moving image curated by Kerry Baldry; screenings include: Meinblau, Berlin, and *Contemporary art Ruhr*, Germany; all UK Big Screens; Ukrainian Art Festival; Marseille Project Gallery, France; *Flatpack* and *Fierce* festival, Birmingham; *The Underground Film Sessions*, Horse Hospital, London; Peloton Gallery, Redfern, Australia.

22 May 2010. 'Project' [with Stuart Moore], *The Falmouth Convention*; The Poly cinema, Falmouth.

7 June-2 July 2010. 'The Measure of It' [TV monitor on plinth, looped: HD documentation, with sound, followed by four 16mm filmstrips running at 12 frames per second, without sound; with glass cabinet on plinth, containing photographic flat-top lightbox with 16mm film-drawing scroll made on Sunday 25 October 2009, and artefacts chosen at random<sup>1</sup>], *The Purpose of Drawing* exhibition, curated by Jacqui Knight and Patrick Lowry; Cube Gallery, Plymouth University.

13-18 September 2010. 'Nectar' [360 film with Stuart Moore], *Count Me In: ICCI 360 Festival*, Plymouth city centre; Innovation for the Creative and Cultural Industries and London 2012 Cultural Olympiad Programme in the South West.

2-17 October 2010. 'White Body' [looped, flatscreen monitor wall-mounted at head height], *Visions in the Nunnery* exhibition; Nunnery Gallery, London.

6 and 10 November 2010. 'Sunset Strip', Brisbane International Film Festival 'Animate Retrospective' curated by Malcolm Turner, Australia.

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1. Brass Swann Morton scalpel with 10A blade, 6 inch clear plastic ruler, satsuma, banana skin, *The Irigaray Reader* (paperback book, second hand, open at page 114: 'The limits of the transference'), end of SW Film Commission pencil, green A5 cutting mat, roll of masking tape, roll of 16mm splicing tape (from Lefkos Greco), pack of small pale yellow post-it notes, Ikea paper tape measure (from the Bristol store), cork top from a bottle of Christmas port (used to carry scalpel around), two arms' length of thin white and red string from Spacex Exeter (found in gallery during a visit to Dutch artist and engineer Theo Jansen's *Strandbeest* exhibition, Saturday 29 June 2010).

13-14 November 2010. 'White Body', *Abertoir* Film Festival, Aberystwyth, Wales.

27 November 2010. 'Hand Eye Visions: the films of Kayla Parker and Stuart Moore' [with Stuart Moore, programme of seventeen direct animation films,<sup>2</sup> followed by discussion with the artists], *Cine-City*; Lighthouse, Brighton.

18 and 21 November 2010. 'Sunset Strip' [looped, largescale projection], *Animated Encounters*, 'AnimateTV' exhibition; Dark Studio, Arnolfini, Bristol.

9 January 2011. 'Shorts a la Carte' [with Stuart Moore, programme of seven films<sup>3</sup> projected 'silently' onto diners' tables, loop], London Short Film Festival; Inamo Restaurant, Soho, London.

14 January 2011. 'White Body' [with new score created, and played live, by The Cabinet of Living Cinema], London Short Film Festival, 'Making Tracks' programme, presented by Whirlygig Cinema, Rich Mix, London; also at Rich Mix 20 May 2011; Wychwood Festival, Cheltenham 3 June 2011; *A Voyage Through Animation* The Yard Theatre, Hackney Wick, London, for *Scala beyond*, 16 September 2012; and *Making Tracks Retrospective* [the best short film], London Short Film Festival, Rich Mix, London 11 January 2014.

15 January-5 March 2011. 'Heirloom', 'White Body', and 'Sunset Strip' [looped, large flatscreen monitor above mantelpiece], *Crafty Animators*, exhibition; Thelma Hulbert Gallery, Honiton, Devon.

14 March 2011. 'Heirloom', 'White Body', and 'Glass', and 'Verge 360' [with Stuart Moore], practice-led research presentation, University of Plymouth Festival of Research, film programme 1: 'Materiality and Technology'; Jill Craigie Cinema, Plymouth University.

22 and 23 April 2011. 'Sunset Strip', *Animateka*, curated by Igor Prassel, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

7 May 2011. 'Sunset Strip', *COLLECT 2011* 'Hands On' exhibition; Saatchi Gallery, London.

30 May 2011. 'Sunset Strip', *VIS Vienna Independent Shorts*, Austria.

8 June-8 July 2011. 'White Body', *HerStory* exhibition, presented by Women's Work; Link Gallery, University of Winchester.

24 June 2011. 'Sunset Strip', Melbourne International Animation Festival, Australia.

2 July 2011. 'Sunset Strip', *Fest Anca*, Bratislava, Slovak Republic.

4-8 July 2011. 'Sensing Place' [with Stuart Moore, programme of seven films<sup>4</sup> and two

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2. We opened the programme with a screening of five films shown from 16mm prints: *Looks Familiar*, *Nuclear Family*, *Unknown Woman*, *Night Sounding*, and *Cage of Flame*; followed by digital projection of nine 16mm and 35mm films: *Puirt-a-beul*, *Canntaireachd*, *Sunset Strip*, *A Short Walk*, *Verge* (dual screen version), *Poppies*, *Hold*, *Heirloom*, and *Brighton Road Movie*. Also included were: *Physic* (a digital 'direct animation'), *Measure* (a loop of the 16mm scrolls), and *Bridgwater Butlins* (a 16mm direct animation made using a 1980s promotional film for Butlins Holiday Camps by Foundation students at Bridgwater College during our animation arts workshop day).

3. Films screened as looped programme: *Heirloom*, *Verge: Nocturne*, *Twenty Foot Square*, *Small World*, *Poppies*, *Project*, and *Sunset Strip*.

4. Films screened in looped programme: *Night Sounding*, *Project*, *Small World*, *Teign Spirit*, *Flora*,



films from the 1950s], for Plymouth Arts Centre's *Mobile Cinema*; Plymouth city centre and suburbs; co-curator.

2011-2014 'Flora' [with Stuart Moore], *One Minute* vol. 5, and *One Minute Remix* programmes of artists' moving image curated by Kerry Baldry; screenings include: Aid and Abet, Cambridge; *The London Underground Film Sessions*, Horse Hospital, London; Peloton Gallery, Redfern, Australia; *Artists cine club*, FACT, Liverpool; *DL8*, International Directors Lounge, Berlin; Furtherfield Gallery, McKenzie Pavilion, Finsbury Park, London.

17 July 2011. *Soundwaves* Festival, 'Listen!' [with Stuart Moore, programme of seven films,<sup>5</sup> projected 'silently' with each member of the mobile audience curating their own soundtrack using handheld audio devices], presented by London Short Film Festival; Sallis Benney Theatre, University of Brighton.

22-24 July 2011. 'Teign Spirit 360' [with Stuart Moore], Cultural Olympiad Open Weekend; ICCI 360 Arena, Weymouth beach.

24 July 2011. *Rushes Soho Shorts Festival*, 'Spiritus Sancti and Ghost Radio', [with Stuart Moore, programme of four films],<sup>6</sup> presented by London Short Film Festival and Artherz; BAFTA, London.

27 July-12 August 2011. 'Teign Spirit' [with Stuart Moore, looped, large flatscreen wall-mounted at head height], *Art in Large Doses*, exhibition, Paintings in Hospitals; Menier Gallery, London.

14 January 2012. 'Unknown Woman' [with new score created, and played live, by The Cabinet of Living Cinema], London Short Film Festival, 'Making tracks' presented by Whirlygig Cinema; Rich Mix, London.

24 February 2012. 'Glass', *Last Friday shorts*, curated by Michaela Freeman; TAP, Southend.

14-23 March 2012. 'These Restless Hands' [digital film loop on flatscreen monitor, at head-height], *Manifestations of Place*, exhibition of postgraduate research by Lu La Buzz, Gabrielle Llewellyn, Kayla Parker, and Yan Preston; Plymouth University; exhibition co-organiser, and co-curator.

16 March 2012. 'STITCH' [film-sewing performance, 4 hours], 'Research Conversations' series, curated by Liz Nicol, School of Art and Media; fifth and final day of the artist's week-long residency in the Foyer Space, Scott Building, part of the *Manifestations of Place* exhibition; Plymouth University.

10-11 August 2012. 'Welcome to the Treasuredome' [with Stuart Moore, two-day artists' 360 moving image festival], for Innovation for the Creative and Cultural Industries with Plymouth University, part of *Maritime Mix - London 2012 Cultural Olympiad by the Sea* programme; ICCI 360 Digital Arena, Weymouth seafront; co-curator, co-commissioner, and co-presenter.

2012-2013 'Yessling' [with Stuart Moore], *One Minute* vol. 6, programme of artists'

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and *Inner City*; plus *Blue Kayak* by Stuart Moore.

5. The films screened without their soundtracks, as a looped programme, were *Heirloom*, *Verge: Nocturne*, *Twenty Foot Square*, *Small World*, *Poppies*, *Project*, and *Sunset Strip*.

6. The films screened at BAFTA were *Brighton Road Movie*, *Teign Spirit*, *Project*, and *Sunset Strip*.

moving image curated by Kerry Baldry; screenings include: Aid and Abet, Cambridge; *Magmart* International Videoart Festival, Casoria Contemporary Art Museum, Naples; Hong Kong Contemporary.

7 November 2012-3 February 2013. 'Sunset Strip' [looped, large flatscreen monitor], *Light and Shade* exhibition, curated by KINO 10; The Public, West Bromwich.

23 March-2 June 2013. 'These Restless Hands' [looped, large flatscreen monitor, wall-mounted at head height], *Drawn* exhibition, Royal West of England Academy, Bristol.

28 May 2013. 'Reading Silence: A Performance with Film and Light' [performance with film screening, 'As Yet Unseen: Slowed Down, and Normal Speed'], *Textually Active*, presented by Driftingspace; The Plymouth Atheneum, Plymouth.

15-28 July 2013. 'White Body' [looped, TV monitor on gallery floor], *A State of Un-Play*, exhibition curated by Diana Ali; Atelier 35, Bucharest, Romania.

2013-2014 'Project' [with Stuart Moore], *One Minute* vol. 7, programme of artists' moving image curated by Kerry Baldry; screenings include: *Dear Serge*, De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill; Furtherfield Gallery, London; Bloc projects, Sheffield; Ginsberg Film Festival, South Africa; Chester Film Co-op, Chesterfield.

28 October 2013. 'Nuclear Family', *Object Documentary: Everything*, presented by Minou Norouzi; North Carolina State University, USA.

30 October 2013. 'Looks Familiar', *Experimental Gothic: Romantic Agonies*, Brown University; Rhode Island, USA.

2-14 June 2014. 'Wort Wall Water' [with Stuart Moore, looped, large flatscreen on wall above bookcases], 'Silence in the Library', curated by Jo Mayes, with no.w.here, for *Loop the Loop*; St Ives Library, Cornwall.

13 and 14 September 2014. 'Reach' [with Stuart Moore, looped 360 video installation], *It's All About the River* film festival, River Tamar Project; Calstock Arts, Cornwall.

10-12 October 2014. 'Reach' [with Stuart Moore, looped, single screen projection] *It's All About the River* film festival, River Tamar Project; The Mayor's Parlour, Devonport Guildhall, Plymouth.

24 October-19 December 2014. 'Small World' [with Stuart Moore, looped, large flat screen], Land/Water and the Visual Arts exhibition, *Of the Earth: Art, Photography, Writing and the Environment* conference (24-25 October 2014), organised by Plymouth University and Sunderland University in association with *WALK ON* touring exhibition; Scott Building, Plymouth University.

28 October-2 November, and 25-30 November 2014. 'Maelstrom: The Return' [with Stuart Moore, looped single screen projection], *CMIR-RWA Moving Image Art Bursary Winners* exhibition, presented by Centre for Moving Image Research, University of the West of England, in collaboration with Royal West of England Academy; RWA, Bristol.

2014-. 'Night Sounding' [with Stuart Moore, single screen projection], *One Minute* vol. 8, programme of artists' moving image curated by Kerry Baldry; screenings include Furtherfield Gallery, London; *Sleepwalkers* International Short Film Festival, 'Night cinema' programme, Baltic Film and Media School, Estonia; Galeria ArtAffairs-Gdansk, Poland.

### **Artist's Talks Delivered**

28 April 2010. 'The Measure of It', artist's talk with film-sewing performance, and screening; presentation of outcomes from the artist's residency at Plymouth Arts Centre during October 2009, part of *The Big Draw*; Studio One, Plymouth Arts Centre.

28 October 2010. 'Close Up: The View from Here', artist's response to the exhibition in Plymouth City Market of moving image work by members of the Subjectivity and Feminisms Research Group at Chelsea College of Art and Design; *Salon South West: Peep Show at the Octagon*, presented by Project Space 11; Octagon Social Club, Plymouth.

24 November 2011. 'Thursdays@One', gallery talk for the British Art Show (BAS7) *In the Days of the Comet*; artist's response to *Composition for Flutter Screen* by Luke Fowler and Toshiya Tsunoda; Peninsula Arts Gallery, Plymouth University.

6 July 2012. 'Liquidity', introductory talk, and presentation of the programme of artists' moving image curated by the artist for *Water: Image* conference, Land/Water and the Visual Arts; Jill Craigie Cinema, Plymouth University.

12 April 2013. 'Zombie Film Nite', presentation of *Otto; Or, Up with Dead People*, and 'in conversation' with director Bruce LaBruce [via Skype], for *Zombies: Walking, Eating, and Performance*, symposium; Jill Craigie Cinema, Plymouth University.

24 October 2013. 'Moving Space and Time: An Introduction to Artists' Moving Image', inaugural lecture for *Sweet FA*, an initiative between Sundog Media, Plymouth Arts Centre, and Moving Image Arts (MIA) research, Plymouth University; Plymouth Arts Centre.

3 May 2014. 'Bodies of Water', presentation of the programme of artists' moving image curated by the artist for *The Power of the Sea* exhibition at the Royal West of England Academy (RWA), Bristol (5 April-6 July 2014).

### **Artist's Workshops Delivered**

2 November 2007. *Move it! Move it!*, experimental animated drawing, with artist's talk, for *The Big Draw*; Viewpoint Gallery, Plymouth College of Art and Design.

2008-2010. *The Image*, performance drawing, with artist's talk [x 3: 'Expressing Emotion', 'On the Other Hand', and 'Identify Yourself']; University of St Mark and St John, Plymouth.

29 May 2008. 'Light Moves' experimental drawing and animation, for *Estrategia* exhibition; Plymouth Arts Centre.

21 February, 28 March 2009. 'Drawn to be Wild' experimental drawing and animation, for *The Animal Gaze* exhibition, Darwin200; Plymouth Arts Centre.

9 November 2013. 'Scratch That!', 16mm film-making workshop for Cornish artists, with Stuart Moore, for *Sweet FA*; Plymouth Arts Centre.

12 July 2014. 'Film Time', artists' DSLR film-making workshop for artists, with Stuart Moore, for *Sweet FA*; Plymouth Arts Centre.

13 September 2014. 'Framing the Valley', 16mm film-making workshop for Cornish artists, with Stuart Moore, for The River Tamar Project's *It's All About the River* film festival, and Creative Skills Cornwall; Calstock Arts, Cornwall.

## **Training**

### **Graduate School research skills training sessions attended**

- 24 October 2007. *Networking and Teamworking*
- 20 November 2007. *Introduction to Qualitative Research*
- 28 November 2007. *Research: Owning and Using*
- 22 January 2008. *Presentation Skills: part 1*
- 31 January 2008. *Developing Professional Writing Skills*
- 12 February 2008. *Presentation Skills: part 2*
- 19 February 2008. *Negotiation Skills*
- 27 February 2008. *Rapid Reading*
- 19 March 2008. *Introduction to Applying for Research Funding*
- 27 March 2008. *Going Global: Presenting a Conference Paper*
- 13 May 2008. *Your Words or Other People's? Plagiarism*
- 18 February 2009. *The Transfer Process*
- 23 February 2009. *Essential Tools for the Viva: Debating Skills: part 1*
- 20 May 2009. *Essential Tools for the Viva: Debating Skills: part 2*
- 8 February 2010. *Tell the World About It! Getting your Research into the Media*
- 27 May 2011. *The Impact Factor! Writing for Publication*

### **Research skills training workshops attended**

- 20 November 2007. *Library Special Collections*
- 5 December 2007. *Copyright*
- 14 February 2008. *Copyright: Sound and Sight*
- 11 November 2008. *Introduction to EndNote*
- 27 November 2008. *Ethical Review of Research Projects: Principles and Procedures*
- 7 January 2010. *Research Bid Writing*, with Klitos Andrea, John Martin and Liz Wells
- 8 December 2011. *Thinking through Art*, with Katy Macleod
- 19 January 2012. *Conferences and Other Presentations of your Research as a PhD Student*, with Roberta Mock
- 15 March 2012. *Writing Spaces*, with Daniel Maudlin

### **Other training**

- 13 November 2009. *Screening Artists' Moving Image*, Independent Cinema Office (ICO); Norwich University College for the Arts.
- 11 and 12 May 2013. *Tyller Vyth I: Artists' Film Workshop*, 16mm hand-processing; no.w.here and CineStar; Island Centre, St Ives, Cornwall.
- 27 September 2013. *Tyller Vyth II: Austerity Measures Workshop*, 16mm hand manipulation; no.w.here and CineStar; Island Centre, St Ives, Cornwall.

## Conferences and Presentations Attended

2007-2008 'Research and Professional Ethics', seminar series (four events); Plymouth University.

7-11 November 2007 *AURORA 2007: Possible Worlds*, Norwich International Animation Festival; Cinema City, Norwich.

11 December 2007. *The Digital Future*, conference, South West Screen; Watershed, Bristol.

9-11 January 2008. *Critical Spaces*, research seminar, and two-day chroma key and digital video workshop, with Daniela Kostova; Plymouth University.

19 January 2008. *Between Land and Sea*, exhibition of film, video and photography by Catherine Elwes, William Raban, Susan Trangmar, and Chris Wainwright; and symposium with the artists, chaired by Malcom Le Grice; Jill Craigie Cinema, Plymouth University.

20 January 2008. *Anthony McCall*, exhibition of recent light cones, with some early works (solid light and fire performances) from 1970s; Serpentine Gallery, London.

20 January 2008. *Louise Bourgeois*, exhibition; Tate Modern, London.

16 February 2008. *Dormitorium*, exhibition, Brothers Quay, Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter; and 'Brothers Quay in Conversation with Suzanne Buchan', *Animated Exeter* festival; Exeter Picturehouse.

30 March 2008. *Derek Jarman: Brutal Beauty*, exhibition; Serpentine Gallery, London.

15 April 2008. 'Human Scale: He Yun Chang in Performance', research seminar, Andrew Brewerton; Plymouth College of Art and Design.

19 June 2008. *Exploring Consciousness: Research through Practice*, symposium; Plymouth University.

26-27 June 2008. *Landscape and Beauty*, symposium, Land/Water and the Visual Arts; Plymouth University.

9-12 July 2008. *Artful Ecologies 2*, conference, Research into Art and the Natural World (RANE); University College Falmouth.

6 November 2008. 'Society as a Work of Art: Herbert Marcuse in 1967', cultural theory seminar with Malcolm Miles; Plymouth University.

16 November 2008. 'Measures of Place', discussion with Chris Darke, Grant Gee, Chris Petit, Emily Richardson, and Iain Sinclair, *Aurora* festival; Cinema City, Norwich.

22 and 23 January 2009. *Live Laboratory Symposium: The Pigs of Today are the Hams of Tomorrow*, Plymouth Arts Centre, Marina Abramovic Institute for the Preservation of Performance Art, and Plymouth University; Royal William Yard, Plymouth.

12 February 2009. 'A Literature of Intimacy? Marcuse and French literature in the 1940s, and his late aesthetic theory', cultural theory seminar with Malcolm Miles; Plymouth University.

23 February 2009. 'When does Meat become Mind? Does the 'Self' Represent a Point of Convergence between Science and Art', Paul Broks lecture for *The Self in Science, Philosophy and the Arts, Literature and Science* series; Plymouth University.

5 March 2009. 'Voices: The Subject in the Research; and Life in the Present', cultural

theory seminar with Malcolm Miles; Plymouth University.

17 March 2009. *Crossing the Void*, conference, South West Screen, and Just-B Productions; Watershed Media Centre, Bristol.

15 April 2009. 'Nature as Performer: The Dance of Agency in the Landscape Works of Chris Welsby', artist's talk for Exeter Interdisciplinary Institute; Exeter University.

16-17 April 2009. *Framing Time and Place: Repeats and Returns in Photography*, conference, Land/Water and the Visual Arts; Plymouth University; session chair.

14 May 2009. *The Influence of Roy Ascott*, symposium, iDAT Plymouth University; Plymouth Arts Centre.

21 May 2009 'Originality; and Differencing Culture: Commentary on Elements of the Work of Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva', cultural theory seminar with Malcolm Miles; Plymouth University.

2 June 2009 'How to Make Art from Life (with the Help of a Few Ghosts)', Robin Rimbaud, professorial lecture series; University College Falmouth.

10 June 2009. 'Culture and Agency', Culture-Theory-Space (CTS) research seminar with Malcolm Miles; Plymouth University.

25-26 June 2009. *Landscape and Expedition* symposium, Land/Water and the Visual Arts; Plymouth University.

11-12 July 2009. *Colour and the Moving Image* conference, Department of Drama: Theatre, Film, Television, University of Bristol; Arnolfini, Bristol.

17 July 2009. *Beyond Darwin: The Co-evolutionary Path of Art, Technology and Consciousness*, Planetary Collegium symposium; Plymouth University.

7 November 2009. *Vauxhall Pleasure*, symposium, Oxford University Centre for the Environment (OUCE); Oxford.

13-15 November 2009. *Aurora: Common Ground*; Norwich Arts Centre.

26-27 May 2010. *Aesthetics in a Time of Emergency: Beyond the Relational-aesthetic Paradigm* symposium; CTS, and Kurator, with Intersections; Plymouth University.

18 June 2010. *Otto Zitko and Louise Bourgeois - Me, Myself and I*, exhibition; Arnolfini, Bristol.

23-25 June 2010. *Creativity and Place: An Interdisciplinary Conference*, School of Geography; University of Exeter.

1-2 July 2010. *Land and the Metaphysical*, symposium, Land/Water and the Visual Arts; Plymouth University.

7 July 2010. 'Magic and Belief: A discussion with Jeremy Millar, Lisa Le Feuvre and Martin Clark', for BAS7; Plymouth Arts Centre.

13 July 2010. *Animation Deviation*, symposium, University of the West of England; Bower Ashton, Bristol.

3 September 2010. *Radical British Screens*, symposium, University of the West of England; Bush House, Bristol.

1 April 2011. *The Look: from Capture to Display - Digital Cinema Aesthetics and Workflows*, symposium, AHRC and University of Bristol; Watershed, Bristol.

16 May 2011. 'Patrick Keiller in Conversation with Nick Bradshaw', *Festival of Ideas*; Watershed, Bristol.

24 June 2011. *Postdigital Encounters: Creativity and Improvisation*, Journal of Media Practice symposium; Watershed, Bristol.

20 September 2011. 'Performance Autoethnography as Pedagogic Practice and Creative Research Methodology', Tami Spry, Research Education seminar; Plymouth University.

17 October 2011. 'Critical Performative Pedagogy: (Un)Schooling the Educational Body', Elyse Pineau, Research Education seminar; Plymouth University.

25 February 2012. *Making Space*, conference, Slade School PhD programme; University College London.

23-25 March 2012. *Exhibiting Video*, conference; University of Westminster.

27-29 June 2012. *Neuro Arts*, arts + sound symposium, Plymouth University.

4-6 July 2012. *Water: Image, Land/Water and the Visual Arts* conference; Plymouth University; session chair.

17 August 2012. *Piercing Brightness*, exhibition by Shezad Dawood; Newlyn Art Gallery, and The Exchange, Cornwall.

27 January 2013. *Film in Space* exhibition, selected by Guy Sherwin, Camden Arts Centre, London.

20 and 22 March 2013. *Lure of the New*, Cognition Institute annual conference, symposium 2: 'Imagery, Dance and Creativity' and symposium 7: 'Engineering Creativity - Can the Arts help Scientific Research more Directly?'; Methodist Hall, Plymouth.

12 and 13 April 2013. *Zombies: Walking, Eating, and Performance*, symposium, Plymouth University.

24 April 2013. 'Between Sounds and Objects' art + sound research seminar by Mike Blow, Plymouth University.

22 May 2013. 'Coffee with Vera in the Vestry' performance by Ruth Mitchell, vestry of the Plymouth synagogue, Catherine Street, Plymouth.

13 June 2013. 'Piercing Brightness', screening and discussion with Shezad Dawood; Arnolfini, Bristol.

12-14 July 2013. *Dialogues at the Interlude: Between Body, Artifact and Discourse* conference, Transtechnology Research with Plymouth University, and Plymouth Arts Centre; Plymouth Arts Centre.

28 January 2014. 'Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art', lecture by Erika Balsom, for *Sweet FA*; Studio One, Plymouth Arts Centre.

19 February 2014. 'Aesthetics and Politics in Women Workers' Education', research presentation by Maria Tamboukou, Feminist Studies, School of Law and Social Sciences and Co-director of the Centre for Narrative Research, University of East London; Research Education, Plymouth University.

28 February 2014. *Derek Jarman: Memories and the Archive*, symposium; Exeter University.

13 May 2014. 'Malcolm Le Grice' talk and screening by Malcolm Le Grice; for *Sweet FA*;

cinema, Plymouth Arts Centre.

14 June 2014. *Image Movement Story*, international symposium focusing on practice as research and practice based research, exploring interdisciplinary approaches to still and moving image and the relationship between artefact and audience; supported by the Journal of Media Practice, MeCCSA Practice Network, The Centre for Research into Film and Audiovisual Cultures, and hosted by the Practice as Research Group with the Department of Media, Culture, Language; University of Roehampton, London.

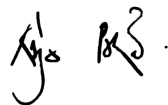
4 October 2014. *Autonomy and Industry: Artists and Film*, symposium, for *It's All About the River* film festival; Jill Craigie Cinema, Plymouth University; co-organiser and session chair.

24-25 October 2014. *Of the Earth: Art, Photography, Writing and the Environment*, conference organised by Land/Water and the Visual Arts, Plymouth University, in collaboration with W.A.L.K., University of Sunderland; Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, and Plymouth University; session chair.

1 November 2014. *Turner Prize 2014*, exhibition; Tate Britain, London.

Word count of main body of thesis: 68,093

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. B. S.' with a period at the end.

Date: 14 August 2015



# Creative Practice Elements

## Creative practice made as part of this research project, provided on DVD

### 1. *Heirloom* (2008)

Super 16mm colour, as HD video (looped) 16.9

Artist's own hair, collected after brushing and printed onto discarded 16mm colour negative film, using household bleach to reveal the yellow and green emulsion layers beneath the unexposed darkness.

### 2. *Hold* (2008)

Super 16mm colour, as HD video (silent) (looped) 4.3

A collection of found objects, once used to bind things, and people, together - their silhouettes burned into the emulsion of 16mm black and white negative film using household bleach, leaving an indexical trace of their presence falling through time and space.

### 3. *White Body* (2008-2009)

Digital stop motion, colour (1 min) 4.3

The animated figure of a small white doll grows from a ball of modelling clay, is cut and sewn shut, and then buried and 'reborn', among a nest of sugar and slut's wool.

### 4. *Glass* (2010)

Digital stop motion colour micro and macro photography, as HD video (2 min 30 sec) 16.9

Through a process of 'close looking', found objects are manipulated to create a miniature 'looking glass', in which the body's language may be revealed.

### 5. *Flora* (2011)

35mm colour, as HD video (1 min) 16.9

Transient plant forms collected during a walk around the city of Plymouth, then pressed onto a clear strip of 35mm film.

### 6. *Making Glass* (2011)

HD video colour (5 min 2 sec) 16.9

Reflective video essay that re-enacts the film-making processes of the stop-motion animation *Glass* (2010), and maps the shifting subjectivities generated through the practice-led exploration of *écriture féminine*.

### 7. *These Restless Hands* (2012)

Digital animation colour, as HD video (silent) (looped) 16.9

The artist's mother crochets a scarf. Her hands twist this way and that in her lap, creating stitch after stitch...

### 8. *Her Dark Materials* (2013)

HD video colour (15 min 2 sec) 16.9

Video essay that reflects on the artist's engagement with film materiality and the materials of film-making in her practice. Includes extracts from direct animation artworks, documentary 'making of' material, and documentation of *STITCH*, the artist's film-sewing performance (2012).

# Introduction

## **Creative Practice Elements DVD**

Before reading this thesis, I would like the reader to view the films and videos contained on the Creative Practice Elements DVD, in order to familiarise herself from the outset with the moving images artworks (six films) and documentary material (two video essays) that form part of my study - an investigation that concerns creative practice, which is led by and conducted through practice. In this research project I have drawn principally upon my own critically reflective praxis in direct animation as an artist film-maker,<sup>7</sup> adopting a multi-modal gendered, subjective position within which I may create and then examine the symbolic structures of the feminine. In my thesis I include my own direct animation projects created during my PhD, as well as referring to historical moving image artworks relevant to this research inquiry.

I situate my study in relation to the direct animation practices of Caroline Leaf, Annabel Nicolson, and Margaret Tait, women artists who engage with the materiality of film-making and who work with the creative potential of the physical properties of film in a variety of ways. Each of these women has pursued a uniquely individual and independent engagement with film and film-making in relation to concerns and

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7. In this thesis I have elected to use the hyphenated form of film-maker as a way to emphasise 'making film' as a process integral to professional artistic practice that seeks to communicate to audiences through experimentation. The unabbreviated form of 'filmmaking', preferred by the British Film Institute (BFI), BBC and other institutions, tends to denote taking a role as a director and/or producer in making a film, and suggests making film as a business of manufacture oriented to a fixed, pre-determined goal. Filmmaking connotes fixed routes or avenues along which one, as the person in charge, should proceed, in order to achieve the goal of a successful product-for-screen that is intended to be "used and consumed", to cite the BFI website <http://www.bfi.org.uk/film-industry/british-certification-tax-relief/about-tax-relief> (accessed: 1 January 2015). In contrast, for me, as an artist film-maker, the practice of film-making embraces contingency and experimentation, and is discursive line of enquiry which allows diversion and for response to the unpredictable.

interests arising from their everyday lives, as women. Their film-making originates from their own body in relation to the materialisation of the mind - conjuring the imaginary, place - home, the screen, the frame, and other bodies - represented and corporeally present. The direct animation work of these three artists forms the contextual core of this study. An autobiographical seam runs through their creative work that captures and transmutes experience as a woman; and they are notable for their experimentation, improvisation, and innovation, and their concern with the everyday.

My theoretical strand is informed by the poststructuralist feminist philosophers Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous. Their thinking allows me to move beyond the rigid parameters and hierarchies of sexual difference to a locus where the feminine position is available to both sexes. These women are concerned with the poetics of the flesh, and centre on the signifying practices of the body through a gendered re-turn to the body, enabling both a philosophical mode of thinking which operates within a feminist framework. They offer a creative strategy of resistance to patriarchal structures in *écriture féminine*,<sup>8</sup> a mode of ethical 'writing' that unfurls and embraces the difference of the other through (phonetic) inscription of the feminine body and its *jouissance*. Their writings are complex and their concepts open to interpretation - for additional insights, therefore, I refer also to Margaret Whitford, Elizabeth Grosz, Judith Butler, Griselda Pollock, among others, for their exploration, speculation, and commentary on Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous.

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8. The term '*écriture féminine*', a form of feminine writing through the body, suggested by Irigaray, and Cixous, will be introduced in Chapter Two, and discussed thereafter in the thesis.

## Direct Animation

Animation is a form of film-making which embraces a set of techniques and approaches for making moving image in which the visual components are created incrementally, frame-by frame. In animation, the film-maker is concerned intimately with the component parts of moving image, the individual frames of space and increments of time in a 'broken-down' form, and their constitution in a synthesised form as an illusory stream of moving images. The term 'direct animation' applies to techniques in which animated imagery is created through physical engagement between the artist's body and the materials used to create the visuals, either 'directly' under the camera (CAIM, 2011; HFA, 2012b; Jean, 2006; Kroon, 2010/2014), or by 'directly' marking the filmstrip (Furniss, 2008: 138-179; NFB, 2014; Russett and Starr, 1976/1988; Schlicht and Hollein, 2010<sup>9</sup>). During the production of direct animation, the animator enjoys a close connection to her 'ingredients', and may be 'immersed' in the material processes of film-making for prolonged periods of time. Such methods of animation foreground the haptic, as the animator's fingers touch the physical substance from which the illusion of animated movement will derive. This is in contrast to professional industry practices, in which the artwork is protected from direct contact with the animator's skin, to prevent its contamination with fingerprints, impressions of fingernails, residues of sweat, and smears of dirt - in effect, to remove any indexical trace of human corporeal presence during the making process. Thus, direct animation may be considered to be first and foremost an embodied method of animation-making.

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9. The bilingual, German and English, publication for the exhibition *Zelluloid. Film ohne Kamera* presented at the Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, from 2 June to 29 August 2010.

There are two distinct techniques within the direct animation method of production.

The first involves the frame-by-frame manipulation of small objects or particles, such as tiny beads, tealeaves, dried coffee, sand, sugar, or salt, on a flat horizontal base. A rostrum camera is used to record the sequential positions of the grouped objects, which are held in place by gravity, using stop-motion capture. A rostrum is a structure that enables a camera to be mounted on a column 180 degrees above a moveable flat surface on which artwork to be filmed is positioned; this allows single frame recording of incremental positions of the camera, the artwork, and the platform on which it is placed.<sup>10</sup> Traditionally, a purpose-built rostrum camera, such as the range manufactured by Neilson-Hordell in the UK, is used for filming, but a tripod or photography copystand can also be used. The background on or above which the artwork sits may be opaque, with the lighting arranged above, or transparent and backlit, or a balance of both.

The materials that constitute the frame image are usually pushed or pulled on a flat surface where they are held in position by gravity whilst being photographed. Notable examples of stop-motion direct animation include Ishu Patel's work with tiny coloured beads in his film *Bead Game*, created for the National Film Board of Canada (1977). In *Stille Nachte I-Dramolet*, their first short piece for MTV (1988), the Quay Brothers used magnets to move a layer of iron filings across the animation set and to hold them in

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10. Kit Layborne provides useful information on animation rostra, also known as 'animation stands', with instructions for the animator who wants to make their own rostrum, in *The Animation Book: A Complete Guide to Animated Filmmaking - From Flip-books to Sound Cartoons to 3-D Animation* (1998).

position, and animated dust and graphite in their visual response to Karlheinz Stockhausen's composition *In Absentia*, commissioned for BBC2's Sound on Film series (2000).

Additional complexities of movement and depth may be created through the use of a 'multiplane', in which layers of clear glass are mounted above the rostrum base to allow artwork to be placed at different levels so one image component can move independently in front of or behind another under the camera. The Russian animator Yuri Norstein is an acknowledged virtuoso of multiplane stop-motion animation. *Tale of Tales* (1979) is his widely acclaimed masterpiece. This short film won the 1980 Grand Prix at Animafest in Zagreb, and was voted "best animated film of all time" twice by animation historians, critics and theorists - in Los Angeles (1984) and in Zagreb (2002) (Bendazzi, 1994: 371-374; Kitson, 2005). Working closely with Francesca Yarusova, his wife and creative partner, Norstein has re-imagined the cultural memory of the Soviet Union and its histories in a series of films in which light and the ephemeral, layered forms of Yarusova's artwork combine to create a unique form of animated poetry told through the dreams and memories of his childhood (Kitson, 2005).

Direct animation of small objects under the rostrum camera will be covered in detail in Chapter Three, when I discuss my film *White Body* (2008-2009), and situate the practice in relation to the sand-on-glass animation film of Caroline Leaf, *The Metamorphosis of Mr Samsa* (1977), and in Chapter Four, which considers my stop-motion animated film *Glass* (2010).

In the other type of direct animation, the 'mechanical eye' of the camera<sup>11</sup> is replaced and images are created through direct intervention with the photochemical analogue filmstrip itself. Images may be created through a range of processes that mark the emulsion layer or the base film layer itself, deploying a range of agents and processes such as printing, or through gluing material to the filmstrip.

This mode is sometimes referred to as 'drawing on film', 'scratching film', or 'hand painted film'; 'camera-less' or 'cameraless' animation, or film-making 'without a camera'. All these terms emphasise moving image creation without the intervention of a photographic 'image-maker', the camera. However, the first three terms refer only to a single technique of direct animation image-making and would exclude important direct animation works such as Stan Brakhage's *Mothlight* (1963), made by fixing small samples of organic material, such as insects and leaves, to a clear strip of film in a similar manner to a flypaper.<sup>12</sup> The second group of terms foregrounds the practice of making films via techniques that create animated images without the use of a camera. Unless the original strip of film itself is projected or exhibited as an artefact, the artwork will be copied photographically for presentation and dissemination. Here I should emphasise that I include the contact-printing of the film laboratory and digital scanning as methods of photographic copying, although a camera is not involved in either process.

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11. The reference here foregrounds the relationship between vision, the body, and technology, and calls to mind the body of the human subject's place within the technological processes of visual representation and Dziga Vertov and the Soviet avant-garde's vision of what cinema could be, argued through the notion of the 'kino-eye', a mechanical eye that is able to see the world in a new way, and to share this unique perception with audiences.
  12. *By Brakhage: An Anthology*, published in two volumes by The Criterion Collection (2013), contains high quality digital transfers of 56 of his short films, in addition to video interviews and audio recordings of his lectures, and written notes. *Mothlight* is included on volume one, disc one.

Notable authorities such as the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) favour 'cameraless' for this type of film-making, and the term is more or less interchangeable with 'direct animation'. However, in practice, direct animation techniques may also be applied to film material that carries within its frames photographic images that have been produced via a camera and photochemical processing. My own direct animation films, from *Looks Familiar* (1989) to *Walking Out* (2000),<sup>13</sup> feature the inclusion of pre-filmed image sequences which have been subjected to a range of treatments, as does Alia Syed's *Priya* (2012) in which the 16mm footage was buried in the artist's compost bin to enable the natural processes of decomposition to affect the photographic moving images carried in the emulsion. If the original material is projected through mechanical means, the film artwork will only be playable for a limited number of times before it breaks; it may be repaired to allow further projections, but will eventually become so damaged as to be un-projectable. It is normal practice for the direct film images to be copied via photographic processes to enable exhibition: either projected as filmprints or presented from a digital copy of the film artwork. For these reasons, I elect to use the term 'direct animation' as a preference.

In both modalities of direct animation, the contact between the animator's body and her film-making materials foregrounds touch as the primary sense involved in image creation - it is touch which effects the transformation of the material that creates the pictorial illusion of moving imagery, when the filmstrip is viewed at speed.

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13. *A Short Walk*, made with Stuart Moore in 2004 for the 'One Minute Film Project' to celebrate the launch of no.w.here, is a digital film lasting 60 seconds, edited from the digitised material used in the 16mm film *Walking Out*.



I am here foregrounding the visual realm, but acknowledge the importance of the audio environment in constructing meaning, whether this is provided as an accompanying soundtrack with the moving image or if the animated sequence is 'silent'. The affect of the various qualities of sound are discussed in later chapters. In addition, for reasons of space, I have omitted mention here of direct animation sound composition in which a sound design for the film is created without the use of a sound recording through marking the soundtrack area of the filmstrip. In brief, however, my understanding of animated sound composition builds on the pioneering work by Norman McLaren in this area, which the animator referred to as "animated sound" (McWilliams, 1986/2006), but is also known as "synthetic sound" (Russett, 2013: 46). McLaren developed a sophisticated system of musical notation through drawing or scratching film onto the optical soundtrack area running along the edge of the filmstrip.<sup>14</sup> Of particular interest is *Pen Point Percussion* (1951) in which McLaren explains his animated sound method, and his films *Dots and Loops*, both made in 1940. Additionally, one of McLaren's best known films, the 16mm anti-war pixillated short *Neighbours* (1952), is accompanied by animated sound created by painting directly onto the film (NFB/Blog, 2011).

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14. McLaren also created sound through photographing - that is, photochemically printing with an optical film printer - patterns onto the optical soundtrack, using a similar technique to Oskar Fischinger (Russett, 2013: 46). *Synchromy*, made in 1971, uses patterns photographed onto both the optical soundtrack and visual area of the filmstrip so the audience 'sees the sound and hears the visuals' (McWilliams, 1986/2006). Of further interest, Lis Rhodes' expanded cinema piece, *Light Reading*, uses a score of drawings which she photographed onto the optical soundtrack and visual area of the film. Presented by Rhodes originally in 1975, the work was re-presented as part of *The Tanks: Art in Action* series at Tate Modern from July 2012 to January 2013: "As the bands of light pass through the projector they are 'read' as audio, creating an intense soundtrack, forming a direct, indexical relationship between the sonic and the visual. What one hears is the aural equivalent to the flickering patterns on the screen" (Tate, 2013).

## Living Film

There has been a growing 'return to film' by artists in recent years, possibly as a response to the demise of photochemical analogue film. For over a century, 'celluloid'<sup>15</sup> was the principal medium globally for recording and projecting audiovisual narrative feature film in the cinema. Digital video production technologies have increasingly dominated,<sup>16</sup> and in the last five years, digital has replaced film in cinema distribution almost entirely. It is predicted by many in the industry that within five years all features will be shot digitally - excepting, perhaps, the occasional artisanal project. According the British Film Institute, the number of digital screens in the UK increased by thirty percent between 2011 and 2012, and at the start of 2013, fewer than nine percent of nearly four thousand UK cinema screens presented films as 35mm prints, until recently the standard gauge for projecting film (BFI, 2013: 125-126). At the beginning of 2014, Paramount Pictures announced that *Anchorman 2: The Legend Continues* would be the last feature film the studio would release on 35mm (Verrier, 2014).<sup>17</sup>

Although 'celluloid' is widely used to mean 'movie film' or 'motion picture film' as a physical photochemical analogue substance, it more correctly refers to the highly flammable thermoplastic compound developed in the 19th century from nitrocellulose and camphor. Celluloid was the principal base material for motion picture film until the 1930s, when it began to be replaced by cellulose-acetate, also known as 'safety film',

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15. The VideoPreservation Website (2009) section on acetate film provides comprehensive details about film as a material base.

16. In 2011 production of Aaton, Arri, and Panavision 35mm film cameras ended, and Eastman Kodak filed for bankruptcy early in 2012. Debra Kaufman's articles 'Film fading to black' (2011) and 'The last film lab?' (2014) provide an accessible background to the issues related to moving image production for mass entertainment, which affect independent production and artists' projects also.

17. Subsequent to writing this thesis, for the first time, no films were projected from 35mm at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival, held in January (Anderson-Moore, 2015).

or, simply 'acetate' - although safety film had been used by amateur film-makers from the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. All moving image production using film since the 1950s has used safety film as the medium for image capture, Most filmprints for cinema distribution are manufactured from polyester (polyethylene terephthalate, or PET), a more mechanically robust material.

The artist Tacita Dean in particular has been a prominent and passionate advocate for film. In her work she has transposed the projection of film from the cinema to the gallery and the museum, the sites of art. Dean believes film to be one of our greatest inventions and the most important art form of the 20th century:

the material that created the existence of cinema - photochemical, analogue film [...] a strip of our imagination projected as light. Our dreams and our cultural memory on the silver screen ... Film will always be magical to me. It keeps the light within its fabric, and holds in its emulsion the imprint of time. I love it for its physicality, its materiality, and for the way it is made using just the simple mechanics of light, lenses and chemistry. (Dean, 2014)

Her Unilever Series' commission for Tate Modern<sup>18</sup> perhaps reflected the crisis that film is currently experiencing in the second decade of the twenty first century. *Film* (2011), a silent movie spectacle constructed for a vertical screen,<sup>19</sup> was projected across the darkened void of the Turbine Hall onto a thirteen metre high monolith, reminiscent of the monumental black slab from Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

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18. In 2000, the brands Unilever and Tate formed a partnership to establish The Unilever Series, for which a prominent artist was invited each year to create work for Tate Modern's Turbine Hall. The sponsorship ended in 2012, after thirteen commissions, although Unilever continues its support of Tate as a corporate member.

19. Excepting the pre-cinema formats of the later 1880s and early 1890s which used a square negative, such as the Chronophotographe developed by Étienne-Jules Marey, the moving image aspect ratio has traditionally followed the orientation of human vision and assumed a horizontal, 'theatrical' presentation - the screen viewed as photographic landscape or as a stage, rather than as a doorway or portrait. Although is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine screen ratio and audience experience in more detail, it is worth noting the recent adoption of a vertical screen mode, facilitated through the use of the camera phone. In addition, moving image artworks presented on vertical screens include Kutlug Ataman's *Twelve* (2004), and Bill Viola's *Ocean Without a Shore* (2007) and *Ancestors* (2012), and the Vertical Cinema project (2014).

The massive presence of Dean's film installation conveyed a sense of mourning for the medium it was shot on, edited in, and projected from, a eulogy of film's unique, analogue qualities. With its vertical projection, that included images of sprocket holes - making visible the filmstrip's mechanical transport system - the *Film* monolith seemed an alien object, belonging to the past and presented out of its original context within the present-day institutional environment of the art museum. Yet the work does suggest a possible future for film through a hybrid relationship with the digital. Its frame-by-frame manufacture was dependent upon a complex aperture gate masking system that Dean developed for the project, made possible by digital technologies.<sup>20</sup>

I would suggest that the release of the shackling of film to mass entertainment - resulting from the digitisation of the creative and cultural industries - has (re)stimulated an artistic exploration of film's inherent material aspects and affects, and prompted a (re)consideration of what film could mean for us in the second decade of the twenty first century.<sup>21</sup> In October 2013, an event entitled *Living Film* was organised at no.w.here, the artist-run space in East London. The programme featured films, installations and performances, "made through the practice of touching film,

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20. Dean patented the technique, and in the film *JG* (2013) has further explored the possibilities for the manipulation of time and place through multiple exposures 'in camera'.

21. The Technical Director of Exhibition and Projection at the Sundance Film Festival, Holden Payne, considers 2015 to be a "bellwether year" for 35mm, with projection from DCP (Digital Cinema Package) 'here to stay' (Anderson-Moore, 2015). It is interesting to note that the only film to be projected from film at this year's festival, held in January 2015, is a 16mm print of Jennifer Reeves' *Color Neutral* (2014). Payne explains that, although Sundance ceased to project from 16mm a couple of years ago, Reeves' film was an exception: "It's a hand-painted 16mm short - I'm spending way too much time to play a 3-minute short, but it was something that I felt compelled to do just because it was a film" (Anderson-Moore, 2015). Payne's rationale here indicates perhaps that direct animation 'film as film' is increasingly being afforded a special status within 'filmmaking' - regarded as different to independent film 'product', possibly functioning as a memento, its evident materiality a reminder of cinema's photochemical past.

applying bodily fluids, and chemically and/or physically altering it's [sic] surface"

(no.w.here, 2013). *Living Film* brought together artists from the UK and Europe for an evening dedicated to the material properties of film and its affects.

The no.w.here event foregrounds film as a substance that is still 'alive', and - as observed by Nicky Hamlyn who was present that evening - reclaims film, "as an artistic, above all experimental medium" (Hamlyn, 2013). My PhD inquiry contributes to a burgeoning area of practice, which includes works by the *Living Film* organisers Karel Doing and Vicky Smith, who are both artists working in film (and also PhD candidates); in addition to audiovisual artist, Ian Helliwell; artist film-maker, Cherry Kino;<sup>22</sup> the experimental film-maker Jennifer Reeves, who uses both optical printing and 'direct-on-film techniques'; and 'camera-less' film-makers, Jennifer West and Steve Woloshen.

## **Methodological Voices**

Within the narrative of my thesis I use a range of voices that merge and intertwine throughout. These diverse modes of 'speaking' emerge through my methodological approach, which applies Robin Nelson's practice-as-research (PaR) framework to support dynamic, dialogic interaction between the different modes of knowledge production in this multi-modal research inquiry. According to Nelson, PaR

involves a research project in which practice is a key method of inquiry and where, in respect of the arts, a practice (creative writing, dance, musical score/ performance, theatre/performance, visual exhibition, film or other cultural practice) is submitted as substantial evidence of a research inquiry. (Nelson, 2013: 9)

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22. This is the nom de plum of Martha Jurksaitis, who also describes herself as an "all-analogue film and photography artist" (Cherry Kino, 2015).

Nelson considers the "practical knowing-in-doing" of creative practice to be central to PaR, which provides a model and protocols for generating knowledge in a research inquiry, such as this PhD.

The three inter-articulate modalities of PaR methodology in my thesis - that is, 'know how', 'know what' and 'know that' - explore and illustrate the interrelationships between writing and the practice. These voices have a fluidity that, at times, makes it difficult to separate them into distinct strands, but they may be identified as polyvalent modes of enunciation. The first voice, writing as (a) woman, *écriture féminine*, is the 'know how' embodied knowledge of my creative practice. In this, I adopt a feminist position centred on the body to create a series of direct animation projects, foregrounding the making experience. It is evidenced by my moving image artworks and subjective 'reporting back' from the immersive sphere within which the practice operates in the form of 'autobiographic scrapbooks' which chronicle experience in the form of diaristic entries, stream of consciousness writing, automatic drawing, accounts of dreams, and so on.

My second, 'know what', voice is critically self-reflexive. It is represented by my written reflections in response to the practice, processes and outcomes, and moves into criticality via an engagement with, and spectatorial interpretation of, the direct animation practices of Leaf, Nicolson, and Tait, in relation to the established discourses of the discipline within which I operate. The third voice is analytical, 'know that', established through reflexive writing inflected with psychoanalytic feminist theories of Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous, in relation to the practice and my experiences as maker and audience. It discusses research findings and outcomes, proposes hypotheses, draws conclusions, and identifies areas for further exploration. The thesis therefore

combines multiple modes of speaking: my own multi-layered voices, interwoven with the practice 'know how' of Leaf, Nicolson, and Tait, and inflected with the conceptual perspectives of Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous, to articulate my research inquiry.

The dynamic cross-referencing between the three PaR modes allows a multi-vocal approach that enables an interplay between different forms of data and the processes of their gathering. The interrelation has been documented during my study by an iterative process of performative writing before, during, and after the process of making and/or spectating. This reflective writing provides evidence in this thesis of the ways in which, "Developments and breaches of established traditions and conventions in ways of working, otherwise concealed extended, might be made discernible" (Nelson, 2009: 127). By extending into a critical account through the inflection of theoretical ideas, I have aimed to allow a conversation to develop between the different elements in order to generate and articulate insights and new ideas.<sup>23</sup> I intend the relational encounters between the PaR modes which take place in this thesis to generate an aggregate of praxis knowledge, in which theory is "imbricated within practice" and "articulated in *both* the product and *related* documentation" (Nelson, 2009: 128; author's emphasis). This thesis seeks to provide an understanding of my own creative practice 'through the practice'.

In this research study, I draw principally upon my own practice as an artist film-maker, adopting a subjective position, which is necessarily gendered, within which I may examine the symbolic structures of the feminine in the materialities of direct

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23. Robin Nelson states that, "One way in which creative practice becomes innovative is by being informed by theoretical perspectives, either new in themselves, or perhaps newly explored in a given medium. Insights might be articulated in a traditional academic mode such as a critical essay which may be written by the practitioner herself or by a collaborator colleague" (Nelson, 2009: 128).

animation. I speak from a position of practice, from the inside looking out, but also, through critical reflection, from a perspective beyond the immersive sphere within which the practice operates, to argue that women film artists, operating independently, are able to create a female imaginary that represents women and is recognised by them, by constructing positions of practice outside the dominant symbolic modes of patriarchy, which evolve through the maternal body and the materialities of the feminine. This PhD seeks to make a contribution to knowledge that strengthens academic research in the under-explored area of direct animation, in animation studies, and in artists' moving image, which is currently undergoing consolidation as a discipline, in addition to making a small contribution to discourses in performance studies. It also seeks to provide a practice-based feminist perspective that augments the growing body of recent scholarship about women artists who work with film materials and the materiality of film-making, allied to recent retrospectives of feminist art and the resurgence of feminist debate in western cultures.

### **Expert Practice**

The subject of my thesis, direct animation, is an area of moving image practice in which I am an 'expert practitioner'. This term applies to an individual who has accumulated a substantial body of reflective knowledge, that comes to seem intuitive, sometimes referred to as 'tacit knowledge', through their professional practice that is considered to be 'expert' (Schön, 1983; Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986). At the time of writing, I have made films professionally<sup>24</sup> for twenty six years, the majority of which depend wholly or in part on direct animation. Many of these films were supported through the

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24. Oxford Dictionaries defines 'professional' as "relating to or belonging to a profession [...] competent, skilful, or assured [...] engaged in a specified activity as one's main paid occupation rather than as an amateur" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015).



successful submission of tenders or project proposals to competitive schemes and awards in both private and public sectors, notably several major Arts Council awards, and arts commissions from television broadcasters. I was the first person to receive a second Animate! Award (the Arts Council and Channel 4 commissioning initiative for experimental animation) which supported the making of my film *Sunset Strip* in 1994. My attainment in securing funding and commissioning for the development and production of new work was augmented by my achievements 'post production', through the numerous programmes and festivals for which my work has been selected, and the diverse range of screenings, distribution deals, exhibitions and television broadcasts in the UK and abroad.

My work has been written about in festival and exhibition catalogues (Wollen and O'Pray, 1993; Hatfield, 2004), and included in historical accounts of artists' moving image (Curtis, 1996; O'Pray, 1996). This provides additional support for establishing my position as an artist who is acknowledged to be an 'expert practitioner' in short film making and animation. The citations above exemplify my achievements as an artist film-maker, but there has been no detailed analysis and critique of my practice published - a key factor in my decision to undertake this doctoral study. This testifies to my 'know how'. My experience of film as a material medium and with the hands-on processes of film-making has resulted from many years of professional practice and, I believe, enables me to speak from a position of expert knowledge and understanding of the creative practice that is the focus of my investigation. This investigation was conducted from a position as an 'expert practitioner' and my expert 'know how' has informed this thesis.

However, my practice is diverse, deploying both digital and analogue technologies, varied forms and materials. It is located within several operational spheres and contexts, and addresses a range of audiences. I have run my own business as an artist film-maker since 1988, generating funding from arts and cultural organisations in order to support the development of my practice and to enable me to create films independently.

Sharing skills and knowledge with others has been a central element of my practice from the outset of my career. In addition to lecturing work in art colleges and universities, I have undertaken many artists' residencies in schools; collaborated with communities, creative practitioners, and professionals; and designed and run workshops for diverse groups of people from toddlers to the elderly. There is an emphasis in this 'engaged practice' on process, but almost all of these projects have one or more creative media artworks and their dissemination as principal outcomes.

Each of these projects was subject to the radical, experimental parameters of my practice as an artist film-maker. From my perspective as the artist film-maker, audience consideration was the key difference in approach between a 'personal', self-generated project and a commission to a brief. In the former, the work was generated in an evolutionary way entirely through the conditions and processes of its making, with no consideration of the audience experience and the ways in which an audience would construct meaning; in the latter, the work would be shaped by its intended impact on the target audience in specific contexts predetermined by the commissioning

organisation. Budgets, available resources, and deadlines affect all moving image productions. However, there is a different emphasis when the work is being made as an investigative process in its own right rather than 'for' an audience.

In order to contain my investigation within the parameters specified of a PhD thesis, it is necessary to eliminate significant aspects and strands of my practice, that are nonetheless important from a holistic perspective. In this account, therefore, I have omitted detail not pertinent to the focus of my study in the interests of brevity and clarity.

### **Theorising Practice Practising Theory**

The 'expert practice' submitted as part of this thesis, comprising six films and two video essays, was made over a period of approximately four years, between the end of February 2008 and mid-March 2012. The films may be considered in the context of this study to be my unconscious 'making its presence felt', by taking form in the 'real' world through the process of animating. My study is led by practice; it is difficult to articulate my *intention* at the time of creating these moving image artworks because my methods as an expert practitioner, established over many years, are predicated on there being no conscious aim either before or during the making process, excepting a purposeful awareness of composing 'something new'.

Afterwards, reflection on praxis allows me to review both *what was made* and *my experience during making* through performative writing, which, Ronald Pelias argues (1999; 2004; 2005; 2014), is a form of scholarship sited in the researcher's everyday life, that "that fosters connections, opens spaces for dialogue, heals" (Pelias, 2004: 2).

Performative writing is written verbal communication<sup>25</sup> that adopts a poetic form. This subjective 'show and tell' mediates my thoughts, 'fixes' them in the written word, and makes them accessible to others. For Pelias, it is a powerful form of poetic expression, whose "power is in its ability to tell the story of human experience, a story that can be trusted and a story that can be used" (2014: 13).

Performance writing is a first-person account that draws on memories of, and thinking about, events and dreams - actual or imagined - in the life of the author. It is rooted in autoethnography, "an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 739). Autoethnography expressed through performative writing fosters an intertextuality between registers of the self, the socio-cultural, and the philosophical, and allows me to interweave my thoughts and personal stories in this research narrative.

It is through iterative cycles of performative writing, that the three modes of 'know how', 'know what' and 'know that' become reflexively enmeshed. During the course of this study, my thoughts about other practitioners and readings their artworks ('know what') and the theoretical material ('know that') - because these now formed part of my everyday lived experience along with my own practice ('know how') - emerged as performative writing. The result is the interplay of voices of my thesis, which theorises practice and the practising of theory in a range of registers. In this way, my thinking is

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25. It may be spoken, as in the video essays *Making Glass* and *Her Dark Materials* which form part of this thesis, or sung.

made open to the reader and "creates a space where others might see themselves ... allowing others to not only see what the writer might see but also to feel what the writer might feel" (Pelias, 2014: 13-14).

## Thesis Structure

My thesis comprises this written submission together with the practice, which is contained on the DVDs supplied.

On the Creative Practice Elements DVD, the six films are compiled from frame-by-frame sequences assembled a) in the order in which they were made (*White Body, Glass*), or b) the procession of frames along a filmstrip following the chronological making of the strips (*Heirloom, Hold, Flora*), or c) the frame order on a video timeline (*These Restless Hands*). Post-production work has been kept to a minimum; film frames are copied photographically and subjected to little visual manipulation; the digital stop-motion frames or jpg photographs are imported onto the video timeline. In these six works, editing enables presentation of the films as moving image, with the frame-by-frame sequences for each being repeated to create loops. It is my intention with these six films for the spectator to see the evolution of each film as an animated chronology of its making, whilst being made aware, through repetition of the sequences, that they are watching something that is always in the process of becoming, being made or being 'said'.

Two films are silent (*Hold, These Restless Hands*); field recordings accompany three pieces (the sea for *White Body* and *Glass*, location ambiance with birdsong with *Flora*); with the sound effect for the remaining film (*Heirloom*) subjected to a minimum of digital sculpting and then looped. The video essays (*Making Glass, Her Dark Materials*) reflect on the practice and contribute an additional level of communication as 'show and tell' spoken performative writing. For both, the sound of my voice is foregrounded. In *Making Glass*, my monologue was recorded after the filming, with some minimal

additional sound from the beach location layered in; for *Her Dark Materials*, I spoke live to camera during the video filming - any sound 'effects' result from my movements and the materials I was handling.

Having already watched the Creative Practice Elements DVD, the reader will be familiar with the practice components of the thesis; further guidance is provided in the written text recommending reviewing of specific material at pertinent points in the narrative. Additional moving image artworks and documentation of performed works are provided in the appendices, referenced at specific places in the thesis: this material expands on or illustrate points but does not form a central component of the thesis argument.

## **PART I Histories and Genealogies**

### **Chapter One: Origins of My Creative Practice in Direct Animation**

Because my thesis is concerned with creative practice, and the inquiry is led by my practice as an artist film-maker, I begin by introducing the 'know how' of embodied knowledge that foregrounds the making experience. My first chapter is a reflexive account of the histories of my own practice so the reader understands the personal context from which the investigation emerges. The first practice element, a video essay entitled *Her Dark Materials*, (2013),<sup>26</sup> establishes the background to the origins of practice and its evolution in film, from the imaginative realisations of early childhood play to the development of a feminist art practice.

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26. A transcript of *Her Dark Materials* is included as an appendix to the thesis: please see Supplementary Material Appendix B. The video is also available for viewing on Vimeo: <http://vimeo.com/111693552>

## **Chapter Two: Becoming (a) Woman and the Practicing of Feminisms**

In this chapter of the thesis, I place myself as a woman within the narrative in order to 'bed in' the philosophical perspectives that inform this study. I provide a autobiographical account of girlhood in relation to feminisms and outline the conceptual frameworks that inform the 'know that' axis of my thesis.

### **PART II Close Looking**

#### **Chapter Three: Material and Maternal Bodies**

In Chapter Three I consider the embodiment of the uncanny feminine in the metamorphic animated materiality of *White Body*, the first of the practical elements of the thesis. I start with this work because it allows me to open out ideas through the practice within a feminist framework, such as constructing a subjective gendered position in order to break the silence imposed by patriarchal authority.

#### **Chapter Four: Making Glass**

Chapter Four centres on two elements of creative practice, the direct animation film *Glass* and the performed essay *Making Glass*. Making 'as (a) woman', I explore the miniature landscape of the animation rostrum through a process of *écriture féminine* and create a 'looking glass' for the feminine imaginary, a poetic moving image text through which I may find a place for my body's language and 'see' myself.

### **PART III Material Substrate**

#### **Chapter Five: Writing the Body**

In Chapter Five, I explore the ways in which the Orcadian film-poet Margaret Tait's creative processes, including the physical engagement between her body and the



filmmaking materials, effect and inflect the interplay of Julia Kristeva's concepts in her hand-painted audiovisual artwork *Painted Eightsome*; also, I present three direct animation films, *Heirloom*, *Hold* and *Flora*.

### **Chapter Six: Women's Work: Making Meaning**

In this chapter, my focus shifts to the performance of an expanded form of direct animation, a strand of creative practice concerned with a dual mode of making-presenting work in which space and audience are integral components. Here, I take a spectatorial approach in a contextual analysis of Annabel Nicolson's film-sewing performance *Reel Time*.

## **Part IV Being In-Between**

### **Chapter Seven: Embodied Practices**

In Chapter Seven, I adopt a position that moves beyond direct animation through a critical reflection on the final practice element, *These Restless Hands*, and bring my thesis to a conclusion.

# Part I Histories and Genealogies

## Chapter One: Origins of My Creative Practice in Direct Animation

### This is How it Begins

This chapter introduces the 'know how', or embodied knowledge, that I have acquired principally through my work as an artist film-maker from the late-1980s onward. In doing so, I also recall certain experiences before this time, as an artist and in childhood, where these inform the emergence of a creative practice. Its purpose is to establish the development of a gendered subjective position focused on the body within my creative practice that existed before the beginning of my PhD study, in order to ground a thesis that interrogates the body-centred practices of women artists who have embraced the materiality of direct animation.

As an artist, I have a relationship with film as a physical substance, that is embodied yet 'other' to my own body. My film-body is sensitive and responsive to its environment, and affected by histories and contexts, recording traces of experience and residues of place as 'physical memories' through direct animation image-making. My early engagements are characterised by physical inventions focused within the space of the photographic moving image frame and the creation of temporal rhythms along the filmstrip. The marking of the emulsion layer through scratching, scraping, rubbing and colouring in *Looks Familiar* (1989) and *Nuclear Family* (1990), were my attempts to recover meaning from memory by drawing in miniature directly on the surface of 16mm film - like the wax crayon and scratch pictures I made as a child.

Thereafter, *Unknown Woman* (1991) evolved from a dream of a woman and a crow, and is the first of a group of three 16mm films that are 'directed by the unconscious' and explore subjectivities of the feminine landscape. *Cage of Flame* (1992) is the second, *Walking Out* (2000) the third. *Night Sounding* (1993) is an audiovisual 'sounding' of liminal place. Working with the larger palette of 35mm, *Sunset Strip* (1996) forms a visual diary of a year of sunsets.

My looped artworks of recent years, such as *Verge* (2005-2010), *Poppies* (2006), *Hold* (2008), *Heirloom* (2008), and *Flora* (2011) use black and clear film material to evoke embodied space-time experience in relation to place and the materiality of memory, and are presented in a range of iterations. Another, more performative, strand of practice, gives agency to the maternal body in the projects such as *Resubjection* (2008), *Measure* (2009-2010), and the durational film-sewing of *STITCH* (2012).

### **Her Dark Materials: Conjuring the Feminine Imaginary**

The reader may wish to review the video *Her Dark Materials* on the Creative Practice Elements DVD.

This fifteen minute documentary is designed to provide a historical account of the evolution of my own practice in direct animation, working with the materials and material processes of film-making. I will return to the video *Her Dark Materials* later in this chapter, following a précis of my evolving practice, which is intended to identify and explore themes and strands that originate in childhood.

To make this video, I retrieved a selection of film artwork from the wardrobe (wound on cores in cans), stored between layers of card between the carpet and underlay (in separate strips), and in a carrier bag under the table in my studio. I then talked about

each film in chronological order to camera, whilst handling the filmstrips over the lightbox on the animation rostrum so that the viewer can see the artwork. The video therefore, although structured, has an immediacy that I feel is difficult to replicate in recordings that are rehearsed. I intended it to convey the sense that it is 'of the moment', with all the imperfections inherent in improvised live recording, as I believe this captures more holistically my histories and making strategies as an artist filmmaker.



Parker, K. (1994) *As Yet Unseen* 16mm colour (2 min 15 sec)

This is a photograph taken of me by my mum. In the photo I'm seven months old. We're staying with Bid and Jack, my mother's parents, at their council house in

Middlesbrough. We've just come back from the corner shop, where my mum's bought some Vim, a scouring powder used for cleaning sinks and stoves, kitchen tiles and utensils. In the original photographic print the container of Vim is in the pram with me. I'm bundled up in a home-knitted wooly hat, scarf and cardigan because we're up in north Yorkshire, it's January, and it's cold. According to my mum, I still have the dark red hair I was born with, as I didn't go blonde until I was ten months old.

My mother says this is the first time I looked directly into the camera when she took a photo of me. And when I, as I am now, look at this image, it's like I'm looking into a mirror. Our eyes meet. I feel connected, as if my baby self is looking directly at me across time.

This is a photo of me taken by my mum when I am seven months old. Or, rather, this is an image of that original photograph extracted from my 'baby book', a family album kept by my mother that is dedicated to her documentation of my early years, and rephotographed for a 16mm film I made about the mother/daughter relationship twenty years ago.<sup>27</sup> It's an image that has been reproduced in print many times, in books, exhibition programmes, film festival catalogues, and screening brochures. This version is transcoded into a digital image file that I use to represent me - it is my 'gravatar', my 'globally recognised avatar' that appears on internet sites by my name.

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27. The film *As Yet Unseen* (1994), which was commissioned by the British Film Institute, evolved from the combined dreams and memories of my mother and myself, using stop-motion animation of fireplace tiles and 35mm projections within a life-size set - originated from our old black and white family snapshots, and the patterns on my mother's dresses when I was a child.

## **Walsoken House: Optical Performance**

In early childhood I became aware that I was able to think in different ways. Being sent to bed early evening during the summer when it was still bright sun outside, I would lie in bed, slightly bored, alone, with nothing to do, waiting to go to sleep.

In the quiet and subdued light I discovered that I could 'make patterns move' by staring at curtains, bedspread, wallpaper, fixing my gaze at a focal plane and through a process of 'defocusing' bring another image layer of a different type into being.

There was a recognition, an understanding, that some objects were still - such as the wardrobe and the chair - and other objects were moving slightly - such as the curtains in a light breeze, or the gentle rise and fall of my bedspread as a result of my breathing. There was also an awareness of my mind operating at different levels simultaneously: I could allow the scene in front of me, or the form of elements within it, to become dynamic, animated, whilst knowing that it was all happening in my mind.

The optical performance that I practised as a young child is an improvised choreography of the mind. There is no outward expression or record; the activity, the practice was not shared - it was solitary, private, and completely internal.

With repetition, it became easier to slip into this mode. As I became more adept, I began to partially-sense the hint of a visual screen a few inches in front of my eyes, upon which I could half-see traces of other images. These wisps of pictures seemed related to the visual illusion I had generated from the surfaces of my bedroom, but had metamorphosed into other forms.

## The Aberdare Rex

I was around three and a half to four years old before I can recall any memories of substance, which are my first experiences of cinema in the Aberdare Rex in South Wales, where my mother worked as an usherette.

In the darkness of the cinema, I am tied to my mother by the light of her torch. The fan of its faint yellow ray catches the backs of heads, arms and the floor of the aisle, as she shows the audience to their seats. I am bound to her, subjected to the maternal space, I must hold her always in sight. Perched on my seat, gliding through the hazy projection beam, I bath in the coloured warmth of the screen's optical embrace, I am multiply present - my muscles flex as I shadow my mother's body, within and without her, a constant echo that feels her movements to and fro. Aged three and a half, I am convinced that the intense focus of my attention will hold her to me.<sup>28</sup>

I remember this as the first conscious acknowledgement of my imaginary. I knew this radiant beam of embodiment, glowing golden through the smoke, as a visual umbilical rooted in the sensing materiality of the corporeal bodies of myself and my mother. From this experience, comes my understanding of cinema as an active, maternal place, one in which the mother moves constantly through the space and orchestrates the audience.

Also, I was aware of the differentiation of mental images, and recognised that the perceived mind image of cinema was different to those virtual images experienced by

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28. The film I saw was Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937). According to my mother, it was after this first visit to the cinema, that I began to draw profusely using the coloured wax crayons she had given me.

staring at patterns on my bedroom wallpaper, curtains or the blanket on my bed, hypnagogic images between sleeping and waking, dreams during sleep, daydreams, and produced by the imagination.

Although, as the author Frances Hodgson Burnett has observed about her own psychological development as a young child, I did not possess the vocabulary to articulate this insight and understanding in the spoken word, I was aware of a 'thinking through' process and the existence of an embodied understanding that had evolved from my experience. *The One I Knew Best of All: A Memory of the Mind of a Child*, Hodgson Burnett's autobiographical account of childhood, and my own experience seems to indicate that we have the capacity to develop and comprehend complex concepts within a self-communication system, prior to the development of a spoken (and written) language in which the thoughts can be expressed.

### **Concerning Ourselves: The Idea of a Practice**

In the summer of 1981, shortly after I had made the decision to 'be' an artist, I visited an exhibition in the Norwich School of Art Gallery. A few months before this, I had developed operational parameters for my emergent practice. This was situated in the life lived in the everyday, but secluded and drawn toward the natural world, in order to quietly listen and respond to what emerged creatively through the body. The exhibition reinforced my decision to work 'as a woman', removed from an authoritarian (male) influence of approval, allowing creativity to flow from the body, in the form of dreams, using the rhythms of the menstrual cycle, and through the processes of automatic drawing.



The exhibit which affected me most was the 'Menstrual Hut', an open structure suspended from the gallery ceiling, its flexible ribs made of reeds and draped with sheets of hand-made paper hanging to the floor, that formed a kind of tented enclosure or den, within the shelter of which one could huddle or nest. I went back to the gallery a couple more times, to look at this construction of a 'woman's space', made collaboratively, that celebrated menstruation, and to examine the assemblage of fragmentary written texts, pottery shards, twigs and dried leaves that represented these women's experiences. What I remember as important to me was the recognition that the women who made this exhibition had felt also the deep psychic wounding resulting from their experience of having a woman's body. Moreover, the 'Menstrual Hut', with its assemblage of artefacts, affirmed the natural processes of (my) woman's body as a 'worthy' subject for an exhibition in an art gallery, and gave validity to (my) woman's creativity - and this reinforced my commitment to follow my own fledgling intuitive practice and to find my place 'as a woman'.

Early in 2011, whilst researching the 1973 *Reel Time* film performance of Annabel Nicolson for this thesis, I came across a press release on the Luxonline resource for a group exhibition of "women's art" entitled *Concerning Ourselves*, which had been organised by her at Norwich School of Art and presented from 22 June to 8 July 1981. It was only then that I was able to connect my pivotal encounter nearly thirty years earlier with an exhibition by women whose names I did not know. It is interesting to observe that, although the exhibition could be identified as feminist, the word does not appear in the promotional material. Its feminism was a shared consciousness, resulting from a group of women sharing experiences and aspirations, and working towards (re)inventing themselves. A quotation from one of the women artists states, "The point

is, to (re)discover myself ... recognise myself, and connect with others" (Norwich School of Art, 1981). Sharron Lea, who reviewed the exhibition for *Spare Rib*, reported that she felt distressed, "to walk away realising that this hut and many other women's spaces in the western world are so temporarily contained within man-made structures" (Lea, 1981).

Just over a year after I had encountered *Concerning Ourselves*, I enrolled as a student on the BA Fine Art programme at Newport Art College in South Wales.<sup>29</sup> Having spent the months since the exhibition immersed in a self-reflective improvisational process of making that was solitary in nature, I now wanted to develop and test my practice through contact with others and to expand the opportunities available to me. I chose this course, led by Roy Ascott, which emphasised art as a mind-set and foregrounded process, because of its open, experimental nature and embrace of hybrid artforms.

As an undergraduate, I made work centred around performance and the technologies and specificities of video, both as an individual, and through collaborations with other students and lecturing staff; in doing so, I acquired expertise in U-Matic video production in the studio and on location, and in post-production on campus and at the Luton 33 Video Workshop. I connected with audiences beyond the college through public presentations of live and recorded artworks at the Midland Group Performance Art Platform, and Air Gallery, among others. During my DIY 'foundation studies' year, I had begun to incorporate photography as a way of documenting the processes of improvisation and divination, using 35mm colour negative film and high street photographic process and print shops, and then, looking through the camera and

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29. Then Gwent College of Higher Education.

imagining what the moment framed would look like in the eventual photograph, as an exploration of time and place, and memory. The tacit knowledge I had acquired through my childhood experimentation with optical performance and visual illusion was beginning by now to become embedded in my creative practice.

Although this study is concerned primarily with the visual, and my focus in the thesis has tended to concentrate on images, I would like to emphasise that sound has been an integral component of my moving image work since my first video piece in the autumn of 1982. In fact, one of the attractions of video as a medium was its ability to combine images with a soundtrack that could be diegetic or recorded separately to the visuals, and be further manipulated in the studio.

At Newport, I continued to pursue the relationship between still and moving images through (re)capturing series of video frames from a television monitor as still photographs (negative and transparency) and then (re)presenting the images as collections of prints, projections onto the body, and video recording, and in the edit suite by electronically interfering with the video fields and combining elements of one image with another. In my exploration of the relationship between memory and the flow of live experience and moments fixed through recording, centred on the body, and my woman's body in particular, I drew on familial relationships, excavating mother-daughter relations and exploring representations of women and gender myths.

Lest I have given an impression that the course was a haven for women artists, my own experiences suggest that it was not. Throughout my three years of study, all the full-time lecturers were men, none of whom I would consider as inclined to sympathise with a feminist cause, although the course did present a notional equality of

opportunity for male and female students. I joined the course in the second year of its iteration as a radical experimental laboratory for the arts, in which students were encouraged to extend their creativity into new territories and push boundaries of form and content. The challenges of this environment and its lack of strictures suited me, as did the opportunities to expand into live art and technology-based art. It was by sharing experiences 'as a woman' with other students on the course, informally, as well as contact with part-time lecturers - the performance artist Richard Layzell was a key influence - and visiting video artists such as Judith Goddard and Richard Kwietniowski, as was exposure to the work of Rose Finn-Kelcey, Angela Carter and Judith Williamson, that I came to position my practice as foregrounding an individual voice as a woman within a 'personal is political' context.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Internal Voice: Evolution of a Film-Making Practice**

My first two 16mm films, *Adult Day Return* (1986), and *The Internal Voice* (1988) were generated through automatic drawing, chance, and the processes of making, located in the autobiography of the everyday.<sup>31</sup> They were edited on film and projected from the film original, and also played back as a telecine from U-Matic videotape on a large

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30. The emergence of the collaborative feminist video and performance group Dark Bananas, of which I was a founding member, was, I remember, at first celebrated by the full-time lecturing staff - particularly perhaps because we engaged with audiences beyond the institution and achieved public acknowledgement for the work we were making - although I believe some found the work challenging. However, when our work moved from a collaborative celebration of 'women' to a position more critical of patriarchal power, I recall that there was a distinct chill in the support for our cause, and, during in my final year, we had to counter attitudes that I would describe as obstructive and hostile from some members of the full-time lecturing staff.

31. Once I had finished my Fine Art degree, I had no access to any film-making equipment. However, early in 1986, I joined Chapter Film Workshop in Cardiff and took a course in 16mm animation, and then worked with both 16mm film and U-Matic video via independent, non-franchised film and video workshops in Exeter, Plymouth, and London.

video monitor.<sup>32</sup> I then began to work in a more direct fashion with film as a material, with a dual focus on the filmstrip as a succession of still frames and as an illusion of animated movement.

The video *Her Dark Materials*, which was introduced earlier as part of this chapter, continues from this point, highlighting themes and strands of embodied practice that originate in childhood and are incorporated into my work from 1988 onward. The original artwork of a selection of key direct animation films is handled in the video, as a way of communicating to the viewer the physicality of the material in addition to its optical qualities. Film has a robust resilience, yet possesses a sensitive tactility and a responsive capacity for a complex range of sonic effects when handled. Each type of film stock and gauge displays its own particular characteristics, responding in a distinct way to the same engagement - but at different times, the same filmstrip may act differently to the same stimulus. Working with film in this way over a long period of time, one acquires an in-depth embedded knowledge and embodied understanding of the material: the 'know how' of precisely what it is like to work directly with film in this way.

*Her Dark Materials* emphasises to me the importance of my 'visualised' memory connected to touch and proprioception in creating a multi-sensory, embodied mind-image that is located in place. I observe that my own memory seems to operate on a sliding scale, which is related to sets of musical notes, ordered according to pitch as

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32. Telecine, or 'TK', is the process for copying ciné or movie film images to video tape (or, more commonly nowadays, converting from the analogue frame directly to a digital video file). Film-makers may enlist the services of a specialist film post-production facility or project their films onto a sheet of white card stuck to the wall and re-film the projected images using a video camera. Another method entails copying the film frames using a photographic or reprographic camera, although this is not strictly speaking a 'telecine'.

keys on a piano or strings on a guitar. The lowest notes are associated with memories of past events, thoughts, dreams; the highest notes ascend into the future, resonant with imaginings of what could be possible. In the present, my fingers play rhythmic combinations of notes to create the moments of the 'here and now'. This improvised performance emerges from, and is centred on, the body, which, for Ronald Pelias is the site of memory:

Remembering begins in the body, in vague feelings, in the sensuous before it claims its story. Memory is made from traces, fragments, and images, from what it cannot let go, from what insists on a psychic place. (Pelias, 2004: 50)

Maya Deren, writing about film, suggested that, "Memory makes possible imagination, which is the ability to accelerate real, natural processes that they become unreal and abstract" (Deren, 1949/2001: 13). As memory, these mental images hold "the ephemeral in place, insisting on space, a stage for future performances" (Pelias, 2014: 140).

The mnemographic property of film, a strip of eidetic memory that collects, conserves and structures memory as optical phenomena, allows me to recall autobiographical memory encoded as mental images. Touching my material augments these memories, which are synaesthetically interwoven with sound, taste, and other sensory impressions.

### **Into the Silence**

The artistic practice introduced in this chapter is the "practical knowing-through-doing" of a PaR methodology (Nelson, 2009: 112-130; 2013). Whilst the embodied practice may be considered to be 'expert', its self-reflexivity, although possessing criticality and

of proven efficacy, lacks coherent articulation in the remaining two PaR strands which triangulate the practice *as* a form of multi-modal research - that is, 'know what' and 'know that' (see the introduction to this thesis).

This, I believe, has resulted from its inherent hybridity, the plurality and ephemeral nature of its forms, and the isolation of the 'know how' modality in several operational spheres, in particular the geographical location of the practice itself in the far south west peninsula of Britain - literally, 'outside the centre'. My direct animation work has not been anchored within the predetermined defined parameters of a singular category of practice. Historically, the films are placed most commonly within one of two strands of practice, as exemplars of *either* the experimental/avant-garde, *or* of women's/feminist work. The former broader terms are more generally used, as they embrace a wider range than the latter, which are specific and tend to be applied in critical or scholarly appraisals that adopt a historical perspective. Although I have not chosen to do so myself, my work as an artist film-maker has been located in the British avant-garde by several commentators, including Michael O'Pray (1996), and Al Rees (1999/2011). Although space does not permit me to explore the relationship between feminist art and avant-garde film in this study, certain characteristics of feminist art are similar to those identified by O'Pray as being evident in avant-garde film, and indeed I recognise the qualities of "restlessness, outside-ness, marginality, and independence" (O'Pray, 2003: 9) in my own direct animation practice.

This practice, emerging from silence, 'speaks' through the gendered body of the artist. I hope that, as a result, the affect of its embodied language 'speaks' to the bodies of its

audience.<sup>33</sup> With this first chapter, I begin my thesis beyond theory, in the dark, the place from which my practice itself emerged. The following one moves into the politicisation of the personal and the framing of my practice, and this research project, as feminist.

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33. This is an observation, but I refer here also to Ruth Lingford's comment about my film *Cage of Flame*, "full of rich and powerful images that communicated directly with my body" (Lingford, 1999: 26).



## Chapter Two: Becoming (a) Woman and the Practicing of Feminisms

Feminism owes its existence to the universality of misogyny, gynophobia, androcentrism, and heterosexism. Feminism exists because women are, and have been, everywhere oppressed at every level of exchange from the simplest social intercourse to the most elaborate discourse. Whatever the origins of this oppression - biological, economic, psychological, linguistic, ontological, political, or some combination of these - a polarity of opposites based on sexual analogy organizes our language and through it directs our manner of perceiving the world. (Marks and de Courtivron, 1981: 4)

### 'Knowing That'

Although feminism has roots that stretch back for many centuries, the word derives etymologically from the French *féminisme*, which emerged from the campaign for women's equal status during the 1798 Revolution, and became used by the growing movement across Europe in the Nineteenth Century for political power through women's suffrage and for sexual and reproductive rights. The feminist agenda that propelled a series of socio-cultural shifts from the mid to late Nineteenth Century onwards are framed historically as a succession of phases, or 'waves': the first iteration extending to just after the First World War, the second rising in the late 1960s, with its influence flooding through successive decades until the third wave in the 1990s.<sup>34</sup> The fourth wave of feminism is ongoing, and characterised by its pluralities and particularity. Current feminist thought acknowledges multiple forms of difference and subjectivity, diversity of culture, ethnicity, race, class, gender fluidity, and so on. There are many different philosophical feminist paradigms that address gender and sex. It is appropriate therefore, in the context of this thesis, to refer to and consider 'feminisms' rather than the singular, 'feminism'. Whilst I acknowledge that there are many different

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34. Third wave feminism foregrounded the heterogeneity of women, in recognition of the diverse backgrounds of ethnicity, race, culture, religion, and class, and sexual orientation.

framings of 'feminist' that exist in a range of patriarchal socio-cultural contexts, this thesis specifically concerns those feminisms that are able to inform the nature of subjective and embodied understanding of creative practice as a woman. This chapter concerns the politicisation of the personal and the framing of my practice as feminist, and provides an introduction to the theories and practices of feminism that inflect my thesis in the chapters beyond.

It is in the writing of Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous that I have found ways of thinking about women's creative practice which derive from the unconscious and adopt a feminist position, and that chime with my own practice. Their writing adopts a range of modes of 'speaking'; they talk from their own experiences, as women, sometimes 'poetic' or lyrical, at another times, using critical voice or the professional tone of the psychoanalyst. Their work intrigues and delights me, it 'speaks' to me. Their words address me directly, as a woman, as an artist. Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous begin writing about 'the feminine' at the start of second wave feminism in France, after 1968. As an artist whose practice emerges from my own experiences as a girl and a woman, and my engagement with my own psychic processes of imagination and dreams, these women philosophers inspire me through their creative analysis of dominant patriarchal systems.

Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous propose modalities of body-centred practice as strategies of resistance for rupturing and subverting patriarchal structures, such as *écriture féminine*, and provide conceptual anchors for the creative practice of direct animation that I am investigating. My second chapter, then, outlines the 'know that' area of knowledge in Robin Nelson's triangulated Practice-as-Research, or PaR, model (introduced in the introduction to this thesis), the axis that provides a conceptual

framework within which I may situate my critical reflections on the practice. 'Know that' informs both the 'know how' of my tacit knowledge as an artist film-maker of direct animation, and the 'know what' knowledge gained through spectatorial 'action research' processes that focus on the creative work of other practitioners, creating a narrative that is interwoven with my own experiences and reflections as a child and an adult, in order to make the embodied knowledge both more explicit and nuanced.

One strand of my practice as an artist film-maker connects to my childhood. For the film *Nuclear Family* (1990) I collaborated with my mother on writing a script from her story of my imaginary friends, and sought to recover memories of my own; another film *As Yet Unseen* (1994) was based on the dreams of my mother and my maternal grandmother. More recent research experiments, such as *White Body* (2009), which form part of this thesis, seek to explore my memories of childhood play and the process of creating animation 'as (a) woman' in order to question a system of representation that negates/effaces feminine voices.<sup>35</sup>

This chapter includes a discussion and examples of personal feminist memory-work that are anchored in a 'social feminism'. It concerns my experience and the material aspects and socio-cultural conditions of patriarchy that obstruct women, offering a theoretical lens which functions in opposition to dominant masculinist discourses. As Nelson states, "all creative work operates within - or reacts against - established discourses" (Nelson, 2009: 128).

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35. The 16mm film *Heirloom*, along with two other practice elements of my thesis, *Hold*, and *Flora*, are included in Chapter Five; *White Body* is the focus of Chapter Three.

In order to 'bed in' the philosophical perspectives that inform this thesis, I place myself as a woman within the narrative. As a feminist artist, I situate my subjectivity within my work, following the example of Adrienne Rich and other radical second wave American feminists who positioned their own experiences, and those of other women, at the heart of their creative practice. Rich, along with the theologian Mary Daly and the poet Susan Griffin, called for feminist scholarship to be based in "the politics of the personal, in which women's subjectivities and experiences of everyday life become the site of the redefinition of patriarchal meanings and values and of resistance to them" (Weedon, 1997: 5).

From the mid-1960s and through the 1970s, women changed the way that art was made. As artists, women foregrounded idea over product (the intangible in preference to a physical object, a commodity that could be bought and sold), executing their ideas via the central position of the female body and its performative agency within their practice. Many artists, such as Carolee Schneemann used their own life as a resource, drawing on personal archive of life experiences and presenting material as forms of 'autobiographical narrative'.<sup>36</sup> As Dee Heddon has noted, all creative production is steeped in the personal. Autobiographical performance by women emerged from and was located within the second wave of feminism, "as a means to reveal otherwise invisible lives, to resist marginalisation and objectification and to become, instead, speaking subjects with self-agency" (Heddon, 2008: 3).

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36. Her self-shot 16mm film, *Fuses* (1965) is a groundbreaking exemplar. In Schneemann's own words, *Fuses* is, "A silent film of collaged and painted sequences of lovemaking between Schneemann and her then partner, composer James Tenney; observed by the cat, Kitch" (Schneemann, 2014). Note that Schneemann and UbuWeb Film both date the film as 1965, with UbuWeb Film also giving the period of 1964-1966 (UbuWeb, 2014).

## Politics of the Personal

The slogan of second wave feminist activism, 'the personal is political', expressed two intertwined aspects of female identity: an emphasis on subjective and personal experience and questions of female representation. The writing that follows interweaves a reflexive narrative generated through my memories and those of my mother as a way of mapping how identity 'as a woman' is constructed and the ways in which our everyday lived experience in the socio-cultural sphere connects to the theory. In this, I use Valerie Walkerdine's poetic statement about the importance of memory in 'finding voice' as a woman, as a guide:

Memory ... is unlocking the past; freeing the spirit. Memory is filling in the gaps, breaking the silence, telling what could previously not be spoken, which was buried in the frozen silences of the history of women. (Walkerdine 1990: 112)<sup>37</sup>

The activists of first wave feminism at the end of the Nineteenth and beginning of the Twentieth Century noted the absence of women from historical accounts, and were inspired to write their own histories. Second wave feminism also addressed the lack of women in historical texts,<sup>38</sup> prompting a re-discovery of the role of women in the past, in addition to giving voice to women's experience. In art history, following Linda Nochlin's radical call to intervention,<sup>39</sup> Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock investigated the discipline's structural sexism to explore the myth of male creativity and the erasure of women, in *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (1981/2013). In her preface to

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37. Haug describes the initial aims of memory-work as, "bring[ing] back the forgotten women to the social sciences" (Haug, 1999: 28).

38. See Sheila Rowbotham's groundbreaking work, *Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It*, first published in 1973 by Pluto Press in London (Rowbotham, 1973).

39. Nochlin's essay 'Why Are There No Great Women Artists?', first published in 1971.

the 2013 edition of this work, written over thirty years after the book first appeared, Pollock noted, "It has taken until the first decade of the new century for the museum world to awaken, a little, to the feminist critique" (Parker and Pollock, 1981/2013: xxvi).

The strategy of writing one's memories in order to bridge the gap between experience and theory via a 'collective biography' is part of the interpretive, qualitative research method known as 'memory-work', developed in the 1980s by the sociologist and philosopher Frigga Haug and her colleagues in West Germany for studying, "the process of 'feminine sexuality'" (Haug, 1987: 33).<sup>40</sup> It evolved out of resistance to dominant cultural ideologies that had rendered women effectively invisible in the public domain, through exclusion and subordination.<sup>41</sup> In Haug's words, memory-work is "emancipating" (Haug, 1999: 28), and seeks to reveal and understand, "the process, whereby women, as subjects within culture, are 'made'" and "the way in which they produce both themselves and the categories of society" (Haug, 1987: 14 and 40).<sup>42</sup>

Memory-work can be viewed as a feminist methodology because it is "non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian, [and] non-manipulative" (Reinharz, 1983: 174), in addition to the central role played by personal experience and reflexivity. It was developed specifically so that women could explore the processes by which they become part of society - that is, "female socialization" (Haug, 1987: 33) - through

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40. *Female Sexualization: A Collective Work of Memory*, first published in 1983, as *Sexualisierung: Frauenformen 2*, by Argument Verlag.

41. Memory-work developed from narrative psychology, which produces knowledge about the ways in which people construct stories that are meaningful from their experiences, and so construct the past for ourselves. The memory-work methodology is used also in marketing and consumer research, and into post-treatment patient experience.

42. Haug's paper *Memory-work as a Method of Social Science Research: A Detailed Rendering of Memory-work Method* (1999) provides an accessible guide to the methodology, and is available online here: <http://www.friggahaug.inkrit.de/documents/memorywork-researchguidei7.pdf> Accessed: 1 January 2015.

collective analysis of individual written memories, and is "explicitly liberationist in its intent" (Onyx and Small, 2001: 773).<sup>43</sup> Although the memory-work is a group process, the researcher can be an active participant and the subject of her own research. Following Haug's methodology, the memories and the insights generated through analysis of this pool of memories, and their expansion and re-telling, may be considered an empirical element of research (Haug, 1987; Crawford et al, 1992; Silver, 2013).

In the account of memory-work that follows, I modify this social science method, which might be considered a less rigorous process as there is no systematic analysis. Using face to face discussions combined with phone calls, I have reflected with my mother about the (re)written material which we have developed through conversational exchange. Rather than arriving at an agreed decision following 'group debate' and writing up collaboratively with my mother as an equal co-researcher, I follow the creative approach used in my 16mm films exploring childhood and matrilineal themes, such as *Nuclear Family* (1990) and *As Yet Unseen* (1994), in order to merge the excavation of my mother's memories of her life and my maternal grandmother's life with those of my own.<sup>44</sup>

I reflected initially on the following questions in order to generate 'triggers' for producing the memories: At what moment did I become aware of gender and its artificial inequalities and restrictions? Is there a particular event which prompted a realisation that my value as a girl was different to that of a boy? When did I first

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43. See also 'Emotion and Gender: Constructing Meaning from Memory' (Crawford *et al*, 1992: 43 - 52).

44. I also use an adapted memory-work methodology in developing performative writing for the practice elements of this thesis.

identify as a feminist? Was it an accumulation of moments that altered the balance in my life, after which the personal *became* political, to echo the mantra of the Woman's Movement and 1970s feminism.<sup>45</sup> The thematic prompts generated through my reflection were, firstly, 'being a girl' in connection with 'feminine', and 'feminist'; then 'mother' linked to 'home', and 'making'. The discursive section that follows is not intended to answer explicitly the questions or prompts used, but encapsulates the empathetic and organic outcomes of the loosely adapted 'memory-work' generated with my mother.

### **Being a Girl**

#### *Rose Perfume*

I am squatting on the path in the garden outside the front of the house we are living in at that time. My left arm is wrapped around a bowl that I press against my body, holding it tight so I can grind up a mass of pink rose petals. I am making scent for my mum, and have collected up all the petals that have fallen onto the grass from the straggling bushes with their hard prickled stems and curled, blotchy leaves spotted yellow and chocolate. I dribble some water into the bowl from a plastic cup to make the mess of petals more fluid. My legs are bare and I can feel sweat trickling from the squashed fold of hot skin behind my knees where the weight of my growing body presses against my calves. I carry my rose perfume carefully into the kitchen, and pour out the bruised mush of petals through the tea strainer. But what I am left with is a brownish murky fluid smelling of cabbage. It is not the perfume I imagined, clear with a pink tinge and the delicate aroma of summer flowers. The bruised residue has crushed my aspiration to create a feminine essence as a fragrant gift that will please my mother, and fill her with the same delight she has when she remembers me as a toddler, filling my wellie boots with flowers because she told me that flowers were 'beautiful'.

As a young girl, I resisted expectation that I should display stereotypical 'femininity' or behave in a manner that would mark me as 'feminine', and so confine me within the boundaries of what was considered to be 'appropriate'. I chose to be a girl who would

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45. As Katy Deepwell notes, "feminism is a political movement, which rewrites the definitions of the personal as political" (1998: 5).



switch modes at will throughout the day; I might do experiments with my chemistry set for part of the morning, followed by catapult target practise with my gang, then come home to climb over the fence into next door's garden, so I could play with our neighbours' toddler and her Barbie doll. The ambiguous gender identity I adopted, shifting between behaviours and appearance, gave me the freedom to engage with the world in ways that would not have been possible for a 'girlie' girl who conformed to the social norms of femininity. These latter behaviour traits, produced by discriminatory socio-cultural conditions, produce in women "moral and intellectual effects so profound that they appear to be caused by nature" (de Beauvoir, 1972: 18). According to Judith Butler's theory of performativity, one's gender is constructed through its reiterated performance. For her, the structure or discourse of gender is nonverbal and centred on the body and performativity is the aspect of that discourse with the capacity to produce what it names, through repetition and recitation. (Butler, 1993).

The gendered 'between' space I chose to occupy as a child suggests my rejection of the compulsory heteronormative binary norms of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'.

Heteronormativity considers sexuality and gender to be fixed 'natural' categories organised as hierarchical binaries, with 'man' as the (superior) opposite of 'woman', and heterosexual as the (superior) opposite of homosexual. Bisexual, intersex and transgender categories of identity challenge, or 'queer', heteronormativity because they demonstrate that gender and sexuality are fluid states that are able to flourish between the fixed orthodoxies. In girlhood, I exercised the diverse and dynamic range of feminine modes that Emma Renold has termed "schizoid femininities": "The pushes

and pulls of the simultaneous demand for compulsory innocence and compulsory heterosexuality and the diversification and fixing of class/race/gender/age norms" (2008: 130).

Renold's analysis is relevant here because it anchors my navigation in this chapter of the external and internal forces operating in my own girlhood, and the framing of my creative practice as feminist. Renold draws on Judith Butler's notion of performative "intelligible genders" and the "schizoid double-pull" identified by Rosa Braidotti (via Deleuze and Guattari) to propose that forms of schizoid femininity "foster a critical agency and a politics resistance to heteronormative ways of 'doing girl' (i.e. where gender norms operate as coercive criteria in the performing and policing of gender/sexuality" (Renold, 2008: 131).<sup>46</sup>

Throughout history, western societies have been characterized by the domination of women by men, within the domestic sphere and the wider community. A woman's role and worth was determined by her primary role as the bearer and carer of children and as property owned by a 'senior' male, a father or another male relative, or husband. The assignation of societal status and 'value' based on the biological body created a system of oppression that has existed for many hundreds of years. This status quo of male supremacy has been maintained by law and by religion, and through the imposition of patriarchal cultural and political systems and conventions, ruled by men. In patriarchy, women are entirely dependent on men for their identity and existence. A

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46. Further discussion of Renold's 'schizo-feminist' theorisation of the lived experience of young femininities in the current day is outside the scope of this thesis, but for further interest, please see her research with Jessica Ringrose (Renold and Ringrose, 2011).

woman's corporeal body is said to confer upon her an array of gendered attributes, such as 'weakness' and 'submissiveness'. Deviation from this heteronormative gender 'assignment' is punished.

Patriarchal ideologies and structures tend to consider women as a homogenous group, possessing a set of common characteristics determined by a female body. Feminism can be said to begin with the observation that women are contrasted to men, most often to their disadvantage and relegated to a subordinate position. Feminism is a set of beliefs and attitudes that arise from a concern about the marginalisation of women in a patriarchal society and culture, and includes a range of philosophical ideas that address subjectivity from a non-patriarchal position. Despite their diversity as a group, women are categorised in terms of their gender, and, as a homogenised group, women are subjected to the gender-based regulations of men. Women's identity, rather, is "heterogeneous and heteronomous", to use Teresa de Lauretis' terms, "multiple, shifting, and often self-contradictory (1986: 9)".<sup>47</sup> Feminism is a critical way of viewing the world, and all of us, specifically concerned with inequalities determined by a biologically determined notion of gender that fails to take account of "the multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of 'women' is constructed" (Butler, 1990: 19). Feminism, then, can be an analysis of social equality and gender relations.

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47. de Lauretis argues for "the concept of a multiple, shifting, and often self-contradictory identity, a subject that is not divided in, but rather at odds with, language; an identity made up of heterogeneous and heteronomous representations of gender, race, and class, and often indeed across languages and cultures; an identity that one decides to reclaim from a history of multiple assimilations, and one that insists upon a strategy" (de Lauretis, 1986: 9).

The binary thinking imposed by patriarchy creates a category of 'women' that can only be seen in relation to 'men':

Women have always been defined in relation to men. The categories within which men have elaborated the male/female opposition are quite simple: women are inferior or superior; or they are equal; or they are different; or they are complementary (different and equal). (Marks and de Courtivron, 1981: 4)

Feminism is important because it differentiates between gender, a cultural construction, and biological sex. Our bodies and the ways in which they have been traditionally represented are therefore a focus of feminist investigation, as are 'feminine' attributes, and gendered roles and activities performed by women within patriarchy and in opposition to its power position. As feminists we oppose patriarchy because it is dependent on female subordination, and seek to effect change. We cannot sit by and watch. Once we see the imbalances, inequalities and injustices that exist, a feminist position propels us into action. The patriarchal construction of a passive, homogenised compliant feminine body becomes energised through feminism, and the body can become a site of resistance and activism, as in the artworks of Carolee Schneemann.

Schneemann's desire to place herself and her body at the centre of her practice, her openness in sharing her research and her personal experience, and her willingness to actively engage in discourses about patriarchal authority, creative practice and gender, has established her as a significant and influential figure of feminist art. In 2001, after four decades of practice as an artist, Schneemann writes:

I pay attention to the direction of unconscious information. There has always been something irrepressible in my work. I believe in the pure thrust of intuition, trust of the body. Putting my body in a central position in my art reveals contradictions in our culture. I resist social, erotic and aesthetic restraints, and have opened my

energies to finding materials and forms which celebrate and transcend predicted directions of the work. (Schneemann in Wentrack, 2001: 1)<sup>48</sup>

As a young artist in the 1960s, Schneemann made herself explicitly the image and the maker of that image by siting her own, naked body directly at the centre of her practice. In works such as the installation, *Eye/Body*, (1963), Schneemann anticipates not only the second wave feminist movement (Lippard, 1976: 122) but also feminist performance art, as Rebecca Schneider observes (Schneider, 1997: 35).

Her 1965 film, *Fuses*, celebrates the feminine body as being actively sexual, desiring and desired, energised and empowered with pleasure. To create *Fuses*, Schneemann filmed her and her then partner, the composer James Tenney, having sex, sometimes observed by their cat, Kitch; she then responded to the 16mm material by etching, colouring and re-ordering the film frames in order to create a moving image artwork synthesised as erotic experience. *Fuses* is a joyous evocation of Schneemann's own (hetero)sexuality as a woman. The film has no accompanying soundtrack. As spectators, we watch in silent fascination as our screen fills with the breathtaking beauty and splendid messiness of female sexuality. Of this work Schneemann says:

I wanted to see if the experience of what I saw would have any correspondence to what I felt - the intimacy of the lovemaking... And I wanted to put into that materiality of film the energies of the body, so that the film itself dissolves and recombines and is transparent and dense - as one feels during lovemaking. (Schneemann, 2015)

Lauren Rabinovitz speculates that Schneemann's "self-proclaimed interest in creating 'sensory arenas' and her detailed, graphic depiction of various sexual acts seemed to keep her outside critical discourse and practices being built up around groups of

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48. Statement from the artist, provided for the exhibition *Double Trouble: Carolee Schneemann and Sands Murray-Wassnik*, Cokkle Snoel Gallery Rotterdam and Amsterdam, Holland, 18 November to 22 December 2001.

feminist filmmakers in the early 1970s" (Rabinovitz, 1991/2003: 192). Schneemann's naked body as an image made by her - 'the female nude' - is also *her own* body.

Schneider comments:

Whether she ultimately wished it, the object of her body was unavoidably also herself - the nude as the artist, not just the artist's (active) object. That the active, creating force of the artist should manifest as explicitly female meant that Schneemann's 'actions' were loaded with contradiction in a culture which aligned active with masculine and passive with feminine. (Schneider, 1997: 35-36; original emphasis).

An artist who is a woman faces risks when she makes the feminine visible as both the image-object and the image-maker.<sup>49</sup> Schneemann's reclamation of female subjectivity through the gendered body may be considered 'essentialist' - that is, attributing fixed properties, or 'essences', to all women.<sup>50</sup> However, her work is complex and multi-layered, and resists a singular interpretation; it signifies differently to different audiences in different contexts, and may be read in many ways.

According to Judith Butler, gender is a set of processes of 'doing' rather than a state of 'being', an illusion created by the repetition of 'normative gender traits'.<sup>51</sup> A body is constructed through the dichotomous classification of 'it' at birth as *either male or female* via a 'speech act' that confirms the infant as belonging to one of two normative

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49. For discussion of the 'problems' of the naked body of a woman artist being overtly visible in her work, see Lucy Lippard's essay on Schneemann and Wilke, 'The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth: European and American Women's Body Art' (Lippard, 1976, 125-126). See also Kristine Stiles' essay, 'Schlaget Auf: The Problem with Carolee Schneemann's Painting' (Cameron *et al*, 1996: 15-25).

50. In the decades that followed her entry into art, Schneemann has been criticised for her perceived self-indulgence and narcissism. She attracted criticism also in the 1960s from "Rigidly essentialist feminists, such as the *Heresies* collective ... [which] chastised Schneemann for debasing the Goddess with what they read as sexual narcissism in her work" (Schneider, 1997: 37).

51. I note here Butler's claim that 'sex' does not precede gender and is also a socially determined category: "If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all" (Butler, 1990: 9-10). Butler, through this argument, destabilises sex/gender by making sex/gender an effect of discourse.

sex categories, rather than a 'description' of its bodily features. The performative act of speaking makes sex/gender a sociohistorical product rather than the result of a body's 'natural', fixed biological characteristics *per se*. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler pursues how performativity produces the materiality of the body. For her, it is signification that makes 'matter' intelligible (gives it meaning), with sex and gender the effect of discourse.<sup>52</sup>

In Schneemann's performance *Interior Scroll*, (1975-1977),<sup>53</sup> the artist "ritualistically stood naked on a table, painted her body with mud until she slowly extracted a paper scroll from her vagina while reading from it" (Schneemann, 2015). Writing about

*Interior Scroll*, Schneemann says:

I thought of the vagina in many ways - physically, conceptually: as a sculptural form, an architectural referent, the sources of sacred knowledge, ecstasy, birth passage, transformation. I saw the vagina as a translucent chamber of which the serpent was an outward model: enlivened by its [sic] passage from the visible to the invisible, a spiralled coil ringed with the shape of desire and generative mysteries, attributes of both female and male sexual power. This source of interior knowledge would be symbolized as the primary index unifying spirit and flesh in Goddess worship. (Carolee Schneemann, 2015)

The text on the scroll was from her Super 8 film *Kitch's Last Meal* (1973-1978), recounting "a conversation with 'a structuralist film-maker' in which the artist sets intuition and bodily processes, traditionally associated with 'woman', against traditionally 'male' notions of order and rationality" (Manchester, 2003). Her naked body, with her vulva visible to the audience, signals her belonging to the normative sex

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52. However, because all attempts by language to 'bring into being' that to which it refers (the thing which exists in the world) must always fail (because the word can never *be* the thing), matter, or materiality, can only be 'known' through this failure, or loss (Butler, 1993: 37-38).

53. Performed in East Hampton, New York, in 1975, and at the Telluride Film Festival, in 1977 (Schneider, 1997: 132).

category of 'female'. In this work, she performs a direct challenge to patriarchal norms; her vulva is an image that is explicitly sexual and positioned clearly as a creative force in her work, which celebrates the feminine.

### *Walking Out*

During one long summer holiday, aged seven, I walked southwards along the disused railway line, which ran through the RAF camp at Henlow in Bedfordshire, where we lived at the time, in an attempt to reach London. I had played secretly in the old railway station with my younger brother on several previous occasions. It was an 'out of bounds' place to children, as the track was still used by goods trains, and we took care to hide from any adults passing by on the road next to the station. To us, the proximity of the heavy, chuntering wheels and squeaking, rattling carriages as a train rushed past the platform, was exciting, the thrill heightened by the danger and because we knew we were in a forbidden place. This day I was alone. I set out early, straight after cornflakes for breakfast, intending to get to London before the evening. I do not know what made me decide to do this, why I wanted to walk to London, or what I thought I would do once I got there. I do recall that my focus was London, and that I knew that if I walked along the railway line I would get there. At first I tried to match the rhythm of walking to the heavy wooden sleepers between the parallel tracks. I managed this for a while, but got out of step because the stride of my walk couldn't match the spacing between the sleepers. I then walked partly on the sleepers and partly on the shingle between, which required more effort and slowed me down. The sun rose, I walked along the track past the scrub and fences along the outskirts of habitation, and through countryside bleached dry. After several hours, I abandoned my quest. I was hot and thirsty, and could feel a blister coming up on my right heel. I hadn't seen any signs in the heat haze above the tracks ahead that suggested London was near, and became frightened at being alone so far from home. I retraced my steps and returned along the same route, getting home late in the afternoon.

An independent and adventurous child, I wandered outside the bounds of the familiar and the everyday, beyond the boundaries of permissible space set by my parents. After this first 'long walk' along the railway, I tended to roam in a more circular route, with a more achievable destination. On some expeditions I took along my younger brother or friends, but mostly I wandered alone through the countryside or explored overgrown liminal spaces on the edges of habitation. In retrospect, I can reflect that I was perhaps



seeking something vital and precious that had been lost or forgotten, through these long walks into 'unknown territory', and that also I was escaping the domestic environment of my home.

In *Daddy's Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture*, Valerie Walkerdine's account of her research into the effects of culture on pre-teen working-class girls, the cultural production of femininity, and the formation of subjectivity, the author recalls that she had "a persistent and deeply disturbing image" during the years in which she underwent therapy. In it, her mother, "stands in the small hall of our house. It is dark and grey and I stand on the stairs, above her, looking down on her and out, through the hall window, on to the grass of the lawn" (1998: 13). Walkerdine's interpretation is that she is positioned literally and metaphorically above her mother, "looking down on her" whilst climbing the ladder to escape her working class roots, towards a better life where the grass is greener. This recurrent image is imbued with the persistent guilt Walkerdine experienced as a teenager - feeling that she was abandoning her depressed and widowed mother because she longed to leave home to "seek the bright lights."

Walkerdine is of an earlier generation, and shares her working class origins and other aspects of her growing up with my mother, including selection for a grammar school education; whilst my girlhood was set within the turbulence of my parents' transitioning to the middle class and peripatetic lifestyle. For me, Walkerdine provides useful insights into the socio-cultural production of subjectivity in Britain through her interdisciplinary methodological approach that draws together psychoanalytic, social and cultural theory, and embeds reflexivity within material reality, and emotional and unconscious experience. Her writing is a helpful guide for the presentation of my research, in its linking to a reflective personal narrative and deployment of

psychoanalytic theory. Although she cannot remember whether this recurrent memory came from a dream or reverie, Walkerdine notes that it retains its potency and continues to disturb her. I feel an affinity between Walkerdine's 'mind image', albeit relating to her teenage experience, and my first long expedition, a real event which took place at a much younger age. In our accounts, we share an aspiration to escape the maternal place of home, the domestic environment of the everyday embodied by our mothers. For Walkerdine, its dreary destiny is suggested by dimly-lit twilight in contrast to a bright new place, identified by the saturated colour of green grass. I felt enclosed by our home at Henlow Camp; I shared a bedroom and had no place of my own, and remember it as a place of boring, flat light and the promise of a dull future, whereas the London of magazines and television was full of brilliance and opportunity. There is also correlation between the repetitive nature of Walkerdine's 'mind image' and my expeditions during childhood that follow this long walk. The construction of the ladder is similar to that of the railway line, and the respective structures provide Walkerdine and myself with an escape route that is both symbolic and actual.

As an adult, I can link my childhood desire to roam with real women, such as the late nineteenth century newspaper reporter and adventurer Nellie Bly, and Gertrude Bentham, who travelled the world during the early twentieth century. In childhood, however, my few female role models came from fictional works recommended by my mother, for example, Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (Mary), Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* series (Georgina, known as 'George') and *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott (Josephina, known as 'Jo'). I quickly outgrew the limited exploits of these characters and drew inspiration from the heroic adventurers of H. Rider Haggard, Jules Verne, and Captain W.E. Johns. My solo expeditions were also influenced by the film

*Sammy Going South* (Mackendrick, 1963), in which a ten year old boy walks across Africa in a quest to find something his only living relative . The trope of the 'bad woman' appealed to me also, because of her agency and the power exercised. 'Bad' characters such as the wicked stepmother in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (in the Brothers Grimm fairy tale, and the Disney animated version) and Cruella De Vil in *One Hundred and One Dalmations* (Dodie Smith's 1956 novel and the 1961 Disney film) were role models for a different mode of 'being a woman', particularly when their strength and ability to shape the narrative of the action derived from magical forces. However, they were often depicted as ugly, or possessed an 'unnatural' beauty that had been produced through supernatural means,<sup>54</sup> and they were always thwarted. In my engagement with these works, I believe I adopted a male position as a reader, and viewer in the films I enjoyed most - Westerns and adventure yarns - that reinforced gender stereotypes in their portrayal of female characters as submissive, passive and weak, in contrast to the male derring-do; with the exception of the powerful 'bad' woman, whose narrative is doomed to failure and punishment.

### **Body/Images**

My feminism stems from an opposition to what I perceived as anti-female attitudes and behaviour, discrimination and marginalisation. In its early forms my feminism was a feeling of discontent at being made to conform to what was expected of a girl, of what I perceived to be girls' unfair treatment and lack of opportunity in relation to boys, and my observation of the difference in status between women and men, with

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54. Rider Haggard's immortal white queen Ayesha is described as extraordinarily beautiful. At the end of the book, she is withered and consumed by the life-giving fire, a sight so horrifying that one of the English adventurers dies in fright. *She: A History of Adventure* was published in serial form in 1886 to 1887, and is widely available in book form. I read the book and saw also the 1965 feature film, which starred Ursula Andress, directed by Robert Day.

the resulting unequal power dynamics, both within the family and beyond. There were efforts on my part to redress the balance. Growing up, I was something of an activist, and although I was not allowed to join the Cubs,<sup>55</sup> I did lead a successful campaign at one primary school for girls to be allowed to play football instead of netball, and to join the school football team. A counterbalance to this was that my independent attitude and proto-feminist stance put me in conflict with authority at home and at school, and I was frequently punished for various transgressions.<sup>56</sup>

As a child, I relished my body's physical prowess and ability to move and to explore. There was pleasure in being in possession of an active, healthy body that had agency, in feeling a unique entity belonging to the ongoing life of the world and aware that one is both making and being made anew. I was good at swimming (especially underwater), football, fighting, making weapons, taking things apart and putting them back together, climbing (trees, the roof of next door's house), and digging tunnels. I also enjoyed quieter and more introspective activities. I was a voracious reader, and had read my way through the children's section in the local library, and progressed to 'grown up' books by the time I was nine or ten. I also drew and made things, designed and sewed stuffed toys and artefacts. However, lurking throughout childhood, with increasing intensity as I progressed through primary school, was the knowledge that one day my

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55. The Cub Scouts were junior branch of the Scouting organisation for boys up to the age of ten and a half years. The Cub 'pack' met once a week, and focused on outdoor activities and learning bushcraft skills. Nowadays, girls can join.

56. Teachers at various schools commented on my having a "bad attitude", whilst school reports remarked that I had "a problem with authority", was "insolent", and displayed "disobedient" behaviour, and that I "treated teachers as if they were [my] equals". At one primary school I recall two teachers forcibly washing my mouth out with soap in the girls' toilets, for 'answering back'.

body would transform into that of a woman. I 'knew' when this happened, that the freedom I enjoyed would be over. I would, in effect, 'become' my body, an object of patriarchal control. What affronted me was my lack of choice in the matter.

### *Parade*

The newsagent's has double doors. I push through the racks of newspapers and magazines hanging in the doorway, and enter the shop, which is crowded with open boxes of crisps and snacks. Behind the counter are shelves of loose sweets in large glass and packs of cigarettes and matches. Packaged sweets are arranged in partitions on the counter. I have my pocket money and am going to buy the latest issue of *The Victor* and a Sherbet Fountain.<sup>57</sup> Each time I buy anything from the newsagent, I have to hand my money to him across the counter on which the 'girlie mags', and 'glamour magazines' such as *Parade*, are displayed. The covers feature 'pin up' photographs of partially undressed women, arranged to reveal a naked leg or a breast through some gauzy material. These brightly coloured images are literally 'in my face'. They unsettle me, as they remind me of my mother when she is 'not my mother', but acting a part in a play in the theatre, wearing heavy make up and a costume, posed under the lights on the stage so she can be seen by the audience.

This confrontation with sexualised femininity both repelled and compelled, and the repetitive nature of this experience reinforced the contradictory feeling of being a (paying) voyeur observing my own destiny as a commodified sexual object. These images of graphic stereotypical sexualisation reinforced the paradox I felt between my own feeling of wellbeing 'in my body' as a child and an arcane knowledge of womanhood and the body's pleasurable potential displayed by my mother and her sister, linked to the 'witchy' powers they claimed and the intoxicating shared laughter that followed their whispered jokes. Many years later, I can frame this sexualisation of

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57. *The Victor* was a British boys' comic, launched in 1961. Published weekly for over 30 years, it featured adventure stories, some of which had comedic elements, often set within the context of the First or Second World Wars. I was an avid reader also of its rival, *The Valiant*, which contained a mix of stories about war and adventurous heroes with superpowers. A Sherbet Fountain was a tube made of liquorice inserted into a paper container of sweet sherbet powder, manufactured by Barratt. One bites off the sealed end of the liquorice stick, and sucks up the sherbet, which then fizzes on the tongue.

my body through Catherine Driscoll's assertion that a girl becomes "defined by a conception of her body as sexualised territory" (Driscoll, 2002: 256) and the recent work of Renold and Ringrose which draws on Driscoll's theorisation to propose that, effectively, "the girl *becomes sex*" (Renold and Ringrose, 2013: 249; original emphasis).

But, as I approached the age of ten, I felt the space available to me becoming increasingly compressed. The outdoor activities in which I could participate and the places in which I could roam became restricted. As my body expanded and changed, my experience of space collapsed, I felt trapped by a biological body that was turning me into a woman. The geographer Doreen Massey has discussed 'the compression of time-space' effected by the modern globalised world, asserting that "women's mobility ... is restricted - in a thousand different ways, from physical violence to being ogled at or made to feel quite simply 'out of place' - ... by men" (Massey, 1994: 2). During puberty, my ability to move freely became curtailed, and my activities became 'quieter' and home centred. I began to create my own books and magazines, which were filled with my drawings, fashion designs, cartoons, jokes, games, and short stories and poems I'd written, embellished with small objects I'd found and brought home as 'treasure'. As a way of gaining insights and understanding into the psychological and social processes, when I was ten I read an introduction to Sigmund Freud, but as an independent child in possession of a proto-woman's body I had no desire for a phallus - which I had interpreted as 'wanting a penis'. It was John Berger's 1972 television series *Ways of Seeing* which prompted my thinking about 'looking' and 'being looked at', images of women and 'representation'; and the groundbreaking book about women's health, *Our Bodies Ourselves* (1973), which gave me insights into the female body and its sexual capacities. In addition, I became radicalised through the example of feminist

activists such as Angela Davis, and began to orientate my thinking around feminist ideas of resistance and liberation. This opening line from Davis' 1987 speech, 'Sick and tired of being sick and tired', reinforces the 'personal-political' interconnection: "Politics do not stand in polar opposition to our lives. Whether we desire it or not, they permeate our existence, insinuating themselves into the most private spaces of our lives" (Davis, 1990: 53).<sup>58</sup>

### **A Woman's Place**

My feminism was also prompted through a matrilineal genealogy. I was keenly aware of a (largely unspoken) discontent experienced by my mother and her mother in relation to their roles as wife, mother, and home-maker, the disillusionment of unfulfilled dreams and the disappointment at the unrealised potential of their lives.<sup>59</sup> In her final novel *The Years*, published just before the outbreak of the Second World War, Woolf described her feminist goal as, "living differently" (Woolf, 1937: 390-391), recognising that women can offer an 'other' way of thinking and being.<sup>60</sup> As an artist, I have found her writing to be a useful touchstone when expressing the ways in which the concepts of feminisms, 'thinking and being differently', may be embodied and expressed.

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58. Davis was addressing the North Carolina Black Women's Health Project at Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina.

59. My own contact with my maternal lineage extends only one generation before my grandmother, to her mother Lili Schneider, the daughter of German immigrants who arrived in Middlesbrough by boat at the end of the 19th century. Family history tells that they were a young Jewish couple from Frankfurt, who eloped westwards from Hamburg across the North Sea, but nothing is known of the families they left behind.

60. Woolf considered that feminism could transform society and offer a solution to male aggression, of which war was its ultimate expression. Her feminism is most explicitly articulated in *Three Guineas*, published originally by Hogarth Press in 1938 (Woolf, 1938/2005). See *Virginia Woolf as a Feminist* by Naomi Black (2004) for a thorough and insightful analysis of Woolf's feminism.

American philosopher Kelly Oliver has identified two trends of feminist thought that may be applied to a global arena, one concerned with the social, and the other concerned with the psyche (Oliver, 2000). The former 'social feminism' addresses women's lived experience inside the home and outside in the patriarchal world of work and society. The latter 'psychic feminism' deals with the phenomena of the psychic realm - interiority, the imaginary, and so on - and proposes theories by which we may understand and counter the mechanisms and effects of patriarchy on our subjectivity. The diverse feminisms emerging through the 'second wave' are categorised by the political philosopher Naomi Black as those "that draw on women's similarities to men, in order to argue for their receiving the same treatment as men", which she terms "*equity feminism*", and "*social feminism*, based on women's differences from men, [which] is derived from women's distinctive experience and characteristics" (Black, 2004: 10; italics in original). Virginia Woolf, considered by Black to 'belong' to social feminism, "because of her valorization of women's 'civilisation' as a basis for social and political transformation" (Black, 2004: 10), provides insights into the effects of patriarchy and suggests arguments for countering its toxic effects. Black describes Woolf's social feminism as 'radical' and 'political' (Black, 2004: 10).

### **Locked Out**

In her essay, *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf meditated on the lives of woman and men, on privilege and interiority. The essay is based on two papers, read to the Arts Society at Newnham College and the Odtaa (One Damn Thing After Another) Society at Girton College in October 1928. Earlier that year, on 14 June, women were fully franchised, when Royal Assent was granted to the bill giving women the vote on the same terms as men. The granting of full suffrage to women on equal terms with



men, in addition to improved property rights gained previously, were the result of the feminist movement's first wave, and enabled attention to be directed towards the inequalities of women in wider society. Woolf reflects this 'turn' in *A Room of One's Own*: "I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and then I thought how worse it is to be locked in" (Woolf, 1928/2004: 27-28).<sup>61</sup>

The first phrase suggests the excluded position of women, prevented physically from entering the locus of power and barred from making any contribution to or benefiting from the privileged space of patriarchal culture. Her use of 'locked out' implies that there are additional restraints in addition to the presence of a material barrier, such as a key or a bolt - this exclusion is clearly not a naturally occurring phenomenon, it is a deliberate act.

However, Woolf indicates, through her second phrase, that there are benefits to being 'locked out'. She believes that the restriction of incarceration is far more damaging. A gaol imprisons its guards and their prisoners. The locked door is a metaphor. Whilst man is secured in his stronghold, immobilised by the need to protect his treasures and keep them close by, woman is free to roam beyond the perimeter of the regulated area under patriarchal control, to explore the wilderness outside. A door may be opened, the key may be turned, a bolt drawn, the hinges may be removed, the barrier can be destroyed with a battering ram or strategically placed plastic explosives. A woman could enter the place of power, using subterfuge and impersonating the masculine. She

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61. The essay was originally published Hogarth Press in 1928.

could gain access through the roof, or from below through a tunnel. Openings may be found in the imagination, locks and bolts released through telekinesis, or the locked door can be a portal that one passes through en route to somewhere else.

Whilst acknowledging that Woolf's focus was literary fiction, and that she wrote from a privileged position as an affluent, educated middle class woman during the inter-war years, I would suggest that the metaphor of the 'room of one's own' has potency for the contemporary creative practitioner. The 'room of her own' that Woolf seeks is a place of physical and psychological refuge from patriarchy, an inviolable space where she can be free to pursue her thoughts and discover her interiority through writing, supported by a private income that frees her from servitude as a wife or the tyranny of earning a living through the limited options of paid employment open to her. Woolf argued for the right to be 'idle', to have time that would allow immersion in her thoughts as they drifted just below the level of consciousness: "could be it is in our idleness, in our dreams, that the submerged truth sometimes comes to the top" (Woolf, 1928/2000: 36). She argued that woman is free from the restrictions and limitations of the patriarchal mindset to "think of things in themselves" (Woolf, 1928/2000: 45). Woolf proposed that a woman's experience of her interiority would enable her to discover new insights and perceive 'truths' that could form the basis for transformative social change.

Her 'room of one's own' has a lock on the door, to provide security for her "freedom of ... mind" (Woolf, 1928/2000: 76) and protect the space from intrusion; from here, woman can make forays to challenge the dominant paradigms of patriarchal society. However, the 'room of one's own' can be a prison, if one does not have the emotional, creative and physical confidence to leave its confines. One's physical body can also be a

prison, when the perceived attributes of the sexed body are mapped onto gender, what is considered to belong 'naturally' to 'female' becomes feminine, and one's biological body determines a culturally defined subjective identity imposed by patriarchy.

### **Locked In**

In the year that Virginia Woolf spoke about women and fiction to the female undergraduates of Newnham and Girton,<sup>62</sup> my maternal grandmother Nellie Powell, known as 'Bid', was a young woman just out of her teens earning her living as a seamstress in the industrial north east of Britain, whilst continuing to care for her younger half-siblings. She had none of the advantages of class that allowed Virginia Woolf to pursue her intellectual freedom as a woman and "live differently" (1937/1968: 391), but she was able to earn her living through a trade that allowed her a degree of economic independence and status.

In Nineteenth Century England, a woman's ideal 'place' was in the home, fulfilling her 'natural' duties as home-maker, child raiser and wife. Sewing was an activity that embodied gender roles, an important element in the construction of the traditional wifely-mother, and bound together the family and the home. After the collapse of rural industries at the end of the Eighteenth Century, work opportunities for women were limited. A working class woman could become a domestic servant or work in a factory; or, she could aspire to earn an independent living as a seamstress through an apprenticeship. In contrast, an upper middle class woman would acquire skills in embroidery in order to sew items that would display her fine needlework and advertise

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62. Published as the extended essay *A Room of One's Own*.

her leisured status. My grandmother was able to escape the drudgery of domestic service and servitude in a factory through her expertise in cutting and sewing cloth with "straight stitches" (Woolf, 1930: xxxv), and the skill of her nimble fingers in sculpting fabric to clothe the human body. She became a seamstress, one of the few respectable occupations permissible to working class women, working at home on bespoke commissions for the local tailor and dressmaking shops.

She married my grandfather, a dockyard crane driver, during the time of the Depression in Britain, and times were very hard for them and they often had no money. Her first child, my mother, was born in 1933, the year that every single working man was made redundant in Jarrow, thirty five miles along the coast north of Middlesbrough, when all the key industries in the town - coal mine, steel works, and shipyard - closed down (BBC, 2014).<sup>63</sup> Bid did not have a 'room of her own'. She had a corner of the family living room where her Singer sewing machine stood, along with a lamp on a stand, a chair, and the tools of her trade, lengths of cloth, spools of coloured thread, scissors and bodkins, chalk and a can of oil, a tape measure and wooden rule, a dressmaker's dummy, and patterns made of tissue paper marked with the hieroglyphics of body measurements. My grandmother was unemployed throughout the 1930s, but her skills as a dressmaker and home-maker enabled her and her family to survive economically during that decade; she and her family suffered terrible poverty, throughout the war years when Middlesbrough was heavily bombed, up to the mid-1950s with the end of eighteen years of rationing.

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63. This mass unemployment led to the people of Jarrow organising a march to London. *Britain in the Depression: Society and Politics* by John Stevenson (1994) provides a comprehensive account of the 1930s depression in Britain.

My grandmother's interiority was given a limited voice in the areas of expression permitted to her - to use Woolf's phrase, her "hands were full of work" (1930/1977: xxxvii), making clothes and home-making. She literally 'made a home' for herself, her husband, and her family, through sewing all the soft furnishings, such as curtains, cushions, bedspreads, and by constructing small items of furniture. She made all the clothes they wore, and washed, starched, pressed, and mended them. She prepared and cooked all the food they ate, and then washed and dried the crockery and utensils afterwards, repairing cracks and fractures with glue. She saved packaging and string, collected the dripping from meat for spreading on bread, and transformed left-over pastry into sweet 'fatty bread' by incorporating currants into the dough, rolling it out and baking it in the oven. There was no separate space for her as a woman, no 'room' where she "could sit down and think remote from boiling saucepans and crying children" (Woolf, 1931/1977: xxxvii-xxxviii), imagined by Woolf as a place where working class women could meet to exchange ideas that would lead to their building a better world for themselves and others.<sup>64</sup>

Woolf's writing is influenced and informed by a feminist perspective most clearly articulated in her series of letters which comprise *Three Guineas*. This work highlighted the social, economic, and psychological restraints women are subject to, so that women would become aware of their subordinate position. She referred to women of earlier generations as being, "shut out" and "shut up" because they were women (1938/2005: 857), but working class women like my grandmother - of a younger

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64. The essay, written in May 1930, was published originally as 'Introductory Letter to Margaret Llewellyn Davies' in Margaret Llewellyn Davies (ed.) *Life as We Have Known It by Co-operative Working Women* (London: Hogarth Press, 1931), and was a revised version of an essay which first appeared in the September 1930 edition of the *Yale Review*. Woolf later revised the piece again for her essay, 'The Memories of a Working Women's Guild', published in 1931.

generation than Woolf - were still imprisoned and silenced. To them, opportunities for escaping their enforced destiny as wives and mothers, home-makers and income generators were limited. My grandmother's aspiration to a bourgeois lifestyle<sup>65</sup> was sublimated through the possible futures she saw for her children, and then her grandchildren. An interrupted education restricted the options open to her, but she was intelligent and wanted to be upwardly mobile and better herself, and aspired that her children would achieve a higher class status through education, hard work, cleanliness, respectability, and the acquisition of culture. She read magazines and novels and went to the cinema, and, in the improving economic conditions of the late 1950s, took her youngest daughter on outings to the theatre to see performances of plays, concerts, and the ballet, and for meals in restaurants, 'to improve her mind' and expand her social options.

However, a melancholic wistfulness clung to my grandmother, like the housecoat she wore, a sleeveless coverall garment made of thin synthetic material that wrapped around her body and protected her clothes while she was doing housework. She felt weighed down by the death of her father before she was born, a plumber who died prematurely from lead poisoning, his absence reinforced by her financial dependence on her step-father. As a teenager, she was forced to leave school so she could support herself and care for her younger half-siblings. Her aspirations to becoming educated

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65. I wish to note here Raymond Williams' assertion that it is not 'bourgeois' to own "objects of utility," nor to enjoy a higher standard of material living. Williams makes a valid point when he states that the working class did not become 'bourgeois' by, "dressing like the middle class, living in semi-detached houses, acquiring cars and washing machines and television sets" (Williams, 1958/1987: 323-324; also quoted at length in Walkerdine, 1997: 11-12). However, my grandmother wanted to climb the metaphorical ladder, argued against by Williams. She aspired that to escape from the social inferiority of the working class, to 'belong' to a better class of people, and to enjoy a more cultured lifestyle liberated from the relentless and bruising physicality of day-to-day living.

and having a better life were effectively quashed, her existence ruled by the demands of family, the daily chores of cooking, washing, and cleaning needed to maintain the smooth running of a household, the less frequent tasks of turning mattresses, washing net curtains, beating out the dust from rugs, and the seasonal duties of spring cleaning, during which she scrubbed all the floorboards. My mother remembers Bid as 'always working', doing housework, cooking, looking after others, and on her sewing machine till midnight, creating exquisite clothes that fit the body for which they were intended perfectly.

When I was very young, my grandmother would sing me a bedtime lullaby about the late Nineteenth Century feminist and activist Nellie Bly, whose first name she shared: "Nelly Bly shuts her eye when she goes to sleep. / When she wakens up again her eyeballs start to peep." I called my first teddy bear Nellie Blye, after the first woman to travel around the world in 80 days. At 4 feet and 11 inches tall, I had overtaken my grandmother in height by the time I was 12. On a shopping trip that year, we colluded in buying a secondhand copy of paperback of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* from a market stall. It was the 1960 Penguin edition, the first unexpurgated version of the book to be available in Britain (first published in 1928, printed privately in Italy). There was a shared delight in being able to read a controversial work that contained descriptions of sex and 'rude words'. She gloried in the physicality of my healthy body, and would squeeze my biceps approvingly. She remembered rickets and other diseases of malnutrition, when a thin child was a sickly child, more likely to die - her eldest child, my mother, was admitted to hospital as an infant because she wasn't receiving

sufficient nutrition. Bid herself had survived TB as a child, at a time before antibiotics when a scratch could develop into a fatal septicaemia, and had the glands in her neck partially exercised.

I recognise my grandmother as an important influence and acknowledge her legacy of the skills of the seamstress in my own work as an artist. She taught me dressmaking when, as a young teenager, I followed the shift of 1970s feminist art in its focus on maternal and domestic activities and devalued women's 'craft' practices such as embroidery, weaving and macramé.<sup>66</sup> My mother taught me how to crochet and my grandmother taught me to sew 'straight stitches', to 'make do and mend' (I too save and re-use string). I am reminded of their maternal 'know how' every time I edit film, prompted by the movement of my fingers as they cut and splice sections of filmstrip.<sup>67</sup>

### **'Know That': Psychoanalytic Feminisms and its Founding Fathers**

In the chapters that follow, the writings of the psychoanalytic feminists, Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous, and later works by them, will be discussed in further detail to provide the primary philosophical lens through which I understand the body-centred direct animation practices of women artists. Their 'psychoanalytic feminisms' concern the psychic mechanisms at play within a conceptual framework that articulates the operating of unconscious forces and their interrelationship with consciousness. These

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66. At this time, I was not consciously adopting these creative forms as a challenge to accepted modes of artistic expression, although I was aware of the focus on women's day-to-day lived experience that formed part of the raised feminist consciousness of the 1960s and 70s.

67. The legacy of 'make do and mend' and the role of 'material' elements in my practice will be discussed in the next chapter, in which I also consider the 'stitching' component of my animation *White Body*. The influence of sewing on my practice will be examined further in Chapter Six, in connection with the performed work *STITCH* (2012).



concerns connect to the origins of my own (proto) creative practice in childhood, and my experiences as a girl and a woman within the dominant ideological systems of patriarchy.

Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous are regarded as the three key figures in the re-thinking of woman-centred subjectivity, often grouped together under the heading 'French feminists' (Grosz, 1989; Weedon, 1997). Their work draws directly on Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory of language and subjectivity, and they may also be referred to as belonging to French poststructuralist feminism, and psycholinguistic feminism. Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous draw on Lacan's re-thinking of Freud's psychoanalytic paradigms, to critique the hierarchies and dichotomies of masculinist discourse, and argue for 'woman centred' alternatives. All propose ways of seeing subjectivity and the formation of gender that are fluid and process-based, in contrast to the rigidity of the 'rational' mono-position exemplified by masculinist thought. The memory-work research of Haug, mentioned previously in this chapter, is an example of the thinking 'difference' that is brought into play as a result of feminist resistance to women's subjugation and invisibility. However, whilst there are similarities in their approach and strategies, Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous each offer a different theorization of subjectivity and argument for redressing the imbalance caused by patriarchy. Over the last forty years, each woman has produced a substantial body of work, in response to which a succession of scholars, including Judith Butler, has written a myriad of critiques, nuanced perspectives, and revisions of their ideas.

Butler's work of the early 1990s is important in its explicit challenge to the orthodoxy that gender is a 'natural' extension of a 'fixed' biological sex, constructed (or 'materialised') through socio-cultural heterosexual 'acts' upon the sexed 'material' of

the body, with sex pre-existing gender. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler pursues the destabilisation of the coupling between sex and gender made in her earlier work, *Gender Trouble* (1990), to question the dichotomous distinction, which she considers has been "crucial to the de Beauvoirian version of feminism" (Butler, 1993: 4). Simone de Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex*, first published in French in 1949 and in English in 1953, along with other writings by her, was a key influence on the women's movement of the early 1970s. In France, the paradigm of her proposition, that 'one is not born, but rather *becomes* a woman', is perhaps represented most holistically by the radical French materialist feminism of Monica Wittig,<sup>68</sup> Christine Delphy and others who were members of the collective which founded the journal *Quéstions Féministes* with de Beauvoir in 1977.<sup>69</sup>

The writings of Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous are known more widely in the anglophone world, perhaps because there have been an extensive number of publications about their work by English commentators.<sup>70</sup> Their work shares the same psychoanalytic roots, and in particular Jacques Lacan's re-framing of Freud, and differs from the other main grouping arising in France after 1968 at the beginning of second wave feminism, the Mouvement de Liberation des Femmes (or MLF), which embraced the de

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68. Butler acknowledged her indebtedness to Wittig's argument which does not separate 'gender' from 'sex', proposing instead that 'sex' is the result of an oppressive heterosexual political system that enforces two 'classes' of people, 'men/masters' and 'women/slaves', who are forced to reproduce the heterosexual species. See Wittig's 'The Category of Sex', first written in 1976 but published in *Feminist Issues* vol. 2 no. 2. (Fall 1982) (and dated as written in 1976), pp. 63-68. Also included in Monica Wittig's collection *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, published in 1992 by Beacon Press in Boston and Harvester Wheatsheaf in Hemel Hempstead, pp. 1-8.

69. Wittig, who was in the USA at the time that the group was established, joined in 1978 at issue number four (Adkins and Leonard, 1996: 19).

70. In 1981, Marks and de Courtviron published their work *New French Feminisms*, and there was a special 'French feminisms' issue of two American journals, *Feminist Studies*, and *Signs*; followed by Toril Moi's *French Feminist Thought* in 1987. Elizabeth Grosz (1989) and Judith Butler (1990) both focused on the work of Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous shortly after its publication.

Beauvoirian proposition. Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous, who were all associated with the Psychanalyse et Politique (Psych et Po) publishing group, take female difference<sup>71</sup> and the psychoanalytic specificity of 'woman' as a given, but argue that 'woman' has never existed (and can never exist) in a patriarchal system; 'woman', therefore, is something as yet unknown.

The Psych et Po project aimed to counter and undermine misogyny, and "bring the feminine into existence" (Duchen, 1986/2013: 35). Irigaray's 1974 publication *Speculum de l'autre femme*<sup>72</sup> (*Speculum of the Other Woman*) focused on exploration of the patriarchal feminine; Kristeva's *La révolution du langage poétique*<sup>73</sup> (*Revolution in Poetic Language*), published the same year, characterised the feminine as a semiotic force that disrupts the symbolic of (masculine) language. The following year, Cixous published her essays *Le Rire de la Méduse* (*The Laugh of the Medusa*) and 'Sorties'<sup>74</sup> that proposed the idea of 'feminine writing', a writing 'through the body' (*écriture du corps*) which would emerge from the multiple diversities of female sexuality. The practice of *écriture féminine* is now widely understood as the inscription of the feminine in the body through 'writing' that embodies sexual difference. Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous acknowledge the relational position of 'the feminine' in a value-laden masculine/feminine dichotomy, where the former term is valued over the latter,

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71. In French, *la différence*, the sexed difference between the categories 'man' and 'woman'.

72. First published in French as *Speculum de l'autre femme* by Les Éditions Minuit, Paris, 1974. I am using the title style of the original publication, for which only the first word is capitalised.

73. I am using the title style of the original publication in French by Les Éditions du Seuil, for which only the first word is capitalised.

74. Cixous' essay was originally published in French in *La Jeune Née* by Union Générale d'Éditions, Paris, in 1975. The English translation of 'Sorties', 'Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays', was published in *The Newly Born Woman* (co-authored by Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clémont) by I.B. Tauris, London, in 1996, pp. 63-134. The word 'sorties' has several possible meanings in French, such as 'exits', 'escapes', 'assaults', and 'outcomes'.

which is regarded as 'lacking' with respect to the first term in the binary. In this context, what is meant by 'the feminine' refers to the specificity of women's bodies, or a specific woman's body, and reclaims the term, and its value.

Detailed arguments by Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous will be discussed where relevant alongside the 'know how' of my practice and the 'know what' of others' practice in the five chapters that follow. Here, I will therefore give a brief introduction to the Lacanian re-imagining of Sigmund Freud from which many of their theoretical frameworks arise. Feminist re-readings of the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan are important because they demonstrate that gender identity and sexuality:

is developed through the individual's encounters with the nuclear family and with the symbolic systems set into motion by the mother-father pair as the parents themselves carry out socially imposed roles toward the child (Jones, 1981: 253).

For Jacques Lacan, a post-structuralist, the human being was a divided entity. He questioned the simple notion of the rational and unified 'self' of consciousness presumed by post-Cartesian philosophy,<sup>75</sup> which he saw as being undermined by Sigmund Freud's theories of the unconscious. Elizabeth Grosz states that Freud's conception of the human unconscious displaces consciousness from the centre of subjectivity, and that it becomes an alternative site "where thinking, wishing and desiring take place" without the conscious mind being aware of its existence or the events that occur within it (1989: 19). Lacan's work explored this 'division', and the implications of its effects, through a series of seminars, and writings such as *Écrits*, first published in 1966, and *Feminine Sexuality* (with Mitchell and Rose, 1982).

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75. The Seventeenth Century French philosopher René Descartes proposed new paradigms, which supplanted the objective and deductive schools of thought that had existed before - such as those following philosophic principles of Socrates and Plato.

Across almost three decades, Lacan effectively undertook a structuralisation of Freud's psychoanalysis. His engagement with Freud's psychical approach to human subjectivity put psychoanalysis 'in conversation' with other disciplines, including feminism. Lacan's ideas were disseminated primarily through his seminars, which were highly influential on the philosophers emerging in France during the 1960s and 1970s. Pertinent to this thesis, Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous attended Lacan's seminars, trained with him, or taught at the Freudian School of Paris; and, despite their different perspectives on Lacanian paradigms, all concurred on the key proposition, "the man/woman dichotomy" (Buhle, 1998: 330).

The Lacanian proposition of *jouissance*, elaborated over many years, displaced the notion of desire (*Wunsch*) that had been central to Freud's theories of the unconscious (Braunstein, 2003/2006: 102-103):

Jouissance is the dimension discovered by the analytic experience that confronts desire as its opposite pole. If desire is fundamentally lack, lack in being, jouissance is positivity, it is 'something' lived by a body when pleasure stops being pleasure. It is a plus, a sensation beyond pleasure. (Braunstein, 2003/2006: 104)<sup>76</sup>

For Lacan, *jouissance* stems from desire; it is unruly, and associated with transgression. He couples *jouissance* with transgression in *Seminar VII*, (1986/1997), which addresses the area between what he identifies as the twin foci of Freud's work: transgression and death (Lacan, 1986/1997: 2-3). The Oedipal scenario of the Freudian paradigm centres on a man's incestuous desire for his mother and his hatred and jealousy of his father, which leads to patricide. Lacan links "the paradoxical origins of desire [and] the polymorphously perverse character of its infantile forms" with "perverse jouissance", which must be tamed (Lacan, 1986/1997: 4).

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76. Although Lacan used the italic form of 'jouissance', Nestór Braunstein prefers not to italicize.

The Lacanian paradox, "Man's desire is the desire of the Other" is laid out in *Seminar XI* (Lacan, 1973/1978: 235).<sup>77</sup> The desire that Lacan refers to here is both a desire for recognition from the Other and a desire for the thing that we imagine the Other desires, in other words, the thing that the Other lacks. This ongoing and compelling quest to be 'seen' - to be recognised - is therefore conflicted at its core through its irrevocable bond with the other's desire, the other that we desire recognition from: "the desire to have his desire recognised ... which is alienated in the other's desire" (Lacan, 1966/1977: 343). By capitalising the term 'Other', Lacan emphasises the Other's otherness, bringing to the fore the Other's unfathomableness. For Lacan, as subjects we are perpetually in a state of questioning, looking for an unknowable answer from an unfathomable Other.<sup>78</sup>

A Lacanian subject is a subject of desire, formed by the "separation" of the child from the mother (Lacan, 1973/1978: 213-215). In *Seminar XI*, Lacan argues that desire is the result of the child's realisation that s/he cannot be the sole object of the mother's desire, that s/he will never satisfy the mother's desire. In Lacan's formula, as a result of this lack (*manque*) of the mother to satisfy her child's desire to be the sole object of her maternal desire, the child realises that the mother is lacking, and that s/he too is lacking by identifying with her. The subject, therefore creates a fantasy structure of desire to mirror the mother's own. It is the circulation of this paradoxical desire that can never be fulfilled that drives the Lacanian subject, a desire which is synonymous with lack: for Lacan, the subject is always lacking (1973/1978).

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77. Published originally in French as *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse: Séminar XI* by Éditions du Seuil, Paris, in 1973.

78. For Lacan, the concept of the Other can refer to a place outside consciousness.

Lacan further developed his conceptualisation of *jouissance* in *Seminar XX: Encore* (1975/1999), which addressed feminine sexuality: "Jouissance in the being who speaks (*parlêtre*) is jouissance of the signifier; it is a semiotic and phallic jouissance" (Lacan, 1975/1999: 78-89).<sup>79</sup> This provocative work on sexual difference, knowledge, *jouissance*, and love was published at a time when the Mouvement de Liberation des Femmes was contesting psychoanalytic theory.

Attributed equally to masculine and feminine speaking subjects, Lacanian *jouissance* operates in three registers: "in the word", "before the word", and "beyond the word" (Braunstein, 2003/2006: 112). This final category is the "jouissance of the Other's body" (Lacan, 1975/1999: 5). For Lacan, the first manifestation of the Other is the mother, a fantasy produced through the infant's anxiety about controlling the presence (and absence) of the maternal figure. According to Lacan, the child is compelled to ask: What does the (m)Other want? (Lacan, 1973/1978).<sup>80</sup> In other words, Lacan's third category is *jouissance* of the feminine, as it is unknowable, centred in the body, and outside of speech, beyond language:

I believe in the jouissance of the woman, insofar as it is extra (*en plus*)... Doesn't this jouissance one experiences and yet knows nothing about put us on the path of existence? And why not interpret one face of the Other, the God face, as based on feminine jouissance? (Lacan, 1975/1999: 76-77)<sup>81</sup>

Lacan considered Freud's work as a mode of 'listening and reading': an attentive hearing and interpretation of what the analysand said, and revelatory of the unconscious (Lacan, 1966/1977: 7-22). He viewed psychoanalysis as a theory that accounts for the ways in which the human subject is created through social interaction

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79. Originally published in French as *Le Séminaire, Livre XX, Encore, 1972-1973* by Éditions du Seuil, Paris, in 1975.

80. This enigmatic 'Other' belongs to the Lacanian dimension of the Real.

81. Braunstein observes that Lacan never again refers to feminine *jouissance* (2003/2006: 112).

rather than a curative process. Lacan connected psychoanalysis with linguistics, with the emphasis on language in the creation of the self, and psychic and social life (Lacan, 1966/1977). He reworked the two key strands of Freud's thinking, the unconscious and sexuality, in his account of the symbolic order, and saw the unconscious as an 'intersubjective' space between people. He proposed that, because the self and sexuality are socially constructed, no (sexed) self<sup>82</sup> could exist before the formation of the subject in language (Lacan, 1966/1977: 154-155).

The phallus is the symbol for that-which-is-not-the-mother. The phallus is not synonymous with the biological father or the penis; it is a symbol and its symbolic power can be assumed by a teacher or mother (or anyone). The phallus is the key that breaks up (penetrates) the symbiotic unity of the young child with its mother and the child then becomes aware of difference. Lacan describes the phallus as the ultimate signifying mechanism because, for him, language, culture, and meaning are organised as a symbolic system of differences. The phallus enables the child's entry into culture and society by the development of a self (an 'I' recognised as being distinct or different from others). All children become subjects (develop a self) controlled by the masculine position therefore, because the phallus represents everything that is not-the-mother (Lacan, 1966/1977: 174-222).

Lacan maps Freud's biologically determined Oedipus complex onto our acquisition of language in which we understand 'self' in relation to 'other/s'. In the linguistic system of Lacan, the phallus represents everything that the child has lost (the sense of perfect

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82. In other words, no masculine or feminine person.



wholeness) and all the power associated with Lacan's 'symbolic father' and the 'Name-of-the-Father' (the laws that control desire, knowledge and the rules of communication) (Lacan, 1968).

Although the subject position for both men and women is defined by a lack, anatomical differences construct a different relationship to the phallus for men and women and the lack is articulated in different ways. For Lacan, the boy gains access to the symbolic power of the phallus by denying his last link to the Real of his sexuality (the material bodily drives centred on his actual penis). The castration complex continues to function as a central aspect of the boy's psychosexual development. He accepts the dictates of the Name-of-the-Father associated with the symbolic phallus, denies his sexual needs and understands his relation to others in terms of his position within a larger system of rules, gender differences, and desire (Lacan, 1973/1978).<sup>83</sup> A girl does not have an actual penis and therefore experiences the castration complex in a different way. Female subjects are thus at once more lacking (never accessing the phallus as fully) and more full (having not experienced the loss of the penis as fully); Lacan argues that the mother is seen as lacking by the child because she has no phallus (Nelmes 1986:251).

As argued by Judith Butler, psychoanalytic theory forces a conceptual alliance between sex, gender and desire; and, for Butler, sexual difference is the catalyst for feminist inquiry (Butler, 2004: 17). Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous seek to free feminine desire from the phallic discourse of Lacan, in order to excavate, reinvigorate, and

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83. It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss concepts of 'desire' evident in philosophy from Plato and Socrates onward, and the detailed nuances of 'theories of desire' articulated during the twentieth century by Lacan, and Deleuze and Guattari, among others.

(re)articulate feminine language. For Irigaray, woman's "desire most likely does not speak the same language as man's desire, and it probably has been covered over by the logic that has dominated the West since the Greeks" (Irigaray, 1977/1985b: 101). Kristeva's (r)evolutionary perspective on the repression of incest that is "constitutive of the history of humanity" - according to Freud's Oedipal scenario - proposes that this repression is displaced "to the medium of expression and communication itself"; she states: "I, the little girl, transfer the intensity of my desire to speaking and thought, to representation and mental creativity" (Kristeva, 2006). Cixous' model is the reconstitution of feminine desire as an uninhibited language of the body:

I don't want a penis to decorate my body with. But I do desire the other for the other, whole and entire, male or female; because living means wanting everything that is, everything that lives, and wanting it alive. Castration? Let others toy with it. What's a desire originating from a lack? A pretty meagre desire." (Cixous, 1975/1976/1981: 262).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the concept of a feminine *jouissance*, introduced by Lacan in his *Seminar XX*, is described by him as being, "a *jouissance* of the body which is ... beyond the phallus" (Lacan in Mitchell and Rose, 1982: 145). The term derives from the French verb '*jouir*', which means 'to come', and links to the intense release of sexual pleasure experienced during orgasm - an extreme sensation that causes loss of (conscious) control. *Jouissance*, therefore, like the unconscious, affects the subject without them being aware of their actions. For Lacan, "the unconscious is the discourse of the Other" (1966/1977: 59). Here, Lacan indicates that language is bound to "the beyond in which the recognition of desire is bound up with the desire for recognition" (1966/1977: 172).

For Lacan, women remain closely linked to *jouissance*, which may also be understood as the lost plenitude of one's material bodily drives that springs into life with the child's entry into the subjecthood (Lacan, 1975/1999).

In this same seminar dedicated to feminine sexuality, Lacan addresses Freud's "riddle of femininity" and responds to the question "What does a woman want?" posed by Freud in his 1933 essay on femininity, in which he summed-up a lifetime's psychoanalytical research into the subject (Freud 1933/1961: 135). Lacan exposed the fictional basis for Freud's phallogocentric explanation of male supremacy through his central notion of the Oedipal castration complex, and instead proposed the 'phallus' as the emblematic core of human sexual development and our 'entry into language' as 'speaking subjects' (Lacan, 1975/1999). For Lacan, "the unconscious is structured like a language" (1966/1977: 164).

Lacan equates the term 'woman' with 'absence'. He argues that women and 'the feminine' cannot express themselves fully 'in language' because our experience as women is constituted outside language: "excluded by the nature of things which is the nature of words" (Lacan in Mitchell and Rose, 1982: 144). The Lacanian linguistic re-visioning of psychoanalysis does offer feminism a theory of both gendered subjectivity and the subject's resistance to rigid gender identities, although feminist thinkers throughout the Twentieth Century have been deeply critical of its reliance on a single signifier, the phallus - which essentially obstructs/deletes the feminine, among other aspects - and oppose Freud's phallogocentric ideas which confine subjectivity to biology. As Elizabeth Grosz states:

the body needs not, indeed must not be considered merely a biological entity, but can be seen as a socially inscribed, historically marked, psychologically and interpersonally significant product. (Gross, 1986: 140)

For Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous, *jouissance* is an important concept - both body-centred and feminine - as I discuss in the chapters that follow.

### **Feminist Practice**

The discourses discussed here, including psychoanalytic feminisms, allow me to position the re-negotiation of the body through an arts practice, and, in particular, to understand my own practice of direct animation through the construction and exploration of a gendered genealogy of theorised practice. In this thesis, I do not 'define' the term 'woman', which Butler suggests is a political category, a fiction maintained by dominant power structures (1990: 9-10). As such, 'woman' becomes "a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or end ... it is open to intervention and resignification" (Butler, 1990: 45), I adopt a subjective practice position in this study that is gendered 'as (a) woman', in order to explore a set of particular body-centred creative processes in film-making as they are practiced by 'women'. Underlying this study, then, is my understanding of the term 'woman' as contingent and unstable, and gender as a construction that is continually 'in process'.

### **Feminine and Feminist**

In this thesis, my use of 'the feminine' derives from psychoanalysis, nuanced by my key theorists. I intend the term 'the feminine' to be a dynamic nexus of gradated and fluid meaning, focused on the body and emerging from the body, that challenges the dominant discourses of patriarchal authority. A perspective inflected by Irigaray

emphasises a culture of the feminine and assertion of (a) woman's *jouissance*, centred on her sexuality and its multiplicity of 'difference' from a man's. The feminine of Kristeva foregrounds *jouissance*, an eruption of the semiotic that opposes phallogocentrism, with woman as an outcast, an attitude. In Cixous' feminine, *jouissance* emerges from the unconscious, and a woman's psychosexual feminine specificity comes into play as a holistic cosmic force of libidinal energy. Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous all consider the maternal body and its rhythms to be associated with creativity and language, and important to the feminine, although each proposes different registers of meaning. The feminine, then, in the context of this thesis, is a concept 'in process', contingent upon context. It is subject to interpretation, with the intention of opening out discussion about practice.

The feminist art critic Lucy Lippard proposed that, "Feminism questions all the precepts of art as we know it" (1995: 172). Second wave feminism provided a frame of reference through which issues of visibility and marginality could be addressed, and dominant power structures challenged, through investigating gendered notions of history, philosophy, materiality, aesthetics, identity, space, and place. Feminism-informed art enabled exploration of these themes, and representations of the body and the body's interrelation with the codes of dominant patriarchal language to be examined, through the artist's own body. In my investigation, feminist art is understood as a plurality of modes of resistance to the dominant cultural norms of patriarchy.

As Katy Deepwell notes, "feminism is a political movement, which rewrites the definitions of the personal as political" (1998: 5). Within this thesis, feminism informs both the arts practice and the theory. I note here the distinction between: a)

'femininity', "a set of culturally defined characteristics" (Moi, 1989: 117);<sup>84</sup> b) the identification of 'the feminine', deriving from psychoanalytic theory; and c) 'feminist', defined by Katy Deepwell as, "critiquing the situation of women and offering alternative socially and politically-engaged perspectives but giving priority to the perspective/representation of Woman/woman" (Deepwell, 2012: 4). I do not ascribe to Lippard's claim in the early 1970s, for 'a separate feminist aesthetic' based on mutual qualities, made also by the artist Judy Chicago, which Deepwell argues against, reminding us that the purpose of feminist art is "to challenge ... categorisations of art production" (2012: 4). However, within this thesis I will go on to identify features shared by 'feminist artworks' in order to triangulate my own practice with examples of women's practice that embody and reveal aspects of feminist theory.

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84. 'Feminist, Female, Feminine': this is an edited, shorter version of an essay originally entitled 'Feminist Literary Criticism' in (eds.) Ann Jefferson and David Robey, *Modern Literary Theory*, second edn., by Batsford, London, in 1986, pp. 204-221.



## Part II Close Looking

### Chapter Three: Material and Maternal Bodies

#### Shape-shifting

Animation, through frame-by-frame construction of the picture sequence "offers an alternative vocabulary to the film-maker by which alternative perspectives and levels of address are possible" (Wells, 2003: 214). It lends itself in particular to picturing spatial movement or 'form in flux' as a dynamic flow of moving images onscreen: in animation practice this is known as the technique of metamorphosis - in which the form depicted on the screen appears to deform and break down, and then reconfigures as a distinct and different form: or, shape-shifting. Metamorphosis in animation is defined by Wells as, "the ability for an image to literally change into another completely different image" that enables narrative transitions, and the creation of "a fluid linkage of images through the process ... itself " (Wells, 1998: 69).

Metamorphosis - literally, changing from one form into another - has been a trope of animation from the Nineteenth Century pre-cinema optical toys - the zoëtropes, praxinoscope, and phenakistoscope, with their cycled graphic image sequences of squashed and stretched facial features and mutating bodies - to the animated films of early cinema, claymation works such as *Fun in a Bakery Shop* (1902)<sup>85</sup> that feature soft clay-dough 'coming to life', and Emile Cohl's *Phantasmagorie* (1908),<sup>86</sup> a continually transforming 'unconscious' stream of drawings. Wells comments also on the

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85. For a comprehensive description of the film and its production process, see Frierson (1994: 39-42).

86. For an account of Cohl's groundbreaking film of animated drawings, see Bendazzi (1994: 7-11) and Neupert (2011). Note that Bendazzi uses *Fantasmagorie*, the English translation of the film's title.



technique's ability to effect transformations, "defining the fluid *abstract* state between the fixed properties of the images before and after transition" and "connecting apparently unconnected images", and the capacity of metamorphosis to disrupt "established notions of ... storytelling" and "resist logical developments", instead creating "unpredictable linearities (both temporal and spatial)" (Wells, 1998: 69; original emphasis).

The animation work of Caroline Leaf is dependent on morphing graphic imagery in communicating narrative through creating 'real' and psychic spaces for the viewer, and suggesting the changing emotional environment of its characters. In all Leaf's animation made there is a sense of a fierce, personal vision and intimacy, achieved through scale - the artwork 'field' is small, and requires her to focus intently on mark-making within an area of only a few centimetres - and the virtuoso performance of the constantly changing images on the screen. Her best known film *The Street* (1976),<sup>87</sup> adapted from Mordecai Richler's short story set in the Montreal Jewish ghetto - about a boy's response to getting his own bedroom following his grandmother's death - is a tour-de-force of transformative flow. Its visuals were created through manipulating washes of coloured ink and paint on a glass sheet in response to the soundtrack of recorded voice (Ajan, 2002).<sup>88</sup> However, it is Leaf's 1977 sand on glass work, *The Metamorphosis of Mr. Samsa*, made at the same time as *The Street* (Vladermersky,

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87. The film received an Academy Award nomination, and was voted the best animation film of all time by the Olympiad of Animation, held in Los Angeles, 1984.

88. Caroline Leaf in interview with Midhat 'Ajan' Ajanovic, at Animafest, the World Festival of Animated Film, Zagreb, in 2002.

2003), that I want to explore next, in order to illuminate aspects that resonates most with *White Body*, especially in its depiction of the body through metamorphic imagery made of 'dirt'.

Leaf regards direct animation 'under the camera' as "a one-off performance" (Vladermersky, 2003). The transmutation of imagery in this process - from the animator's imaginary through her body and hand(s) of the material ingredients lying inert before her on a glass sheet - is both "a technique of immediacy" - because "one films as one draws, and one image is destroyed to create the next image" (Vladermersky, 2003)<sup>89</sup> - and a complex, technically difficult process requiring focused skill and sustained commitment over the many months during which Leaf worked alone on the rostrum, secluded with her materials. In the painstaking process of creating moving images frame-by-frame as a solo artist, I recall the seemingly impossible, complicated tasks of myth, folklore and fairy stories, which have to be completed as a condition for some reward. These are achieved by ingenuity - such as the Hellenistic tale of Psyche and Cupid, in which Venus sets Psyche the task of separating grains of wheat and millet, accomplished by Psyche with the help of ants (Warner, 1994: 326)<sup>90</sup> - or through persistent effort requiring suffering over a long time, for example, in Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Wild Swans' (1838/1955: 127-161), in which the banished Elisa gathers nettles from a graveyard and then, with her blistered fingers, weaves the spun thread into shirts that her eleven brothers (turned into swans

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89. Leaf speaking in an interview with Nag Vladermersky, conducted in Brittany in March 2002. Vladermersky's account of his interview with Leaf, was published as the feature article, 'Caroline Leaf: An Interview' in *Senses of Cinema* [online] issue 25 (21 March 2003). Available: [http://sensesofcinema.com/2003/feature-articles/caroline\\_leaf/](http://sensesofcinema.com/2003/feature-articles/caroline_leaf/) Accessed: 1 January 2015.

90. Warner expands on this tale, and discusses its medieval retellings and later iteration in Grimm, in the chapter, 'Wicked stepmothers' (Warner, 1994: 218-240).

by their wicked stepmother) can wear to return permanently to their human form once more.<sup>91</sup> Elisa's task is made particularly difficult by the need to remain mute throughout, as speaking one word will kill her brothers. In 'under the camera' direct animation there the animator has a similar feeling of facing an impossible task, as she works alone to create a film frame-by-frame, moving forwards steadily towards a goal that must be completed step by step. It is, in Leaf's words, a 'one off performance' requiring focus and concentrated effort that must be repeated incrementally and sustained throughout.

The metamorphic imagery characteristic of Leaf's work has its origins in her choice of beach sand for her first animation whilst a student at Harvard in the 1960s, and her successive development of this direct animation 'under the camera' technique in films such as *The Owl Who Married a Goose: An Eskimo Legend*, (1974), based on Inuit legend. The granular nature of dry sand makes it difficult for an animator to work with, as each particle continues to slide under its own weight on the smooth surface of glass, but the continual movement of the material allowed Leaf to develop a technique that embodies the fluidity of motion and sustains metamorphosis throughout a film, the shapes on the screen shifting and reforming in a constant flow.<sup>92</sup>

Leaf relies upon 'back lighting' for her sand animation, in which the glass sheet is lit from below, rendering the image two dimensional - the areas of sand become black,

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91. Pre-dating animation, metamorphosis is a key theme in fairytales, such as the transformation of the wicked queen into the evil witch in the Grimm brothers' fairy tale, 'Snow White'. For Marina Warner, "Shapeshifting (sic) is one of fairytale's dominant and characteristic wonders: hands are cut off, found and reattached, babies throats are slit, but they are later restored to life [...] metamorphosis defines the fairytale" (Warner, 1994: xv-xvi).

92. This fluidity of continual transformation is a feature also of her animated ink-on-glass films, such as *The Street* (1976).

and the transparent patches of glass, white, creating a silhouette effect that recalls the shadow play of early cinema, developed into a virtuoso artform by the German animator Lotte Reiniger.

Beach sand, a chosen medium of expression for Leaf, is associated with childhood play and enjoyment. Leaf's sand animations of the late 1960s and 1970s reflect the focus by some women artists of the second wave of feminism on 'household' materials that could denote women's marginalisation by the patriarchal society that oppresses them, and their traditionally subjugated position.<sup>93</sup>

As well as being a "particular kind of performance", Leaf states that she sees the process of making a film to be a metamorphosis which can take many years. She says that was drawn to the "intensely interior and psychological" nature of Kafka's storytelling in *Metamorphosis* (Vladermersky, 2003), and because of "the issue about 'appearance' [...] I liked the movement from the humane to the monstrous, and I liked the idea of 'metamorphosis'" (Wells, 2002: 107).<sup>94</sup>

## **Metamorphosis**

One morning, as Gregor Samsa was waking up from anxious dreams, he discovered that in bed he had been changed into a monstrous verminous bug. He lay on his armour-hard back and saw, as he lifted his head up a little, his brown, arched abdomen divided up into rigid bow-like sections. From this height the blanket, just about ready to slide off completely, could hardly stay in place. His numerous legs, pitifully thin in comparison to the rest of his circumference, flickered helplessly before his eyes. 'What's happening to me,' he thought. It was no dream. (Kafka, 1915/2004: 1).

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93. This is my observation - note that, to my knowledge, this has never been expressed by Caroline Leaf herself, or commented on by others.

94. Leaf speaking in an interview with Paul Wells: 'Interview with Caroline Leaf' in Wells (2002: 101-111).

In her adaptation of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*,<sup>95</sup> Leaf renders Gregor's beetle-body as a silhouette, a quivering shadow repelled by his own corporeality. Throughout, Gregor's outward appearance is that of a giant 'bug', whilst his thoughts and feelings are those of his human self. To his family, Gregor - someone with whom they are intimately familiar - has been 'made strange' and they are all unsettled by his physical transformation. The visceral force of his self-loathing is made more poignant by his family's rejection of him, and by his body's proximity to the recognisable symbols of home - single bed, wallpaper, alarm clock, door handle, dining table set for breakfast, a ball of wool being wound - sketched by Leaf's fingers in the layer of sand. The shadowy browns of Leaf's chiaroscuro recall the deep pools of shadow in horror cinema, into which we focus our gaze, fearful of what might emerge into our sight. Through the metamorphic interplay of shifting darkness and light, accompanied by a spare soundscape of foley and vocalisations, Leaf draws us into Gregor's mind of memory and emotion. The boundaries between Gregor's screen presence and his inner world are unstable: as Wells reminds us, "In enabling the collapse of the illusion of physical space, metamorphosis destabilises the image, conflating horror and humour, dream and reality, certainty and speculation" (Wells, 1998: 69).

Kafka's *Metamorphosis* has parallels between the metamorphic journey of its main character, Gregor, and that of the Freudian oedipal scenario. Kafka was writing around the same time that Freud was developing his ideas of the Oedipus complex, and his fictional characters are typically alienated and in conflict with authority. In *The Divided Self*, R.D. Laing has commented also on Kafka's uneasy relationship with his own and others' bodies (Laing, 1960). Gregor's story could be seen to embody the helplessness

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95. The narrative of her film takes place over the course of a single day.

of an infant with impaired communication, alienated within the oedipal family, trapped within a feeble body that oozes and seeps, fearfully suffering, he retreats to the confines of his bedroom and loses his sight, then blinded/castrated, he expires.

### **There is a Thread**

I recognise several features in Leaf's *Metamorphosis* that are shared with my own direct animation film, *White Body*. In both, the directly animated imagery is predominantly monochrome, created from familiar materials 'made strange', that connect with feminist art of the 1970s Women's Movement: beach or play-pit sand in *Metamorphosis*; sugar, plasticine, needle, thread, and fluffy dust for *White Body*.

Gregor's beetle-body with its lumpen torso and pitifully thin legs has a resemblance to the white body's dough-body and hairy cilia, suggestive of the arms of an anemone underwater. Gregor goes blind, the white body has no 'eyes' with which she may 'see'. The protagonists have impaired mobility - they scuttle and wriggle - and cannot/do not communicate with the verbal language of everyday discourse. Gregor can be seen as suffering castration anxiety to its ultimate conclusion, death; white body conveys the maternal and is therefore castrated because feminine.

Whereas Leaf's animation uses a single material for a two-dimensional, silhouetted shadow world throughout, my film incorporates several ingredients, lit from above to ensure the audience can see the three dimensional nature of my screen image, with no part obscured by shadow: white body does not conceal her "genital deficiency" (Freud, 1964: 132). In contrast to the helpless suffering of Leaf's Gregor, the white doll in *White Body* acts with a confident agency within its environment on the screen. At the end of

Leaf's film, space collapses around Gregor as he retreats to the confines of his room, overwhelmed by his experience of the world, and expires in a flurry of dark shadowy sand.

Like Gregor, the white body can 'escape' the prying eyes of the world by burying itself in its material surroundings, but has the capacity for transforming its body and regenerative reproduction; and, although it has no oral 'voice' with which it can speak, the white body does communicate through the embodied animated narrative created by the three dimensional materiality of its orifice/s.

*White Body* (2009) was created through a series of 'finger performances' that were filmed one frame at a time. The movements of my hands in making the film are not recorded: what remains is a chronological animated account which depicts the figure of a small white doll that grows from a ball of modeling clay, is cut and sewn shut, then buried and 'reborn' amongst a nest of white sugar and the dark stain of 'slut's wool' - that is, the fluffy dust that collects under furniture and along skirting boards. Play performed alone and in secret was the source of much delight to me when I was a child: in making *White Body* I enter the silence of that 'play space' as an artist, to connect with the past, and give form to feminine pleasure.

### *Finger Exercises*

I am five years old and we live on the other side of the country near Wisbech in the East Anglian Fens; our flat is part of a large old house. My mother now works the night shift as a nurse at the local hospital. In the school holidays a childminder comes to look after me during the day while my mum sleeps. After lunch I am put in a room on my own for an hour to 'be quiet and not move'.

My play is set by the piano, an upright instrument made of polished wood that sits on four small wheels. After carefully pushing aside the wooden stool with its prickly seat, I sit on the floor, my legs apart, under the overhanging bosom of the shuttered keyboard, next to its pedals.

The two pedals are smooth brass feet, cool and slightly pitted: piano and forte, one softens the note, the other amplifies; quiet and loud. Bending slightly, I slide my hands under the piano, and retrieve the collection of plasticine I have hidden: it has been moulded many times and is now marbled grey-purple, a combination of several colours, and furred with dust.

Once a week I visit a crotchety music teacher for an hour's piano lesson. She sits hunched by my side and raps my knuckles with a ruler if the backs of my hands aren't horizontal and level with my wrists and forearms: I am not allowed to look at my hands while I am playing, but am taught to stare ahead and fix my eyes on the sheet of music. The ivory keys are yellowing, some are mottled with grey, like old people's teeth. The long black keys are smooth chocolate fingers that rest between the flat off-white keys. In between my weekly lessons, I practise for an hour every day after my mother has woken up: my fingers feeling their way up and down the keyboard through scales and my first music exercises.

While playing, I try to focus my vision on my music book and not look down, but I have to keep checking that the backs of my hands are flat. It is a strange experience to look at black notes on a stave printed on white paper whilst my hands perform and create sounds that together make something that is music. I cannot reach the pedals whilst playing the piano as my five year old legs aren't long enough.

During my hour of enforced rest after lunch I am told by the childminder to be silent and still. I sit alone on the floor downstairs at the piano's feet whilst my fingers perform. The body of my mother lies breathing in her bed upstairs. I hear the waves of a distant ocean beating in slow motion and the rhythmic breeze of my breath, and the tiny noises made by cold plasticine as I squeeze and warm the clay between my hands: these sounds are accompanied by the almost imperceptible vibrations of the piano's body, as it hums and sings along to my secret play.

### **White Body**

At this point, the reader may wish to review the film *White Body* on the Creative Practice Elements DVD.

The rhythm of my fingers whilst performing stop-motion animation is an outward expression of my embodied psychic rhythm, a gentle *jouissance* that overflows to fill the silence. *Jouissance* is attributed to feminine language by Luce Irigaray: the word embodies rapturous sexual pleasure and blissful and diffuse fluidity, "within the



intimacy of that silent, multiple, diffuse touch" (Irigaray, 1974/1985a: 29). In *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973/1975),<sup>96</sup> Roland Barthes confirms and expands on Irigaray. He understands *jouissance* as an experience of *the body*; a blissful erotic intensity that bursts through our coherent consciousness<sup>97</sup> and disrupts one's sense of oneself as a unified subject. Importantly, Barthes consider *jouissance* as 'belonging to' infancy, an "unweaned language ... milky phonemes ... sucking ... the orally that produces ... pleasures" (Barthes, 1973/1975: 5).<sup>98</sup> My fingers communicate with each other through their contact with the material, which has no differentiated 'skin': its interior is the same substance as the exterior, the outer layer of the form exists in direct contact to the world/space beyond its boundary. As my hands interact with the milk-white plasticity of the clay, the flow of these musical rhythms create a link to my early childhood.

Irigaray principally discusses *jouissance* in two texts, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974/1985a) and *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977/1985b),<sup>99</sup> in which she explores possible connections between female sexuality and writing. As an artist I'm positioning myself with feminine mark-making, which I understand as a form of 'writing'. I see my

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96. Originally published as *Le Plaisir du text* by Les Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1973.

97. In the context of this thesis, I intend 'consciousness' to mean our awareness of various mental processes such as thinking and speaking, and also the rational aspects of our being. I refer to 'unconsciousness' as the mental processes which are generally 'hidden' from the conscious mind, and the bio-physiological processes of the corporeal body. The unconscious may be accessed in the recollection of dreams and is evident in the 'gaps between' consciousness, such as 'slips of the tongue'.

98. In *The Pleasure of the Text*, although Barthes is concerned with literary texts, his distinction between '*plaisir*' and '*jouissance*' is a sound one. He divides the effects of texts into two: *plaisir* ('pleasure') and *jouissance*. These terms correspond to his further categorisation of texts as 'readerly' and 'writerly'. Barthes states that the pleasure of the text corresponds to the readerly text, which does not challenge the reader's position as a subject; the writerly text provides the 'bliss' of *jouissance*, which fractures literary codes and ruptures the coherent consciousness of the reader. As Susan Hayward observes, one can experience pleasure and *jouissance* in the same text - the former is "enunciated in language" and belongs to the Symbolic Order; the latter is "largely unspoken" and located in the Imaginary (Hayward, 2000: 303).

99. Originally published as *Ce Sexe qui n'en pas un* by Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris, in 1977.

animation practice as *écriture féminine*: a writing of the feminine that I associate with my white modeling clay. Irigaray uses the term *parler femme* (in French, 'to speak (as) woman') whilst Hélène Cixous, in *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975/1976/1981),<sup>100</sup> refers to *écriture féminine* ('feminine writing'): both are concerned with experimental process and "writing the body's language", and both agree that this is a body-centred practice. Cixous says that a woman speaks through "writing" with "white ink", a "physical materialisation" of "her thought", expressed through the "little of that good mother's milk" which is "always within her" (Cixous, 1975: 251). In the protected/protective space of Woolf's 'room', I mould the white modeling clay and manipulate the solidified, but still malleable maternal milky essence of Cixous' 'white ink', giving form and substance to 'writing the body'. The body's inscription through *jouissance* is both transgressive (Lacan, 1986/1997),<sup>101</sup> and must be practised in secret. In a recent interview, Cixous states, "To a certain extent, one can only transgress in secret - hence without witness" (in Jeannet *et al*, 2006: 255). Irigaray supports the need for secrecy and a protective space, and says that femininity "may be recovered only in secret, in hiding" (Irigaray, 1985a: 30). The digital animation *White Body* remains as a residue of performance, a chronological trace of the play of my silent and invisible fingers, continually in a process of transition, of metamorphosis, of 'becoming'.

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100. Reprinted from *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* vol. 1 no. 4 (Summer 1976), Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. pp. 875-893; a revised version of 'Le Rire de la Méduse', originally published in *L'Arc* 61 (1975), pp. 39-54.

101. As discussed in my previous chapter.

## **Making White Body: Moving into the Silence**

The technical set up is a digital video camera attached to the rostrum in my studio that was once an upstairs bedroom. The camera connects to a laptop with a FireWire cable; iStopMotion software enables me to record individual frames and playback the sequence as the animation builds up. The camera looks down onto a sheet of white paper and is set to film in colour: in the RGB system red, green and blue light combine in to yield white light. I fix a single soft light to the back of the rostrum so that there is a slight shadow that falls away to the left, giving an impression of three dimensionality to the screen image. At this stage my mind is blank. I create a space for absence, a silent place in my mind where the film will be, projected onto the rostrum stage under the camera. The blank whiteness of the paper waits to be inscribed with 'feminine writing', a space that is doubly bounded: once by its edge, but also upon the screen by the framing of the camera.

Over the next two weeks I complete seven sessions on the rostrum, animating in silence on my own without a break for sixty to ninety minutes each time. I perform the animation standing up, poised over the set I have created on the rostrum: the area in view to the camera fits into a circle made by my outstretched middle fingers and thumbs. Working at such a small scale requires an intense focus of concentration: as my fingers push and pull and tweak and stroke, I need to control my breathing so as not to disturb the fragile artwork.

In the practice of stop-motion animation I am led by the sense of touch: my fingers move my material into incremental positions, which I record as a single photograph in my computer. These still images build up when played back, and are seen on the screen

to create an animated gestural visual language of feminine pleasure. For Irigaray, female pleasure and language grow "indefinitely" through their "passage in and through the other" (Irigaray, 1974/1985a: 31). The 'other' here is perhaps the inanimate thing that, when animated through stop-motion appears to possess agency. A thing becomes a being, an object lives as a subject: there is intense pleasure in this magical transformation, which is multiplied when the material being manipulated has plasticity, and can be moulded and sculpted and made to appear to shift from one shape into another.

The animation technique originates in the 'trick films' created by professional stage magician Georges Méliès in the early days of cinema. In stop-motion animation an illusion of moving image is created through stitching together successive frames or still photographs that have been recorded of a view of the three dimensional 'real world'. Méliès recreated his illusionist stage acts for cinema and translated the sleight of hand, illusion or 'trick' of the live stage performance - in which the magician manipulates the audience's attention and directs us to see what we believe we see - by filming one frame at a time: on the screen we only see the 'finished' moments of the performance of the animator's hands.

I have to film at night because it is summer and my curtains let in too much light during the day. Although the scenes are created on different days, my animation-in-process lies untouched on the rostrum in between filming sessions so that each sequence follows on from the one before. I do not watch what I have filmed in between: during these pauses in production the animation exists in my mind as I move from making (touch) to being a spectator (seeing). I remember the magic transformations I have

effected, which are intensely pleasurable for me, and I imagine the people who will experience the embodied viscosity of the film on the screen, once it is made, and the pleasure that will be affected.

In my animation work I choose to seclude myself in my studio and place myself voluntarily 'in hiding', within the protective and protected space of Woolf's 'room of one's own', discussed in the previous chapter. There is a need for an inviolable space, physical and psychological refuge where I am shielded from patriarchy, and can be free to follow my thoughts and discover my interiority as a woman. This is in contrast to my imprisonment as a five year old, when silence was imposed upon me in the piano room by the authority of a childminder, an adult whose word was law. For me the absence of sound is the place of nothing, an erasure, a space between words, a silent place between my body and language: when 'two lips' touch, there is at first silence. Irigaray emphasises the voluntary state of silence, which she considers to be a gesture that must be "safeguarded" in order for a woman to find her language and express her identity (Irigaray, 2002: 103). It is through feminine *jouissance*, which emerges from the maternal body and its abundant materiality, that I find my own body's language.

### **Sequence 1**

The first ingredient I choose to make the film *White Body* is a corrugated strip of white plasticine, left over from a commissioned animation. To start the film I slice off a third of the modeling clay with a surgical scalpel fitted with a 10A blade. I roll the pliable material between my fingers and sculpt a rudimentary human figure, which I curl

inward on itself and place in the approximate centre of the sheet of paper. A soft white lumpy shape appears on the screen: it could be a hand that is made of dough or the mulberry-like cluster of cells known as a morula that is the early human embryo.

There is no referent by which the scale of the image may be judged, but the clump has slight irregularities in its surface that reveal the imprint of fingers, and so the sense is of something small and round that can be cupped in the palm. The object's appearance of three dimensional roundness conveys the sense that the mass is resting upon the 'ground', and that we are looking down and in close-up. I record a frame, and another, and another... the shape opens out and reveals itself to be the figure of a white doll, and there is also the sense that it is 'standing' upright within the frame.

Immediately a cut appears slashed from groin to chin and stainless steel darning needle cuts through its body from right to left several times, leaving a fringe of white threads on either side of the torso; the crack is sealed, the legs close, and are sewn shut by the needle and thread. These closely spaced parallel rows of running stitches are used to fill or reinforce worn areas of a textile; the thread is 'woven' in rows along the grain of the fabric.

The shallow incision that runs up from between the legs of the doll suggests the vulval groove of a young girl's body where her 'two lips' meet. The dough-like softness of the small body and its virginal whiteness reinforce our perception of its vulnerability as the sharp needle pierces laterally through the plasticine flesh on either side of the cleft, and it heals over. I recall Irigaray's description of the women's genitals within the scopic paradigm of patriarchy as being "simply absent, masked, sewn back inside their 'crack'" (Irigaray, 1974/1985a: 26).

When the body is sutured for non-medical reasons, it is an action of control and of transgression that crosses boundaries of acceptable behaviour and mutilates the inviolate human body. Examples include infibulation, sewing up a girl's vagina to 'protect' her virginity and ensure purity, undertaken for cultural, social or religious reasons, in order to ensure that (vaginal) sexual intercourse cannot take place until the threads are cut (World Health Organization, 2014); and sewing the lips around the mouth together; an extreme strategy practiced by both women and men, as a last resort, often in desperation, to draw attention to inhumane treatment by the law and as an appeal for their (silenced) voices to be heard (Thornhill, 2011).

The suturing of the doll's pudendum (in Latin, literally 'a shameful thing') to conceal its presence and protect its value as a commodity to be exchanged within patriarchy merely creates a second vulva, one that is larger, hairy, more delineated, bolder. The doll becomes a vulval body with vestigial wings and a clitoral head, whose form and animation convey the sense of something alive. The suturing control that closes the female body is metamorphosed into an autonomous, joyous plurality of defiance that Irigaray describes as "always in the process of weaving itself" (Irigaray, 1974/1985a: 29).

## **Sequence 2**

The fringe of cilia around the torso and fused-together legs flutter to and fro in rhythmic beats. More hairs grow out of the creature's head, and sway as if moved by underwater currents. At this point I feel a desire for my fingers to work with white granulated sugar, so I walk to local Co-op store and buy some. The waving of the

threads becomes more agitated; grains of crystalline white emanate from the head, cover the white body and then fill the whole screen with a gentling rippling ocean floor of fine white sand.

As I work on alone into the night, I flick the cotton threads and manipulate the sugar grains repeatedly with my fingers that they will appear to move; and I can taste the scent of candyfloss: moving the sugar around with my hands releases small particles of sugar into the air.<sup>102</sup>

In this sequence the animation of the threads and the grains of sugar that 'little girls are made of' goes "off in all directions", a characteristic of the *jouissance* Irigaray attributes to feminine language (Irigaray, 1974/1985a: 29). As a child I was intoxicated by my knowledge of my corporeal body and my affect upon the secret world I inhabited, a phenomenological domain of *jouissance* that was multi-layered, interactive and continually 'flooding' between modes of experience (Irigaray, 1977/1985b: 229).

### **Sequence 3**

I make a depression with my finger in the middle of the smooth white crystals, the whole surface becomes alive with dimples, and the hairy white figure excavates itself, its body crazed with sugar grains that I have pressed into the plasticine. The threads waft backwards and forwards, the figure flattens and is covered in sugar once again.

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102. In other 'under the camera' direct animation work, I have used refined table salt as a medium. After about an hour, there is a briny smell and I become aware that I am breathing in the fine salt dust that has been dispersed into the air around the rostrum through the actions of my hands animating. The particles of refined white sugar, such as those used in making *White Body*, are larger and become airborne less than salt crystals, but I can taste the sugar while animating - it has a slight, caramelised sweetness, perhaps from the heat of the rostrum lamp.



In retrospect, the waving cilia are reminiscent of the snakes that writhe around the head of Cixous' laughing medusa. The 'quickness' of the white body's figuration and its 'nest' is clearly the result of the touch of playful fingers. The scene conveys the multiple fluidity of the feminine through the animation "everywhere" of its joyous materiality (Irigaray, 1977/1985b: 336).

In writing (*écriture*), sense is translated to touch, words are effected through the body. This suggests a corporeal in-between space in which feeling-sensing becomes transposed to touching, an embodied abstraction that exists beyond the world of reality (Bachner, 2005: 155-182).

Modeling clay is capable of assuming any form, and all parts are interchangeable: it possesses infinite possibilities and is in a continual state of becoming. All the same: matter in a constant state of becoming through the touch of my fingers, its poetic sensibility created through an irrepressible and continual overflow of *jouissance*. The white body is a dough creature, a doll-familiar created by kneading and squeezing. Yeasty, soft and unbaked, unfixed in form, the material is moist and pliable: it responds to my touch, becomes warm. A living substance, it embodies the kneaded maternal breast plumped with milk that writes my body, and becomes me.

#### **Sequence 4**

Ripples of movement spread out from the white threads that are clear of the sprinkling of sugar over the figure. During a series of seismic pulses created by the edges of both my hands, more of the threads are revealed, curving around a circular depression.

### **Sequence 5**

I harvest fluffy grey dust known as slut's wool from the corridor outside the room, and apply a fingerful to the centre of the image where the squashed body is just visible. A stain appears, then a slit, which I sculpt into the folded edges of a seam while the threads wave magically in front. The fleshy material folds back on itself, bending into itself so that outside and inside are proximate and visible at the same time. A vulval opening has been created, which swells and disgorges hanks of fluffy grey woollen dust as the now slightly grubby threads wave to and fro. Dirty materiality spills from the pure white plasticine, made from the finest China clay 'newly born' from the earth. My hands smooth a layer of white sugar across so that no features are visible, just the protrusion of a pubic mound.

### **Sequence 6**

I cut another third off the plasticine strip and chop this up into small chunks, which I roll into balls: these swirl around the screen in a spiral and line up in two vertical rows running from the top of the frame to the bottom. A muscular spasm: a line of dust splits the screen down the middle forming a wound. The needle reappears and sews across from right to left in a series of stitches, leaving a trail of threads behind. A larger white ball or egg appears in the centre, more balls become visible; some are encrusted with sugar and appear bound with threads. The bundle of eggs and woven threads expands in a series of pulsing waves, expelling more and more slut's wool. This is the second iteration of sewing, a suturing that does not close, which evokes Irigaray's statement that feminine pleasure flows from "the non-suture of her lips" (Irigaray,

1977/1985b: 30). The lips which, for Irigaray, touch themselves in auto-affection and define *woman as herself* - rather than a lack or an absent phallus:<sup>103</sup> "This self-touching gives woman a form that is in(de)finitely transformed" (Irigaray, 1974/1985a: 233).

## **Sequence 7**

The mass of crunchy white eggs in their nest of sugar and dust continues to erupt. I use a paintbrush with hog's hair bristles to sweep away an oval area in the middle of the screen: a slit appears, which I mould with my fingers to create a vulval crevice, nestled by a ring of threads and dirty fluff.

I make five balls from the modeling clay, that gradually increase in size from a dried pea to a small button mushroom. I place the smallest ball in the approximate centre of the orifice and record a frame, I replace this ball with the next in size and record a frame, and so on until a white egg appears to inflate like a balloon or blister and then suddenly becomes the curled body seen in the first sequence, unfurling as a white figure with rudimentary arms, legs and head which I have formed from the last third of the plasticine strip. More and more dust is ingrained on the white body until it is completely covered in fur, and the screen fades to white.

## **Writing: White Body**

In *This Sex Which is Not One*, (1977/1985b), Irigaray counters Freud's view of the female child as a little man, with her clitoris a rudimentary penis (Freud, 1964: 112-135).<sup>104</sup> Instead she focuses on a woman's two sets of lips as a metaphor that

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103. I refer here to Freud and Lacan.

104. Here, I refer to Freud's lecture 33 'Femininity', pp. 112-135 in volume XXII (1932-1936) 'New introductory lectures on psychoanalysis and other works' published in 1964; part of Freud, S. (1953-1974) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* translated by James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis.

figures female morphology, making a connection between the labia/lips that embrace the orifice of speech, the mouth, and the labia/lips that embrace the vulval opening. Irigaray states that woman is "already two - but not divisible into ones" (Irigaray, 1974/1985a: 24). By this she puts forward the proposition that the feminine is only seen as a hole, a lack, and absence when the male body is the template: if the penis/phallus is removed, the lips are free to touch. They do not fuse shut, to be made 'one', but allow an opening that is always in touch, and may take on an infinity of different forms (Irigaray, 1974/1985a: 229). In *White Body*, the clay flesh that forms the labial bodies of the twin white bodies, is always in motion, metamorphosing between one shape and (an)other; the 'lips' of plasticine open and speak 'woman', and write the feminine body.

The seven animation sequences joined together create a film that lasts for just over a minute. After its first public exhibition the film was screened as a loop that continuously and seemingly endlessly cycled through the sequences. Projected onto the gallery floor the white clay figure as long as my thumb was enlarged to human scale. After this initial presentation, an audio recording of ambient watery sounds - waves softly breaking on the Plymouth shore - was added, along with a title and credits, enabling the film to be shown either on a monitor or projected in a range of exhibition contexts.

The audio recording that accompanies the animated images was chosen to suggest interior sounds of the body and liquidity. Water is an element that ripples and trickles and is in continual flux of form; it is "the feminine element *par excellence*" and one of

Cixous' most important symbols of the feminine (Moi, 1985/2002: 117). Irigaray sees complex interrelationship with the fluidity of liquid water and the creativity of the feminine (1980/1991); and, Kristeva associates the sea directly with maternal language: "The word is where the sea/mother (*mer/mère*) sings" (Kristeva, 2005/2010). Feminine language is outside patriarchal discourse, its waters flow beyond its boundaries: in the soundtrack of *White Body* we hear the susurrations of salty ocean waves, which become a limen upon which feminine identity is continually undone and remade in an unending process of becoming.

The title *White Body* is descriptive of its principal character, the clay doll. In fact the body is a multiple, as the second white body is, essentially, 'born' from the body of the first figure which is buried in the nest beneath it and which metamorphoses into the labia and vulval orifice.

In reflecting on the completed animation, this animated (re)birth recalls the deep archaeological excavation that Sigmund Freud suggested is necessary to uncover the long-forgotten nature of woman's sexuality. We cannot see 'behind' the modeling clay and dust figure on the screen at the end that conceals the first vulval-doll buried within: what lies beneath is invisible, hidden. What occurred is in our memory: the succession of still images, moments viewed at 25 frames each second that combine to create an illusion of movement, as they pour through the present and spin off into the past.

As a child I infiltrated the space of pristine silence with small clumps of dirty plasticine, secreted below the radar of the controlling gaze of the 'minder'. A prison became a delight, a rebellion, as I undermined the law and entered willingly into the silence. I

embraced the hushed absence and found myself through the circular discourse of my lived experience within my body and the evolution and expression of my 'body's language' through gesture and images, "invented" - to use Irigaray's word - through transgressive play and silence (Irigaray, 1974/1985a: 214). *Écriture féminine* is associated with transgression: it is, "by its nature transgressive, rule-transcending, intoxicated" (Barry, 2002: 128). The silence of this 'room of my own' allows my body to 'speak'.

When I animate, the action of my fingers performs letters and words, gestural traces of an 'other' alphabet, writing the body. The voice emerges from deep within the body, given ephemeral form through breath, sound waves travelling away and rippling back, vibrating the body. Oral music of the lips, electromagnetic energy experienced aurally and in the body, passing through the membrane of the skin into and beyond the humid dark interior: writing the body.

### **Uncanny Bodies**

The ability of the female body to shock was highlighted for me when *White Body* was selected for the *HerStory* exhibition, presented by the group Women's Work for the gallery at University of Winchester in summer 2011, and then withdrawn. Shortly before the event, one of the organisers contacted me to say that they had to unfortunately remove my film from the exhibition, because of Winchester University's policy that work on display should be 'suitable for a family audience' - because its gallery is hired for wedding receptions.<sup>105</sup> In a phone conversation with a very apologetic member of Women's Work, I was told the offending imagery was -

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105. My film was screened throughout the private view opening event, and included on the *HerStory* DVD, produced by Women's Work after the exhibition.

specifically - my depiction of a white plasticine vulva, seemingly 'bleeding' dust, that had the potential to 'cause offence', and its dynamic, seemingly 'living' appearance had reinforced the decision for the work to be banned from public view.

Since the film was made in the summer of 2008, *White Body* has been shown many times in a range of exhibition contexts. In its first showing, as a silent projection onto the gallery floor,<sup>106</sup> some visitors responded playfully by laying down on top of the image of the white doll, which I had projected to 'human scale'. Following its iteration as a one minute film with sound in 2009, *White Body* has been shown in festivals and galleries, projected with live musical accompaniment,<sup>107</sup> and on urban screens including all the UK Big Screens<sup>108</sup> and in the Merrion Centre, a shopping mall in Leeds.<sup>109</sup> Apart from its 'silencing' by exclusion from the *HerStory* exhibition, I am not aware of any other adverse responses to the film. However, *White Body's* 'disquieting strangeness' was revealed by an email I received in 2010 from the organiser of the *Abertoir* Film Festival, who was interested in showing the film at its next festival of horror film that autumn.<sup>110</sup> Before this inquiry, I had not considered *White Body* as potentially 'belonging' to the genre of horror film, and will discuss this reading later in the chapter.

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106. The work was presented as part of the 'Immersion' exhibition, for the Land/Water and the Visual Arts summer symposium, *Landscape and Beauty*, 26 June to 1 July 2008. 'Immersion' was presented by four postgraduate research students who were enrolled at Plymouth University at that time: Nicola Gilmour, Melanie Morrell, Sally Waterman, and me.
  107. The film was rescored by The Cabinet of Living Cinema, which performed its new composition at screenings of *White Body* presented by Whirlygig Cinema, from January 2011 to January 2014.
  108. *White Body* was included in volume 3 of the One Minute artists' moving image collection, curated by Kerry Baldry. The collection was shown first on Hull Big Screen, 1 June to 31 July 2009, and then presented across the UK Big Screen network 27 July to 2 August 2009.
  109. For Lumen's *Art in Unusual Places* exhibition, 3 December 2009 to 14 January 2010; shown as part of the One Minute volume 3 programme.
  110. The *Abertoir* Film Festival organiser had seen the film at the ICA, where it was screened in the London Short Film Festival in January 2010. *Abertoir* is an international horror film festival, held annually in Aberystwyth, Wales.

The response to my film, selected for the *HerStory* exhibition and then 'removed' because of its perceived potential to 'upset' 'families', was more extreme than I had anticipated. I had not expected people would need to be protected from seeing my animated white doll - but it does remind me of the power of images, and their capacity to disturb, unsettle, and shock to such an extent that they need to be hidden from the sight of 'ordinary members of the public'. The censorship of *White Body* in this instance does have a comedic aspect - for example, imagine the groom confronted by the sight of an unruly white vulvic plasticine doll, disgorging slut's wool, behind his new bride in virginal white - but it is a reminder that, despite the efforts of three previous feminist waves, we continue to be oppressed by a patriarchy which regards a visual representation of the female body that does not conform to its ideological system as challenging its authority.

In this study, my practice explores the concept of *écriture féminine* and aims to write the female body into discourse - a position that is counter to patriarchal authority and which transgresses its codes. According to Cixous, *écriture féminine*:

can never be theorized, enclosed, coded...But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogentric system. ... It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate. (Cixous, 1976: 883)

However, as she points out,

as soon as there is law, and that's what makes me tremble, there is transgression, almost structurally: the law, showing you the forbidden, gives you the desire to flee, therefore the desire? (Cixous in Jeannet, 2006: 254)

As an artist, I feel the same lure to what is forbidden as I did during childhood. This pull to break rules, a desire that that is almost a compulsion, to move to the very place that



is out of bounds, seems engendered by the existence of the law itself. My response to 'law' is to transgress, but under cover of secrecy; and, in doing so, I 'find myself on the other side' (Cixous in Jeannet, 2006: 254).

As Cixous observes, "one can only transgress in secret" (in Jeannet, 2006: 255). The play of feminine *jouissance* during the process of animating 'in secret' creates the doubled white body that is clearly sexed as female and suggestive of feminine sexuality. Lacan refers to "the paradoxical origins of desire [and] the polymorphously perverse character of its infantile forms", and of "perverse *jouissance*" which must be tamed (Lacan, 1986/1997: 4). The animated figure of the twice-born white body that is seen by viewers does not adhere to the socio-cultural norms of patriarchy. The author (film-maker/ animator) and reader (viewer/spectator/audience) are challenged by *écriture féminine*, which Cixous urges as a strategy to confront patriarchal discourse - in order to open up a new space for meanings (Cixous, 1976: 875). As maker-mother of the newly-born, white body twin, I am surprised by the new creature I have 'given birth to' through my secret animating, when she 'comes' out and can be seen on the screen. Through my 'know how', acquired through many years of practice, I am delighted - not repelled - by the strangeness of the *White Body* animation that writes my body. However, the censorship of the film in the *HerStory* exhibition reminds me that

transgressive representation of the female body and depiction of feminine sexuality may be considered by some as too shocking to be seen - even when<sup>111</sup> depicted in the familiar materials<sup>112</sup> of sugar, dust, and plasticine.<sup>113</sup>

### On Looking

The paradox of phallogentrism in all its manifestations is that it depends on the image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning to its world. An idea of woman stands as linchpin to the system: it is her lack that produces the phallus as a symbolic presence, it is her desire to make good the lack that the phallus signifies [...] the function of woman in forming the patriarchal unconscious is two-fold: she first symbolises the castration threat by her real lack of a penis and second thereby raises her child into the symbolic. [...] Woman's desire is subjected to her image as bearer of the bleeding wound; she can exist only in relation to castration and cannot transcend it. She turns her child into the signifier of her own desire to possess a penis (the condition, she imagines, of entry into the symbolic). (Mulvey, 1989/2009: 14)

Luce Irigaray writes that the "'elsewhere' of feminine pleasure can be found only at the price of crossing back through the mirror that subtends all speculation", although she won't define what forms a feminine language could take: this is up to each of us to find for ourselves (Irigaray, 1977/1985b: 77-78; Grosz, 1989: 131). Various registers of 'pleasure' operate during the making of *White Body*. I experience the joy of *jouissance* as my fingers remember the play of my childhood and animate the materials. My hands knead the doll's body, which 'becomes' the forms of outer and inner genitals - a pudendum, then a vulval cleft with labial folds; I sift the sugar grains and gently waft

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111. Or, even, because of - these are not the materials used in mainstream animation production.

112. Although the use of everyday materials such as these would be considered as 'belonging to' experimental animation, the practice follows a tradition that stretches back through the Twentieth Century. The artist Helena Smith Dayton, one of the earliest women animators, used human hair in the construction of plasticine models for her animated fairy tales. Her first film, *Romeo and Juliet*, was distributed through the Educational Film Corporation of America in 1917 (Wells, 1998: 58). Also, I recall that it was my *knowing* that the Hungarian film-maker Berthold Bartosch had used soap to create the poetic imagery in his 1932 film *L'Idée*, which prompted me to make animated films in 1986. For discussion of *L'Idée*, see Russett and Starr, 1976/1988, pp. 83-89; Bendazzi, 1994, pp. 38-40; and Chapter Three in Neupert, 2011.

113. In my practice as an artist film-maker, I do not consider audience response until after the work is completed, with the exception of pieces that are commissioned for a specific audience or context.

the creature's waves of hair. My fingers transmit the tactile sensations, which are felt as a delightful frisson, and I feel that I am both inside and outside my body. There is a doubled pleasure in looking during this creative process: the pleasure of seeing these same objects 'quicken' and come to life on the screen as I work, and the subjective pleasure of 'seeing myself from within' in the process of animating.

Conventional cinema conveys an illusion of looking on a scene in an 'other' place, as an unseen observer hidden in the darkness of the auditorium in which they sit.<sup>114</sup> In a conventional cinema, the spectator experiences a feeling of power through their gaze - there is no reciprocal looking from the 'other' side of the screen. Laura Mulvey's political analysis of cinema in her 1975 article 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema'<sup>115</sup> used psychoanalytic theory to demonstrate the ways in which the patriarchal unconscious had structured film form.<sup>116</sup> The "cinematic scopic regime" of representation is informed by the phallogocentric Freudian-Lacanian paradigm, in which the image is centrally important to the formation of subjecthood, and produces a viewing subjectivity that meshes with unconscious processes (Metz, 1975: 62). Central to this scopic regime is the generation of a viewing subjectivity predicated on absence, a lack, because the performer's body on the screen occupy a different space to that of the viewer: "as the absence of the object seen ... The cinema signifier ... installs a new figure of the lack" (Metz, 1975: 63).<sup>117</sup> Mulvey argued that the predominant form of

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114. In a purpose-built cinema, the technologies which produce the moving image and film sound are concealed, and thus support the fantasy appearing before one's eyes 'by magic'.

115. Written in 1973 and first published in *Screen* volume 16 (Autumn 1975) pp. 6-18.

116. Mulvey's feminist perspective in her 1975 paper, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', was informed by the second wave critique of the dominant socio-cultural and politics systems of that time which subjugated women.

117. Metz argues that this cinematic signifier is 'imaginary', because there is a double absence: not only is the body of the performer absent from the cinema, but the body of the 'character' from whom the 'act' derives is also absent. Metz argued that cinema is the ultimate artform of the imaginary, as it is the most "sensorially present", because it manipulates five material components

Hollywood narrative cinema coded erotic pleasure through the controlling language of a patriarchal system, constructed around and fundamentally dependent on a male spectator and the function of a male gaze that enjoys identifying with the male hero and derives pleasure from a representation of women that exploits them as a passive screen objects.

In traditional narrative film experienced in a conventional cinema, the viewer's body is immobilised in a seated position that recalls an infant's lack of autonomous physical capacity. Mulvey further argued that the cinematic gaze draws into play Lacan's mirror stage, which pre-dates the development of language, in which a child's recognition of its image 'in a mirror' creates a feeling that this reflected image of itself is superior to its actual embodied experience of itself. Here the ego becomes split between a fantasy image of oneself as autonomously 'all powerful' and the 'real' experience of the lack of motor function one's corporeal body. The cinema screen resembles a mirror, in that both frame the body in its surroundings and are dependent on sight for their effect. The viewer identifies with the image representation of the illusory character-object on the screen, effectively 'projecting their ego' onto the film's protagonist and identifying with the (male) screen actor, whilst 'losing their own ego in the dark cinematic space.

Mulvey identified three levels of cinematic gaze which combine to satisfy a wish to derive pleasure from looking and sexually objectify women: the 'look' of the camera, the perspective of the male character intrinsic to the film narrative, and the spectatorial gaze of the audience. In retrospect, the agency of the white clay doll and

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of communication - analogical image, graphic image, sound, speech, and dialogue - but what it depicts is absent. This combination of presence/absence "is characteristic of imaginary, as exemplified in the mirror stage of Jacques Lacan" (Penley, 1989: 63).

its doubled nature in *White Body*, seems to intentionally resist the male gaze: she is not powerless, her materiality acts in conjunction with the materials of which 'she' is constituted - sugar, sewing thread, and dust. The white body is an object given agency through the 'magic' of animation, but not sexually objectified.

In *White Body*, the rostrum filming set-up with its overhead camera view can be regarded as a 'controlling' gaze. It has been set up that way, and only permits what is 'allowed' to be seen to be visible on the screen. This selective vision does not, for example, reveal the sleight of my 'animator's hands' at work, or the intervals that elapsed between each period of animating. The closeness of the view and focus on such a small area eliminates the distance between the (male) spectator and female character that Mulvey argued was necessary for voyeurism to function in film.<sup>118</sup>

The white doll is recognisably sexed as female, there is no 'character' that can be identified as male. Although lying on her back (held in place by gravity) on a 'bed' of white sugar, 'she' is not passive but 'appears' to have agency and the ability to move independently, as she wriggles around and mutates from one shape into another. In this supine position, she 'cannot', perhaps, escape the camera's controlling view and leave the screen by moving 'off frame', but evades the camera's and our gaze by going underground, burying herself 'underneath', below the covering of sugary dust... and then reproduces herself and creates a second white body.

The viewer's position as a spectator is meant to be challenged from the outset, when they see an image on a vertical screen that can only exist horizontally in the 'real world'

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118. As a spectator, I feel a detached curiosity, a 'desiring look' that compels but does not control - however, I am seeing the film *White Body* 'as a woman' and my body responds to the doubled white body in recognition of its likeness to my own.

- as the sugar grains rely on gravity to maintain their position and would, otherwise, fall onto the floor - although there is a perceptive dissonance, as the white body appears to be 'standing' upright. The spectator is confronted then by the appearance of a moulded white form suggestive of a woman's body part - this is clearly not a female 'character' who can be controlled through a male gaze.

In Mulvey's analysis, based on the Freudian-Lacanian paradigm, woman is "a bearer of meaning but not a maker of meaning":

Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as a bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning. (Mulvey, 1989/2009: 15)

in *White Body*, the white body demonstrably draws attention to its 'lack' of a male sexual organ. The 'meaning' of *her* white body is unclear at the beginning of the film, but it is clearly *creating* meaning, and *she* has the power to shock.

### **Uncanny Feminine**

I attribute such responses to *White Body*, at least partly, to what we might call 'the uncanny feminine', created through animated metamorphosis and the use of familiar, household materials. The uncanny, *Das Unheimliche* in German, meaning literally 'unhomely', can be the recurrence of something from childhood, that reminds us of our psychic past, which is hitherto forgotten - a thing hidden that has been revealed. It can also establish a connection to the animistic beliefs of primitive humans and children, a fantastical happening that appears to be magically 'real'.

Freud's 1919 essay 'The 'uncanny'<sup>119</sup> begins by uncovering the etymological roots of the German word for 'uncanny', *unheimlich*,<sup>120</sup> which derives from *heimlich*, which means both "what is familiar and agreeable" and "what is concealed and kept of of sight" (Freud, 1955: 224 - 225). A translator's note here, highlights the similar ambiguity that exist in the English word 'canny', which can mean 'cosy', as in 'snug', and possessing occult or magical powers (Freud, 1955: 225).<sup>121</sup> Freud rejects Ernst Jentsch's relation of the uncanny to "the novel and unfamiliar" in his 1906 paper 'On the Psychology of the Uncanny'<sup>122</sup> (Freud, 1955: 220-221). Instead Freud proposes that the uncanny 'effect' is the result of something once familiar, made unfamiliar through being hidden, and made visible, becomes a source of fear, horror and revulsion.<sup>123</sup>

He ascribes the uncanny quality of the 'double' - meeting one's own image in mirror reflections and shadows - to the creation of a 'double' in early childhood, before ego formation, that has now become "a thing of terror" because it has become "foreign" (Freud, 1955: 236).<sup>124</sup> Freud also placed the supernatural in the uncanny, as something

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119. It is not known when Freud wrote this essay, although he was exploring ideas about the compulsion to repeat as early as 1913. Published 1955 in *S.E. volume XVII (1917-1919) 'An infantile neurosis and other works'* pp. 217-252. A pdf facsimile of the essay is available: <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/burt/uncanny.pdf> Accessed: 1 January 2015.
120. I refer to Alix Strachey's English translation of Freud's essay 'The 'Uncanny'', made under the guidance of her husband James Strachey, and follow her German spelling of 'uncanny' and 'canny'; pp. 217-252 in *S.E. vol. XVII (1917-1919)*. A pdf facsimile of the S.E. essay is available: <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/burt/uncanny.pdf> Accessed: 1 January 2015.
121. In English, 'canny' derives from the Anglo Saxon root 'ken', meaning 'knowledge', 'understanding' - uncanny, therefore, something beyond/outside one's knowledge, awareness.
122. See Jentsch, E. (1906/1997) 'On the Psychology of the Uncanny (1906)', translated by Roy Sellers, in *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities* vol. 2 no. 1 (1997). This study was a precursor to Freud's investigation. Available as pdf: [http://www.art3idea.psu.edu/locus/Jentsch\\_uncanny.pdf](http://www.art3idea.psu.edu/locus/Jentsch_uncanny.pdf) Accessed: 1 January 2015. Note that I have used the 1997 publication date given by the journal publisher - the translator gives the publication date as 1995.
123. In her essay, 'Fiction and its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche* (The 'uncanny')', "divided between literature and psychoanalysis" (Cixous, 1976: 528), Cixous highlights Freud's belief that Jentsch's downfall was his failure to consider literature as well as everyday experience and she comments on Jentsch's 'intellectual' perspective on the uncanny as being "antianalytical because of its phenomenological approach to strangeness" (Cixous, 1976: 528-529).
124. Julia Kristeva's notion of the uncanny as 'the stranger within' is developed by her in *Strangers to Ourselves*, in which she draws on the Greek translation of *unheimlich* as 'strange' or 'foreign' to

once familiar to us but made secret, and alienated because it has been repressed:

"something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light" (Freud, 1955: 241).

Freud locates the origin of the 'canny', the familiar and homely, in one's memory of the mother's body - the uterus is the first 'home' all of us have - which is repressed. He draws on his own experience in psychoanalysis to observe that his male patients often remark on the uncanniness of "female genital organs", and continues:

This unheimlich place, however, is the entrance to the former Heim [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning. There is a joking saying that: 'Love is home-sickness'; and whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: 'this place is familiar to me, I've been here before', we may interpret the place as being his mother's genitals or her body. In this case, too, then, the unheimlich is what was once heimisch, familiar; the prefix 'un' ['un-'] is the token of repression. (Freud, 1955: 245).

The Freudian paradigm of 'castration anxiety' originates in a psychically formative scenario in which the child experiences horror at the sight of the maternal genital area, which 'reminds' him of his own (potential) lack. Freud links the concept of woman-as-monster to an infant's belief that his mother is castrated: "Probably no male human is spared the fright of castration at the sight of a female genital" (Freud, 1963/1997: 154).

As Barbara Creed points out, this notion of the 'monstrous feminine' is ubiquitous:

the myth of the *vagina dentata* is extremely prevalent. Despite local variations, the myth generally states that women are terrifying because they have teeth in their vaginas and that the woman must be tamed or the teeth somehow removed or softened. (Creed, 1993: 2; original emphasis)

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argue that "uncanniness occurs when the boundaries between *imagination* and *reality* are erased" (Kristeva, 1991: 188; original emphasis). Kristeva considers the uncanny to be closely linked to the abject, which will be discussed in Chapter Four: *Making Glass*.



The waving hair of the white body is reminiscent of the medusa's snake-like locks, which, for Freud, took the place of female genitals (Freud, 1963/1997: 274).<sup>125</sup> Creed says that she uses the term 'monstrous-feminine', because it "emphasizes the importance of gender in the construction of her monstrosity" (Creed 1993:3).

The white doll's body suggests the female genitals, its metamorphic animation reinforcing the association with the generative power of feminine sexuality. Creed proposes that the monstrous female is always defined by the female reproductive body: "the concept of the monstrous-feminine, as constructed within/by a patriarchal and phallogentric ideology, is related intimately to the problem of sexual difference and castration" (Creed, 1993: 2). Whilst discussing the womb in horror films, Creed comments, "castration fear plays on a collapse of gender boundaries and the uncanny feeling associated with a familiar/unfamiliar place disturbs the boundary which marks out the known and the knowable" (Creed, 1993: 54).

In his essay, Freud distinguishes between one's personal experience of the uncanny in real life and the creation of the uncanny in fictional works, in which the experience of the uncanny may be muted but at the same time made pleasurable, effectively rendering the uncanny 'homely' once more. He concludes, "fiction creates more opportunities for creating uncanny feelings than are possible in real life" (Freud, 1955: 252).

Freud notes Jentsch's association of the uncanny with inanimate matter in a humanoid form appearing to be animate, such as "ingeniously constructed dolls and automata" (Freud, 1955: 226). He also addresses the animistic uncanny of fairytales: "We have

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125. The essay 'Das Medusenhaupt', written 14 May 1922, and published posthumously.

heard that it is in the highest degree uncanny when an inanimate object - a picture or a doll - comes to life" (Freud, 1955: 246).<sup>126</sup> The classic motifs of the fictional uncanny are doubles, mirror selves, being buried alive, catalepsy, disembodied figures such as ghosts, dolls with an outward appearance of being alive, re-animated corpses, disembodied but animated body parts, prophecies, omens and magic, and other seemingly 'illogical' phenomena such as the 'evil eye', and *déjà vu*, that confuse the rational mind (Freud, 1955: 246-251; Castle, 1995: 4).<sup>127</sup>

In his book *Understanding Animation*, Paul Wells draws on Freud's essay and "the notion of an unconscious mechanistic force" to argue that the uncanny, "is central to the whole art of animation" (Wells, 1998: 48). In Wells' view: "animation has the ready capacity to facilitate 'the uncanny' by effacing the imagined and the real in creating an environment where inanimate lines, objects and materials have the illusion of life, impossible relations can take place, and representational modes of expression become fully accepted aspects of the 'real' world" (Wells, 1998: 48-49).

Maureen Mulloy argues in her 1999 essay, 'Death and the Maiden', that

the uncanny is the feminine, the doubling, merging unbounded, archaic unpredictability neatly encapsulated not in the home, nor simply the mother's body, but the problematic that the female presents to the Western notion of the unified bounded self (Molloy, 1999: 155).

As a spectator of *White Body*, I recognise the familiar materials of sugar, white clay-dough, thread and sewing needle, but the environment is strange and unlike what they

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126. Although, because the power of the uncanny derives from the emergence of repressed forces within what is familiar, domestic, and intimate, Freud is inclined to discount the uncanny in literature when it is set entirely in a world of the imagination, not in "the world of common reality" (Freud, 1955: 250).

127. Creed helpfully separates these into three categories of fear, all of which are explored in the horror film: doubles, castration anxieties, and being lost. She assigns 'womb fantasies' to the third category (Creed, 1993: 53).

are familiar with in my everyday world. The narrative status of the materials that comprise the screen image, or frame, are unclear; as a viewer I do not know what to expect, what will happen next, and how I will be affected - despite being intimately involved in the generation of this animation. When I watch *White Body*, my audience experience is to the fore, as I watch the imaginary animated images unfolding on the screen. However, I observe that the memory of my immersive subjectivity of animating infiltrates and interweaves this viewing. As a spectator of *White Body*, I occupy a viewing position that is doubled through the interplay of the memory of the film's making.

The modelling clay that playfully 'becomes' the white body seems to embody both the figure's familiar and unfamiliar aspects, thus evoking the uncanny. And yet, for the viewer, the effect is mischievous and celebratory. The play of *jouissance* in *White Body*, explored through the making process as I 'write my body', when captured in the metamorphic animation, seems to communicate the oscillating crescendo of orgasmic sexual pleasure 'of the feminine' and write 'her' body. My body is written 'out of me' within a state of *jouissance* - she writes herself through playful touching (Cixous, 1975/1976/1981).

In the film, ordinary materials of the everyday domestic environment, sugar, sewing needle, white thread, and white dough-like substance are made extraordinary - unfamiliar - through the magic of animation. A familiar<sup>128</sup> is created, and then another is conjured. The manner in which the second white body is 'born' through the body of

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128. I refer here to 'familiar', in the sense of 'familiar spirit', a supernatural entity in animal or humanoid form which aids a witch in her practice of magic. In contrast to the faded ephemerality of ghosts, familiar appeared, "clearly defined, three-dimensional ... forms, vivid with colour and animated with movement and sound" (Wilby, 2005: 61).

the first, aligns to parthenogenesis; the nest of white sugar is a creative 'womb' with the generative capacity to reproduce 'young' without any male/masculine involvement.

Susan Gunbar argues that,

Parthenogenesis<sup>129</sup> ... releases women from the female Oedipus complex [...] The female, far from seeming castrated or mutilated or wounded or envious of the penis, derives her energy and her assurance from the fact that, having no penis, she cannot be castrated. (Gunbar, 1983: 144-145).

Here, following Gunbar's thinking, parthenogenesis can be seen symbolically, "to represent the creativity and autonomy of women, mother-daughter reciprocity, and the interplay of nature and human nature" (Gunbar, 1983: 144).

The twin white bodies in *White Body* manifest the reproductive maternal body, making it visible, generative, multiple, and uncanny. In patriarchy, the chronotope<sup>130</sup> of motherhood is the mother kept out of sight, in the background, associated with (unthinking) nature. I recall here the artist Ana Mendieta's silhouettes, made during the 1970s through ritually tracing and retracing her body's outline on the landscape, in order to heal the rift felt when she was cast out of nature and the maternal body:

I am overwhelmed by the feeling of having been cast from the womb (nature). My art is the way I re-establish the bonds that unite me to the universe. It is a return to the maternal source. Through my earth/body sculptures I become one with the earth. (Mendieta in Raine, 1996: 242)

Our mother is someone who was once intimately familiar to us, in infancy and early childhood, but then separated from us. In patriarchy, mother and the maternal are excluded from the public sphere - culturally and socially repressed, kept indoors, silent, hidden in the home, and relegated to the past of childhood. Mendieta's placing her

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129. The biological process by which a female organism produces offspring without fertilisation from a male organism.

130. I am here extending Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the 'chronotope', the model that describes how changing configurations and interactions of time and space are represented in language and discourse, from its original literary context (Bahktin, 1981).

gendered body<sup>131</sup> in and on the earth with "obsessive repetition" (Raine, 1996: 244) in the *Siluetta*, in an attempt to effect a return to the maternal body through the 'female earth', is a powerful reminder of the anguish and psychic rupture that women feel through centuries of being outcasts within patriarchy. As Anne Raine observes, the silhouettes are also uncanny, in their repetitive doubling of the self and compulsion to return to the repressed maternal (Raine, 1996: 240) - qualities which are shared by *White Body*, and reinforced when the film is shown as a looped video installation.

Molloy highlights the "immanence of the unhomey in the home for woman", pointing out that for women, the home can never 'just' be a place of comfort, warmth and intimacy - because patriarchy also relegates 'woman' beyond culture, outside society, without an identity of her own. In addition, she identifies uncanniness in, "the re-appearance of narratives of femininity that echo ... the ways in which female sexuality both secures and undermines [the] home ... [through] secret female worlds, muteness and speaking, merged identities" (Molloy, 1999: 167).<sup>132</sup>

In addition to giving visual prominence to the sexual organs of woman, which Freud gives as an example of the uncanny (Freud, 1955: 245), it occurs to me that, by bringing the maternal body into the light - making the doubled 'her' visible - vibrantly alive and purposeful with animated energy, I am 'making her uncanny' - in effect, creating a feminine uncanny; and that this is strengthened by the playful use of "embodiments of the familiar and the unfamiliar which conjoin to provoke the 'uncanny' effect" (Wells, 1998: 49): the gendered activities of sewing, baking and cleaning, the plasticine

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131. The silhouettes inscribed on and in the earth by Mendieta's body are clearly gendered as feminine (Raine, 1996: 242).

132. Although Molloy is commenting on the New Zealand films, *Heavenly Creatures*, *The Piano*, and *Once were Warriors*, her commentary is applicable to *White Body*.

modelling material that 'belongs' to the past of childhood, and the white sugar of which girls are 'made'.<sup>133</sup> In addition, *White Body* enacts the 'classic motifs of the uncanny', such as the interwoven doubling of Irigaray's feminine phenomena, mutilation, and the return of the repressed" (Molloy, 1999: 160).

Through *White Body* using my intuitive creative 'know how' in direct animation, I understand that *écriture féminine* is a process. My subsequent reading of the film suggests that I am drawing on the ability of the uncanny to confront the unconscious and excavate what may be discovered in its hidden recesses. In doing so, I bring the repressed into the light in order to collapse the boundaries between the 'real world' and the imaginary. The white body is 'written' through the *jouissance* of my body, empowering 'her' to 'speak' with 'her' own 'voice' in "a new language" (hooks, 1989: 29). Her, the object pronoun of the feminine, is both the (re)doubled white doll and myself - and perhaps is representative of all women.

The Black feminist writer bell hooks considers it an important step for a woman's liberation that she breaks the silence imposed on her by patriarchal authority and makes herself heard by "talking back" (hooks, 1989: 5). In *White Body*, through her

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133. The second part of the nursery rhyme 'What Are Little Boys Made Of', answers the line "What are little girls made of?" with "Sugar and spice and all things nice". The rhyme appeared in Halliwell's *Nursery Rhymes of England* (1842) with two additional verses. The original 10 stanza work, entitled 'What Folks Are Made Of', is generally attributed to the poet laureate Robert Southey, around 1820. See Delamar, G.T. (2000) 'What Folks Are Made Of' in Mother Goose Society [online] Available: [http://www.delamar.org/mgs-long\\_folksmadeof.html](http://www.delamar.org/mgs-long_folksmadeof.html) Accessed: 1 January 2015. More details in Delamar, G.T. (1987) *Mother Goose: From Nursery to Literature*, Authors Guild (Backprint.com 2001 edn.) Originally published in 1987 by McFarland. Lincoln, NE: Authors Guild Backprint.com.

embodiment of the uncanny feminine, the clay doll disrupts, resists and supplants the male gaze of patriarchal cinema - in doing so, she makes her 'voice' heard. The white body talks back.

hooks believes creating a 'new language' is liberating, and that doing so allows women to move "from object to subject", speaking "in a new way" (hooks, 1989: 29). Through the narrative circularity of (re)birth of and her continuing process of generation the white body (re)names herself in the subject voice *she* has made. hooks, who (re)named herself and took the name of her maternal great-grandmother,<sup>134</sup> believes self-naming is an essential step for a subjugated individual towards their assertion of an autonomous identity:

Naming is a serious process. It has been of crucial concern for many individuals within oppressed groups who struggle for self-recovery, for self-determination ... a name is perceived as a force that has the power to determine whether or not an individual will be fully self-realised, whether she or he will be able to fulfil their destiny, find their place in the world. (hooks, 1989: 166)

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134. bell hooks adopted a 'pen name' for her professional life, calling herself after her native American maternal great-grandmother, Bell Blair Hooks (del Guadeloupe Davidson and Yancy, 2009: 1-14).

## Chapter Four: Making Glass

### Introduction

My association of your film 'Glass' with the female body and to be accurate the vagina was quite startling. It felt celebratory, alive, pulsing, constructed of things strange yet familiar. The quality of the material with its softness was ultimately feminine and I sensed the presence of the female artist within the film. The movement moved me, and I reflected upon on this dark passage which came to mind. It was infused with light, warmth and life. I think of glass as inherently hard, sharp, easily shattered and able to draw blood and cause pain with the smallest of shards; indeed I associate the vagina with both life and death. Yet this glass reflected or moreover represented life - a woman's life. The passage of time on the beach had worn away danger and by its reduction had created a pleasing soft shingle. The shingle moves back and forth is both seen and unseen, still and in motion. It is manipulated and is an intersection between the natural - mother earth - and man's urban metropolis. As I watched the film and this part of the beach became woman - you! - a life force." (Irving, 2010)<sup>135</sup>

In this chapter I want to think through ideas about the feminine using my direct animation film *Glass* (2010), a direct animation of glass fragments found on a beach in Plymouth. It was made by 'playing' with glass fragments, smoothed by the movements of the sea and found among the sand, pebbles, bladderwrack, and briny débris on the strandline of an urban beach in Plymouth. *Making Glass* (2011), a performed essay which forms part of this chapter, extends my reflexive writing about the practice via an audiovisual communication mode which documents my creative process and allows me to 'show and tell'. *Glass* (2010) writes the body through my close examination; peering at the world in close-up evokes the intense looking at the world practised by the Orkadian poet and film-maker Margaret Tait, whom I will consider in the following chapter.

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135. Extract from an email sent to me by Maggie Irving, who wrote in response to seeing my film *Glass* at the opening evening for *Finding Place*, the exhibition of recent practice by research students in Arts and Humanities at Plymouth University, 3-26 February 2010. My film *Glass* was presented as a continuous loop on a large video monitor mounted at chest height on a plinth. To see the film, a viewer needed to incline their body slightly downwards, towards the glass screen.



At the end of 2011, I returned to the location where I had collected the 'sea glass' and re-enacted my walk along the beach on 10 December, and then re-created the making of the still life on my rostrum in the studio; I recorded my monologue on 19 December, to provide a structure for the video edit.<sup>136</sup> I manipulate the found objects through a process of *écriture féminine*, in which the senses of touch and sight become intertwined. I am wondering how making *Glass* 'as (a) woman' connects with ideas of the feminine, and in what ways this film can provide a lens through which I can further understand my creative practice in relation to the 'natural' world.

### Reflections

Here, the reader may wish to review the video *Making Glass*, followed by the film *Glass*, on the Creative Practice Elements DVD.

### The Poetics of Place

When thinking about place, of being here and being there, I remember the poet Harriet Tarlo,<sup>137</sup> whom I heard give a reading at the *Landscape and Relic* symposium in the summer of 2007. Here, Tarlo said that her most significant experience of land and water is the coast around Padstow in north Cornwall, which she had "visited since before [she] was born" (Tarlo, 2009: 36), by which she means, 'being here' within her mother's body/in this place of the mother: "cave womb in womb cliff" (Tarlo, 2009: 43).<sup>138</sup> What she said reminds me of my own desire to be where ocean meets land, to be on a level with the sea, walking the shoreline - a return that carries a longing for

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136. A transcript, written as a detached third person account, is included in Appendix B.

137. Tarlo locates her site-specific practice as a poet within the open form tradition of Charles Olson and the Black Mountain group.

138. A line from 'Three Poems from 'Love/Land': Before life', published originally in Harriet Tarlo *Brancepeth Beck*, The Other Press, 1997; reprinted in *NAB: Brancepeth Beck, Coast, NAB*, by Etruscan Books, in 2005.

something that I have lost. Tarlo's words resonate for me with the embodied subjectivities of place, time, genealogy, memory, materiality and the maternal that thread throughout my thesis.

Poetry and animation may be said to share an approach to their respective languages.<sup>139</sup> Making *Glass* reminds me of Yuri Norstein, who works directly under the camera, animating scraps of cel 'straight ahead' on sheets of glass. This 'straight ahead' technique allows for no mistakes, and requires a concentrated focus combined with an "intuitive approach to the choreography of events" (CAIM, 2011).

Visualising a movement in one's mind, and the resulting physical gesture used ... to realise that movement in a tangible way, provides one of the shortest paths between the animator's craft and the production of an animated sequence. Such animation becomes a kind of performance, albeit in a different timeframe from a real life one. (CAIM, 2011)

Antonia Byatt says that Norstein's masterpiece, *A Tale of Tales*, "combines perfectly the way we define childhood memories every time we call them up, and the sense we have of the archetypes of myth - apple, forest, snow, wind, light, fire, water, dark - as part of those memories" (Byatt, 2005). She observes that Norstein's images, such as the visual sequence of "round solids" - apple, breast, potatoes roasting in an open fire - "are all metamorphic parts of each other" (Byatt, 2005). She suggests also that the sudden flare of blinding white light that bursts forth from the screen, "emanating from the poem-paper - is perhaps a recollection of the first light we see, opening our eyes for the first time, our first visual memory" (Byatt, 2005).

Doreen Massey, the social scientist and geographer, argues for a perception of space as something intertwined with time, and therefore always changing (Massey, 1994). She

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139. In the following chapter, this affinity is explored further in the work of Margaret Tait.

foregrounds an approach to 'places' that is open and hybrid, always provisional and contested: "Places do not have single identities but multiple ones; places are not frozen in time, they are processes; places are not enclosures with a clear inside and out" (Massey, 2005: 106).

The metaphoric places of memory that Norstein depicts in *Tale of Tales* are rooted in our first memories as an infant. The nourishing comfort of the mother's full breast is recalled by the roundness of a golden juicy apple, a hot roasting potato, the plangent pools of the little wolf's eyes. During the film, these images of roundness connect us to the maternal body, our first place, our first memory. Massey's statement, "That histories linked to ... places are not fixed but are continuing as we pass through. History does not hold still ... but is constantly in motion. It should not be seen in terms of a singular temporality, but have some sense of multiple becomings. A sense of movement, of constant motion" (Massey, 2005: 106), recalls Byatt's observation, that watching *Tale of Tales* changed the memory she held "of all other films" (Byatt, 2005).

When memory 'returns us', Massey reminds us that,

places change; they go on without you. ... For the truth is that you can never simply 'go back', to home or to anywhere else. When you get 'there' the place will have moved on just as you yourself will have changed. And this of course is the point. For to open up 'space' to this kind of imagination means thinking time and space as mutually imbricated and thinking both of them as the product of interrelations. (Massey, 2005: 124-125)

Norstein's animated films are compared to poems, "pure lyricism developed through a sequence of visual images" characterised by "[u]nexpected associations, sensations, reminiscences, fears and dreams" (Russia-IC, 2014). Clare Kitson reports that:

he ... feels that poetry of all the arts, is the most closely related to animation - his own animation, at least. He often compares the perfect animation script to a haiku, and has also likened the economy needed in putting together an animation

sequence to that required in composing a poem, because both media are so highly condensed. (Kitson, 2005: 59)<sup>140</sup>

Norstein's animations have a pellucid quality, in which the screen itself seems to be awakening, and becoming alive, an experience he describes as, "a play of the air, of the space" (in Kitson, 2005: 43). Speaking in an interview in 2000, he is referring to the construction of backgrounds, through layers of textures on the multiplane, so the 'landscape' of his animations has a presence as a 'character' that is able to "come alive and participate in the film" (Kitson, 2005: 42 and 43). Norstein has said that, "[t]he image is just an outer layer under which something else is hidden" (Norstein in Carter, 2010),<sup>141</sup> and, "[w]hat is essential is that you must remain true to yourself; you must submerge deep down there" (Norstein in Russia-IC, 2014).

In her anthology of radical landscape poetry, *The Ground Aslant* (2011), editor and poet Harriet Tarlo uses the term 'radical' to convey the formal experimentation evident in each poem. In an interview about the collection, she says the poems are about the specificity of place, "the experience of being in and moving through a landscape", and that each poem communicates a lived experience about being 'somewhere else', localisation giving "an integrity to thinking and to poetry" (Williams, 2011). Tarlo describes poetry's ability to 'go beyond itself' as "striving beyond itself, ourselves", and says: "perhaps the most radical thing is to push beyond that even to try to reach place-as-place, the non-human elements as having existence in their own right and our responsibility even to try to get past just our own experience of that" (Williams, 2011).

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140. Kitson supports her comments with the reference 'Metafory' Part 2 in *Iskusstvo Kino* 8 (1994), p. 95.

141. Norstein in conversation with Ukrainian animator Igor Kovalyov following a screening of his films, 10 February 2010, presented by University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts at Norris Cinema Theater/Frank Sinatra Hall, University Park Campus (USC, 2010).

Tarlo's views are resonant with Massey's theorisation of space, in which she argues that the philosophies of the Twentieth Century have separated time from space: time conceptualised as the active (masculine) arena of change and politics, and space as the passive (feminine) arena of fixed relations and representations. Space is therefore inanimate and dead, because - as the dimension in opposition to time - "it is the dimension *without* temporality" (Massey, 2009: 17; original emphasis).

Massey adopts a relational conceptualisation of space and puts forward three propositions: a) that it is constituted through interaction; b) that space is "the sphere of possibility of the existence of multiplicity"; and that it is "always in the process of being made [...] always open to the future" (Massey, 2005: 9). Tarlo's work is 'rooted in place' by her radical strategy of formal experimentation. Her poems do not seek to capture 'place' as a distilled collection of perceived fixed qualities - as Massey reminds us, "You can't hold places still" (2005: 125). Rather, Tarlo's aim as a radical poet is to *pass through* space and time, to mesh her own story with the intersecting, multilayered narrative that constitutes place as a never-ending process: "imagining space is always in process [...] for the future to be open, space must be open too" (Massey, 2005: 11-12).

I consider my film *Glass* to be 'radical' in that it is formally experimental and also strives to 'go deep' towards a place 'beyond' the (un-named) geographic location, covered over with layerings of history and besmirched with decomposing matter and waste. My aim is to reach an understanding, not of place as an 'essence', but through "a living of place as a constellation of trajectories, both 'natural' and cultural" (Massey, 2005: 149). For Massey,

You can't go back in space-time. ... You can't hold places still. What you can do is meet up with others, catch up with where another's history has got to 'now', (more rigorously, that 'here and now', that *hic et nunc*) is itself constituted by nothing more than - precisely - that meeting up (again). (Massey, 2005: 125; original emphasis)

In 'submerging' myself through the process of direct animation, and imagining a possible landscape in light with the small fragments of coloured glass I gleaned from the sand, I may find a 'place' for the language of my body and reconnect (with) my self. I recall Tarlo here, as I am drawn to revisit the 'nowhere' place between land and water from which this film emerges, and because I intuit that, in making this work, I am returning, perhaps, to the 'place of my mother'.

### **Making Glass: Scene 1 Beach**

The video opens to an exterior, a small urban beach in a corner formed by two walls, a patch of sand and stone, strewn with rope-ends, polystyrene chunks, bladderwrack, plastic bottle tops and an empty mermaid's purse. It's a winter's afternoon and the sun is setting. The tide is coming in, and soon the beach will be almost covered in water. A woman in a thick coat is walking carefully along the water's edge, her head is bent over, looking at the ground. From time to time she stoops to pick up a small object that has caught her eye. The woman is me - I am gleaning pieces of coloured glass. I'm visiting the place where I had collected a handful of glass fragments, almost exactly two years before, prompted by an idea to use 'sea glass' to create an animated 'still life'. In returning to this location, and re-enacting for the camera, I am absorbed in my search for small, wet nuggets of cold, coloured glass... yet I feel detached, as if I am watching myself perform, and through this process of re-enacted documentation becoming both 'I' and 'she', (a) woman.

It is close to the solstice, the shortest day, when the spin of the Earth brings it to its furthest position away from sun. Close to the water are slippery wet rocks crusted with small barnacles and hairy with hanks of green weed.

The gritty sand crunches underfoot as I walk the strandline, my hands gleaning fragments of smooth glass that catch my eye as they curve along the shoreline. The salty lozenges shine blue-white milk of magnesia, warm whey, pale colostrum, moss, strawberry juice, amber toffee, and clear hyacinth, in the low winter sunlight.

This scrap of beach on the western edge of the Stonehouse Peninsula is two and a half miles across the city from where I live.

To call this place a 'beach' stretches the imagination. It's a wedge of sandy pebbles that is almost but not completely covered by the waves of a spring tide. A rare stretch of 'natural' shoreline along a built-up rocky promontory, caught between housing from various centuries, a children's playground, car parks, and boatyards. It's somewhere I know well, although when I visit the area, it's to go elsewhere on the peninsula - this beach has little to recommend it. It is said that the name 'Stonehouse' comes from a house made of stone that stood on the peninsula many centuries ago. The name reminds me of Virginia Woolf's 'room', which can be both a place of refuge and of confinement.

There are no signposts. It's a rubbishy nowhere place, unnamed on any maps.

I've looked for identifying marks, but I can find no name for this place. If you zoom in on GoogleEarth, the aerial photograph taken at the limit of a low spring tide in 2007 (when the beach was almost clear of weed and débris) shows a tiny arc of drying grey-brown sand, with lines of dark seaweed, stuck in a corner of a wall along the eastern edge of Stonehouse Creek, an outer branch of the Hamoaze, the southernmost part of

the River Tamar. You walk down Strand Street to the end, where the road runs out, and make your way carefully down the concrete slipway onto the beach, which is heaped with squelchy weed and rubbish – or, if you can see a clear patch of sand, then jump.

I've come to walk the treasure line, a narrow strip of gritty sand between heaps of weed, just below the reach of the full moon tide. I walk along the upper strandline of the beach, which is covered by water only at a full spring tide. I'm collecting nubs of coloured glass, washed up remains of bottles and jars.

Great swags of bladderwrack and kelp curve around the beach from one wall to another. You need to look where you're putting your feet, as there are branches, dog shit, and all sorts among the mounds of slippery seaweed, formed across the beach by the waves.

Between the lines of weed, are constellations of 'sea glass', pieces of broken glass washed to and fro by the sea until their edges are dulled and worn. On the beach, my hand chooses small, smooth glass collups with no distinguishing mark of their former lives as useful objects. I avoid glass that carries in its shape the hint of what it once was, such as a wine bottle, a jam jar, a bowl, or a jug. In my studio, I have several collections of small objects I have 'found': lost jewellery and discarded personal items of unknown people, scraps of cloth, washers and screws, interesting stones and shells, sticks, leaves and flowers. These things form an archive of memory, and link to walks and visits to particular places, events, and people. When making a film, especially in the early stages when ideas are nebulous, I often sift through my 'treasury' to find some thing that resonates, and around which thoughts can begin to form, and I may incorporate one or more pieces in the film.<sup>142</sup> At other times, I may go to a specific

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142. In making my 16mm film *Hold* (2008), which is part of this thesis and included in the next chapter, I used objects I had previously collected. An earlier film, *Small World* (2007), objects found whilst walking a circular route along Plymouth's boundary with the sea created a miniature landscape in



place or walk along a particular route<sup>143</sup> because I want to collect things I can use to guide my creative process, or, as in *Glass*, which have the potential to be used as ingredients/subject matter.

It's a cold, bruised non-place, caught between the Royal Naval Victualling Yard on one side and Devonport Docks on the other; an estuary of the River Tamar, which pours through the gap between Devon and southeast Cornwall, out into Plymouth Sound and beyond to the ocean. I'm close to where Turner painted picturesque views of the south coast and the naturalist Charles Darwin sailed off to the Galapagos.

When I am here, I feel the massive weight of quarried limestone and granite, wooden beams and metal of the substantial buildings, fortifying walls and roads that cover this peninsula. The histories that are written of the surrounding area concern great men, valorised for their voyages of exploration and discovery, and their achievements. Their names are remembered.

When I visit this forgotten corner I am reminded of many histories.

Space for Massey is "material ... the land out there", but also an abstract dimension.

She understands space as intimately connected with time, and imbued with all types of stories and memories and events:

If time is the dimension in which things happen one after the other, it's the dimension of succession, then space is the dimension of things being, existing at the same time: of simultaneity. It's the dimension of multiplicity. (Massey, 2013)

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the studio when viewed 'on screen'.

143. Unless the location is already determined - for example, in a commissioned work such as *Teign Spirit* (2009), an Animate Projects film for Sea Change, focused on the Devon seaside town of Teignmouth - the place or journey will be chosen intuitively as part of my 'know how'.

As I walk to the water's edge, I can feel the interlinking moments, a "constellation of processes" (Massey, 1994: 156; 2005: 141), that this un-named place 'remembers': "Space concerns our relations with each other and ... is a product of our relations with each other, our connections with each other" (Massey, 2013).

It is exhilarating to be on level with the sea, at a high rising tide, the huge bowl of the sky curved above my head. Soothed by the rhythmic lap of these small waves at this fluid boundary, I think of my mother. The sway of salt-sweet water tugs at my body. I feel the movements of briny clouds, the dimming sunlight, the swell of the sea, the shift of sand particles, and the exhalation of dying creatures. In these moments of endless time, in which all things are connected, there is a sense of unfolding. The wet glass fragments are ova, each smoothed shape a boiled sweet sucked in my child's mouth.

The waves wash to and fro and release the scent of fermenting homebrew. I sweep the tainted beach for coloured glass. The winter sun falls to dusk.

A gleaner, stooped, working the narrow field of the tiny beach. My eyes on the lookout for objects that have... possibility. Tiny treasures that I can take home in my pocket. Once home I wash my collection of glass in the kitchen sink, cupping the coloured shards in both hands under the tap as the clear water runs through my fingers, and then set the pieces to dry on the draining board.

### **Making Glass: Scene 2 Studio**

The scene opens to an interior, a large upstairs room, the curtains are shut, and there is no sense of whether it is day or night. What light there is emanates from within the

body of an animation rostrum stand, upon which is placed a large sheet of glass. A woman's hands are arranging the pieces of beach glass into a balanced composition. The woman is me. I am in my studio.

I prefer the softened feel of worn glass to sharp edges, newly broken. I'm also attracted to small shards of decorated pottery, but I want the translucent panes of the glass to 'look through'.

Once dry, the glass pieces are dull, their surfaces matt. I remember how they gleamed in the wet sand of the beach. Held in my hand against the light, their transparency glows.

The fragments are sections of smashed glass bottles, the dry translucent, misty surfaces pitted with tiny imperfections, their sharp edges abraded by movements of the sea. I have no knowledge of the precise moment when each vessel broke. Yet each piece carries the fracture lines from the time when force shattered form, like the postmemory described by Marion Hirsch: a phenomenon that carries the memory of trauma forward into successive generations (Hirsch, 1997/2002; 2001;<sup>144</sup> 2012). The bottles once served to give shape to unknown liquids and particles; now, broken, emptied and useless, the absent presence of what was contained is carried along by currents, infinitely mingled and beyond retrieval.

The digital stills camera fixed to my animation rostrum creates what I think of as my reference shot. Its view is fixed, overhead, monocular.

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144. Hirsch's 2001 essay, 'Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory', provides a succinct exploration of postmemory and the rupture of "inconceivable violence" that is transferred generationally (Cixous, 2001: 5). First published in *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, Hirsch's essay was also published in Barbie Zelizer (ed.) *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, Depth of Field series, by Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, in 2001. It is available online from the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration: <http://www.fsf.ane.ru/attachments/article/157/mar%20f.pdf> Accessed: 1 January 2015.

The DSLR replaces the video camera and frame capture software method, used to film the smooth animated metamorphosis of *White Body*. At the end of my animated exploration of the surface of the arrangement of glass, I want to record what this camera 'sees' in close up, to draw attention to its looking, which is 'detached'.

By playing the part of both audience and performer, an actual audience need not be present during the performance of femininity. According to Butler, one's gender is performance - "a set of repeated acts", a series of processes: "gender proves to be performance - that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed" (Butler, 1990/2006 : 25). Butler is not claiming that gender is a performance, but that "gender proves to be performative, that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be" (Butler, 1990/2006: 24-25). She argues that gender identities are constructed by language: in other words, gender is a 'doing', a gerund, a non-finite verb form producing that which it names - feminine.

To 'see myself', I construct a 'looking glass'; (re)citing my body through a process of *écriture féminine*, drawing on the histories of these washed up objects. On a sheet of clear glass under the camera I arrange a still life from the glass fragments: daylight neon tubes shining up from below create an intimate landscape painted in light. The pieces of glass slither and clatter; they have to be carefully balanced.

What is a mirror? I reflect. I have to reflect (myself). I have to reflect on the absolute mirror. I have to see the pure mirror. I have to try to see the mirror, with a seeing-purified-of-looking.

In general, we don't see the mirror, we see ourselves in the mirror. Nothing is less visible, more used than a mirror. The mirror is the servant of my self. The mirror is the thing from which I begin. I don't respect the mirror, I make use of it. The mirror,

so to speak, is nothing, the Nothing from which everything makes its way to me. To the me. (Cixous in Segarra and Masó, 2012: 67; original emphasis)<sup>145</sup>

In making the animation *Glass*, only the light shining from below can 'touch' my 'looking glass'. The materials are in equilibrium, arranged in such a way that the slightest change would cause them to fall. The miniature still life fits inside a circle made by the thumb and middle finger of my left hand curving around to meet its twin on my right hand.

I use a digital hand-held microscope to explore. Sold for use in science education, law enforcement, industry and aerospace, it is a mobile camera that allows me to inspect an area the size of a millimetre. I examine the glass, capturing each position frame-by-frame on my laptop as a digital photograph. A rhythmic circling of multiple viewpoints.

My ProScope resembles a vaginal speculum, the gynaecological device used to examine the cervix. A speculum for Irigaray is not only a mirror, but may also be:

an instrument to *dilate* the lips, the orifices, the walls, so the eye can penetrate the *interior*. So that the eye can enter, to see, notably with speculative intent. (Irigaray, 1974/1985a : 114; original emphasis)

I peer through this speculative looking glass so that I may find my body's language as (a) woman.

The roving camera of my ProScope is attached to an umbilical USB lead that carries the digital data to my Mac laptop and enables me to capture each photograph in succession. The depth of field is the length of my little fingernail, less than a centimetre. Seeing beyond the glass, light passes across into a liminal space, like Alice through the looking glass.

I have to work very carefully with slow precise movements and controlled breathing: the glass fragments are delicately poised, and the arrangement could shift and collapse

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145. Part of Hélène Cixous' poetic response to the work of artist Roni Horn.

at any time. Sitting next to the rostrum with the microscope-speculum in my right hand I move in ultra-slow motion just above the still life, exploring its surface in forensic detail. As my right hand performs its dance in time and space, holding the instrument of vision, I record the progression of movements at regular intervals with my left hand.

1.15pm like weed in water I float in time; the lip of a feature catches my eye and I am drawn to follow a fold in the bed, a gap between two tectonic plates, a green sea valley with a foam of air sacs held within its translucency; I come to the edge and peer down to the circular formation on the red plain below; fly across the north east corner to examine the fissure between three plates, the underwater light washing caramel, amber, golden syrup. [...] 2.15pm shifting left to right across the frame, pulled along the grooves, leaf veins; reach the intersection and then scorched rose petals, sun-burned skin flakes, surface of Venus, the body; back in the pool of green water.

As I record a series of circular explorations of the miniature still life, this reconnects me to making 'seeing-touching' artwork - such as a drawing, painting, or sculpture - in which gesture is marked as a trace of the subjective exchange between the artist and her materials. I see also that what I am doing is an extension of my performances for video camera as an undergraduate. At Newport Art College, in the intimacy of the video edit suite that doubled as a small filming studio, I found a protected and protective space, a 'room of my own'. Here I worked 'in secret' with the immediacy of video technologies, drawing on autobiographical material and using my body as an 'performing instrument'. The lights, camera, monitor, and recorder connected by 'umbilical' leads, gave me a direct and immediate way of exploring the ideas that were in my head about my 'self', my identity as a woman, and getting them 'out there'. The mental images I refer to here are multi-sensory and dynamic 'feelings', part of my embodied, subjective, and multi-modal experience of being. Reflecting on her own experience as an emergent woman artist at the end of the 1970s, Catherine Elwes

observes, "It was possible to have a very private confrontation with your own image through the video medium, which didn't involve anybody else" (in Meigh-Andrews, 2000); and that:

The instant feedback of the video image made it an ideal medium of performance, as an element in the work itself, as a record of a live event and as a means of recording private or directed actions to camera. (Elwes, 1996)

In my previous chapter, I discussed the woman artist becoming both 'art-object' and 'art-maker' in relation to Carolee Schneemann's practice. Elwes has said of her own strip tease performance as a student, which is documented in a series of black and white photographs in her DIY manual 'A Plain Woman's Guide to Her First Performance' (1979): "Like Carolee Schneemann, I was trying to find out whether it was possible to be a naked woman and still create aesthetic and political meaning" (in Battista, 2005: 2).

Elwes believes the 'personal is political' mantra of second wave feminism provided women artists of the late 1970s and early 1980s, like her, with a "philosophical and methodological basis" for their work. Further, she believes that:

Video offered the perfect medium within which to explore autobiography and manifestations of the self. The technology produced instant image feedback and could easily be used in a private space like a mirror, the images accepted or wiped according to the perceived success of the recording. (Elwes, 2000: 9)

Like Elwes, I became aware of the control I gained through working directly from my body in this way, and of "the power of the image that the artist creates in the traces left behind from performances" (Battista, 2005: 2).

The rostrum set-up my animation studio during the making of *White Body* and *Glass* provides an immediacy of process that is similar to the instantaneous feedback of my performances to camera. In these recent direct animations, my body is invisible on the

screen - the track of my movement is marked only by the incremental positions of the materials. However, in *Making Glass*, I appear as a performer in my own work, as 'a woman walks along the shore', a detached third person: allowing myself to be seen in this way, I am able to become a spectator of my own work.

In creating work as an artist, through this study, I have come to realise that there is a dual purpose for me that chimes with Irigaray's "wishes to occupy the position of analyst and analysand simultaneously" (Whitford, 1986: 8). Margaret Whitford explains that Irigaray wants "to 'speak as a woman' (analysand) but also as the analyst to 'read' and 'psychoanalyse'" (1986: 8). During this process, Irigaray "*needs* the other, the interlocutor, as the analysand needs the analyst, for it is only in the exchange that the repressed desire emerges into language" (Whitford, 1986: 8; original emphasis).

*Écriture féminine* has become a process through which my body 'speaks': during the animating of *Glass*, I perform as a maker, the analysand; *Making Glass* begins the transition to analysis, when my standpoint as creator becomes inflected by a spectator position. It is through reflexive strategies that involve "various forms of verbalisation" (Whitford, 1986: 8) that I then move to the role of analyst, my interlocutor, and verbal writing.

In her review of performance art by women, Elwes has suggested that: "In performance we may, at last, take control of the ways we are seen, drawing out meanings from the language of our art that reflect our own consciousness" (Elwes, 1985: 175). The small curling strokes of my hand, the improvised finger performance of the camera upon the miniature stage of the animation rostrum and the flexings of embodied vision move beyond the traumatic to give exquisite pleasure of *jouissance*.



I film almost continually for nine hours, recording my performance of tactile looking in intense bursts of concentration, that are accompanied with a mouth-feel of intensely coloured fruit bursting on my tongue. During my experience of making *Glass*, my sense of sight becomes interrelated with that of touch through the experience of 'looking in close', and the visual becomes tactile and multi-sensory. My expert 'know how' allows me to enter into a zone of heightened sense in which I am focused on the space of making – an area under the rostrum that approximates to the size of my outstretched palm. This small field is shared by *White Body*; a 'field' in animation is the two dimensional area seen by the camera, and applies also to the size of the artwork. The small increments of change in position of the object/s that are the subject of manipulation, whilst holding a mental impression of what the audience will see when the captured still frames are played back in succession.

Perhaps the making of *Glass* is an intimate dialogue between my hand-held roving camera-eye and the translucent glass morsels, conducted under the watchful eye of the fixed rostrum-camera, which looks on from above, 'seeing' nothing. My ProScope speculum's tiny increments of 'seeing' movement become traces of coloured light recorded as sequences of still images, that play back in sequence on the timeline to create the impression of motion - a visually dynamic displacement of place and time.

The breathing of my exploration forms the rhythm of looking-touching. The breath of my living body transfers rhythmically to the balancing of the still life landscape and my fingers' shifting positions as they 'feel' the energies of this poetic composition of patterns of coloured light. On the video timeline the suturing of the still photographs tricks the mind into perceiving animation. The writer and curator Edwin Carels considers that "animation is the art of the interval" (Carels 2006: 14), reprising the

animator Norman McLaren's belief that, "What happens between each frame is much more important than what exists on each frame. Animation is ... the art of manipulating the invisible interstices that lie between the frames" (McLaren in Furniss, 1998: 5). For me, it is animation's inbetween-ness, its slipperiness, that draws me.

Swimming through the fluidity of my seeing-feeling performance, I feel (full)filled by the focused delicate movements of my body 'under camera'. It is time now to leave the water and come up for air. In my final act of making *Glass*, I carefully lay down my speculative ProScope camera and switch on the camera locked to the rostrum above me.

To end, I defocus and refocus the lens of the DSLR, recording its flexing sight as, finally, I touch the glass.

I have to stand up to look through the DSLR and operate it. This camera can only record what is directly in front of it. Peering through the viewfinder, I focus the lens so the glass fragments are sharp in the viewfinder and then capture a series of stills as I gradually defocus, until the image is soft and blurry, and softly shift the glass fragments with my fingers. The fixed camera looks on, but is blind to what is happening most of the time. Elwes has stated that, "If femininity is a series of acts or persona to be worn and discarded at will ... performance more than anything disrupts the objectification of the camera's eye" (Elwes, 1996). When I allow it to see, the DSLR camera loses its focus, its controlling gaze becomes diffused.

In making *Glass*, I control this 'all seeing', fixed camera so I may appropriate "the masculinity embedded in the eye, the look of the camera" (1996). As a feminist artist, I address the 'personal' of the everyday in order uncover other selves, allowing my body to 'write herself' and manifest the feminine.

It occurs to me, that, in gathering together these glass fragments, which can never again be made whole, and liberating them from their setting, I have 'unlocked' their potential to be 'other', to 'speak'. Through the process of making, I have 'fixed' what was smashed and thrown away into an 'other' form. This makes me think that in *Glass*, I may be 'undoing' the rigid structures and hierarchies of the patriarchal symbolic. The assembly I created is temporary. The lightest touch of my hand, the slightest tremor, and the pieces fall, are released and set free to take on other configurations.

A small object held up close to the eye enfolds the field of vision, and creates an impression that one is a miniature within a macrocosm, as in the paintings of Georgia O'Keefe.<sup>146</sup> Made small through my sense of magnified sight, I move within an interior landscape.

In making, there is a shift between experience of the exterior world and an awareness of the inner realm. When my sight is concentrated into a small field of view, I feel pulled by looking, as I did as a child, to examine in detail the immensity that fills my gaze.

I write in the intervals between focused bursts of concentration. I report back from my experience. And, through this writing, creating the animation connects to childhood memories of swimming in the Mediterranean. Looking at the seabed through my mask, I dive below the surface and can hold my breath for longer than anyone else.

As a child in Cyprus I spent hours snorkeling over the sand and rocks close to shore on the south coast, my body suspended over the underwater field of vision below me. Floating face down, held by warm salt water below and the sunlight above. Rocked by the gentle swell, my cupped hands sculling the water to control my position on the surface, my legs and feet outstretched and flowing, buoyed. My drifting sight an umbilical cord that anchored me to the seabed below.

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146. The Twentieth Century artist created large scale paintings of natural forms and flowers, depicted in close up.

The soundscape, created the next day, is a recording made along the breakwater at the mouth of Plymouth Sound. The soft rise and fall of these waves reminds me of my careful breathing while I was floating on the surface of the warm Mediterranean Sea and during the making of *Glass* in my studio. I imagine also the interior sounds of my body and the auditory experience of the foetus *in utero*, immersed in the watery environment of her mother's body. The accompanying sound of the sea augments the shifting of fragmentary coloured light and textures captured by my handheld ProScope camera. These rhythmic waves cause me to remember that the word 'animation' comes from the Latin verb *animare*, 'to give life to or cause to come alive', from *anima* 'life, breath, spirit' (Collins Dictionary, 1979/86: 58).

Through this process of animating my seeing I give new life to these objects with broken pasts. Extracted from their environment to become a seamless streaming future-present woven from the stopped moments of time and light.

The arcing motion of the 'actively looking' speculum/microscope seems to follow Irigaray's description of a girl's entry into language and subjectivity: a place for feminine pleasure woven from a circular dance, rhythm or song through which the girl constructs for herself "a vital, subjective space [...] around her or inside herself [...] an initially defensive and subsequently creative territory" (Irigaray 1989: 132-133). The fragments of glass can be seen to correspond to Irigaray's description of the plurality of the feminine imaginary, taking on multiple forms and being constituted from "scraps, uncollected debris" (Irigaray 1985: 30). She rhetorically asks:

So woman does not have a sex organ? *She has at least two of them*, but they are not identifiable as ones. Indeed she has many more. Her sexuality, always at least double, goes even further: it is plural. (1985: 28; original emphasis)

During the making of *Glass*, I bring together and animate the dispersed elements of the shattered looking glass, in a dance that circles around the axis of my *jouissance*.

Although each frame I create is a tiny moment, every frame counts, as it combines with others to make an animation that occupies time and space, and has meaning. When I make animation, I am both unseen - an invisible presence in that my movements between the capture of frames are not recorded and through 'my' absence as a woman in patriarchy - and 'seen' because my imaginary is given form in the world through the animation and my voice 'as (a) woman' has agency.

### **Legacy**

Each time I animate frame-by-frame, I remember that I am creating a mind image which cannot be 'seen', that animation is a phenomenon created by the presentation of a succession of still pictures via the eyes to the brain, wherein the illusion of movement is effected. I recall this in particular when I am creating stop-motion, because the sleight of hand that is inherent in this technique, connects me to the histories of animation from its origins in optical deception and the magical visual effects of early cinema. I feel a great silence, also, as women's voices are largely absent from the histories of animation and cinema: when I animate, it is as if I am pouring myself into this void.

Chapter Two noted how second wave feminists sought to insert women into historical narratives. Luce Irigaray has stressed the importance of there being a legacy, an inheritance for us in which the feminine is inscribed in a multiplicity of ways and forms. In her book, *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference* (1990/1993b),<sup>147</sup> in the section 'How She Became Not-he', she highlights the lack of the feminine, which she describes as having been made "non-masculine" - in other words, "an abstract nonexistent

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147. Originally published in French as *Je, tu, nous* by Éditions Grasset et Fasquelle, Paris, in 1990.

reality" - by patriarchal cultures (Irigaray, 1990/1993b: 20). She states that, "women find it so difficult to speak and to be heard as women. They are excluded and denied by the patriarchal linguistic order. They cannot be women and speak in a sensible, coherent manner" (1990/1993b: 20). Irigaray believes that every individual "must recreate his or her own collective history" (1990/1993: 28), but that for women the 'structuration' of the 'real world' environment is defined by the male cultural imaginary (1990/1993b: 35-42). She calls for "attractive images" of mothers and daughters to be displayed prominently throughout cities and towns, in order to "give girls a valid representation of their genealogy, an essential condition for the constitution of her identity" (Irigaray, 1990/1993b: 47-48). Of course Irigaray was not calling - literally - for posters and photographs of women to be put up on walls, billboards, hoardings and screens as 'Big Sisters' to dominate the landscape of our lives. What she was bringing to our attention was the absence of women from a culture dominated by what she terms a "vicious" patriarchal phallographic order, and she called for a complete restructuring of this cultural framework, in order to foster the emergence of new identities and subjectivities for women.

### **Imaginary**

As I understand it, Irigaray is calling here for the creation of a 'feminine imaginary'. In her paper, 'Luce Irigaray's Critique of Rationality' (1988), Margaret Whitford notes the use of the term 'imaginary' (as a noun) as then being current in French theory, although not in English, excepting when it is deriving from Lacan. She also makes the point that the term is, "rich in connotations and operates differently in the different conceptual frameworks of the different authors who use it" (Whitford, 1988: 109).

Whitford's reading of Irigaray foregrounds the concept of the imaginary. She considers

that, for Irigaray, the imaginary and the symbolic are intertwined - in contrast to Lacan, who positions the imaginary as being contained by the entry into the symbolic. In her important monograph, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (1991),<sup>148</sup> Whitford argues that Irigaray "is concerned with the possibility of a female imaginary, which would necessitate images or representations of women in which women could recognize themselves, or with which women could identify" (1991: 97).

Irigaray's concept, linked to the morphology of the labia and connotations of doubles and multiple pairs, opens up possibilities for thinking about a feminine imaginary. My own imaginary is inflected by my 'know how', and its histories and genealogies. I associate my imaginary with Virginia Woolf's 'room of one's own', because it is linked to my body's access to a secure and protective location in the physical world, and to the psychological space afforded by time free from the personal, domestic, and socio-economic duties one is required to perform. I first began to use 'imaginary' as a noun in the early 1990s, because I needed a word that could describe the almost tangible interior space I was creating in using my own body and the dreams I experienced to generate the visual and sonic material for my films.<sup>149</sup> I wanted a word that was more than the mind images of my 'everyday' imagination, to represent the deep sense of 'otherness', and of being in an/other place, that I felt at the heart of my film-making. In

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148. This work includes revised versions of articles and papers previously published in 1986 in the journals *Paragraph* volume 8 and *Radical Philosophy* volume 43, in addition to Whitford's co-edited work *Feminist Perspectives in Philosophy* (Brennan and Whitford, 1988), and a chapter in *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (1989), edited by Teresa Brennan. In this thesis I refer to Whitford's *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (1991), except where detail in the earlier publications provides is more pertinent.

149. The need emerged initially through reflective writing in response to my practice. These notes attempted to articulate (to myself) an understanding about the processes of creative practice - what was actually happening when the unconscious began to form into a thought, was manifested as an action performed for my camera, or was captured/recorded on film. I then began to use the word in informal conversations with other woman film-makers at the London Film Makers' Co-op.

developing the notion of an 'imaginary', I connected to my year of 'solitary' experimentation as an artist at the start of the 1980s, before going to Newport Art School. An A3 self portrait in coloured pastels, made whilst sitting naked in front of the coal fire in my living room, marks a transition in the evolution of my practice. For this drawing, I constructed a 3-dimensional 'cage' of paper that was both a frame and a container - the layer of 'bars', curved like flames, partially obscured the image of my body and produced an 'optical flux' through the doubling of focal planes, as you could not focus on both bars and portrait at the same time. I then set fire to the cage sculpture in the back garden and took a series of photographs that documented its destruction. The ashes that remained blew away, or were washed into the earth by rain.

Then, in my 1991 funding application to the Arts Council and Channel 4, I proposed a 16mm film which became *Cage of Flame* (1992):

A personal investigation and expression in interactive animated image and sound of the female power of menstruation. / Following the clues laid down in the strength of dreams and the raw energy of this time, I shall seek out and trap images, ideas, sounds, and construct a place of 'confinement' where the imaginary can come to life. (Parker, 1991)

With this work - in which my "dreams came true" (Parker, 1991) - I was able to effect an embodied immersion in my own psychic environment throughout the making process and feel an almost palpable presence of my self's 'other/s' operating within my interior landscape, which I represented visually and aurally as moving image with sound.

When I am making films, and direct animation in particular - because of the intimate relationship with my materials and the materiality of film-making - I connect with the imaginary of the deep past of my early childhood, my memories of becoming a woman,



and with my experience as an artist film-maker. I have an interactive relationship with these genealogies and histories that inform, anchor, and enrich the 'know how' of my practice. I thus follow Elizabeth Grosz's definition of the imaginary as "a psychical projection of the body, a kind of map of the body's psychosocial meaning" (Grosz, 1991: 43), but my imaginary is more than a hollowed out space, a delineated container for 'mind images' and structured sensory perceptions. I turn again to the mirror, to see if my reflections can assist me.

### **Mirror**<sup>150</sup>

Reading Jacques Lacan's 1949 paper 'The Mirror Stage as Formative in the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience',<sup>151</sup> I notice the centrality of the body, and the importance of gestural play between the child and its double. I like Lacan's use of the term '*imago*',<sup>152</sup> as it also denotes entomologically the final stage of an insect's development, when it acquires - through metamorphosis - a fully-formed adult body, that is usually winged, thus conveying a doubled transformative meaning to the mirror

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150. In this section I refer to Lacan's 1949 paper 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience', but I am informed also by his subsequent conceptual revisions, which incline the mirror to the symbolic rather than the imaginary realm, and relate the self, as subject, to a dynamic with the 'other', as object.

151. 'Le stade du miroir formateur de la fonction du Je' was presented at the 1949 International Psychoanalytic Association congress in Zurich, and published a few months later in *Revue Française de Psychoanalyse* no. 4 (October-December 1949). It is a revised version of a paper, entitled 'Le stade du miroir', delivered over a decade earlier at the 1936 congress. The earlier lecture was published in English under the title 'The Looking-glass Phase', in *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* vol. 18. no. 1 in January 1937 (Lacan, 1977: xiii). I have not been able to locate this paper, and the source *LacanOnline* (2010) has it as "mostly lost".

152. Lacan's use of the word '*imago*' relates to Carl Jung's psychoanalytic theorisation in which the term denotes the various 'images' of self that emerge from the collective unconscious. I have omitted Jung from this thesis for reasons of space, although his writings on archetypes played an important part in the development of my practice whilst an undergraduate.

stage as well as connecting to the metamorphic potential of animation, discussed in my previous chapter. I note also the importance of repetition in the child's engagement with the image of its imaginary body.

Imagination - calling mental images into being - performs at some distance from, or in the absence of, the physical object that is its focus. An awareness of separation of oneself from the external world is necessary for the formation of the imaginary, which derives from Freudian and Lacanian unconscious phantasy. The term 'Imaginary' (with a capital I) is used by Lacan for his re-interpretation of Freud's pre-oedipal period during which the child<sup>153</sup> has no sense of 'self' and cannot make a clear distinction between its own body and the external world (Lacan, 1977: 1-7). Lacan's Imaginary refers to the developmental moment (of the Ego, or I)<sup>154</sup> in which the almost-toddling infant<sup>155</sup> becomes aware of its body as a separate unit, coherent and unified, a progression from its hitherto jumbled sensoria of limbs, undifferentiated feelings, and (seemingly) disconnected bodily movements through recognition of a reflected imago 'double'. For Lacan, the 'self knowledge' that is produced through what he termed the 'mirror stage' is as illusory as the child's perception of its self having physical mastery of its body-made-whole - the image of itself as a whole, unified body - and the environment that surrounds it.

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153. Lacan's child is, of course, male.

154. Lacan proposed the 'I' as a fourth function, adding to Freud's elemental trio of personality, ego, id, and super-ego, through which a subject is able to achieve self-recognition (become a subject) - the Imaginary, a mechanism for the assembly of a coherent inner identity, effected via the mirror stage of a young child's psychic development.

155. Lacan uses the French, '*trotte-bébé*', to mean a young child who is able to emulate 'walking' on two legs only when supported.

Lacan's revision of Freud proposes a period when the child is between six and eighteen months<sup>156</sup> during which time the child identifies with its own image and recognises itself as 'I'. This recognition of the self's image is an essential stage which comes before the entrance into language. After this, the subject can understand the place of that 'image of the self' within a wider social order, in which the subject must negotiate their relationship with others. This 'I',<sup>157</sup> represents to the subject a distinct unified/whole form of the self, in contrast to the turbulent chaotic perceptions, feelings, and needs felt by the infant child. The unified illusion and imaginary sense of completeness conferred by the 'ideal image' is preferred to the jumbled discord of the fragmented body (which is dependent on a larger adult - usually the mother - for movement, clothing, bathing and sustenance) giving rise to 'narcissistic' fantasies in the subject, and establishing what Lacan terms the imaginary order. The mirror phase also marks a symbolic castration, by which Lacan means the separation between self and m/other that is the result of detachment from the Real (from the actual materiality of things). The child's movement into an increasingly mobile developmental stage augments the separation from the Real and any subsequent intrusion of the Real's materiality (from chaos outside and within the body) is traumatic.

Lacan modified Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory to demonstrate that language is a system which makes sense only within its own internal logic of differences: the word (signifier) 'father' only makes sense in terms of those other terms it is defined with or against (mother, 'me', law, phallus etc.). On entry 'into language' the subject becomes part of the 'symbolic order' defined by Lacan as the field of culture and

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156. In the stages of development proposed by Lacan and others, the ages are approximate, and can overlap and/or exist simultaneously.

157. Termed by Lacan as 'ideal ego' or 'Ideal-I', following Freud's '*Ideal-Ich*'.

language created by those who came before. In doing this the child is reduced to an empty signifier, 'I', within the field of the Other. According to Lacan, the linguistic position is marked by gender differences: all actions are now determined by the subject's sexual position - for Lacan, this does not have much to do with sexual urges or sexual markers - by a linguistic system in which the terms 'male' and 'female' can only be understood in relation to each other in language.

Throughout her life a woman experiences the continual death of her subjectivity. Stuck at the back of the mirror, pressed against the glass, looking on to the world. She reflects man, she is his 'container', the repository of his subjectivity. Irigaray tackles Freud's concept of femininity, including the issue of representation: "an organized system whose meaning is regulated by paradigms and units of value that are in turn determined by male subjects". She proposes that: "the feminine must be deciphered as inter-dict: within the signs or between them" (Irigaray, 1974/1985a: 22). Irigaray considers this to be "one of the tasks of our time, following particularly from the discovery of the unconscious and the various human liberation movements" (1990/1993b: 59) and calls for "the right to 'verticality' in female identity", by which she means a woman's right to her genealogical and spiritual becoming (1990/1993b: 94).

### **Mirror, Mirror**

Kristeva follows Lacan's theorisation of the mirror stage, marked by the child's identification with its own 'image' and preceding the 'entrance into language', after which the subject can understand the place of that image of the self within a larger social order, in which the subject must negotiate their relationship with others.

However, she proposes that the infant passes through an intermediate phase before the mirror stage. She terms this 'abjection', which must exist as "a precondition of narcissism" for the mirror stage and stresses the importance of the "*narcissistic crisis*" of abjection (Kristeva, 1982: 13-14; original emphasis). During this developmental period the child recognises a separation between itself and the mother, the existence of boundaries between self and 'other' essential for entrance into language.

Confronted continually with the pre-linguistic chaos of materiality, the subject feels fear and horror because, being drawn back into the *chora* (in other words, the threat of death) means giving up all the linguistic structures by which we order our social world of meaning. Linking defilement, sewage, "muck", bodily fluids, "dung", and dead things to the abject, Kristeva says, "There. I am the border of my condition as a human being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border" (Kristeva, 1982: 2-3). The tainted beach where I found the broken glass it may be considered 'abject', a liminal place between the ordered world and breakdown/decay, a border between sea and land that attracts and repels me.

Kristeva posits the abject moment as the pre-lingual point at which we separate from the luxurious sensual wholeness of the *chora* and establish a boundary between the self and the 'm/other'. Thenceforth in our selfhood we become filled with the fear of being drawn back into a state in which meaning breaks down and we become indistinguishable from the dead world of objects. Confrontation with the abject (across the chasm, the border) triggers a traumatic response as we flee from the inevitable immobility of death, "that ultimate law" (Kristeva, 1986: 296). She views this as pre-

lingual because the 'protective' physical response originates from the time in our early development 'before language'. In addition, our response is 'instinctive and occurs 'spontaneously', before/outside of consciously articulated thought.

She adds to Lacan and suggests that language is a fetish; in other words, an attempt to conceal the lack inherent in our relation to death, materiality, and the object: "But is not language our ultimate and inseparable fetish?" (Kristeva, 1982: 37). We are constituted 'speaking beings' via our entry into language. This is a condition of subjectivity. But language camouflages or is a substitute for lack, and the loss of the mother in the symbolic order when we shift from eating/drinking at our mother's breast to speaking 'empty' words:

Through the mouth that I fill with words instead of my mother whom I miss from now on more than ever, I elaborate that want, and the aggressivity that accompanies it, by *saying* (Kristeva, 1982: 41; original emphasis)

Kristeva is drawing attention here to how words in language 'stand in' for the objects that they can never replace. The word 'milk' is just a sound, marks on a page: it can never provide the 'real' sustenance of my mother's milk or the plenitude of my experience before I was separated from her. In the rupture of *choral* time, there is an energy released which finds outlet and expression in the breath of speaking. Kristeva seems to suggest language itself is an attempt to heal the aching gulf that opens up in the self as a result of becoming a subject, through a compulsion to describe - and provide a stopgap for - what we cannot (ever) have (again).

### **Edgeland**

In thinking through the ideas generated by *Glass*, I am reminded of the incremental moments of close looking that I captured during its making, played back to create an

illusory synthesis of moving images, and wonder how this process of animation creates coherence and 'significance' from the disparate, unconnected fragments of glass, that have no 'meaning' attached to them which is immediately discernible.<sup>158</sup>

The spoken word is separated from the thing it signifies, because the object or thought that the word describes is absent - the word, then, stands in for the thing or concept.

For Ferdinand de Saussure, a word, or linguistic sign, results from a coming together of two elements: a sound pattern, or signifier, and a thought, or signified. He makes clear that these have no physical 'presence'; they are, rather, mental impressions produced during a sensory interaction with the mind. Each and every signifier and signified is but a 'value', produced as a result of its 'difference' (*différence*) from any other signifier and signified.

Saussure proposes language as a link between the "floating realm" of thought, also described as "a vague, uncharted nebula", "jumbled" without features, "chaotic by nature" and the "equally vague plane of sounds". He refers to both thought and sound as "shapeless masses" and linguistics as operating in "the borderland where elements of sound and thought combine" (Saussure, 1916/1959: 112-113). For Saussure, language comes from a site of liminality, an 'edgeland' between one place and another - like Stonehouse beach, the 'un-named' place for which no word existed until I 'called it' into significance with a sound pattern and a concept. He refers also to thought as becoming "ordered in the process of its decomposition", by which he means the

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158. I refer here to 'signification', as the production of meaning. The pieces have no distinguishing markings that reveal their original form or function.

structuration that results from its bond with the sound pattern (Saussure, 1916/1959: 112). And here, I catch the sour-sweet scent of feculent seaweed that haunts the scrap of beach.

Saussure considers the combination of the "thought-sound" (the "sound-image", "linguistic-entity", or word) as a blending that produces a 'form' not a 'substance', (de Saussure, 1916/1959: 113), with meaning produced through a play of 'differences' between the constituent parts of language. Although, any connection is arbitrary: as Jacques Derrida points out, there is no relation between the word and the object or thought it substitutes for, and the word, the sign is but a momentary fusion of the concept, the signified and its sound-image, the signifier (Collins and Mayblin, 2000/2005). He draws attention to the fact that we cannot adhere a permanent meaning to a word and that the the meaning of a word is not immediately apparent, but requires other words to define and clarify what we mean. In addition, Derrida's notion of '*différance*' - as a never-ending process that disrupts through a doubled movement that disorders and re-arranges - destabilises and 'deconstructs' the binary union of Saussure's linguistic model (Collins and Mayblin, 2000/2005: 91; Macey, 2000: deconstruction).

In *Glass*, each incremental moment of close looking captured as a photograph combines with other moments on the video timeline. When transposed to visual language, Saussure's linguistic equation - meaning equals sensing-plus-thinking - produces a signifier as an image (the sensory material) and a signified (or meaning). The slight gestures of my hand, carefully breathing as my fingers hold the microscope moving in slow exploration just above the balanced arrangement of coloured glass



fragments, are fixed in place as digital photographs. These optical patterns become a coherent stream animated moments, their shifting synthesis accompanied by the rhythmic sonic swell of the ocean.

Following the Lacanian linguistic model, meaning occurs through the position of each signifier - the optical patterns of my animated photographs and the sounds of the sea - relative to and interlinked with other signifiers in the signifying chain. In this process, each unit of visual and audio sensory material contributes to the film's unified 'whole'.<sup>159</sup> In making *Glass*, my unconscious speaks through the play of *jouissance*: in animating, my body has (re)written herself, drawing on my memories of childhood and my vocabulary as (a) woman artist.

### Looking Glass

The screen is something that is permeable, a membrane that allows entry through, like the mirror in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* which "melts away, just like a bright silvery mist" to allow Alice and Kitty the black kitten to get through to the 'other side' via the mantelpiece above the fireplace (Carroll 1871/1970: 181, 184-185).

Elizabeth Grosz states that Alice:

acts as metaphor for the woman who ... steps beyond her role as the reflective other for man. She goes through the looking-glass, through, that is, the dichotomous structures of knowledge, the binary polarisations in which only man's

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159. Similarly, Maya Deren argued that film-making was a matrix in which all the elements were interconnected in a non-hierarchical dynamic 'whole': "In an anagram all the elements exist in a simultaneous relationship. Consequently, within it, nothing is first and nothing is last; nothing is future and nothing is past; nothing is old and nothing is new... Each element of an anagram is so related to the whole that no one of them may be changed without affecting its series and so affecting the whole. And conversely the whole is so related to every part that whether one reads horizontally, vertically, diagonally or even in reverse, the logic of the whole is not disrupted, but remains intact" (Deren in Nichols, 2001: 6). Deren's essay, was first published in an edition of 750 copies by The Alicat Book Shop Press in Yonkers, New York, as number nine in its 'OUTCAST' series of 'Chapbooks': a facsimile is included as an appendix to Bill Nichols' book, *Maya Deren and the American Avant-garde* (2001).

primacy is reflected. On the other side is a land of wonder, a land that can be mapped, not by the flat mirror, but by the curved speculum. (Grosz, 1989: 131)

The speculum is both a mirror and a device for inspection of body cavities, and part of the 'toolkit' for consciousness-raising promoted by the women's movement of the 1970s, through self knowledge of our own bodies. Irigaray's speculum allows the 'other' woman within to be 'seen', as my imaginary 'other' is seen on the moving image screen.<sup>160</sup>

The slippage between forms and the instability of the representation of the material world in *Glass* echo the moment in Jean Cocteau's film *Orphée* (1950) when the protagonist, arm outstretched, walks into a mirror, and, instead of smashing the glass, passes Alice-style through the misty gauze into another world.<sup>161</sup> I recall also that the fractured edges of a looking glass can cut, slice and wound, as the broken mirror flung onto the wet sand of a beach in Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943). This choreographic study of poetic interiority is resonant with longing and fear, and haunted by a foreshadowing of death - the death of the woman by her own hand.

Through her argument in *Strangers to Ourselves* (1989/1991),<sup>162</sup> that woman must construct a place for herself from a position of sexual difference, Kristeva proposes a doubled and conflicted negotiation of belonging and not 'fitting in', of being excluded:

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160. In addition to the cinema screen - a flat white or silver surface upon which pictures are projected for viewing - and other screens and visual systems for delivering moving images - iPods, tablets, digital cameras, phones, LCDs and plasma screens - are the interwoven layers of meaning that come from the word 'screen': something that hides, conceals, separates, protects - such as a screen in front of a fireplace; a sieve for sifting fine particles such as sand; a mesh inserted into a door or window to prevent insects from entering; and, to examine a body for evidence of disease or infection.

161. In a scene from Cocteau's earlier film *Le Sang d'un Poète*, (1931), the female statue instructs the male artist: "Do you think it's that simple to get rid of a wound? ... There is only one way left ... You must go into the mirror and explore" (Stenhouse, 1931: 134).

162. First published in French as *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* by Favard, Paris, in 1989.

"trapped within the frontiers of her body and even of her species", woman identifies with - but must acknowledge difference from - the maternal-feminine (from which she is separated) and her permanent estrangement from the masculine domains of language, society and culture: "the clear laws of conscious existence" (Kristeva, 1986: 296).<sup>163</sup> Kristeva relates the 'foreignness', the 'strangeness', of femininity to the loss of one's 'mother tongue'. In the original French of *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, she uses '*la langue*', which means 'tongue', as in language,<sup>164</sup> with '*maternelle*', to make it clear that in this context she is referring to the maternal realm 'lost' as a result of woman's signification in patriarchy:

Not speaking one's mother tongue [Ne pas parler sa langue maternelle] ... cut off from the body's nocturnal memory, from the bitter-sweet slumber of childhood. Bearing within oneself like a secret vault ... that language of the past that withers without ever leaving you. (Kristeva, 1989/1991: 15; and Kristeva in Smith, 1998: 79)

Woman must recognise, retrieve, and find a place for '*sa langue maternelle*', the 'otherness' within from her childhood, integrated before separation from her mother, then cast out and 'exiled'. In *Glass*, I recover my 'other self' and am returned to the language of my mother, who speaks to me with her/our 'mother tongue', re-united through my body, my memories of childhood, and the intuitive language of my 'know how' as an artist film-maker.

The glass is broken. The containers cannot be re-constituted, will never be made whole again. These fragments were once empty vessels to be filled, as woman is a container for man. It seems to me that, in making *Glass* 'as (a) woman' through a process of *écriture féminine*, I am creating a 'looking glass', a poetic moving imaging text through

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163. 'A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident' published originally as an editorial in *Tel Quel* no. 74 (Winter 1977) under the title 'Un nouveau type d'intellectuel: le dissident', pp. 3-8.

164. Rather than '*le language*'.

which I may find a place for my body's language and 'see' myself. Every frame counts, each moment matters, and all image and sound elements are balanced in relation to one another. In *Glass*, I signify, I make myself significant with an embodied 'other' language that 'belongs' to me.



## Part III Material Substrate

### Chapter Five: Writing the Body

#### Blobs in Tartan Colours

My reading of Orcadian film-poet Margaret Tait's hand-painted film *Painted Eightsome*, (1970), which follows, aims to establish a spectatorial perspective on the practice of direct animation with film, so the reader may understand the processual, embodied nature of a woman artist's engagement with her materials. In my reading of Tait's 'film poetry', I am informed by my 'know how' and a conceptual framework deriving from Julia Kristeva. My exploration of the Margaret Tait's creative processes includes examination of the ways in which the physical engagement between her body and the film-making materials, effect and inflect the interplay of Julia Kristeva's concepts in her audiovisual artwork *Painted Eightsome*, in which the music of a Scottish reel is combined with animated imagery painted frame-by-frame onto clear 35mm film (SSA, 2014: 4444).<sup>165</sup> Methodologically, I am responding to the material itself and the materiality of semiotic and symbolic in Tait's 'painted surface' as a maker of direct animation films, attuned to certain types of processes, in order to generate a particular reading of the work.

As a creative artist, Tait used a range of forms. She wrote prose and poetry, and made short films, usually shooting on 16mm with her clockwork Bolex camera. In her cinematic work she explored an array of highly experimental techniques, including

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165. The film can be viewed on the Scottish Screen Archive website at 'Full record for 'PAINTED EIGHTSOME'', reference number 4444: <http://ssa.nls.uk/film.cfm?fid=4444> Accessed: 1 January 2015.

painting and scratching on the film surface, from the beginning of her film-making career in Italy in the early 1950s. Tait regarded her short films, of which she made over 30 across almost half a century, as 'film poems'. Notable for her experimentation, improvisation, and innovation, she pursued a uniquely individual and independent engagement with film-making in relation to concerns and interests arising from her concern with the everyday. In her hand-painted works she engaged directly with the materiality of film and the creative potential of its physical properties. *Painted Eightsome* combines music and painting within the artform of poetic film. The running time of the film, just over six minutes,<sup>166</sup> is determined by the length of the accompanying music. The frames of the 35mm filmstrip are delineated with hand-drawn lines and have been painted with aniline dyes<sup>167</sup> in a range of vibrant colours (Winn, 2002/2013: 24 - 26).<sup>168</sup>

In her 'Foreword' to Sarah Neely's book *Margaret Tait: Poems, Stories and Writings* (2012), the poet Ali Smith refers to Tait as a "film-poet" (Smith, 2011: xiii) in acknowledgement of her duality as an artist who created films that are visual poems and wrote poems that conjured cinematic images. Poetic language is distinct from our everyday verbal communication, in that our attention is drawn to the words through which meaning is constructed. To use Margaret Tait's own words, "In poetry, something

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166. There is another, longer and slightly different version of Tait's film *Painted Eightsome*, at Scottish Screen Archive, 'Full record for '8SOME'', reference number 4444A, available: <http://ssa.nls.uk/film/4444A> Accessed: 1 January 2015.

167. Aniline dyes are synthetic organic compounds used to stain biological samples in order to make cell structures more visible when studied through a microscope. They come in a range of colours, from deep saturated primaries to subtle hues. Margaret Tait was medically trained, and was familiar with aniline dyes and their use in the laboratory.

168. Joss Winn's paper, 'Preserving the Hand-Painted Films of Margaret Tait' (Winn, 2012/2013), includes a detailed technical report on the artwork for *Painted Eightsome* and another hand-painted film by Margaret Tait, *John MacFadyen* (SSA: 4445), both of which are contained on the same roll.

else happens" (Tait in Smith, 2011: xiv). The words are no longer transparent, we become aware of the language being used and the words themselves, their sounds and rhythms and juxtapositions (Robbins, 2000: 126).

Although the philosopher Julia Kristeva follows Lacan's understanding that the speaking subject is a duality divided into a conscious mind and an unconscious mind,<sup>169</sup> she positions the body within discourse and argues that we should consider unconscious and conscious processes of language, as both are needed to create meaning. For me, Kristeva's re-imagining of Freud and Lacan, and her theorisation of the connection between mind and body, suggests a conceptual framework within which the film poem *Painted Eightsome* may be 'read' in order to open out thinking about Tait's practice. Kristeva's emphasis is on the maternal and pre-oedipal in the constitution of subjectivity, in that she is interested in the development of subjectivity before Freud's oedipal stage or Lacan's 'mirror' stage, and foregrounds the interplay between the 'symbolic' structure of language and the 'semiotic' of rhythms and the maternal body (Kristeva, 1986). In *Painted Eightsome*, the dancing music of the Scottish reel that drives the animated imagery forwards, together with the materiality of the 'hand made' visuals, foregrounds the presence of the film-maker and her making processes. In addition, the continually mutating pictorial forms of Tait's poetic moving image language convey an 'open' subjectivity, enabling a cascade of meanings to be generated through the interplay of the viewer's conscious and unconscious.

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169. In the context of this thesis, I intend 'consciousness' to mean our awareness of various mental processes such as thinking and speaking, and also the rational aspects of our being. I refer to 'unconsciousness' as the mental processes which are generally 'hidden' from the conscious mind, and the bio-physiological processes of the corporeal body. The unconscious may be accessed in the recollection of dreams and is evident in the 'gaps between' consciousness, such as 'slips of the tongue'.



My own critically reflective praxis as an artist film-maker gives me a spectatorial perspective on Margaret Tait's direct animation that is inflected by my 'know how,' the term used by Robin Nelson for the "practical knowing-through-doing" of embodied knowledge and understanding that is acquired through practice (Nelson, 2009; 2013). I have an understanding of film as a physical substance and the processes of direct animation film-making from working with the materiality of photochemical analogue film for over two decades.

In Greek, a spectator or onlooker is *θεατής*, from which the word 'theory' comes. Philosopher Hannah Arendt states that thinking derived from Greek philosophy rests on the premise that only the spectator, who is removed from the action taking place, is in a position to see and comprehend the entirety of what is occurring before their eyes:

as a spectator you may understand the 'truth' of what the spectacle is about; but the price you have to pay is the withdrawal from participating in it ... only the spectator occupies a position that enables him to see the whole play - as the philosopher is able to see the kosmos as a harmonious ordered whole. (Arendt, 1978: 93)<sup>170</sup>

My position as a spectator is informed by my 'know how.' When I watch Tait's film poem *Painted Eightsome*, her work 'speaks' to my body. I cannot 'un-know' the embodied knowledge of direct animation film-making acquired through years of experience. As an artist film-maker, my research is practice-led; as a researcher, I adopt a dynamic multi-layered approach that modulates across the modes of maker and spectator, accentuating the fluidity between these positions.

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170. From the combined volume, *The Life of the Mind: Thinking and Willing*: this work was intended by Arendt as a trilogy, with 'Judging' as the third volume. However, five days after completing volume two, 'Willing', she died of a heart attack. Her friend Mary McCarthy then edited the first and second volumes, and added notes on Arendt's perspective on 'judging'.

Tait described *Painted Eightsome*, completed in 1970 and made by her over a period of 14 to 15 years, as:

An eightsome reel played by Orkney Strathspey and Reel Society, recorded in about 1955 - 1956, later transferred to 35mm optical stock with clear picture,<sup>171</sup> and gradually painted over the years. Eights of different things - figures, antlers, or sometimes just blobs in tartan colours - dance their way through the figure of the reel. (Tait in SSA, 2014: 4444)

The eightsome reel is both traditional fiddle music and its accompanying energetic dance, a complex combination of a Scottish reel and the quadrille. Intended for four couples to dance at social gatherings, such as weddings, the beat is fast and regular, driving the motion of the dancers ever onward as they twirl and interlink. The dancers form into different positions and move to counts of eight beats, such as: all holding hands in a circle for eight steps and then moving back to their original positions, women and men each making a chain, with women moving clockwise and men anti-clockwise, and individual women taking turns to dance alone in the centre of the circle while the rest of the dancers move around.

Tait's film has received few public screenings, but a digitised version is freely available for viewing online at the National Library of Scotland's Scottish Screen Archive website. Here, at the Full record for 'PAINTED EIGHTSOME' page (SSA, 2014: 4444), a doughy white face with a quizzical look peers from a small video window, pressed against an almost-square pane of tropical turquoise. Despite the pixelation that presents the image as tiled, like a mosaic, I can discern that this is an image painted by hand with a brush using colours in liquid form. In the upper left corner, deep cerulean brushstrokes form the letters: PAI / NT / E.

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171. Winn notes that Tait used a Kodak black and white Comopt (optical) print of the music recording, as a single roll (Winn, 2002/2013: 25).

An azure curl with an inner crotchet of orange-yellow curves around to make the left eye, the right eye a swirl of diluted orange squash. These shapes remind me of musical notes seen in a mirror, one crotchet or quarter note with its stem upmost, like the letter 'b' makes the left eye; the other crotchet, the right eye, has its stem pointing down, like 'g'. The artist has left a dot of amber in the centre of each eye. Amber on cobalt makes greenish cheeks: slashes for the left cheek, a circular swab for the right. The muted peach hook of the right eye reaches down to suggest a nose, and the mouth sits on the windowsill as parallel strokes of pale gold and ultramarine.

As I look, I respond to the work as a maker, and become aware that my body is following the actions of the artist's hand at the time of creating this image. My fingers' memory feels their pressure on the paintbrush as Tait loads the sable hairs with liquid colour, pauses momentarily to concentrate the energy, then releases by stroking the surface of the picture. She has created the face from the transparent field of the unmarked film surface which appears here as a white ground, patching in a blue wash at the frame edges to leave a rough oval free of colour except for a suggestion of features. The face looks surprised and melancholic, as if caught inside the confines of a digital prison cell, its window branded National Library of Scotland / Scottish Screen Archive in white letters at the top right hand corner. This is accompanied by a white icon of an open laptop, or a book open at empty pages, pictured in stasis, caught in the act of flying away through an imaginary sky. So far, I have looked through the surface of my screen to the space beyond, where the face stuck in the frame implores me to press that flat dark grey square with a white arrowhead facing right, placed dead centre, seemingly on top of the picture. I adjust my focus, then click to set the face free, and animate...

Neely and Riach, among others, place Tait within the international avant-garde and consider her film poetry to share a common heritage with moving image work made by other avant-garde film-makers such as Maya Deren (2009: 1-19). They observe that a "fecund relationship between cinema and poetry ... developed through her experimental film work" (2009: 3) and consider that the constraints of budget and equipment she experienced throughout most of her film-making career influenced the development of her unique film language. She was driven through necessity to economical and resourceful ways of capturing and representing the world cinematographically "in a way comparable to written poetry" (Neely and Riach, 2009: 6).

Margaret Tait said of her film-making: "The kind of cinema I care about is at the level of poetry - in fact - it has been in a way my life's work making film poems" (Tait in Luxonline, 2005). Her work explored the lyrical potency of the everyday, and sought to reveal the transcendence of the 'ordinary' she intuited through her deep connection to the things, places and people she loved. She often quoted the poet Lorca's notion of "stalking the image" (Tait in Smith, 2004: 26) to explain her own position as a film-poet. Tait practiced an acute observation of the world and her embodied and knowing psychic responses to being in place, patiently lying in wait, hunting 'mind images'.

Tait's partner Alex Pirie wrote the following about her film-making in 1977:

In 25 years of unremitting application to the film medium, Margaret Tait has evolved the style that allows her to display and offer what Alfred Kazin, writing of Simone Weil, called 'a loving attentiveness to all the living world'. That definition of her philosophy, of her method, holds true, whether the setting is an Edinburgh street, the banks of an Orkney burn, a domestic interior or a human face. Unlike so much that is called experimental and avant-garde, her films are not merely exercises in perception. Her film images are accessible (A thistle is invariably a thistle), they are of the everyday, and, at one level, a presentation of things as they are. But, in their framing, in their rhythmical patterning, in their duration, those images offer a vision

of the mystery and ambiguity with which so-called common objects are saturated. (Pirie in SSA, 2014: 3697)

Her insights into her own creative process as a film-poet can be seen in Tait's

comments about her work. Of her film poem *Where I Am is Here* (1964), Tait wrote:

my aim was to construct a film with its own logic, its own correspondences within itself, its own echoes and rhymes and comparisons, all through close exploration of the everyday, the commonplace. (Todd and Cook, 2004: 161)

Tait's notes for her seven short film poems (Tait in Winn, 2002/2013: 14),<sup>172</sup> released in 1974 under the collective title *Colour Poems* (SSA, 2014: 3697), indicate the organic, evolutionary, 'to and fro' relationship between experience and psychic processing in the generation of film poetry:

memory gets somewhat lost in the present observation, although it never disappears, and there are reverberations back ... Out of one's own memory and thought one then finds (or arranges) the external scenes which can be filmed and made into something else again. (Tait in SSA, 2014c)

Kristeva's paradigm of 'semanalysis' (*sémanalyse*) combines de Saussure's semiology, or semiotics (*la sémiotique*), with Freud's psychoanalysis. She explains that the 'bodily drives' of the unconscious display their energy through language: Kristeva's 'living' language is interwoven with the unconscious and its drives (energies/forces). The semiotic (*le sémiotique*) oscillates with the symbolic, it is preverbal, feminine, connected to the body, and associated with the maternal (although it is available to the masculine). Tait allowed the memories, dreams, and imaginings of her unconscious to emerge, catching these 'mind images' and then setting them free within the dynamic visual poetry of her films. When I watch Tait's film poem *Painted Eightsome*, I feel her connectivity with the 'living world' she experienced and I am touched by its vibrant energies. I am, in effect, feeling 'affect', a collective term that embraces both feelings

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172. Winn quotes Tait as saying that this title contains nine short films.

and emotions. When these embodied processes reach consciousness, they are perceived as feelings, and emotions when they are experienced as more complex physical sensations. Watching *Painted Eightsome*, I am 'brought back' to my body, and it is through this interwoven conscious and unconscious processing that I, the spectator, create meaning and the work becomes meaningful, significant, to me.

It seems to me that the playfulness of the animated imagery in Tait's film evokes Kristeva's semiotic, which has its origins in childhood play, before language. The painted drawings are unsophisticated and communicate the immediacy of Tait's response as a film-poet to the everyday things of the world, and her remembered experience of the musical dance of the eightsome reel. She applies sufficient motor control to her mark-making within the 35mm frame to suggest shapes that can be recognised by the audience, but these childlike images have an affinity to Kristeva's pre-oedipal chora, her term for the symbiotic dyad of mother and child. The dyes, in the colours of Scottish tartan, were chosen for their affect, the feelings they generate and their emotional impact. *Painted Eightsome* is reminiscent for me of our first coming to language as children, and becoming part of the socialised world. The animated imagery presents a child's view of the world, a sensorial encounter of kinaesthetic immersion that is initially experienced directly in relation to the mother's body.

In contrast, the formal structure and complex choreography of the dance aligns with the Kristevan symbolic, which can be seen as the child's post-oedipal identity, when the child separates from the maternal, acquires language and submits to the 'rules' of the

masculine in order to enter the social world of patriarchy. The eightsome reel is a dance for eight people, it is an ordered activity governed by a specific series of moves that requires an individual to be socialised, to 'belong' to the symbolic order.

Through my encounter as a spectator, *Painted Eightsome* conveys a fluid intertwining of semiotic and symbolic. Kristeva's conceptualisation of the semiotic is as a pre-oedipal 'underground space' of bodily pulsations that interacts with, and gives meaning to, the 'empty' symbolic of syntax and grammar, and the judgement position of language is embodied by the energies of the semiotic rhythmic 'bodies' in motion. The animated coloured light enters my body and affects me, generating feelings of rhythmic motion, drawing forth sensory memories and tactile sensations and a deep, unspoken level of immersive engagement with the screen world of Tait's film. The play of the pictorial forms on the screen and my body's response to my experience of watching the film connects to Tait's own movements as she painted the artwork and her recollections of the Scottish reel, woven through with the oscillating rhythms of the maternal chora.

Film has a specific size, weight, thickness, and material composition. Small rectangular holes punched through the material at regular intervals have rounded corners to avoid tearing when the film is advanced through the teeth, or sprockets, that pull or turn the strip. The picture area shown on the screen is within a 'frame'. These 'picture' frames are arranged in a ladder formation along the width of the filmstrip, the rungs acting as a line between the bottom of one frame and the top of another. Each frame occupies the same area as the other when the filmstrip is projected or seen in a mechanical viewer. The filmstrip is moved at a regular pace so that the small changes in the images are not discernible by the spectator's brain as individual frames, but are perceived to

be a continuous flickering stream of movement or change of shape, colour or texture. The symbolic of film's form and the controlled actions of its presentation therefore produces a structure which contains the semiotic of the marks within its frame borders, and creates a spectatorial experience of the moving image.

Photochemical analogue film has a material presence. Even if no image has been created photographically on the emulsion layer or marked by other means, the film surface on both sides picks up debris and detritus, dust, fluff, fibres and flakes of matter discarded from the body. The film is marked further through the touch of fingers and scratched by contact with hard objects and surfaces. Film only exists in a pure, pristine state when it emerges newly coiled and sealed in an airtight wrapping after its manufacture.

As a maker of films, when I watch *Painted Eightsome*, an immediate question is, How is this made? From my position as a spectator, I can tell from the 'look' of the moving pictures on the screen that the imagery is painted by hand at a small scale, because of the quality of the brushstrokes (the traces of pressure and direction applied have resulted in changes of width and shape of the marks), and the imperfections caused by detritus caught in the coloured liquid medium used. From my 'know how', I understand that the artist has painted directly onto successive frames of movie film because of the visual 'shiver' produced by imperfect registration, and that the gauge used is 35mm because of the size of the flecks of dust and dirt embedded in the images, relative to the size of the frame. There is a pellucid quality to the colours onscreen that suggests the images were painted with dyes rather than with pigments.



The animated imagery of the title sequence unfolds, then a hiss and rustle on the soundtrack as the musicians of the Orkney Strathspey and Reel Society ready themselves and their instruments. A traditional Scottish reel begins, and the coloured figures appear to dance in time with the sound. To me, there seems to me to be a synchronous relationship between the up-and-down quick tempo of the music and the nimble shape shifting of the painted imagery. I want to know how Tait kept track of the music for this film during the decade and a half in which she painted the images, and how she contrived and maintained such a complex synthesis of audio and visual elements while she was making the animation.

According to Peter Todd, Tait worked through the visual elements of her films first, adding the sound components after the imagery was edited. Todd reports that, as an integral part of her film-making process, Tait would screen her 16mm work-in-progress to her partner Alex Pirie (Todd, 2004: 5). This allowed her to experience her work 'within an audience' and to discuss the films as they evolved over a period of months, or even across several years of intermittent production.

Todd comments on the importance of editing for Tait, and describes her process in terms of an 'evolution' (Todd, 2004: 5). In film-making, Tait's post-production was iterative and practice-led. She would edit, project the work-in-progress to her partner Alex Pirie, discuss it, then resume editing. Her method involved a triangulated engagement: firstly herself working with the film material; then the reception of the projected rough cut by a critical audience of herself and Pirie, feedback from him and her own response as spectators; and finally she would return to editing, reflexively informed by feedback from Pirie, her own response, and their subsequent discussion. Todd explains also that Tait would incorporate film from previous projects and "often

reworked and reused bits of film and sequences" (Todd, 2004: 5). She continually revised and re-edited her work, and there are several versions of many of her titles. For Tait, language is alive, and its heterogeneousness, its diversity and infinite possibilities, is stressed. The modalities co-exist: for Kristeva, the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, and in process; in Tait's film poems, film was material to be used, and creativity was fluid and constantly in process.

Other women makers of poetic film, such as Maya Deren and Marie Menken, share with Tait the key role of editing in the construction of their films. These artists also used the ambulatory hand-held camera as a 'seeing eye', feeling their way to capturing the world photographically in an intuitively choreographed dance. The film-maker's body here in contact with the ground, the mobile camera in hand, her eye looking there through the viewfinder, and her body moving towards the framed image. Deren in particular used editing as a process of organisation and transfiguration, reinforcing visual rhythms, patterns of movement, the relationship between a performer and the space of filming and the film space seen within the frame.

However, the making of work for cinema through the direct animation techniques used by Tait for *Painted Eightsome* requires a different set of strategies and psychological processes. Here, the artwork is a continuous strip of 'found' 35mm film, the length of which is fixed by the soundtrack it contains: in order to retain the flow of the Scottish reel, the film cannot be physically edited. In contrast to Tait's methodology used in her 'photographic' work for cinema, for her films which were entirely hand-painted, the audio pre-existed the visual element: the music track was laid along the edge of a 35mm filmstrip, leaving the 'picture area' empty so that Tait could paint each frame using aniline dyes, intense colours that stain the analogue film base. The imagery of

*Painted Eightsome* is created entirely through colour, which is for Kristeva, pure semiotic (Kristeva, 1980: 210-236).<sup>173</sup> The presence of the drive energies is a continual manifestation on the screen. Even where Tait has used a line to 'contain' an infill of colour, the line is itself coloured, a gestural mark rather than a controlling perimeter. The pictorial forms are crudely sketched, the coloured squiggles suggest representation and their interpretation remains with the viewer - a wiggling hoop of reddish-brown becomes a worm, then the body of a writhing snake, as an exuberant kaleidoscope of carnival flags, bright yellow sun, forget-me-not blue sky, and swathes of rose pink, plays within the frame. For Kristeva, "all colours... have a non centred or decentring effect ... [and] return the subject to the archaic moment of its dialectic," - that is, to the maternal *chora* (Kristeva, 1980: 225).

I would suggest that Tait followed a similar 'evolutionary' method for her 'hand-made' films to that used in making her 'photographic' films, and that she and her partner would have viewed and reviewed *Painted Eightsome* 'in progress' at several times during its 15 year period of making. Whilst I have found no record of Tait owning a 35mm projector, Todd mentions that Tait edited her 16mm films on a pic sync, a film viewing device that allows the film-in-progress to be seen at speed and for its accompanying soundtrack to be heard. Once editing was completed, she then sent her films to London for sound dubbing and printing in the laboratory (Todd, 2004: 5). It is likely, therefore, given her self-sufficiency and independence as a film-maker, that she would have had a 35mm pic sync or other motorised editing device, such as a Moviola

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173. Her essay 'Giotto's Joy', first published in French as 'La joie de Giotto' in *Peinture* vol. 2 no. 3 (January 1972), and reprinted in *Polylogue* by Seuil, Paris, in 1977, pp. 383-408. Also published in Norman Bryson (ed.) *Calligram: Essays in New Art History from France* by Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, in 1988, pp. 27-52.

or Steenbeck flat-bed editing table, which allow the film-maker to control the speed at which the film moves through the machine and enables the soundtrack encoded in the filmstrip to be heard at the same time as viewing the moving images. If this is not correct, then Tait could have arranged to have access to 35mm projection in a cinema, as she did for checking her 35mm *Calypso* filmprint when she moved to Edinburgh from Italy in 1954.

The self-reflexivity of Tait's methodology sustained her creative focus and the evolution of animated imagery over a lengthy period of time, during which she made several other films. From my 'know how' as an experienced practitioner, I would suggest that the symbolic structuring of the film's material specificities enabled Tait to return repeatedly to the process of making the visual artwork, the semiotic drives within her body responding to the music as she conjured rhythmic patterns with her brush loaded with coloured dye, for almost one and a half decades. In addition, it seems to me that Tait demonstrates an integrated shifting between modes that is symbiotic, a form of 'dispersed subjectivity' described by Kristeva's 'subject-in-process', who, "accentuates process rather than identification, projection rather than desire, the heterogeneous rather than the signifier, struggle rather than structure" (Coward and Ellis, 1977: 145 - 146; original emphasis). For *Painted Eightsome*, its process - the extended act of making - remains visible in the work and the space of the film frames in which the creation occurred; when projected, or viewed as a moving image work on a screen, the spectator is aware of the filmic material and its materiality through the presence of brush marks and accumulations of detritus; it is heterogeneous - as a dynamic procession of continually evolving and mutating coloured shapes, its meaning is

contingent; and struggle is evident in the instability of the pictorial elements, as the figures made of coloured dyes wrestle to emerge from the clear ground and continually refresh the imagery.

Additional research would be most welcome in order to confirm the methodology used by Tait for *Painted Eightsome* and *John MacFadyen (The Stripes in the Tartan)*, the artwork for which is contained on the first part of the same, unbroken roll of 35mm film with its optical soundtrack. Records available at the time of writing, by Winn and from the Scottish Screen Archive, and LUX, among others, indicate that Tait hand-painted these two films 'consecutively' between 1955 and 1970. The total length of the combined length of the artworks is given as 880 feet, with *John MacFadyen* having the first 316 feet of the roll and *Painted Eightsome* having the remaining 564 feet (Winn, 2002/2013: 24 -26). From my 'know how' as an experienced practitioner of direct animation, I know that an artist can unravel hundreds of feet of 35mm film in order to work directly onto the surface of the film in a precise manner, without any specialist film equipment, although one must take care not to damage the sprocketholes, which are vulnerable. Also, the dyes can take several hours to dry, especially if colours are overlaid as they are in *Painted Eightsome*, and newly painted artwork must be left exposed to the air until all the moisture has evaporated, and the surface is no longer tacky, before 'winding on'. From making *Calypso* with Peter Hollander's assistance whilst in Rome, Tait was already an experienced practitioner in the art of painting on film, and Winn notes that Tait began work on *Painted Eightsome* shortly after *Calypso*, and it is likely that she used the same aniline dyes. However, from the records available

to me, I cannot know for certain whether Tait was able to listen to the *Painted Eightsome* soundtrack during her making process – as I believe she did – and, if so, exactly how she did this.

Tait was familiar with the Len Lye's *A Colour Box*, made in 1935 for the GPO Film Unit, and was inspired by this work, which chimed with her own ideas of making a film to a 'musical beat'. From his conversations with Tait in the 1970s, Mike Leggett reports her as saying:

I had always enjoyed the Len Lye films which used to appear in the cinemas in the '30s... The use of sheer colour, screen-wide, coloured my idea of film (and perhaps colour) from then on." (Tait in Winn, 2002/2013: 24-26)<sup>174</sup>

*A Colour Box* on a large cinema screen is a powerful experience, and stunned audiences around the world from its release in the mid-1930s. Horrocks considers it a "breakthrough film," which

demonstrated the potential of the direct method in such a thorough and sophisticated way that the paint-brush had to be accepted ... as a viable alternative to the camera. (Horrocks, 2001: 141)

Lye was drawn to experimental film by the potential the form offered for movement and colour, and used "expressionistic automatic drawing and free association techniques" (Horrocks, 2001: 52-56).<sup>175</sup> Although it is not known whether Tait had a deeper knowledge of Lye's hand-made film practice, in particular his interest in Freud's theories of the unconscious and psychoanalysis, it is clear that *A Colour Box* influenced Tait's decision to paint visual music onto film. Joss Winn cites several similarities between Lye's film and Tait's first hand-painted work *Calypso*, such as, the adoption of

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174. Winn quotes from Mike Leggett's 'The Autonomous Film-Maker. Margaret Tait: Films and Poems 1951-76', an unpublished article written in 1979.

175. For more detail on the development of Lye's first engagement with film and his initial "fiddly scratches", please see the chapter on kinetic theatre.

the hand-painting process as a means of making a short film 'on the cheap' - because it didn't require a camera and didn't use much film stock; the exuberant rhythmic style of mark-making, and both films painted with the aniline dyes used in histology to study cell structures Winn, 2002/2013: 10 and 19).

Tait was familiar also with the work of Scottish-born experimental animator Norman McLaren, including his innovatory techniques in expressing music as imagery through direct animation (Todd, 2004: 3). His films inspired the making of her first hand-painted film *Calypso* in 1955 (SSA, 2014: 6226), which used as source material an unwanted 35mm optical track of some music, 'found' while she was in Rome. Lye's *A Colour Box* was a pivotal influence for McLaren, who reported that he was "electrified and ecstatic" when he saw the film for the first time:

Apart from the sheer exhilaration of the film, what intrigued me was that it was a kinetic abstraction of the spirit of the music, and that it was painted directly onto the film. (Winn, 2002/2013: 9)<sup>176</sup>

This experience was such a powerful one for McLaren that he was compelled to watch the film over and over again at every opportunity, and said that he "felt like a drug addict" (Winn, 2002/2013: 9). McLaren's reflection is resonant for me with the Kristevan *chora*, a pleasurable immersion in the materiality of existence, a chaotic swirl of undifferentiated feelings, needs and perceptions when one feels a 'one-ness' with the mother and the world.

McLaren was a pioneer in experimentation with film sound and developed a sophisticated notation system for creating music by marking the optical track area of a 35mm filmstrip, which he referred to as 'animated sound'. I would suggest that Tait

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176. The original source is Horrocks' biography of Len Lye (Horrocks, 2001: 145).

was aware of his use of the optical track to inform the painting of sequences within the picture frames of the filmstrip. There is a regular 'beat' marked along the edge of Tait's 35mm artwork for *Painted Eightsome* - a painted mark along three frames at intervals of approximately every nine frames - which I think would be used during the making process as a visual reference for rhythm.<sup>177</sup> Throughout the lengthy process of painting over nine thousand individual frames, the visual representation of the film's sound was a constant presence.<sup>178</sup> Tait was highly observant and attuned<sup>178</sup> to small changes in things:

It's the looking that matters, / The being prepared to see what there is to see. / Staring has to be done: / That I must do. (Tait in Neely, 1958/2012: 109)<sup>179</sup>

She looked at the world in detailed close-up with an intensity of vision, and used the wavering lines of the optical track an additional guide or score as she painted the frames, though not necessarily in an analytical manner - the visual appearance of the miniature optical code's symbolic structuring providing an opportunity for the embodied semiotic of the film-poet's imaginary to emerge as chromatic mark-making.

Additionally, there is evidence that Tait had an interest in codes. Peter Hollander, Tait's fellow student at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematographia in Rome and collaborator, remembers that she "devised an arcane system to indicate the opus numbers of our films in their titles", which he referred to as "Margaret's code" (Hollander in Winn, 2002/2013: 7).<sup>180</sup> I believe that Tait would have been interested in

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177. The beat punctuates sections of 12 frames, which last for half a second.

178. The running time of *Painted Eightsome* is 6 minutes 16 seconds at the customary cinema projection speed of 24 frames per second; this is equivalent to 376 seconds, or 9024 individual 'picture' frames.

179. The opening lines to Tait's poem 'Seeing's Believing and Believing's Seeing', dated 7 November 1958, which is reprinted in Neely's book.

180. Winn quotes from Hollander's unpublished autobiography.



the visual coding of music within the 35mm filmstrip, and would respond to it during the protracted period in which she painted the frames. There is no evidence that Tait attempted a detailed analytical correlation between the visual waveform and the marks she made, and I am not suggesting this. Tait, with her acutely 'peering' eye, did refer to the variations of the sound wriggles as she painted. This affected her mark-making performance and reinforced the "elasticity and multiplicity of meaning" which, as Ali Smith observed, is embedded deep in Tait's cinematic work (Smith, 2005: 2).<sup>181</sup>

So that the reader may gain a deeper understanding the translation processes by which live sound is recorded and then played back during the traditional making and presentation of a cinematic film such as *Painted Eightsome*, I describe the key stages of coding and decoding:

Music is played and recorded onto magnetic audiotape. Sound waves, produced in the air by the actions of the musicians' bodies upon their instruments, vibrate the diaphragm of a microphone, which registers the changes in atmospheric pressure and converts them into a variable electric current. An electromagnet then represents the acoustic sound wave as magnetic particles of ferric oxide arranged on a thin plastic tape. This audio analogue is transposed cinematographically into juddering waves of light embedded within a perforated strip of cellulose acetate or polyester film: the audio waveforms are translated into a visual code, rendered photographically by the laboratory as an optical soundtrack printed throughout the length of the filmstrip next to the sprocket holes. This is an analogue of the stereo sound waves, their variations of loudness and frequency converted to changes in the shape of two clear (white) lines. In 35mm film the optical track takes the form of a pair of wavering clear lines within the black ground of the film stock, running alongside the perforations on the left hand side.<sup>182</sup> These allow varying amounts of light to pass through: changes of brightness correspond to changes in volume and pitch. When decoded via the bright light of a projector or pic sync, the embedded optical track can then be heard by the listener: the film projector converts the optical code to electrical pulses, which move the diaphragm of a loudspeaker,

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181. I quote from Smith's essay on Tait, written for LUX: on page 2 she discusses Tait's 1964 film of Edinburgh, *Where I am is Here*.

182. The edge along which the soundtrack runs is termed the 'S side' or 'sound side' of the filmstrip; the opposite, right hand edge is the 'P side', or 'picture side'.

an electroacoustic transducer, to create changes in atmospheric pressure, audio waves which act upon the bodies of the listeners and re-embody the original sound.

The optical sound embedded in the *Painted Eightsome* filmprint is an analogue of the music. Its waveforms bear a direct relation to the original audio recording and to what the audience will hear 'played back' during projection. In the film, the animation is integrated with the sound and becomes visual music, a film poem in which the body's presence is reinforced by the highly mobile, intensely coloured imagery that seems inseparable from the Scottish reel.

My 'know how' suggests that the eightsome reel's swell of tiny waves, with its pattern of troughs and crests, informed the creation of the film's visuals in a similar way to that in which Tait's experiential observations were processed, embodied, then flowed... and became inscribed rhythmically and metaphorically in her poems. These short lines capture the relentless pushing and pulling movements of the Orcadian sea in its watery connection to the Earth's lunar satellite:

It never gets anywhere except to where it came from,  
But keeps up that regular surge and heave  
Of the tides  
As it hurls itself  
for ever towards the moon  
(Tait in Neely, 1959/2012: 50-51)<sup>183</sup>

Then, in these lines from another poem, she draws on a deep genetic and cultural memory to evoke the dominant force of the Vikings, who came first to Orkney at the end of the Eighth Century:

With the swift sides of their longships entering between two lips of water  
And at speed rushing ... And the dream of the deepest sea in their eyes  
Took them spinning down the coasts,

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183. The lines are from Tait's poem 'Cave Drawing of the Water of the Earth and Sea', published in Tait's collection *origins and elements* (1959); reprinted in Neely's book.

Ripping out into the ocean  
(Tait in Neely, 1959/2012: 113)<sup>184</sup>

For Kristeva, human subjectivity is a dynamic open system 'driven' by the constant movement and 'ceaseless heterogeneity' of the maternal chora that underlies the process of subjectivity and 'significance', a term used by her to indicate the infinitely changeable, unbounded and never-ending vibrations of the drive energies, which transform language through an vibrant fluctuation of organisation and superabundance.

All Tait's work, both films and writing, carries many layers of meaning within it. This is evident particularly in her use of light. Throughout her career Tait was fascinated by the phenomenon of light and its perception, and was clearly aware that is electromagnetic radiation that has observable behaviours such as refraction and reflection, and with different colours being 'seen' because of absorption. In her poem 'The Scale of Things', she refers to the "stunning frequencies" that are absorbed close to the ground so that the "full light of the sun" becomes calm, but not too blue (Tait in Neely, 1960/2012: 85).<sup>185</sup> As well as her detailed observation of light and its affects in microcosm, Tait also possessed a 'macrocosmic' understanding of the seasonal rhythms and cyclical changes of light, particularly on Orkney. In her long form poem 'Cave Drawing of the Water of the Earth and Sea', Tait wrote of making "an abstract picture out of magic water", and how a rainbow can be "water particles, refracted light, curvature of space" yet still "irrefutably a miracle." (Tait in Neely, 1959/2012: 49-55).<sup>186</sup>

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184. From Tait's 'That's Them off on Their Spring Forays', published in *The Orkney Herald*, 13 January 1959.

185. From 'The Scale of Things', published in *The Hen and the Bees*, 1960.

186. From 'Cave Drawing of the Water of the Earth and Sea', published in Tait's collection origins and elements, 1959.

This deep knowingness of 'how things work', and the interconnectedness of the world and ourselves, can be clearly seen in these lines:

The world is reeling out to its very utmost once again  
Until it must shudder to stop and turn  
And let the light back to us,  
Back into the lower dark storeys and the foot of the valleys.  
It is revolving in the darkest possible way now for us in the North,  
And the time of all-light is half a year away  
(Tait in Neely, 2012: 122)<sup>187</sup>

Finally, to return to my point about Tait's likely use of the 35mm filmstrip's optical sound code to inform her markmaking for *Painted Eightsome*, in her poem 'Light', she refers directly to the electromagnetic waves of which light is constituted, with its final lines evoking Kristeva's immersive semiotic:

Did you say it's made of waves?  
Yes, that's it.  
I wonder what the waves are made of.  
Oh, waves are made of waves.  
Waves are what they are,  
Shimmeringness,  
Oscillation,  
Rhythmical movement which is the inherent essence of all things.  
(Tait in Neely, 1960/2012: 88; original emphasis)<sup>188</sup>

In cinema, previous frames of films, 'aspects of experience', are 'expelled' from the mind as their place is taken by a succession of new images. The phenomenon of cinema can only come into being because we cannot recall, precisely, the single, still images once they are not present before our eyes for the fraction of a second they appear on the screen. We see an illusion of movement and change: distance travelled, shifting form and changes of colour, texture and pattern. By the stroking action of her brush, Tait ensures that we cannot sink beneath the surface, and drown in the

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187. Lines from Tait's unpublished poem, 'Winter Solstice'.

188. The poem 'Light' is dated March/April 1958, originally published in *The Hen and the Bees*, 1960.

seamless, illusory moving image stream, unaware of the underlying material processes by which it is constructed. Each frame is newly created, unique; a dynamic moment that enfolds past, present and anticipated future. In parts, alternating images produce a flickering effect in the brain, sand and ocean seen in a rapid shimmer of yellow blue. This oscillating instability ensures that we retain the awareness that we are watching a series of static frames whilst simultaneously perceiving the phenomenon of moving image. The coloured light has no indexical link to a material presence in the world, other than its own materiality. The marks and washed grounds are simultaneously suggestions of recognisable objects and coloured splodges, "figures, antlers, or sometimes just blobs in tartan colours" (Tait in SSA, 2014: 4444), continually forming and re-forming, becoming a multiplicity of possibilities. In Tait's poetic film *Painted Eightsome*, this contingency is the 'structuring and de-structuring practice' of signification. Tait's hand-painted animation embodies what Kristeva refers to in her doctoral thesis, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, first published in 1974, as the 'negativation' of representation, in which 'revolution' signifies the disruption to subjectivity (Kristeva, 1986: 89-136). In *Painted Eightsome*, nothing is still. Like the sea, there is change in each moment of consciousness, every frame, as it is eclipsed by memory. The film is a life lived, a linear event wound on a reel, energised by the revolutionary action of the projector, made visible by the light that shines through its frames, and transformed in the mind and body of the audience to the 'animated shiver' that signifies the living.

In her later work, *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva links the maternal to abjection: that which is revolting and repressed becomes revolutionary through its emergence in patriarchal symbolic systems (Kristeva, 1982). Here, Kristeva's key notion is that subjectivity is

established through expulsion. In other words, in the dynamic system of subjectivity, something must be expelled, excluded, cast out beyond the border into formless death-womb, the abjected maternal, as an integral part of the process of significance and the maintenance of one's identity and psychic health. This aspect of Kristeva's thinking is developed from her theorisation of the anal stage, in which the young child expels faeces from its body and derives pleasure from this expulsion. The waste matter is an excess, something that cannot be contained indefinitely within the biological body, and must therefore be 'rejected'. However, for Kristeva, the prompt for the child's process to language and subjectivity is generated by the *jouissance* of pleasure and material excess, rather than merely a lack and separation, as argued by Freud and Lacan.

Tait left the residues of excess dye to dry on the surface of her filmstrip, unlike Lye, who cleaned his painted film artwork (Winn, 2002/2013: 22). During drying, these deposits have accumulated flecks of fluff and dust. This waste matter, expelled from the body of the world, is caught in the surface of the dried aniline dye. The dancing flickers of dust seen by the spectator on the screen are a disruption to the visual synthesis of the painted animated imagery. They mark the presence of an excess of materiality, an overabundance of *jouissance*. There is a knowing pleasure for the spectator in this: the dust reinforces awareness of the materiality of film, and the time and place of making is inscribed in the work through the particles of air-borne matter that landed on the sticky dye residue, and which cannot be erased.<sup>189</sup>

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189. The aniline dyes used by Tait are soluble in water and alcohol. It is possible to clean up the film artwork to some extent, but even gentle rubbing with a dry cloth will remove some of the surface material and density of the dyes.

Kristeva argues that the 'logic of signification' is present within the materiality of the body from birth. The infantile body incorporates food, digests and expels what is left over as waste, prefiguring the identification and differentiation processes that create and maintain signification. The mother regulates these bodily functions, and therefore 'maternal law' predates and displaces the 'paternal law' with its threats of castration. The Kristevan paradigm is counter to that of Jacques Lacan, who, following Freud, foregrounds separation (a lack) as the causal event of the mirror stage, through which castration, or signification, is effected. Kristeva's semanalysis argues that the corporeal body of the young child carries within it the 'logic' that will lead to signification.

The artist, the mother/parent and the psychoanalyst all share a similar relationship to the semiotic. The artist channels her drives and gives this energy form; a mother/parent teaches their infant to recognise and then control its bodily rhythms; the psychoanalyst gives structure to their patient. Each of these roles brings the pre-verbal, and the non-verbal, into the structuration of the symbolic where socialisation may occur, and so facilitates access to culture and language. In recent work, Kristeva refers to a lively, poetic and musical language as revealing, "a carnivalesque, playful body that joins opposites and exults in its skilfulness in manipulating language" (Kristeva, 2005/2010).<sup>190</sup> From my 'know how' as a maker of direct animation, in *Painted Eightsome*, Tait is speaking to us with what she called the "blood poetry" (Neely, 2012: 17-18),<sup>191</sup> using a chromatic pictorial language that emerges from the maternal chora

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190. From Kristeva's essay 'The Impudence of Uttering: The Mother Tongue', translated by Anne Marsella, in *Julia Kristeva* [online] (2010) Available: <http://www.kristeva.fr/impudence.html> Accessed: 1 January 2015. Originally published as 'L'impudence d'énoncer: la langue maternelle', in Julia Kristeva (2005) *La Haine et le Pardon*, published by Fayard, Paris, pp, 393-410. Published in English, translated by Patricia Viera and Michael Marder, 2010, in *The Psychoanalytic Review*, vol. 97 no. 4., Guildford Press, New York, NY, pp. 679-694.

191. Writing in the Introduction to her book on Tait.

and is 'directed' by *jouissance*, the unbounded, embodied pleasurable exuberance of the feminine, being alive and in the world, interwoven with the symbolic of the film structure as a material in 'living motion'. The abstracted animated imagery of the choral drive energies in *Painted Eightsome* push to the very limits of possibility, threatening to burst forth at any moment from the screen to rupture the symbolic order. Within the affective dimension, the sensorium of Tait's audiovisual Scottish reel recreates itself anew through the fluency of her 'mother tongue' each time I play the film.

The avant-garde artist is allied to the avant-garde poet in that both rupture and break apart the meaning, syntax and grammar of their respective realms of language in order to render visible and/or audible what is unnameable. For the film-poet Margaret Tait, sight was the primary sense that connected her to the world. She transformed wave particles of light into film poetry. In *Painted Eightsome*, as in much of her cinematic and written work, we, as viewer-audience/reader-listener, 'become' her experience of seeing and being. Tait's vision is mediated through her embodied experience of living. She connected with the things she saw and her seeing became transmuted through time spent within her body. Sight emerging from embodied memory, as the 'blobs of tartan colours' are transformed through animation into something 'other': the transcendent visual poetry of the screen.

### **Working with Film**



Margaret Tait continued to use direct animation in her film-making practice throughout the rest of her life.<sup>192</sup> Her final film, the triptych *Garden Pieces* (1998),<sup>193</sup> was completed the year before her death. The letters of the film's titles are composed of mis-matched pottery fragments laid on bare earth. Tait sets the scene with a live-action look around her studio, observing the materials of film-making with her camera - rewind arms, spools and cores, film cans and other paraphernalia. Then, her film-poet's eye is caught by a view of her garden at the open window. We pass from the dim, cave-like interior to the green outdoors of the first piece, 'Round the Garden'. Her camera roams around, looking intently at her garden, returning again and again to revisit specific areas. It is as if the film-maker is sensing her own mortality - *Garden Pieces* was released when Tait was in her eighties, and she died the following year. Looking through her camera, she is committing to memory every loving detail of bright sunlight and deep shadow, capturing in her mind's eye all the blades of grass and flowers, each branch, heavy with fresh leaves, shaking in the Orcadian breeze.

The second of Tait's set of three short pieces, 'Fliers', was the catalyst for my return to working 'directly' with film after several years of digital film-making. In 'Fliers', Tait experimented with hand scratched "animated sequences of fliers of one kind and another" (Tait, 1999/2004). To make the piece, she drew her impressions of the flights of insects and birds around her garden, by scratching directly into the emulsion of 16mm film. The stock she chose to use was one that had been 'struck' by light then developed in a lab, a process that results in a dense layer of black emulsion along the

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192. Tait died on 16 April 1999 at the age of 81 years, at her home in Orkney (Todd, 2002/2014).

193. In common with *Painted Eightsome*, Tait's ideas and experiments for *Garden Pieces* evolved for more than a decade - she says that the first of the pieces, 'Round the Garden' "was begun in the early 1980s or even before that" (Tait, 1999/2004).

length of the filmstrip. Tait then worked with the Filmatic lab in London to print the sequences of artwork with coloured grounds - following a similar post production route to that used by Norman McLaren for films such as *Boogie Doodle* (1941).<sup>194</sup> In 'Fliers', Tait's fascination with the world around her and its affect upon her is transmuted into marks of scratched light that dance around the screen against translucent backgrounds of different colours to a counterpoint of piano music composed and played by John Gray. The film shimmers with a hallucinogenic intensity. Its vibrating scribbles become the magenta hover of a buzzing bee, a flutter of a butterfly's wing, a feather-skeleton falling through air of iridescent green, a sycamore-bird hovering, then tumbling into ultramarine, juddering to a ground etched full of a child's impression of flowers, flickering midges against deep russet, and birds flying into a pure turquoise blue, a dandelion clock, and on and on till the sound of birdsong and a close-up shot of an opium poppy in flower.

Following the screening of *Garden Pieces*, I excavated my collection of 16mm and 35mm from the boxes and cupboards in my studio: odd reels and cans, various leaders, and strips and scraps of film from a variety of sources. I made contact with 'film as film' again and renewed my engagement with its materiality and image-making potential. Drawing on the techniques of my first 'direct' encounters with film in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I responded 'intuitively' to short sequences of found footage. In a rhythmic response to incremental visual changes in a frame sequence, I cut into the layers of coloured emulsion with a surgical scalpel and abraded and coloured both

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194. McLaren drew his imagery onto clear film using black ink, and this artwork was 'turned' into a filmprint in the laboratory, using filters and masks, and the final screening print shows coloured lines, including black, dancing in a rich tomato red ground. *Boogie Doodle* can be viewed on the NFB site: <https://www.nfb.ca/film/boogie-doodle> Accessed: 1 January 2015.

sides of the filmstrip. These initial explorations, conducted intermittently over the next two years, focused on sections of 35mm feature films, leftovers from the cinema projection booth, and offcuts of rushes from my 16mm film *Walking Out*.<sup>195</sup> I However, my experiments felt unsatisfactory - I did not feel 'connected' with my material. These cinematographic images did not resonate: the film did not 'become' my experience of seeing and being, mediated through my embodied experience of living. It was only in destroying the pictorial imagery - by removing each 'photographic transparency' carried by the filmstrip through scraping, abrasion or bleaching - that I was able to 'see myself' in the frame and 'be myself' within the film.

In 2004 I began to develop *Verge* (2005),<sup>196</sup> a 16mm diptych loop, with one screen made from short strips of clear leader and the other from sections of found 'lightstruck' colour reversal<sup>197</sup> footage, which appears black to the eye, but is in fact composed of coloured pigment layers, the composite of which absorbs all light waves in the visible spectrum. In *Verge*, small objects<sup>198</sup> collected on a circular walk are stuck to the surface of the clear leader (Screen 1: 'Verge: Sculptural Geometry'), and 'printed' on the emulsion of the 'black' film using household bleach (Screen 2: 'Verge: Flux'). In order to exhibit this piece, the film artwork needed to be encoded into a digital form, using a cross-media method which I continue to use today: each frame area of the filmstrip is photographed using a DSLR, then edited together on a computer with the

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195. This film was edited digitally in 2000, using direct animation footage largely completed some years previously. Prior to my re-engagement with film in 2002, my last direct animation film was *Sunset Strip* in 1996.

196. A commission for the Salt Gallery, Hayle, in Cornwall; made in collaboration with Stuart Moore. Exhibited in our solo show 'Stuart Moore and Kayla Parker' from 16 July to 19 August 2005.

197. Sometimes referred to as 'colour positive' film.

198. Pieces of vegetation growing along the verge along the South West Coastal Path as it snakes around the perimeter of an industrial estate on the outskirts of Plymouth, and the wings of dead bees, whose bodies I'd found on the ground whilst walking there. I brought my samples home to my studio in my pocket, wrapped in kitchen roll.

sound track.<sup>199</sup> In this work, the visual elements of the film are abstracted as a result of their making: imagery is 'fixed' on the filmstrip by interaction between the film and the matter of the world. Through this process, the acetate filmstrip, which 'carries the image', becomes distressed or distorted to such an extent that it cannot be threaded through a projector or a film editing machine, such as a Steenbeck or pic synch, to allow viewing of the material as moving image, or for a digital video copy to be made via a telecine. A reproduction must be made of these scraps of artwork, in order for the film to be seen as moving image, projected or shown on a screen. The three direct animation film artworks included in Chapter Five, *Heirloom* (2008), *Hold* (2008), and *Flora* (2011) follow the hybridic photochemical-digital film production model established in *Verge*. Before proceeding further into the chapter, the reader may wish to review the films on the Creative Practice Elements DVD.

### **Heirloom**

Artist's own hair, collected after brushing, printed onto found 16mm colour negative film using household bleach. The film's emulsion is dense black, the result of being exposed to a bright light source, and then processed. No images are recorded photographically within its frames, which are filled with darkness; its histories are unknown. The 'lightstruck' filmstrip is 'blinded', impenetrable, and cannot be seen through.

An heirloom is something that has special meaning and has been passed down through the generations of a family; in the title, 'heir' is a homophone of 'hair', 'loom' is a device for weaving together disparate strands that meet at 90 degrees, but also carries the resonance of appearing threatening, magnified, or hugely distorted.

I dip my hair in household bleach, and lay the tangled strands along four short 16mm strips of film to create 'hair pieces', revealing the yellow and green emulsion layers beneath the (un)exposed darkness.

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199. I resize and crop these jpg pictures to the proportions of the original frames of the film artwork. However, this method allows the entire filmstrip to be seen, and the sprocketholes are visible in my recent 16mm work *Reach* (2014).

## Hold

Steel dressmaker's pins, buttons, small metal screws, plastic and silver rings: a collection of 'found objects', once used to bind things, and people, together: they have been lost or discarded, then rediscovered; their silhouettes burned into the emulsion of 16mm black and white negative film using household bleach: leaving a trace of their presence falling through time and space.

When projected onto the screen, the blistering white forms cannot cling to its surface; they fall and tumble into the grainy darkness of sepia ink.

## Flora

Buttercup petals, wild garlic and cranesbill flowers, forget-me-not florets and the seeds blown from a dandelion clock: transient plant forms collected during a walk around the city of Plymouth, then pressed onto clear strip of 35mm film, and accompanied by the cheeping of a hundred sparrows, found huddled in a wall of ivy on a sunny spring afternoon.

Hélène Cixous' theme of gestation in her depiction of the generative process of writing mirrors my creative process in making animation: I feel an awareness that the time approaches in which my body must 'write' which is resonant with the process she describes:

The womb is all the world. the child is made from all sides. Throughout months, years. It is not me. It is at the crossing of my thinking body and the flux of living events that the thing is secreted. I will only be at the door and the spokesperson supplying words. the linguistic receptor. The scribe. / There comes the time of immanence. A desire to write rises in my body and comes to occupy my heart. Everything beats faster. The entire body readies itself. I say to my daughter: 'I feel like writing.' (Cixous, 1998/2005: 192)

In the film loop *Heirloom*, the intense vibrant colours burst from the screen, pustulent yolk yellow and suppurating greens pulsing through the black ground, rupturing the confinement of order and returning the spectator to that moment of "breaking away from instinctual, biological (and maternal) dependence" (Kristeva, 1980: 225). Poised on the limen between the exquisite plenitude of the *chora* and becoming 'I', held

forever in this loop of moments, unable to move forward, or back, the becoming-subject is caught between maternal and paternal realms. For Kristeva, the imaginary space of colour is "a pressure ... linked to the body proper" (Kristeva, 1980: 219).

The impact of colour is felt unconsciously, its material excess experienced as an overabundance of chromatic joyousness - a *jouissance* that dissolves object-subject boundaries, the semiotic irrupting into the symbolic, with the power to transform the spectator.

The organic matter of my hair degrades through its immersion in the cleansing action of household bleach,<sup>200</sup> and the bleach-soaked strands 'burn' through the chromatic layers of the lightstruck black film. The colours revealed in the dye layers result from the amount of time bleach has been in contact with the film surface. Light shining through the film reveals the transparent areas of white, where the bleach has seeped right through to the acetate film carrier itself, and predominantly yellow and green underlayers, where its chemical reactivity has played out.

For Irigaray, colour is an excess that is available to women for liberation from patriarchal strictures: "When all meaning is taken away from us, there remains color ... the colors that are ours owing to the fact that we are women" (1993b: 109). In 'Flesh Colours', she explains that the arts can be a source of regeneration for the subject, because colours, music and poetry can communicate sense-immediacy, an immediacy

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200. Liquid bleaching aids for general household use are a solution of 3 to 8% sodium hypochlorite, and are used to whiten and remove stains from laundry, and to sanitise and destain surfaces around the home.

of expression that is able to provide a link or bridge to the transcendent process of becoming more than flesh: for Irigaray, colour is connected with the transcendent corporeal (2004: 116).

Irigaray argues that colours "evade" the constricting binaries of dominant patriarchal traditions in "their expression of the sexual", despite their "potential bipolarity: blue/red" and so on (Irigaray, 2004: 115). She continues: "there are many many nuances, variants, and scales of values that move uninterruptedly from one extreme to the other. There are even three or four, not two, so-called primary colours: blue, red, yellow, and green" (2004: 115). The colour yellow, "seems to be a place of meditation between colours and the sexuate flesh: yellow, sometimes transmuted in gold, and perhaps green" (Irigaray, 2004: 117). She considers that "we need to find a balance between hearing, sight and touch, between sound and light. This can be found through colours" (Irigaray, 2004: 114).

Kristeva and Irigaray provide useful conceptual frameworks for thinking through ideas about the practice. However, I find there is a 'coolness' to their writing about sensory perception that does not match my experience. Kristeva does indeed feel colour as a "pressure" on the body (1980: 219), but Irigaray seems detached - untethered, perhaps - from the perceptual process of 'sensing' colour.

I *feel colour* as an artist during the making process and as a spectator during the viewing process - I experience colour, hue, pattern, texture, and other visual phenomena *through my body*. My practice is concerned with the (audio)visual realm of

moving image. In the written elements of this thesis, despite the use of different registers of 'voice', I have not found a way to communicate fully - to my own satisfaction - the rich sensorium of my subjective experience. Words fail me.

It is Cixous perhaps who resonates the most directly with my direct animation practice in photochemical analogue film. Although she is a writer, I *feel* that she understands creative process 'from the inside'. She *speaks directly* to me with more *feeling* than the voice/s of Kristeva or Irigaray. Cixous talks of writing the self, *écriture féminine*, as "an attempt to spit up the most secret blood to try and see with one's own eyes the interior colour ... of one's own mind, the personal juice of life, the interior proof of existence of oneself" (Cixous, 1994/1997: 129). These poetic words bring me back to my female body, to the visceral nature of experience, of 'gut feelings'.

In her book, *Stigmata*, Cixous' theoretical ideas are enmeshed within the poetic flow of her verbal language. To read her words, I need light reflecting off the white sheet of paper, upon which the matrix of her thinking is encoded. My eyes scan the page and allow her to enter me: for Cixous, eyes are "the most delicate most powerful hands, imponderably touching the over-there" (1998/2005: 187). She communicates her creativity-in-process to me, with me. She 'writes her imaginary', a synaesthetic space of multiple dimensions where all time - past, present, and future - is present. When I read Cixous' words, I feel her voice/s within me - she calls me: "*je t'appelle*" (1998/2005: 195; original emphasis) - her thoughts twine around and about mine, in a continuous cycle, like a Möbius strip of language, or a loop of film, like *Heirloom*, *Hold*, or *Flora*. I



open up myself, Cixous speaks to me through her text, and, via this process, I go beyond my seeing-hearing of her language, into the depths of my-self, which now embraces and is embraced within her-self.

For me, as maker, *Heirloom* produces a sense of being enclosed, confined within the genetic material at the seething heart of matter. When creating this piece, I am immersed in the sensory experience of working in direct contact with my materials: hair gleaned from my hairbrush, bleach from the cupboard under the kitchen sink, somebody's unwanted scraps of 16mm film.

Working with the materials of fine blonde hair, household bleach and 16mm film requires a high degree of finger dexterity, in laying the fine strands of my blonde hair into the bleach and placing it on the filmstrip, and careful avoidance of unwanted bleach droplets, which can 'eat' through to the 'bone' of the acetate carrier (resulting in a clear image). In addition, temporal acuity is required in 'knowing how' long the teased hair should remain in contact with the emulsion, so that the desired effect is created.

Cixous urges us to grab the fleeting memories of moments as they pass by, otherwise, "these pulsations are lost forever. ... So, have on hand a notebook, a bit of paper, and capture the rapid traces of the instant" (1998/2005: 194). In making *Heirloom*, I capture the rapid traces of moments through the action of bleach applied by strands of my hair to strips of black film: these are *my* fleeting memories of moments told in *my* body's 'words'. Cixous lays emphasis upon the need for a delicate sensitivity in 'writing', so one may "touch the body of the instant with the tips of the words" (1998/2005: 195).

My mother, like Cixous' mother, was a midwife. As a child, I was familiar with the processes of giving birth through stories told and retold by my mother, of her experience of childbirth, both of others and her own. For, into this repeated narrative, she placed the (re)cited story of my own birth. Throughout my life, my mother's words have called me into being again and again with her recounting of my birth. In the essay 'Coming to Writing' Cixous unites the experience of herself as a woman giving birth and as a creative being 'coming to writing':

Giving birth 'well'. Leading her act, her passion, letting herself be led by it, pushing as one thinks, half carried away, half commanding the contraction, she merges herself with the uncontrollable, which she makes her own. Then, her glorious strength! Giving birth as one swims, exploiting the resistance of flesh, of the sea, the work of the breath in which the notion of 'mastery' is annulled, body after her own body, the woman follows herself, meets herself, marries herself. She is there ... Entirely. Mobilized, and this is a matter of her own body, of the flesh of her flesh. ... she can take and give of herself to herself. It was in watching them giving birth (to themselves) that learned to love women, to sense and desire the power and the resources of femininity; to feel astonishment that that such immensity can be reabsorbed, covered up in the ordinary. ... It was woman at the peak of her flesh, her pleasure, her force at last delivered, manifest. Her secret. ... She gives birth. ... She has her source. She draws deeply. She releases. Laughing. ... A longing for text! ... What's come over her? A child! Paper! Intoxications! I'm brimming over! My breasts are overflowing! Milk. Ink. Nursing time. And me? I'm hungry too. The milky taste of ink (Cixous, 1977/1991: 30-31)

Abigail Bray counters accusations that Cixous, through her valorisation of a mythic mother, is guilty of a biological essentialism that mystifies and romanticises woman by arguing that Cixous' strategy, opens up "new creative ways of expressing a repressed female body"; further, she counters the claim by Alice Jardine (1985: 62-63), Janet Woolff (1990: 127) and others, that "the liberation of the female body is limited to a particular style of avant-garde writing" (Bray, 2004: 30).

I have a body sexed female, and have lived my life as a girl and as a woman: this does not essentialise me. I experience the world and others' bodies through my corporeal

body. My imaginary allows me to be other, and to experience - through my imagination and my unconscious mind - other bodies; but, I have grown up and live within a predominant phallogocentric system. As Bray points out, morphology is different to anatomy: it "refers to the cultural representation of anatomical differences" (2004: 34-35). Cixous' passionate (re)connection with the 'essence' of the generative female body allows her to 'write as (a) woman', something that is impossible within patriarchy.

As Bray point out, following Cixous, "*écriture féminine* is capable of transforming previous definitions of the female body and opening up new horizons for rewriting the body" through its positioning of the human body as neither nature nor culture, but a third place, a dynamic poetic body between the binaries (Bray, 2004: 37). In this, *écriture féminine* can be seen as a translator, or interlocutor, acting between the corporeal body and culture, who articulates a new language that allows the body to speak.

The "feminine textual body" is defined by Cixous as a:

female libidinal economy ... a system ... not necessarily carved out by culture. ... recognised by the fact that it is always endless, without ending, there is no closure. ... There's *tactility* in the feminine text, there's touch, and this touch passes through the ear. Writing in the feminine is passing on what is cut out by the Symbolic, the voice of the mother, passing on what is most archaic. (Cixous, 1981: 53-54; original emphasis)

The imagery in *Heirloom*, *Hold*, and *Flora* is produced through touch. In the first two films, small objects (hair, found objects) laid first in bleach are placed in direct contact with the photochemical substrate of discarded 'lightstruck' film. In *Flora*, petals, florets and seeds are pressed flat onto the surface of clear 35mm film leader, using clear nail varnish as a solvent for the organic material.

*Hold* seems to open up space: when the film is projected large scale as a loop onto the outside wall of a building, the tiny forms of dressmaking pins and rings and fasteners appear as massive jittery silhouettes of blistering white light. Despite the monochrome, flickering abstracted imagery, I can ascertain the indexical referent for these forms, although the frame that carries the image is presented to the eye for a fraction of a second. The register of scale is brought into play as massive ghostly pins scatter and dwarf me. I recall memories in connection with the visual stimuli, a perceptual loop is formed. I remember my grandmother holding pins in her mouth, imagining her swallowing them and seeing her insides as an unmade dress, held together with lines of pins and ready for stitching on her Singer sewing machine, and then wincing as a pin stabs my finger. In this way, the experience of seeing becomes rooted in my body and my memories. The lost objects I found are (re)remembered and repurposed: they have new meaning.

In her essay, 'Writing blind', Cixous skips and gambols around a multisensory garden of language, in which flourishes an abundance of flowers, fruit, memories, and imaginary creatures. She recalls seeing words with her eyes "when I was three years old", words that are "our dwarfs, our gnomes, our minuscule workers in the mines of language. They perforate our deafness. They forethink" (Cixous, 1998/2005: 196). This reminds me of my first engagement with verbal language, at the same age as Cixous, and recorded by my mother in my 'Baby Book': hearing the word 'beautiful', I filled my wellie boots with flowers from the garden of the coal miner's cottage where we lived at that time. My creative language has developed from the visuality of my early childhood - of things seen with the eyes and envisioned in the imaginary. An artist film-maker, my 'words' are images, made through seeing-touching, and sounds.

In her essay, 'Without end',<sup>201</sup> Cixous considers movement in drawing in relationship to life-in-process-of-being-lived. She reminds us that we are hybrid beings, in part human, but also partly animal. She suggests that drawing, too, slips back and forth across boundaries and that this enables us to see beyond mere visual appearance, to suggest that which is not visible, to sense the potential for what could and can be (Cixous, 1998/2005: 25-40).

For Cixous, writing and drawing are conjoined, "writing-or-drawing, because these are often twin adventures" (1998/2005: 26). She describes what is to be written-or-drawn as germinating, and rising up like in spasms from "inside the body", as the birthing of an "unknown child [...] Barely traced - the true drawing escapes. Rends the limits. Snorts" (Cixous, 1998/2005: 27-28).

Cixous reveals the intimations of mortality she has discovered in a series of drawings. For her, drawing is an impulse, a poetic practice undertaken at a distance from the living subject it encounters (and which will, eventually, escape the drawing) and also refers to itself, to its potential - what it could be:

There is no end to writing or drawing. Being born doesn't end. Drawing is a being born. Drawing is born. / - When do we draw? / - When we were little. ... / As soon as we draw (as soon as, following the pen, we advance into the unknown, hearts beating, mad with desire) we are little, we do not know, we start out avidly, we're going to lose ourselves. (Cixous, 1998/2005: 26)

Drawing moves in a not fully co-ordinated series of encounters with error. It is unpredictable: "Our mistakes are our leaps in the night. Error is not lie: it is

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201. The full title in English is "Without End, No, State of Drawingness, No, Rather: The Executioner's Taking Off", translated by Catherine A.F. MacGillivray. First published as 'Sans Arrêt, non, État de Dessination, non, plutôt: Le Décollage du Bourreau' in *Repentirs* Reunion des musées national (1991) pp. 55-64; this translation first appeared in *New Literary History* vol. 24 no. 1, (Winter 1993) pp. 90-103.

approximation. Sign that we are on track" (1998/2005: 29). Drawing is "the living of life" (Cixous, 1998/2005: 32; original emphasis), reaching out to touch in the darkness. When I am drawing, making marks, looking with my eyes wide, defocused; in the moment of the mark, there is a rupture through which pours *jouissance*. The inbetween-ness of drawing - mark-making - reveals to us both our own interiority and allows us to see, and to be alive, beyond ourselves.

The imagery in *Flora* is created through adding material to the filmstrip. The making process for this piece foregrounds touch. My 'know how' in this technique is in 'knowing how' far I can physically 'push' the material in order to bond the reproductive structures of flowers I have gathered with the strips of found film. For Cixous, there must be contact between the artist's body and her materials through touch:

the text needs the paper. It is in contact with the sheet of paper that sentences emerge. As if coming out with great wing-strokes from a nest hidden beneath the paper. / ... It is not written in my head. There must be contact with my hand and the paper. ... I am a painter. ... I paint, I draw the sentences from the secret well. I paint the passage: one cannot speak it. One can only perform it. (Cixous, 1998/2005: 198)

She believes it is the kinetic contact with the matter of the world and material processes of touch, when "we close our eyes so as not to distract our body, not to divert it from its intimate course" that enables her to write - a process she likens to making love,

with the loved one, the only one, the one who - is to me, / the one we trust as our own mother, the one I believe with my eyes shut, and I close my eyes so as better to believe, and so that the exterior will not exist, and so that we will be the two together in the hand of one same Night. (Cixous, 1998/2005: 199)

Read by "a policeforce reader" with a patriarchal perspective, Cixous' says her writing will seem crazy and illogical - "an anarchic thing, an untamed beast" - because it is "a poetic animal machine, [and] the grain of its skin is pure poem" (Cixous, 1998/2005: 199).

Cixous writes about what 'creating' is: she must escape from the bright light of day, in order to "see what is secret. What is hidden among the visible. I want to see the skin of the light". She descends "behind her eyelids"; seeing and writing 'by the other light', she enters into a "primitive space" within (1998/2005: 184-185).

She stresses the importance of looking *within*, of lingering in the transitional time when one is between sleep and consciousness:

barely awake but not yet having passed to an upright position, still on all fours and on the run, still clothed in sleep, but already convoked, I put on the brakes, I slide very slowly toward the day. Between the night and the day there is a long vivacious but fragile region where one can sleep even while being awake, where even standing on two legs one is still a phantom, where the doors do not yet exist in us between the two kingdoms, where what will be past survives, lingers, *stays* ... / It is a fragile region that can be shattered by a too brusque gesture, a magic hour that can be chased off by too brusque an encounter with an inhabitant of the day. (1998/2005: 186; original emphasis)

Watching *Flora*, is as if I am looking with closed eyes and am able to see the "skin of the light" in the flattened forms of petals, translucent folds and veins pressed against the screen of my vision (1998/2005: 185).

## **Chapter Six: Women's Work**

Film communicates with me as if it were a living thing. Its voices speak through handling the material: slitherings of film moving freely across film, squeaks and soft whickerings from squeezing the filmstrip lightly between fingers, scrunching noises from crunching loops of film in the hand; running a fingernail down the sprocketholes produces a rattling percussion, and film whispers when waved in the air.

The performances with 'film as film', discussed in this chapter, are expanded forms of direct animation, a strand of film-making practice that energises the live context of watching, and opens out possibilities for the performer and her audience. Annabel Nicolson's *Reel Time* holds a seminal place in the canon of 'materialist' film and expanded cinema (Dusinberre, Curtis, Gidal, Le Grice, among others), yet it is only in recent years that this work has received critical attention in the context of her practice as a woman (Hatfield, Reynolds, Sparrow, Gaal-Holmes).

### **Jamming the Machine**

The performance of cinema that interests me was presented on only a handful of occasions at a few London venues, such as the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) and the London Film-Makers' Co-op cinema space, which was located at that time in a former Victorian dairy, during the early 1970s. Entitled *Reel Time* by the young woman who created it, this artwork is ephemeral, only existing for the duration of the few minutes of its live performance. There is no record of these events beyond some brief, written accounts of audience members and the artist herself, and a few black and white documentary photographs. Yet this 'projection performance' resonates almost forty years later with a nuanced complexity that is breathtaking, seen from our



perspective here in the Twenty First Century: for its thinking-through-practice and inscription of the feminine, and for its articulate address of the very real issues faced by women at that time, and in the years following.

Annabel Nicolson's exploration of female subjectivity<sup>202</sup> and her suturing of film materiality with the materiality of her own corporeal body in *Reel Time* can be seen as a fore-runner of her increasingly overt engagement with feminism's concerns and campaigns later in the 1970s and during the 1980s. This live artwork, performed in 1972 and 1973, placed the artist's body and her hand cranked sewing machine at the centre of a multi-sensory projection event that may be considered 'proto-feminist'; exemplifying, *avant la lettre*, the women's art movement in Britain, which emerged from the feminism of the late 1960s.

The theme that the 'personal was political' was central to the argument of the 'second wave' of feminists, who highlighted ways in which women were oppressed within the 'private' and domestic areas of their lives, including within their family, personal and sexual relationships, and housework. *Reel Time* enacts these key aspects of a woman's identity, through a live encounter between a domestic sewing machine and a film projector.

Nicolson's feminism is integral to her creative practice, and in the 1970s she adopted a stance that was increasingly feminist. During *Reel Time*, the audience could see the artist operating her sewing machine in three manifestations: as a film projection, as a shadow, and as a corporeal presence. In her performance, Nicolson continually pierced

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202. Nicolson was interested in disrupting the contested place of the subject, as both film-maker and audience, in the dominant ideological form of the 'cinematic apparatus' - the technological and spectatorial 'procedural event' of making-and-projecting film.

the long loop of film with the unthreaded needle of her sewing machine, until the material was too damaged to pass through the projector, thus 'jamming the machinery' - literally - of dominant masculinist film culture and wider society.

### **Context**

Annabel Nicolson is a woman whose practice has been most often viewed, by male historians and scholars, in the context of her contribution to the formalist concerns of 'materialist' film and expanded cinema. Her film-sewing performance *Reel Time* is cited as a key work of Structuralist film, with reference to her membership of Filmaktion, the informal group of film-makers based in London in the early 1970s, which presented live film projection events (Dusinberre, Curtis, Gidal, Le Grice, among others). Structuralist film, also referred to as formalist or materialist film, is a set of critical approaches and practices adopted by the pioneers of avant-garde film of the 1960s and early 1970s who rejected a commodity based gallery system and the outdated film production models of mainstream, commercial cinema. The evolution and development of the expanded cinema of live film events, experimental moving image performance 'happenings' and installations is illustrated by the Filmaktion group, of which Annabel Nicolson was a member. David Curtis describes Filmaktion's principal concerns as being: "to dramatise the film-projection event, to give viewers an active role in which they construct their own experience, and become aware of the elements that have contributed to it" (Curtis, 2003). In recent years Nicolson's work has been subject to reappraisal by female commentators and has been discussed in broader contexts and in relation to her wider practice as an artist (Hatfield, Reynolds, Sparrow, Gaal-Holmes).

Nicolson's *Reel Time* is cited also as a canonical example of the early work of expanded cinema originating from members of the London Film-Makers' Co-op. The audience position in expanded cinema is different to that of conventional cinema, which presents a two dimensional photographic illusion of reality projected onto a highly reflective fixed screen within a proscenium arch, with the technological components of moving image and audio presentation being concealed. Proponents of expanded cinema sought to expose the illusionism of film as a carrier of photo-real meaning and to foreground the mechanics of representation. Nicolson and her contemporaries presented film in spaces other than a 'proper' cinema with fixed seating directing the audience's attention forward and upward to the screen, projection equipment hidden in a booth, and so on. They sought to free the constituent elements of film presentation and reception, by liberating the audience from its fixed position as a passive unified mass and encouraging participation, and by giving prominence to the audiovisual experience of the processes and material aspects of film presentation.

In common with many pioneers of the film co-op movement, avant-garde film and expanded cinema in Britain, during the 1960s Nicolson studied drawing and painting at art school, then turned her focus to the potential of film as a material in order to explore what she describes as the "'paradoxes' of film" (Nicolson in Curtis and Dusing, 1978).<sup>203</sup> Nicolson explains her movement away from the directness of mark-making to film in 1969 as: "thinking out from the screen into the actual projection space", and focused on the "physical reality of the situation and further into qualities of circumstantial phenomena" (Nicolson in Nesbitt, 2000: 73).

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203. No page numbers.

## Woman: Seeing for Herself

For me, Nicolson is an artist whose feminism is integral to her identity as a creative practitioner. She takes a stance which is explicitly feminist in the statement 'Woman and the Formal Film', co-written with the group of women film-makers who collectively withheld their work from the 1979 Arts Council of Great Britain major retrospective exhibition *Film as Film: Formal Experiment in Film 1910-75*<sup>204</sup> because of the "dominance of the masculinised modernist canon patronised by the Arts Council" (Hatfield, 2003). The statement, written with Felicity Sparrow, Jane Clarke, Jeanette Iljon, Lis Rhodes, Mary Pat Leece, Pat Murphy and Susan Stein, was included towards the end of the exhibition publication (Nicolson, *et al*, 1979: 118-120). The signatories felt that the rich diversity of their practices in film, video and tape/slide was being forcibly constrained within the 'formal abstraction'/anti-narrative or 'art cinema'/narrative categories of a male-dominated canon. In protest against the way that the history of women's work was being represented in the exhibition, Annabel Nicolson, Lis Rhodes and Peter Gidal resigned their places on the curatorial panel (Mazière, 2003: 1/1979). Further, in a direct response to women's lack of recognition in the history of the moving image, she co-founded Circles, the feminist organisation which distributed films and videos by women. Moreover, although her own commentary about her work does not adopt an overt feminist perspective, I would suggest that her engagement with the possibilities of film embodies her gendered position 'in' and 'of' the feminine and centres on her presence 'as (a) woman'.

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204. The exhibition took place from 3 May to 17 June 1979.

Felicity Sparrow refers to *Reel Time* as a "proto-feminist" work (Sparrow, 2005: 2), and the focus of Nicolson's practice shifted away from film during the 1970s as she addressed female subjectivity more directly. Exemplars of feminist artwork include the 'Menstrual Hut' installation she created for the 1981 exhibition *Concerning Ourselves*<sup>205</sup> at Norwich Art Gallery, at the end of her year as John Brinkley Fellow at Norwich School of Art (1980-1981). For this exhibition, Nicolson collaborated with other women, "all of whom are concerned with the numerous issues that arise from women's creativity" (Norwich School of Art, 1981). The shifts in Nicolson's practice during the 1970s resonate with the changes in the theoretical contexts of formalist film centred on the London Film-Makers' Co-op at the time. During that decade, theories of feminism and feminist film developed in academic environments from the impetus created by the largely pragmatic focus of the women's liberation movement<sup>206</sup> in Britain and other cultural and socio-political factors. From the mid-1970s Nicolson sought to involve the audience in works such as the performance *Matches* (1975) and her work became more collaborative in nature. In 1978 she performed *Circadian Rhythm*, a long-durational performance with seven others, at the London Musicians' Collective. One of the ensemble, Evan Parker, writes that the group intended "to play for a whole day", but they ended the performance after 13 hours (Nicolson, et al, 1980).<sup>207</sup> For 'Women and Creativity' at the Hayward Annual she presented audio recordings of artists talking about their practice and encouraged the audience to

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205. The exhibition was held from 22 June to 8 July 1981. This exhibition, and in particular the creation of a 'woman's space' through the menstrual hut installation, was a catalyst for the evolution of my practice as an artist, as I describe in my Introduction to this thesis.

206. The socialist feminist historian and writer Sheila Rowbotham considers that women's liberation was established as a movement in Britain by the National Women's Liberation Movement conference, held at Ruskin College, Oxford, from 27 February to 1 March 1970 (Rowbotham, 1969/1972).

207. With Annabel Nicolson in the group were Evan Parker, Paul Burwell, Max Eastley, David Toop, Hugh Davies, Paul Lytton, and Paul Loven,

contribute their own experiences. In addition, Nicolson increasingly developed her interest in the spontaneous, the ephemeral and the elemental, working out of doors in her performances *Sweeping the Sea* (1975) and *Combing the Fields* (1976).

From the late 1970s she became more actively feminist in her involvement with avant-garde film: her central role in *Circles* is evidence of her politicisation. Founded as a collective in 1979 by Nicolson with ten other women, this "small network of resistance" (*Seeing for Ourselves*, 1983) questioned dominant modes of representation and aimed to reconsider cinematic histories and confront an industry totally dominated by men, seeking to 'redress the balance'. Initiatives included creating a public place for showing work by women, holding screenings with women-only audiences followed by discussion, and conducting research into women's history. The work of *Circles* was funded in its early days by eleven women, who each contributed £20: Annabel Nicolson, Felicity Sparrow, Jane Clark, Jeanette Iljon, Joanna Davis, Lis Rhodes, Mary Pat Leece, Pat Murphy, Rachel Finkelstein, Susan Stein and Tina Keane (Mazière, 2003: 1/1979).<sup>208</sup> *Circles* created new contexts for showing a range of work by women in film, video and tape/slide. The organisation 'brought back into circulation' work by early women film-makers, showing their films alongside contemporary work, and stressed the importance of nurturing different thoughts and developing ways of expressing them using moving image (*Seeing for Ourselves*, 1983). Along with its sister organisation Cinema of Women, the other major distributor of feminist film in Britain, formed in 1979 as a collective by a group of women including Audrey Somerville and Caroline Spry, *Circles* played a critical role in the independent film and video culture of the 1980s for its advocacy and dissemination of historical and contemporary feminist

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208. Mel Taylor, quoted in Mazière, 2003.

practice. In 1991 a re-structuring of feminist distribution in Britain took place when Cinema of Women lost its funding. Circles kept its funding and relaunched as Cinenova: this organisation lost its revenue funding in 2001 and has since been run by volunteers. During the early 1980s Nicolson became more involved in feminist initiatives, including direct action peace protests associated with the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp. She was involved the independent film sector in Britain and was a founder member of Falmouth Film and Video Workshop in Cornwall, an organisation which was set up in 1985 and funded by South West Arts to support independent film-making, screenings and community based projects. Nicolson continued to exhibit her work, but by the mid-1980s she had ceased to use film in her creative practice, although she continued to perform and worked increasingly with cloth and organic materials, such as bark. For Annabel Nicolson, the emphasis was on the live event, of 'being there'. Felicity Sparrow, her contemporary and co-founder of Circles, affirms Nicolson's wish for her performance work not to be captured on video or by audio recording, and states that she was, "fiercely resistant to having her work documented" (Sparrow, 2005: 2).

### **The Performance of *Reel Time* Annabel Nicolson 1972 and 1973**

Felicity Sparrow describes one event in her Prologue, *The Art of Light and Shadow*, for LUX:

North London 1973, a Victorian dairy, a former industrial space designed to be cold, now housing artists' studios. Up a worn staircase to the third floor, a door gives onto a dimly-lit hall, the cinema space of the London Film-Makers' Co-op.

The audience is gathered, standing and sitting to the sides and behind a woman seated at a small table bearing a Singer sewing machine. In front are two screens, one at an angle; behind is a film projector. Light glints off a long strip of film which is strung on a loop from the ceiling, descending to the sewing-machine table and back to the projector. House lights dim and the show starts.

From one side a second projector starts running, throwing a silhouette onto the angled screen: a life size shadowgraph of the woman as she begins to operate the sewing machine. As the first projector starts an image appears to the front: the black and white picture is of the same woman operating the sewing machine.

The room is full of noise: the steady whirring of the projectors, the clacking and clicking of the filmstrip as it passes over pulleys and through the projector, the hum of the sewing machine as the woman turns the handle, intent on her sewing... she's sewing the filmstrip! Carefully she manoeuvres the loop of film so that it passes beneath the machine's needle before passing back to the projector. There's no thread but the perforation of the film's surface soon becomes evident, as tears and holes of leaking light begin to appear in the onscreen image. This continues; the film getting more and more damaged as it continues its perilous journey, sometimes spilling, gathering dust and scratches, slithering along the floor, spectators picking it up and passing it along. Intermittently the image blurs as the film clatters and slips in the gate until it snaps altogether.

In the lull, while the projectionist mends the break, one can discern the voices of two audience members, as they read occasionally from separate instruction manuals: 'how to thread a sewing machine' and 'how to thread a film projector'.

Once repaired the film starts again, but the pauses become more frequent as the brittle filmstrip deteriorates, needing further splices. The screen image becomes all-but-obliterated by light, unlike the real-time moving shadowgraph which remains constant. The performance ends with the film's destruction, when the projectionist announces that it can no longer pass through the projector. The house lights come on. (Sparrow, 2005: 1)

### **Thinking Through Practice**

Nicolson punctures, literally, the illusion of cinema through her manipulation in 'real time' of the apparatus, breaking down the experience of cinema into its constituent parts. If we were there, we would see her feeding an unbroken loop of celluloid through her Singer sewing machine, and turning the handle by hand to punch holes with its needle in the filmstrip, which then passes through a film projector so that we can see an enlarged black and white recording on the screen of her working at the same sewing machine, damaged and shot through with holes that appear as shards of



blazing white light. Eventually the film snaps, is mended, and the cycle continues, but finally the film and the cinematic projection falls apart, the procession of cinematic images is disrupted, and the performance ends.

### **Women's Work**

Nicolson deployed textile-based practices within her engagement with celluloid, adopting a 'craft skills' methodology like many women artists of that time. The film scholar Gregory Zinman sees Nicolson's earlier work, the 1971 film *Slides*, for which she sewed together cut-up colour transparencies of her abstract paintings and then passed the joined-together images by hand through a film printing machine as, "staking her claim for a space in two areas of artistic production dominated by men: abstract painting and abstract filmmaking". He states that, "the technique of sewing also connotes an ironic stance toward the notion of 'women's work', even as it provides a new means of manipulating film by hand. For *Reel Time*, Nicolson put even more pressure on this concept - as well as on the material of the film itself" (Zinman, 2012).

### **Wounded Bodies**

Nicolson wrote this reflective "handwritten stream of consciousness" about *Reel Time* twenty years after its performance:

I was sitting with my back to them sewing  
a beam of light coming at me from the projector the film  
trying to hold the film in the sewing machine trying to sew fast enough  
to keep up with the projector the tension on the film realising  
the thing that holds it down so it wouldn't break trying again  
the holes in the film getting very torn another beam of light  
from the side casting my shadow on to a wall shadow of what  
I'm doing the murky image of me sewing in the film loop  
getting more light as the holes as the holes get more tears and breaks  
such a loud sound as it snaps aware of people trying to mend it

I can sit for a moment hear the voices of the two readers  
words about threading the sewing machine threading the projector  
so similar the time the pace so slow just to read now and again  
don't have to allow spaces where nothing is happening  
the light catches the film loop so shiny because it is new  
light reflecting onto walls film very slack trickling through the room  
along the floor between people they help it along pass it back  
to the projectionist or to me I can't see any of them only the  
murky image of me sewing now very ripped and hard to get through  
the sewing machine let alone the projector how long will it last  
I keep going just keep doing it until they can't get it  
through the projector and it breaks down more and more often  
and it really can't go on and this jagged broken film  
the task done lies still people start to move tread carefully  
over the film I pick it up not sure what to do with it  
a tangled heap all broken spilling everywhere  
(Nicolson in Hatfield, 2004: 65)<sup>209</sup>

Nicolson's account conveys the immediacy of the occasion and its rich, interactive sensorium. She communicates the variable pace of the film loop's movement and suggests slowness by her use of "trickling" and "allow spaces where nothing is happening", and urgency through the phrase "trying to sew fast enough/to keep up with the projector". These rhythms are punctuated by the sound of the film breaking, "such a loud sound as it snaps", and the finality of the film's destruction. She also recalls the projected film image of herself working at her sewing machine as being "murky", in contrast to the clarity of the, "beam of light/from the side casting my shadow on to a wall". In addition, Nicolson suggests the vulnerability of the film loop and her empathetic connection to its irrevocable deterioration through her use of the words, "this jagged broken film" and the final line, "a tangled heap all broken spilling everywhere" (Nicolson in Hatfield, 2004: 65).<sup>210</sup>

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209. I reproduce here, as accurately as possible, the spaces between words of Nicolson's original.

210. When I read Nicolson's writing on the page, the gaps form a rhythm of speaking and call up her presence as a living, breathing woman. When I visited the *Film in Space* exhibition, curated by Guy Sherwin, held at Camden Arts Centre from 15 December 2012 to 24 February 2013, I read a handwritten note by Annabel Nicolson in which she comments on the photophobia she had developed.

Through her words, the work is positioned firmly as a site for the wounded maternal body, spilling its guts. In psychoanalytic feminism the body is, "the embodiment of the subject" (Braidotti, 1992/2005: 173), a key term in redefining subjectivity and its locus. As the Dutch feminist Rosi Braidotti explains, "the redefinition of the female feminist subject starts with the revaluation of the bodily roots of subjectivity, rejecting the traditional vision of the knowing subject as universal, neutral and gender free" (Braidotti, 1992/2005: 171).

### **Inscribing Femininity: 'As (a) Woman'**

The French philosopher, psychoanalyst and writer Luce Irigaray argued that the structure of specularization underlies all western thought and culture. By the term specularization, she refers to Jacques Lacan's revisioning of Freud in the mirror-stage, the corporeally focused developmental fantasy that precedes the formation of a child's ego and the 'I' of language - subjectivity, because in Lacanian terms, one-who-is-male becomes a subject through language. Lacan constructed a paradigm in which the young boy, offered a imaginary reflection of himself in a mirror, (by) his (m)other, who supports the processes of the male imaginary, identifies with this unified image, 'outside of himself', and then projects his male ego onto whatever he looks at. His image reflected back at him by the world, he sees himself everywhere.

Irigaray's use of the mirror as a metaphor posits woman as the tain. Women are matter. We are body. We constitute the mirror: we are the material of which it is made and therefore we can never see ourselves. In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray

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This note also features gaps between words. I intuit that Nicolson's painful hyper-sensitivity to light in recent years has led to her writing through touch - the gesture of the pen marking paper aligned to the rhythm of her speech experienced within. For me, this gestural 'speaking' resonates with the precision of her 'thinking/speaking-through-making' of her work as an artist.

reiterates that man sees himself reflected back at him in the mirror of his "sister", and the impossibility for her to see or be her own self (as "nothing to see") within "traditional sociocultural organization" (Irigaray, 1993: 100).

### **Mapping the Theoretical Terrain**

'Making as a woman' is a creative strategy proposed by Irigaray as a subversive modality of thinking and writing that 'jams the machinery' of patriarchal discourse and specular logic, and enables other discourses to reveal themselves. Writing in *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977/1985b), Irigaray stressed that what was important was not a complementary theory in which women could become subjects, but that of "jamming the theoretical machinery itself" (Irigaray, 1985: 78). As discussed previously in this thesis, the term *écriture féminine* denotes 'feminine writing', the transformative practices that come through the body, a language of the body.<sup>211</sup> Irigaray uses the term *parler-femme* for feminine writing, a practice that enunciates a position of/by/with the feminine that is doubled. The English translation of Irigaray's term 'speaking (as) woman', retains the pun of the original French, '*par les femmes*' (by women). The film critic Catherine Constable in her recent book *Thinking in Images* argues that Irigaray's critique in *The Speculum of the Other Woman* enables the creation of "spaces for subversion within philosophy" (Constable, 2005: 25), and creates openings into the phallogocentric theorising of film, women and the feminine. Margaret Whitford in her commentary 'Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine' (1991) used the model of

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211. As noted previously, a man can also produce feminine writing if he takes an appropriate structural position: in other words, one that is not phallogocentric.

psychoanalytic practice to propose that *parler-femme* is like the analysand's unconscious making itself heard during an analysis session, something that can modify the structures of the unconscious itself. Whitford writes:

we might understand the idea of a woman's language as the articulation of the unconscious which cannot speak *about* itself, but which can nonetheless make itself heard if the listener is attentive enough. (Whitford, 1991: 39; original emphasis).

In her film-sewing projection performance *Reel Time*, Annabel Nicolson listens to her body speaking, feeling her way in the *espacement*, the space in between. As an artist she practices a sensuous and tactile engagement with her surroundings and the substances that are present, both material and psychic. Her presence 'as (a) woman' is an essential constituent of her work, which embodies the feminine.

### **Real Women, Real Issues: 1970s to Twenty First Century**

The sewing machine is a mechanical device operated by hand, foot or electricity that was intended for use in the home by women from the mid-1900s onward. It is the first machine to occupy a position in the living room. Sewing was a naturally 'feminine' (sedentary and 'passive') activity done by women to care for their family and maintain their home, and the 'needle' was a metaphor for maternal devotion and domestic bliss.

In contrast to her sewing machine, the operation of which Nicolson felt comfortable and confident, the technological aspects of film-making and projecting were challenging. The freelance curator Felicity Sparrow has referred to the "proto-feminist aspect" of Nicolson's performance *Reel Time* (Sparrow, 2005: 2). Sparrow's doctoral research looks at the formation of Circles, the feminist distributor of women's moving image, which she founded in 1979 with Nicolson, and has published essays about the expanded cinema of the 1970s and the work of Annabel Nicolson. Her observation highlights gender as being *the* issue in the live encounter between "the domestic

sphere of sewing and the public space of performance", established by the machines themselves. Sparrow considers Nicolson's linking of the domestic sewing machine with a film projector to be "revelatory" for that time (Sparrow, 2005: 2).

## **Conclusion**

In this artwork we see the personal politicised. Almost one hundred years ago the filmmaker Alice Guy wrote, "There is nothing connected with the staging of a motion picture that a woman cannot do as easily as a man and there is no reason why she cannot master every technicality of the Art" (Guy, 1914/1979: 125). She is considered to be the world's first female director. Guy was a pioneer of narrative film, responsible for a phenomenal output of hundreds of short films and twenty two features in a career that stretched from the beginnings of cinema in 1896 to 1920. Yet she was absent from cinematic history for most of the Twentieth Century, excluded and made invisible by her gender, although her achievement and importance were more widely recognized after the publication of her memoirs in 1976.

In her work, Irigaray explores the association of woman and the maternal with nature and 'unthinking matter', material that is inert, lifeless and unthinking. Mimesis and 'strategic essentialism' are deployed by Irigaray to create an ingress into masculinist discourse, using repetition as a means to affect change and create an opening through which a reconstitution of femininity on its own terms may be effected and 'her own' genealogy created. Mimetic practices can be risky as they re-affirm the subordinate position of woman and the patriarchal model of femininity through imitative behaviour: Irigaray "uses 'mimicry' and 'mimesis' interchangeably, thus fully exploiting their connotations" (Martin, 2000). However, Hilary Robinson considers mimicry to be

a form of mimesis that is "non-productive", and associated with mime and the masquerade of femininity "which maintain patriarchal structures" (Robinson, 2006: 8).

Hilary Robinson uses the term "productive mimesis" for sites of resistance to patriarchal femininity and the hypothesisation of feminine subjectivities that could exist beyond the masculinist paradigm. Unproductive mimetic strategies include hysteria and paralysis, and the ultimate annihilation of the self through death.

Art can be seen as a specularized simulacrum of nature, a re-production of that which exists 'naturally' in the world. Irigaray states that,

women can play with mimesis ... because they are capable of bringing new nourishment to its operation ... re-producing (from) nature ... giving it form in order to appropriate it for oneself (1985: 76-77).

Braidotti suggests that mimesis, when it is in its "productive" mode, enables women to revisit and repossess territory, "where 'woman' was essentialized, disqualified or simply excluded" (Braidotti, 1992/2005: 187). For Robinson, the maternal body is the, "most poignant of all [these] discursive and material sites" (Robinson, 2006: 43).

Irigaray's theorisation of the feminine, and in particular the modal strategy of mimesis, is criticised by some commentators as essentialising. However, Braidotti, amongst others, refutes this, and sees Irigarayan "productive mimesis" that is sited within the area of reproduction as supportive of, "the project redefining female subjectivity", rather than reducing woman to a biological function as a mother (Braidotti, 1992/2005; 177).

To draw my analysis to a conclusion, in her film-sewing 'performance projection' *Reel Time*, I believe that Annabel Nicolson is practicing a mimetic strategy that is 'productive', to use Robinson's term. In her performance, the artist destroys her

specularised representation by piercing the celluloid through the needle action of her hand-cranked sewing machine: her living breathing corporeal body thus damages irrevocably the illusory moving image of herself projected large onto the screen through the tattoo of her mechanical needle, which is unthreaded.

In *Reel Time*, the activity of sewing is foregrounded within a proto-feminist methodology that is based in, "the politics of the personal, in which women's subjectivities and experiences of everyday life become the site of the redefinition of patriarchal meanings and values and of resistance to them" (Weedon, 1997: 5). In *Reel Time* a personal-political drama is performed by, with and through the body of the young woman artist and the focused violence of her empty needle in the cinema space she has created. Through effecting a live encounter between a domestic sewing machine and a film projector, Nicolson takes on the most pressing issues of that time: a woman's struggle for identity within her family, personal and sexual relationships, and for equality and autonomy at home, at work, and in the world. In *Reel Time* she positions her own experience and those of other women at the heart of her work, and, in doing so, 'jams the machinery' of dominant masculinist film culture and wider society: her image captured on film is shredded and destroyed, can never be reconstituted, the projector breaks down, there is darkness... then the houselights come on, the performance is over, and the 'personal-political' continues in real time.





## Part IV Being In-Between

### Chapter Seven: Embodied Practices

On my mother's most recent birthday, she told me what a pleasure it was to give birth to me. All my life, my mother has told me the story of my birth, how I came to be born, the first breaths I took, what I looked like, and how she held me. As a very young child, it was one of my favourite stories.

The final piece of practice I present in my study, is a short animation, made silently, without a soundtrack, of my mother's hands crocheting a scarf. Watching this film, which is exhibited as a video installation, the repeated movement of the inaudible maternal hands is soothing. For me, this film has a meaning that is personal to me, as it is bound with the subjectivity of my memories, and experience: these are *my* mother's hands, it is *my* mother's lap, *I* filmed her as she sat in her armchair one autumn evening. She is *my* mum, whose voice speaks to me through these remembered images. I made this film to bring her back to me, the mother from whom I am separated.

#### These Restless Hands

Here, the reader may wish to review the film *These Restless Hands* on the Creative Practice Elements DVD.<sup>212</sup>

My mother crochets a scarf. Her hands twist this way and that in her lap, looping the fluffy yarn around her crochet hook to create stitch after stitch. She is making a woollen scarf, for no one in particular. When she is finished, she will unravel all her stitches, and start again.

She sits in her living room beneath a lamp in a shower of light, the clicking dance of her crochet needle diving and hooking the yarn as her hands turn in and out. My mother's hands have been busy stitching since she was a young girl. She learned her craft from her mother, a gifted professional seamstress, who taught her first to hand-sew using

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212. A copy of the film is also available on Vimeo: <http://vimeo.com/58640466>

scraps of old bedsheets. My grandmother showed her daughter how to seam, to mend, to darn and embroider, and to knit clothes for her doll; as my mother taught me...

The film is constructed from a series of frames, extracted from a short piece of filming shot as QuickTime video on a stills camera. My filming frames my mother's hands in her lap, as she was crocheting a woollen scarf early one evening, shortly after moving home in autumn 2007. When she had finished making, my mother pulled out her stitches and unravelled the scarf, reconstituting the yarn into a ball of wool once again.

To create the film, I printed out 143 PAL digital video frames (720 x 576) onto sheets of white A4 copier paper, in landscape format, using a laser printer with its (black) toner cartridge running out. I re-photographed each still image on an animation rostrum with a Canon 60-D DSLR. Then I imported the jpgs onto the QuickTime timeline to 'stitch together' the sequence as a moving image stream, with a duration of 6 frames per image and a one frame overlap at the beginning and end of the series. This sequence is looped, endlessly, and shows my mother's hands repetitively making and unmaking.

The process by which this artwork *These Restless Hands*, and through which meaning is made and a feminine imaginary embodied, is a materially intimate engagement with the embodied practices of craft, specifically the skilled activities of sewing and crochet, that are located in the feminine. In her text for the 2011 *Hacking Antiques*<sup>213</sup> exhibition, a series of artworks by Amy Houghton, created in response to the collection of artefacts donated by explorer Gertrude Bentham to Plymouth City Museum, the cultural geographer Harriette Hawkins considers the tensions that arise through the (im)material processes of making and 'unmaking' in artistic practice. She comments, "Presenting the dematerialization of the objects draws our attention to their materiality and the practices of their making" (Hawkins, 2011).

In my film, my mother's hands are depicted seeming to unravel the line of stitches she has just crocheted, and then to start the row anew.<sup>214</sup> The film, as a continual loop,

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213. Hawkins is writing for the exhibition held at Plymouth College of Art Gallery 3 March-23 April 2011.

214. Through this repetitive activity, my mother slips into a partial hypnogogic state whilst keeping her

repeats this activity endlessly - her hands cease their perpetual restless movements only when the screen or disc player is switched off.<sup>215</sup> The photographic stills from which the film is constructed, are doubly removed from their indexical source - the living, breathing body of my mother, and her restless hands' compulsion to be engaged in making and unmaking. In Hawkins' words, "These material intimacies are ... not only a study of making practices, but also a making of meaning" (Hawkins, 2011).

### **Conjuring the Feminine Imaginary in Practice**

As I move towards the conclusion of this research study, in which I have explored an audiovisual form of *écriture féminine*, making film 'as (a) woman' through the transformative, embodied modalities of practice suggested by Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and others, I wish now to reflect on the 'trance state of being/non-being' that I have come to realise is embedded within my praxis, with reference to Maya Deren's theorisation of cinema and her ethnographic study of Haitian voodoo belief systems.

In *These Restless Hands*, my mother is wrapped in her own thoughts, connecting with her memories through the repeated movements of her hands. She has sat in this position, alone in her armchair, and performed these actions many times, as darkness falls beyond the room. In the 'know how' of making, she 'knows her place'. She settles into the task of making something, and her mind slips back to a reverie of times before, entranced by her hands' knowing rhythm, as they work together to create the stitches. She is both present, and absent, as my time here and now synchronises with her time of the film. My child's body remembers her body, and the enfolding comfort of its

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hands busy practising the patterns she has learned - the scarf she was crocheting at this time was meant for no one, and there was no end product.

215. There is a connotation here with a life support system being turned off, allowing the living body to die, to become inanimate, still.

monumental warm resilience. She is beyond, in an/other place. My mother is there, in front of me, I can see her - up there on the screen - but I can only touch the fleeting shimmer of her body's image, she cannot hear me.

In creative practice, I take the feminine position through an embodied layering of consciousness, entering a trance or dream state, which for Freud, Mulvey comments, is "the threshold between life and death ... a space of uncertainty in which boundaries blur between rational and the supernatural, the animate and the inanimate" (Mulvey, 2006).

Deren has written of the "invisible underlayer of an implicit double exposure" that is unrolled beneath the stream of moving images when we watch a film (Deren, 1960: 154-155). We construct meaning from the memories and dreams evoked, from the film itself and the space in which the experience takes place. Although Deren refers to the visual realm, reflecting the cultural primacy of the sense of sight, the sonic environment of the film also affects our understanding. The double exposure to which she refers is the unconscious interweaving of imaginary materials - our own subjectivity and the fictive reality we perceive.

As a maker, in giving agency to multiple strata of the self, I conjure the material specificities and repetitive rhythms of light and shadow that form the illusion of moving image. Life and representation entwine to the rapturous beat of animate and inanimate states of being, in the flux of the present moment, within which - to borrow Deren's words - life and death become one and the same. Each material loop of space-time, telling and knowing, woven through its link to a maternal other, continually in process, making and unmaking.

The 'dark materials' in the title of my video that formed an introduction this thesis connect to the distaff side of the binary, a distaff being a stick used for holding the unspun fibres of thread, wool, or flax during spinning. Hand-spinning requires the skilled co-ordination of both hands, the distaff being held in one hand, and the spindle, a longer stick that was spun to bond the yarn, in the other. It is an activity traditionally performed by women - women's work - and the distaff is associated with the home, and the mother, and symbolises the feminine. The distaff side is the maternal line, or branch of a family.

In the dichotomies of patriarchy, night, sleep, the unconscious, belong to woman - as do those things that are hidden, secret, unknown and unknowable - and too dangerous to know. I play with the attributes of femininity, the 'unthinking' and irrational matter of my raw materials, to conjure animated illusions that can only be 'seen' when the inanimate images that constitute them are in motion.

The 'magic' of the distaff, in turning the raw materials of plant and animal hair to a skein of yarn that can be woven to become cloth, is that of the witch, supernatural, the uncanny that makes the homely *unheimlich*. These 'dark materials' imply the 'dark matter' that we know is present in the universe, but which is invisible: it is missing, and there is a blank space where it should be. 'Dark materials' alludes also to John Milton's reference in his poem, *Paradise Lost*, to the omnipotent 'Almighty Maker's dark materials' - the four elements of heat, cold, moist, and dry, which are in endless battle with the realm of chaos and darkness.

According to Irigaray in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, feminine sexuality is an unfathomable "dark continent of dreams and fantasies" (Irigaray, 1974/1985: 141). Her comments resonate with Cixous, who says in her essay *The Laugh of the Medusa*:

Your continent is dark. Dark is dangerous. You can't see anything in the dark, you're afraid. Don't move, you might fall. Most of all: don't go into the forest. And so we have internalized this horror of the dark." (Cixous, 1975/1976/1981: 878).

Cixous' words echo with the dangerous deep forest of fairy tales, their wild darkness beyond the bounds of civilisation, culture and society, outside the law. In the course of my practice, I have followed the distaff side of the forked path on, walking to the left, the sinister side. I have entered the dark forest to explore the vastness of her immense bodily territories, that dark continent of the feminine, which is "unrepresentable" in patriarchy (Cixous, 1975/1976/1981: 885).

Both Cixous here and Irigaray earlier refer to Sigmund Freud's allusions to women's sexuality as a 'dark continent', in his essays on hysteria. In 'The Notion of Lay Analysis', (1926), Freud wrote: "We know less about the sexual life of little girls than of boys. But we need not feel ashamed of this distinction; after all, the sexual life of adult women is a 'dark continent'<sup>216</sup> for psychology" (Freud, 1926: S.E. 20: 212). This shadowy continent is imbued with mystery and danger, a vast blank area on a map that the male explorer-psychoanalyst could penetrate, discover and conquer.<sup>217</sup> As Doane suggests, Freud's

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216. This term is in English in the original text.

217. Julia Kristeva, writing in the *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, notes that Freud borrowed the expression 'dark continent' from the Nineteenth Century British explorer John Rowlands Stanley's description of the exploration of a dark, African forest - "virgin, hostile, impenetrable" (Kristeva, 2002/2005). Available: <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3435300325.html> Accessed: 1 January 2015.

phrase, "transforms female sexuality into an unexplored territory, and enigmatic, unknowable place concealed from the theoretical gaze and hence the epistemological power of the psychoanalyst" (Doane, 1999: 448).<sup>218</sup>

Kristeva, too, recalls Freud's likening of 'woman' to the unknown 'dark continent'. In her essay, 'Stabat Mater',<sup>219</sup> she writes:

There might doubtless be a way to approach the dark area that motherhood constitutes for a woman; one needs to listen, more carefully than ever, to what mothers are saying. (Kristeva, 1977/1987: 256).

She conceives that, "a woman as mother would be ... a strange fold that changes culture into nature, the speaking into biology" (Kristeva, 1977/1987: 260). Here, Kristeva seems to suggest that the 'key' to the 'dark continent' is the mother herself, and implying that the maternal body is capable of embracing within its realms both culture and nature, to unify not mutually exclusive as in the dichotomies of patriarchy. The 'love' of which Kristeva speaks.

The Freudian paradigm of female sexuality suggests that this landscape lurks in the darkness of woman, a deadly secret within her body that is monstrous. Within patriarchy, we learn that female sexuality and desire is untamed, dangerous, and must be censored (Cixous, 1976). In my practice, I have connected with the *jouissance* of childhood play and my unconscious, and bring 'her dark materials' into play. In *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Cixous argues that the dark continent of the feminine is, "*neither*

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218. Mary Ann Doane notes that Freud's speculations about 'the dark continent' of female sexuality are, "tucked away almost unnoticeably in ... a general treatise on psychoanalysis inspired by the quite technical problem of whether or not psychoanalysis should be practiced only by medical doctors" (Doane, 1991: 210).

219. Published as 'Héretique de l'amour' in *Tel Quel* in 1977



*dark nor unexplorable*. It is still unexplored only because we've been made to believe that it was too dark to be explorable" (Cixous, 1975/1976/1981: 884-885; original emphasis).

In this thesis I focus on the visual realm, the borderspace between being awake and unconsciousness, and the representation in a moving image artwork of a fictive reality that derives from the maternal, which is continually in process and being made anew. I remember the beginnings of a creative practice, and the visual illusions I would perform as a young child, whilst lying in bed on light summer evenings, waiting to fall asleep - settling my mind to just below the level of consciousness, and making patterns move. The optical performance is an improvised choreography of the 'mindbody', a process of temporary hypnosis that fulfils the conditions identified by the influential psychiatrist Martin Orne, in his classic paper on hypnosis, as optimum 'situations of trance induction'. Orne stipulated that five features be present: first, "desirability of entering trance"; second, "expectation that trance can be achieved"; third, "respect and trust for the operator"; fourth, "restriction of external stimuli"; and, finally, "focusing of attention" (Orne, 1959: 278).

The sequence of my mother's hands is looped, repeating endlessly, and shows her making and unmaking, again and again. There is no logical reason for my mother's performance of crochet in the 'real world' nor for the moving image of my mother's performance. As Martin Orne reminds us, "The absence of expression of a need for logical consistency seems ... to be one of the major characteristics of hypnosis" (Orne,

1959: 296). As an artist, during the making process I, too, slip into a hypnogogic state through the repeated actions required by animation protected in my quiet 'room of my own'.

As I mentioned earlier, Deren observed that watching a film is a doubled viewing experience:

As we watch a film, the continuous act of recognition in which we are involved is like a strip of memory unrolling beneath the images of the film itself, to form an invisible underlayer of an implicit double exposure. (Deren, 1960: 154-155)

I would suggest that the double exposure to which she refers is also an encounter with 'the other'. This state of cinematic subjectivity operates for me also in the film-making process: when I am animating or performing, I am aware of occupying more than one subjectivity - a slippery subjectivity, that is plural, emerging from the gaps in language (what is absent, not said), and has been recently described by Jenny Chamarette as a "chiasmic in-betweenness" (Chamarette, 2012: 3).

### **Moving Between: Mind-Making-Screen**

By its nature, the technique of animation requires the performer- animator to be immersed in a minimum of two space-time experiences simultaneously: during making, the frame-by-frame performance of stopped moments is overlaid with a kinaesthetic mind-image of the illusion of continuous motion that will be perceived by the audience from the completed animation on the screen. Thus, as something original is given visual form in the world as a linear sequence of still images, the animator is aware simultaneously of its eventual synthesized realisation 'in motion'.

Richard Schechner's 'performance theory' embraces an all-encompassing holism of thinking and doing in performance through an embodied wholeness, a "psycho-

physical unity"<sup>220</sup> (Schechner, 2010: 40), and "a whole person not mind/body" (Schechner, 1977/2003: 39).<sup>221</sup> Schechner's notion of 'bodymind' unifies the artificial and hierarchical separation of mind and body, a theoretical separation of the cerebral from the visceral which splits thought from physicality, thinking from doing, the idea from the act (its realisation in the real world). In crocheting a scarf for no one in particular, and repeatedly pulling out her stitches, my mother, perhaps, is enacting a similar transformational modality allied to Schechner's notion that performers "temporarily undergo a rearrangement of their body/mind" (1977/2003: 123). Through the cycle of repeatedly re-telling the story, change is perpetuated, the narrative is refreshed, allowing transcendence.

In the film *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), Maya Deren collaborates with her then husband, Alexander Hammid, to create a psychodrama, also referred to as a 'trancefilm', "modeled on dream, lyric and ... dance" (Rees, 1999/2011: 58). Deren appears as the woman, Hammid as the man, in a poetic exploration of the threshold between life and death in a setting of suspense and alienation. For A.L Rees, *Meshes* is resonant with "elemental fear and anxiety" (1999/2011: 57).

Marina Warner describes Deren's films as having a "profound affinity between the material properties of film and inner states of mind" (Warner, 2007). At the end of her ethnographic study of Haitian voodoo belief systems, conducted between 1947 and 1952, Deren writes of her own experience as a *voudouisant*, of possession by a Haitian *loa*, the spirit-god Erzulie:

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220. Whyman also refers to the "psycho-physical unity" (Whyman, 2008: 242)

221. In 'Towards a Poetics of Performance' published originally in *Essays on Performance Theory, 1970-1976* by Drama Book Specialists, New York, in 1977.

The bright darkness floods up through my body, reaches my head, engulfs me. I am sucked down and exploded upward at once. That is all. (Deren, 1953: 260).

For me, Deren's "bright darkness" recalls the dense blackness of 'lightstruck' film, something that is tangible and has a material existence - utter darkness being created from its opposite extremity, dazzling and annihilating light. In animation, the electromagnetic waves may be the breath which 'activates' the inanimate matter, between the intervals of darkness that lie between the frames. Their energies being both light and dark, at one and the same time.

I recall also, Sigmund Freud's belief that the subconscious, or dream state, was "the threshold between life and death ... a space of uncertainty in which boundaries blur between rational and the supernatural, the animate and the inanimate" (Mulvey, 2006: 38).

There is an eight second section of *Meshes*, appearing at nearly three minutes into the film, in which the screen is filled by the left eye of the woman (performed by Deren), who is lying down. The extreme close-up brings me into the position of a lover, hovering quietly over her. The film seems to pause here. As I look down on her face, the film-maker catches my eye through part-closed lashes. She registers a fluttering view of the world I cannot see behind my left shoulder; sees through me, her eye a dark pool shaded by soft fringed lips. As her eyelid lowers, I can feel her thoughts moving across my face and I am within what she dreams beneath the lowered swell of her *palpebra*, the Latin word for the fold of skin covering the eye that derives from the verb *palpo*, to caress.

This small moment lasts the time it takes to inhale, to draw air into the lungs, and then exhale. As a child, I watched my mother sleeping, counting each breath. My body feeling the soft rise and fall of her body, I knew in intimate detail each feature of her face. Our lives are made in these small sections of time, of enfolded subjectivities, repeated endlessly.

There is a layering of interiority, the woman's and mine, connected by the skin of the film, a resonance of remembered meanings, moments between sleeping and waking, in the shimmering light and dark of the stop-start frames and woven fields. *Meshes of the Afternoon*, contains five repetitions of entering the house, four by the woman, and the fifth by the man. Note that we, the audience, are made aware of time's stuttering. In replaying the same collection of moments, we become aware that we are trapped in time's not-passing - both repetition backward, and forward into the future. "Caught in Deren's 'mesh'", writes Catherine Fowler, "time is frozen, replayed, remembered, reordered and foreshadowed" (Fowler, 2004: 343).

In the Nineteenth Century, photography conferred immortality through its capture and the apparent fixing of the likeness of the sitter. In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes draws a connection between photography and death:

the Photograph (the one I intend) represents that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter. (Barthes, 1980/2000: 13-14).

The notion of being transformed from subject to object by photography is expressed also by Susan Sontag in her comment that the photograph functions as a *memento mori*:

To take a photograph is to participate in another person's ... mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt. (Sontag, 1977: 15)

Cinema further augmented this immortality through the medium's ability to conjure and replay seemingly living moments over and over again, countering what Laura Mulvey has described as, "the intractable nature of time itself" (2006: 31). The performers appear never to age, remaining as the day their images were recorded onto film, projected life-size, as a miniature, or larger than life, on the screen... living and re-living forever. Mulvey continues: "For human and all organic life, time marks the movement along a path to death, that is, to the stillness that represents the transformation of the animate into the inanimate" (Mulvey, 2006: 31). In animation, lifeless matter is (re)animated into movement, a semblance of what once was or what could be, experienced now. The frozen slices 'melting' together for an instant, only to be re-frozen, in the perpetual motion of the animation medium.

In making work as an artist, I adopt the methodology of *écriture féminine*, the metamorphic practices of 'feminine writing' that come through the body; an operational mode and a language of the body that enunciates the feminine - a position that is not reliant on one's biological identity - subverting the dominant hierarchies and representation modes through giving feminine subjectivities a voice that is not constructed as the 'other' of patriarchy. As Annette Kuhn explains, the feminine subject position is established through a relationship to language that is "characterised by process and heterogeneity" (Kuhn, 1982/1994: 11). Therefore, subjectivity is set in

motion, in process, through the feminine text, "making the moment of reading one in which meanings are set in play rather than consolidated or fixed" (Kuhn, 1982/1994: 12).

In *These Restless Hands*, the manipulated, indexical imagery of my mother's hands repeatedly crocheting and unravelling the woollen yarn in the past, contrasts with the viewer's own corporeal presence in the moments of the present. Our mother is 'called up' through the mediation of the digital image-making, to live on the screen, and her body speaks to us.

Alison Stone points out that maternal subjectivity is an intensive version of feminine subjectivity within the dominant paradigm of subjectivity which is structured around separation from the mother: "The (Western) self is understood in opposition to the maternal body (or, to be a subject is to separate from the maternal body)" (Stone, 2012: 1). Irigaray counters this paradigm, and proposes that 'feminine language' evolves through the creation of a circular dance. She 'feminizes' Freud's little Ernst, suggests that a girl would react differently to the absence of her mother, and would not symbolise her as a spool, an object.<sup>222</sup> Irigaray's suggestion is that a girl responds as follows:

She dances, thereby constructing for herself a vital subjective space, space which is open to the cosmic maternal world, to the gods, to the other who may be present. This dance is also a way of creating for herself her own territory in relation to her mother. (Irigaray, 1989: 132)

All of us experience the maternal, through the shared processes by which we are grown into being, *in utero*, and then, from our first breaths, in the dependencies of

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222. Irigaray bases her proposition on her analysis of the mouth positioning of the syllables and consonants of little Ernst's '*fort-da*' in German and French.

early childhood. As a child, I watched my mother, and repeated her. I 'covered' her movements, followed the look of her face, mirrored her. Seated in her armchair, in a pool of light, my mother's hands create stitch after stitch after stitch, making meaning. She counts her stitches, only to pull them out when she reaches the end of the row. She does not want to end, so she starts over again. Sitting at my mother's knee, I too, learned to stitch, and to count.

The audiovisual form of *écriture féminine* that I practice, film-making 'as (a) woman', allows me to complete this never-ending circle, through the embodied sensations and dual consciousness linked to the experience of making-and-observing.

When I confront *These Restless Hands*, as a spectator, I am immediately aware of the gap that exists between my body standing here, right now, and the images moving on the screen on the wall there, a few feet away, replaying something that occurred in the past. Other points of comparison emerge, my three-dimensional presence, alive and tasting the air in full colour, yet stilled and quieted in contemplation of a flat rectangle that holds a pair of shadowy hands. I am drawn to this place across space and time, captured by these hands that move ceaselessly and silently, close enough to touch, yet beyond reach. Hands that appear larger than life-size. This work is silent, the maternal voice is aurally absent. It is not heard, she has no voice. The diegetic soundtrack that accompanied the video pictures at the time of recording has been excised. And yet she calls to us, we hear our mother's voice across the expanding void of space-time - how do we respond?

Mary Ann Doane has described the maternal voice as a "sonorous envelope", a place of safety which "surrounds, sustains, and cherishes the child" (Doane, 1980: 33-50).



This immersive metaphor recalls the *chora* of Julia Kristeva's mother-child dyad, the infant captivated in utter bliss within the pre-linguistic milky warmth of the maternal sphere.

*In utero*, my mother surrounds me: she is, in psychologist Didier Anzieu's words, my 'first skin'. Then, after birth the full force of her voice is accompanied by her active touch, the sight, the smell and the taste of her. My experience of the outside world is, in infancy, mediated largely through the multi-sensory zone of the maternal. I feel the vibrations of her bodily sounds as they transfer through her skin to mine, my mother's voice undulates against my skin, I am aware at a level below consciousness of the sounds produced by my own body, and the range of physical effects that are generated, and I can open my mouth.

As Brandon LaBelle detects, silence itself can be a form of communication, foregrounding the decision not to speak. Silence, then, "operates as a vehicle for modulating, contouring, and performing communicative gestures" (LaBelle, 2010: 73). Salomé Voegelin refers to "the absence of sound as the beginning of listening as communication" (Voegelin, 2010 : xv).

So, there is a space of promise within the absence of sound, in silence there is the anticipation of it being filled. John Cage's:

what we re-quire \_ is / silence ; ... it is like an \_ empty glass / into which \_ at any /  
moment \_ anything \_ may be poured /  
(Cage, 1961: 109 - 110)

I understand Cage to mean that the volume of space which silence opens out, is vital as it offers the promise of our being made full, whole. I hear my mother in the silent spaces, I connect to her through making work 'as (a) woman'. Her body, that is my body, speaks to me.

Perhaps, then, my film *These Restless Hands*, is metonymic of film-making/making-film-meaning process itself? As Chamarette has observed:

Film, photography and installation art all share aspects of the temporal and the figural (those aspects related to form and representation). They are doubled arts in that sense, requiring a temporality of creation and a temporality of viewing which do not participate in the same framework.  
(Chamarette, 2012: 5)

The inbetween in animation denotes an incremental stage of change (of size, shape, form, movement) between one key image (a definite, fixed position) and another key image. The interval between these positions within the image/frame is also an 'inbetween', perceived as visual metamorphosis of one 'still' and that which precedes or follows on. It is this mutable fluidity - its 'between-ness' - that is at the very heart of animation - qualities it shares with *écriture féminine*, 'writing as (a) woman', 'writing (as) woman', or 'feminine writing', which, for Cixous:

is precisely working (in) the in-between, inspecting the process of the same and of the other ... not fixed in sequences of struggle and expulsion ... but infinitely dynamized by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another ... a multiple and inexhaustible course with millions of encounters and transformations of the same into the other and into the in-between, from which the woman takes her forms. (Cixous, 1976: 254)

Animation may be seen, therefore, to share with *écriture féminine*, an infinity of dynamic possibilities of transformational interrelationships.

In the course of this study, I am looking for the maternal in the materiality and material processes of direct animation. In searching for my mother, I have found her in the 'know how' of my practice as an artist film-maker, in the gendered activities of making that draw on childhood play.

*These Restless Hands* bring her back to me... and yet, she is immaterial, there is nothing there... she is de-materialised. A silent image that holds its own space, bounded by her hands' activity, the weave of the crochet needle, and the growing/shrinking woollen garment. Beyond the hands, there lies a volume of air contained in her lap, where she held me. Once, I was small enough to fit here.

What remains? Every frame counts, every scrap of memory I hold, each stitch, every frame, the single moments that make seconds, minutes, the flow of which moving image time is constituted. All in motion, making and unmaking, like these restless hands, moved by the breath of animation that makes us alive.

## Conclusion

The films that form the Creative Practice Elements of this study explore the territories of the feminine through a gendered, body-centred creative process that I understand as *écriture féminine*, to create a female imaginary that represents women and is recognised by them, by constructing positions of practice outside the dominant symbolic modes of patriarchy, which evolve through the maternal body and the materialities of the feminine. This mode of making allows me to originate, develop, and use a language which can emerge through my embodied experience. The moments extracted from the stream of my experience and distilled, provide an audiovisual essence that permeates the written elements of my thesis. I do not refer here to any reductive 'essentialisation' of woman, but to the concentrated complexity of animation as a poetic form: "Animation tends to be a condensed art form, using metamorphosis and metaphor to collide and expand meaning. In this way it resembles poetry" (Harvard University, 2014).

My thesis may be considered, perhaps, as a series of psychoanalytic encounters, in which I play a dual role of analysand and analyst. The practice in this model constitutes the unconscious material, what is recounted by the analysand in the form of dreams, memories, and parapraxes - the involuntary slips of the tongue, word play, mishearings, misreadings, and losing things - including losing one's way. The phenomena of parapraxis were called '*Fehlleistungen*', (literally, 'faulty acts'), by Sigmund Freud, who believed they shared an affinity with dreams and carried more than one meaning (Freud, 1915-1917: 15-16).<sup>223</sup>

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223. Freud first considered paraphrases in *The Psycho-pathology of Everyday Life* (Zur

Through the course of my investigation, I have discovered the transformative potential of *écriture féminine*: through its capacity to (re)write/translate the body and its slippage between hierarchies and rigid forms, the body 'becomes' a poetic hybrid, operating between and beyond boundaries, able to speak its own language.

This thesis is a starting point for a process, a becoming. My own creative practice in direct animation, working from the body to determine an individual identity 'as (a) woman', has evolved through personal experience, located in the everyday, entwined with a maternal genealogy, arising from and interlinked with the histories of my mother, her mother, and her grandmother. I am interested in these members of my family, and in other women, as makers whose creative activity has arisen from their everyday lives. It is their experiences as women and the artefacts they have created that have shaped my own practice.

My study has explored through practice the ways in which women film artists, operating independently, are able to create a female imaginary that represents women and is recognised by them, by constructing positions of practice outside the dominant symbolic modes of patriarchy, which evolve through the maternal body and the materialities of the feminine.

Through the course of my investigation, my engagement with materialist film as a feminist, combined with performative writing, has enabled me to weave autobiographical elements with my direct animation practice in order to articulate a nuanced account of the origins and evolution of both my creative practice and my

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*Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens*), based on his researches from 1897 onward (Freud, S.E. vol. VI) and written in 1901. He discussed the phenomena at length in his lecture 'Parapraxes' (Freud, 1916-1917: S.E. vol. XVI).

feminism. My understanding of my practice has been enriched and strengthened by sustained practice-led interaction with the theoretical ideas of Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous and through undertaking critical reflection of other artists' work, in particular Caroline Leaf, Annabel Nicolson and Margaret Tait. I have found that Cixous resonates the most directly with my direct animation practice in photochemical analogue film. Although she is a writer, I feel that she understands creative process 'from the inside'. She speaks directly to me with more *feeling* than the voice/s of Irigaray or Kristeva. It is through my deep engagement with Cixous' *écriture féminine*, a writing of the 'secret blood' of the imaginary, rooted deep in the visceral nature of experience, of 'gut feelings' of my female body, and the 'blood poetry' of Tait, that I have come to understand my practice of direct animation as creating a metamorphic space of continual becoming - a synaesthetic locus of multiple dimensions, where all time - past, present, and future - is present.

My original contribution to knowledge lies firstly in the insights I have provided, via examination of my own practice, into the ways in which the feminist artist writes with her body through working directly with the materials and material processes of film-making. In my thesis I have demonstrated how feminist theory may be embodied in the practice, providing evidence to illuminate aspects of *écriture féminine* as creativity-in-process, and making manifest the operational dynamics of *jouissance* in the creation of feminist artefacts. In addition, I have made an original contribution to knowledge in the insights I have provided as an expert practitioner on the methods used by Margaret Tait in *Painted Eightsome*, and through my reading of Annabel Nicolson's 'jamming' of the patriarchal machine of language and cinema in her film-sewing performance *Reel Time*. A further contribution to knowledge may be found in my exploration of the

performative aspect of animation practice, and the production of materiality that results through direct animation's repetitive (re)presentation and (re)interpretation of gendered experience.

My PhD research was conducted as it became apparent that we were experiencing a resurgence of feminist thought in society and in the arts during the Twenty First Century. Around the time of the Second Millennium, a widespread perception emerged in western societies that the previous waves of feminism had achieved their goals in securing gender equality, and that feminism itself was no longer relevant. Legislation had enforced women's rights to ownership of property and suffrage, and provided a legal framework for change to ensure parity of rights in the workplace and in the political sphere, autonomy in marriage and borrowing money, augmented by anti-discrimination laws reinforcing individual rights of 'difference'.

However, at a global level many inequalities in power persist. Despite centuries of struggle for women's rights, and gaining emancipation and gender equality through legal and constitutional amendments, I would argue that a critical, active and vocal feminism remains relevant in society and culture. A feminism that is a transformative mode of thought seeking to unsettle and subvert the status quo of power, by stimulating 'other' ways of thinking and doing in order to produce a different future. My experience and that of other women indicates a need for continuing vigilance to counter the challenges that seek to disenfranchise women and unravel the achievements of successive waves of feminism.

This thesis reflects the actively evolving conditions in thinking that are a result of the dynamic of third millennium feminisms. As the current feminist 'movement' becomes

more visible, it has become characterised by an abundance of voices and manifestations, and a lack of cohesion. It is difficult to situate the present in a specific historical context when one is living through a time of paradigmatic change, as this affects many strata of one's life, from the public to the private. Third wave feminist activist Jennifer Baumgardner (2011) believes that the current fourth wave of feminism 'enacts the concepts' of the previous wave and reinvigorates its key concerns, and has emerged through the online spaces opened up through new media. Use of social media has highlighted feminist agenda in mainstream media and led to widespread discussion and activism about issues such as rape, female genital mutilation, the visibility of women, transgender rights, and economic equality, in addition to providing a platform for feminist art and promoting understanding of women artists and their work. However, as Baumgardner has pointed out, advances in global and digital technologies are "coming faster and faster", and generate rapid shifts in perspectives and foci (Baumgardner, 2011). The reader should recognise that the 'thinking-through' in this thesis must, by necessity, be in-process and does not present finite conclusions.

All direct animation of film needs the touch of someone or something to 'mark' it in some way, in order for an image to be seen. The history of the filmstrip is recorded on its surfaces, like the scuffs and bruises on a child's knees. I think of film as a body that lives in the world and is subjected to the wear and tear of space and time, scarred by chemical and physical actions: the filmstrip becomes a record of its own life, as this thesis *Every Frame Counts* is a record of my investigation into creative practice and gender in direct animation.





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## **Audiovisual and Broadcast Material**

*8Some* (1970) directed by Margaret Tait [film]. Edinburgh: Ancona Films. 7 minutes 7 seconds.

*A 70mm Film Wearing Thick Heavy Black Liquid Eyeliner That Gets Smeary* (2008) directed by Jennifer West [film, silent]. 30 seconds.

*A Colour Box* (1935) directed by Len Lye [film]. London: GPO Film Unit. 4 minutes.

*Adult Day Return* (1986) directed by Kayla Parker [film]. Chapter Film Workshop. 2 minutes.

*An Ancient Journey Extended* (2013) directed by Peter Matthews [film, silent]. 8 minutes 33 seconds.

*As Yet Unseen* (1994) directed by Kayla Parker [film]. BFI Production. Plymouth: Sundog Media. 2 minutes 15 seconds.

*Blue Window Drawing* (2008) directed by Kayla Parker [video documentation]. Plymouth: Sundog Media. 1 minutes 51 seconds.

*Brighton Road Movie* (2010) directed by Kayla Parker and Stuart Moore [film]. Plymouth: Sundog Media. 3 minutes.

*Cage of Flame* (1992) directed by Kayla Parker [film]. Animate Award, Arts Council of England and Channel 4. 9 minutes 40 seconds.

*Calypso* (1955) directed by Margaret Tait [film]. Edinburgh: Ancona Films. 4 minutes and 29 seconds.

*Canntaireachd* (1992) directed by Kayla Parker [film]. Scottish Television. 1 minute 15 seconds.

*Color Neutral* (2014) directed by Jennifer Reeves [film]. 3 minutes.

*Colour Poems* (1974) directed by Margaret Tait [film]. Edinburgh: Ancona Films. 11 minutes 20 seconds.

*Combing the Fields* (1976) Annabel Nicolson [performance]. Large, handmade comb, field. Sandford Orcas, Dorset. Variable length.

Dean, T. (2014) 'Tacita Dean: save this language' [radio programme]. *BBC Radio 4* (first broadcast 17 April 2014). 30 minutes. Available:

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*Dots* (1940) directed by Normal McLaren [film]. National Film Board of Canada. 2 minutes 24 seconds. Available: <http://vimeo.com/32645760> Accessed: 1 January 2015.

*Entre Deux Soeurs (Two Sisters)* (1991) directed by Caroline Leaf [film]. Montreal: National Film Board of Canada. 10 minutes 26 seconds.

*Film Quilt* (2013) by Jennifer West [2-D sculpture].

*Flora* (2011) directed by Kayla Parker and Stuart Moore [film]. Plymouth: Sundog Media. 1 minute.

*Frames* (1971-1972) Annabel Nicolson [film, silent]. 6 minutes.

*Fun in a Bakery Shop* (2002) Thomas A. Edison [film]. New York: Edison Manufacturing

Company. 1 minute 19 seconds (at 20 fps). Available Library of Congress:

<http://www.loc.gov/item/00694005>

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*Fuses* (1964-1966) directed by Carolee Schneemann [film, silent]. 21 minutes 51 seconds. Available:

[http://ubu.com/film/schneeman\\_fuses.html](http://ubu.com/film/schneeman_fuses.html)

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*Garden Pieces* (1998) directed by Margaret Tait [film triptych]. 'Round the Garden', 'Fliers', 'Grove'. Edinburgh: Ancona Films. 12 minutes.

*Hardwood Process* (1996) directed by David Gatten [film, silent]. 14 minutes.

*Heirloom* (2008) directed by Kayla Parker [film]. Plymouth: Sundog Media. 1 minute 50 seconds.

*Hold* (2008) directed by Kayla Parker [film loop]. Peninsula Arts, as large-scale projection for the 2008 British Animation Awards onto the exterior wall of the Davy Building and onto the interior wall of the Roland Levinsky Building, Plymouth University. Plymouth: Sundog Media.

*John MacFadyen* (1970) directed by Margaret Tait [film]. Edinburgh: Ancona Films. 3 minutes 30 seconds.

*Le Sang d'un Poète (The Blood of a Poet)* (1930) directed by Jean Cocteau [film]. 55 minutes.

*L'Idée (The Idea)* (1932) directed by Berthold Bartosch [film, based on *The Idea* by Frans Masereel]. 25 minutes.

*Looks Familiar* (1989) directed by Kayla Parker [film]. 3 minutes 15 seconds.

*Loops* (1940) directed by Normal McLaren [film]. National Film Board of Canada. 2 minutes 42 seconds. Available: <http://vimeo.com/32646107>

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*Love in the Cold: Caroline Leaf and Her Two Sisters* (1994) directed by Donald McWilliams and Isabelle Turcotte [documentary]. An ASIFA, and National Film Board of Canada production for *Four-Mations* series, Channel Four Television. Off air recording [VHS] First broadcast 2 June 1994. 35 minutes.

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*Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) directed by Maya Deren, with Alexander Hammid [film]. 14 minutes.

*Mothlight* (1963) directed by Stan Brakhage [film, silent]. 3 minutes 13 seconds.

*Neighbours* (1952) directed by Normal McLaren [film]. National Film Board of Canada.

8 minutes 6 seconds. Available:

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*Night Sounding* (1993) directed by Kayla Parker [film]. Arts Council and BBC 'One Minute Film Award' for BBC2's 'The Late Show'. 1 minute 15 seconds.

*Nuclear Family* (1990) directed by Kayla Parker [film]. TSW Film Award, Television South West and South West Arts. 4 minutes 15 seconds.

*Orphée (Orpheus)* (1950) directed by Jean Cocteau [film]. 95 minutes.

*Painted Eightsome* (1970) directed by Margaret Tait [film] Edinburgh: Ancona Films. 6 minutes 16 seconds.

*Pen Point Percussion* (1951) National Film Board of Canada [documentary film with Norman McLaren]. 6 minutes. Available:

[https://www.nfb.ca/film/pen\\_point\\_percussion](https://www.nfb.ca/film/pen_point_percussion)

Accessed: 1 January 2015.

*Peyote Queen* (1965) directed by Storm de Hirsch [film]. 9 minutes.

*Phantasmagorie* (1908) directed by Emile Cohl [film]. 1 minute.

*Physic* (2001) embroidered by Kayla Parker [film]. Aune Head Arts. loop.

*Poppies* (2006) directed by Kayla Parker [film loop, with photographic triptych].

*Priya* (2012) directed by Alia Syed [film, silent]. Arts Council England and Southampton Solent University. 11 minutes 36 seconds.

*Project* (1997) directed by Kayla Parker and Stuart Moore [film]. London Film Makers' Co-op and National Lottery. 1 minute 15 seconds.

*Reel Time* (1972-1973) Annabel Nicolson [performance]. Sewing machine, projectors, long loop of 16mm film and two readers. Variable duration.

*Seeing for Ourselves: Women Working in Film* (1983) directed by Margaret Williams [television documentary]. Arbor International for Channel Four Television and the Arts Council of Great Britain. [DVD]. 56 minutes.

*Skinnydipping Carbon Beach Malibu Film - In Front of David Geffen's House* (2008) directed by Jennifer West, with Renee Lotenero, Lia Trinka-Browner, and Karen Liebowitz [film]. 5 minutes 8 seconds.

*Slides* (1971) directed by Annabel Nicolson [film, silent]. 16 minutes.

*Small World* (2007) directed by Kayla Parker and Stuart Moore [film]. Definitive Stories, National Review of Live Art. Plymouth: Sundog Media. 2 minutes.

*Snow White* (1933) directed by Dave Fleischer [film]. New York, NY: Fleischer Studios. 7 minutes.

*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) directed by William Cottrell and David Hand

[film]. Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Productions. 83 minutes.

*STITCH* (2012) Kayla Parker [performance]. 400 ft 16mm film (unexposed), white crochet yarn, darning needle. Plymouth University. 4 hours.

*Sunset Strip* (1996) directed by Kayla Parker [film]. Animate Award, Arts Council of England and Channel 4. 4 minutes 15 seconds.

*Sweeping the Sea* (1975) Annabel Nicolson [performance]. Broom, beach. Southampton Festival of Performance Art. Variable length.

*Teign Spirit* (2009) directed by Kayla Parker and Stuart Moore [film]. Animate Projects for Sea Change. Plymouth: Sundog Media. 2 minutes 50 seconds.

*The Internal Voice* (1988) directed by Kayla Parker [film, projected by the artist with live musical accompaniment improvised on the mandolin by David Johnstone]. 3 minutes approximately, variable length, dependent on projector speed.

*The Metamorphosis of Mr. Samsa* (1977) directed by Caroline Leaf [film]. Montreal: National Film Board of Canada. 9 minutes 42 seconds.

*The Ocean Moves Through It* (2013, silent) directed by Peter Matthews [film]. 16 minutes 49 seconds.

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*The Street* (1976) directed by Caroline Leaf [film]. Montreal: National Film Board of Canada. 10 minutes 12 seconds.

*Twenty Foot Square* (2009) directed by Kayla Parker and Stuart Moore [film]. Plymouth: Sundog Media. 1 minute 20 seconds.

*Unknown Woman* (1991) directed by Kayla Parker [film]. The Arts Council of Great Britain, and South West Arts. 8 minutes 45 seconds.

*Verge* (2005) directed by Kayla Parker and Stuart Moore [film diptych, loop]. 'Verge: Sculptural Geometry' and 'Verge: Flux'.

*Walking Out* (2000) directed by Kayla Parker [film]. Arts Council of England, and South West Arts. 10 minutes.

*What the Water Said: Nos. 1-3* (1998) directed by David Gatten [film]. 16 minutes.

*What the Water Said: Nos. 4-6* (2007) directed by David Gatten [film]. 17 minutes.

*White Body* (2009) directed by Kayla Parker [film]. Plymouth: Sundog Media. 1 minute.

*Wort Wall Water* (2004) directed by Kayla Parker and Stuart Moore [film loop, silent]. Lux Centre. Plymouth: Sundog Media.

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# Appendices: Supplementary Material

## **Appendix A: *Making Glass* Transcript**

*Making Glass* video documentation: monologue script

Scene 1.

FADE IN

EXT. SMALL BEACH, STONEHOUSE, PLYMOUTH - DAY

Just before high tide. Winter, the sun is setting. A WOMAN in a coat is walking along the water's edge, her head is bent over, looking at the ground. From time to time she stoops to pick up a small piece of coloured glass.

WOMAN (V.O.)

This scrap of beach on the western edge of the Stonehouse Peninsula is two and a half miles across the city from where I live.

There are no signposts. It's a rubbishy nowhere place, unnamed on any maps.

I've come to walk the treasure line, a narrow strip of gritty sand between heaps of weed, just below the reach of the full moon tide. I'm collecting nubs of coloured glass, washed up remains of bottles and jars.

It's a cold, bruised non-place, caught between the Royal Naval Victualling Yard on one side and Devonport Docks on the other. An estuary of the River Tamar, which pours through the gap between Devon and southeast Cornwall, out into Plymouth Sound and beyond to the ocean. I'm close to where Turner painted picturesque views of the south coast and the naturalist Charles Darwin sailed off to the Galapagos.

When I visit this forgotten corner I am reminded of many histories.

The waves wash to and fro and release the scent of fermenting homebrew. I sweep the tainted beach for coloured glass. The winter sun falls to dusk.

FADE OUT

Scene 2.

FADE IN

INT. STUDIO, LIPSON, PLYMOUTH - DAY/NIGHT

Winter, curtains are shut, no sense of time. Lit by lamps within the body of an animation rostrum stand, upon which is placed a large sheet of glass. The WOMAN works carefully, balancing the pieces of glass gathered from the beach.

WOMAN (V.O. CONT/D)

I prefer the softened feel of worn glass to sharp edges, newly broken. I'm also attracted to small shards of decorated pottery, but I want the translucent panes of the glass to 'look through'.

The digital stills camera fixed to my animation rostrum creates what I think of as my reference shot. Its view is fixed, overhead, monocular.

On a sheet of clear glass under the camera I arrange a still life from the glass fragments: daylight neon tubes shining up from below create an intimate landscape



painted in light. The pieces of glass slither and clatter, they have to be carefully balanced.

I use a digital hand-held microscope to explore. Sold for use in science education, law enforcement, industry and aerospace, it is a mobile camera that allows me to inspect an area the size of a millimetre. I examine the glass, capturing each position frame-by-frame on my laptop as a digital photograph. A rhythmic circling of multiple viewpoints.

To end, I defocus and refocus the lens of the DSLR, recording its flexing sight as, finally, I touch the glass.

A small object held up close to the eye enfolds the field of vision, and creates an impression that one is a miniature within a macrocosm, as in the paintings of Georgia O'Keefe. Made small through my sense of magnified sight, I move within an interior landscape.

I write in the intervals between focused bursts of concentration. I report back from my experience. And, through this writing, creating the animation connects to childhood memories of swimming in the Mediterranean. Looking at the seabed through my mask, I dive below the surface and can hold my breath for longer than anyone else.

Through this process of animating my seeing I give new life to these objects with broken pasts. Extracted from their environment to become a seamless streaming future-present woven from the stopped moments of time and light.

FADE OUT

Recorded 19 December 2011

## Appendix B: Her Dark Materials Transcript

### Her dark materials: conjuring the feminine imaginary

#### Video transcript

scene	time: min + sec	visuels	audio	notes
	00.00	<i>black</i>	<i>silence</i>	
titles	00.01	Her Dark Materials: / conjuring the feminine imaginary / Kayla Parker	<i>silence</i>	<i>White text on black ground</i>
	00.05	Fade up to wide shot (WS) of K in studio, sitting to left of screen at animation rostrum, 16mm Steenbeck editing machine in background. DAY. White curtains are drawn over the windows (behind).	[fade up to <i>atmosphere of studio, no movement or perceptible sound</i> ]	
	00.07	K picks up metal 400 foot film can and holds it against her body: on the lid we can see the label of the processing lab Filmatic and <b>LOOKS FAMILIAR</b> (handwritten).	So, it all starts really with this film, <i>Looks Familiar</i> , which...	<i>K speaking on screen</i>

	00.12	Cont/d Takes lid off can	<i>[sound of can lid being wrenched off] ... started life [sound of metal can lid being placed on rostrum] as [rustle of tissue paper wrapping] a hundred foot [noise of can base being placed on lid] of colour reversal film</i>	<i>K speaking on screen</i>
	00.18	Cont/d Starts to unwrap the tissue paper wrapped around the film artwork	donated by the local TV company <i>[delicate rustling sounds]</i>	<i>K speaking on screen</i>
	00.25	Cont/d Unwraps the tissue paper completely, and <i>[at the rostrum]</i> begins to unwind the leader from the front end of the film. The unwound leader coils into a heap on the rostrum. Then, we can see the filmstrip contains frames of coloured pictures, although too small to discern what the images are.	and <i>[sound of tissue paper being crushed into the empty can]</i> on my way to work in Exeter, I used to take a Bolex camera with me ... and I, filmed all the stray cats that I saw ... um, cats sitting on windowsills, things like that ... <i>[slithery sounds of film slipping against itself]</i> And then there was an event at Spacex gallery in Exeter, and I projected the film ... and I ran it backwards and forwards through the projector ... and projected it over the bands that were playing (playing) that evening. So that's really how this started off. (Um) ...	

00.53	Cut to close up (CU) of glass sheet over rostrum lightbox: we can see K's hands holding the 16mm film, laying the beginning of <b>LOOKS FAMILIAR</b> down on lightbox so the coloured sequences of frames can be seen [ <i>a yellow, orangey and red strip of the pumpkin face</i> ]. K holds film in place with splayed fingers of left hand, while right hand points to film images.	[ <i>slithering sound of film</i> ] So when I got the film back, I looked at the pictures, and... it didn't look ... or feel, like m-my memory of the filming experience. And so I began to, chop it up with a pair of scissors, and start to colour it and scratch it (um) responding rhythmically to the images within the frame and the sequence.	<i>K voiceover</i>
01.17	Big close up (BCU) of frames [ <i>face of George Falloon's landlady's cat, inscrutable; outline of eyes and whiskers scratched into emulsion</i> ] fingers moving the strip across the glass.	That's actually a friend's cat there. (Um) and so the visual rhythms become as	<i>K voiceover</i>
01.25	Back to previous CU shot, K runs film through fingers.	important as what is seen on the film when it's a moving image piece.	<i>K voiceover</i>
01.29	Back to previous WS, K at rostrum with film. There's now a tangle of film on the rostrum, with coloured sections visible [ <i>short sequences of light green, pale blue and magenta frames</i> ]	When I edited this film - it was actually edited with a pair of scissors [ <i>laughs</i> ] ... and some masking tape - and what I did was	<i>K speaking on screen</i>

01.35	<p>Cut to <b>LOOKS FAMILIAR</b> telecine (TK), full 16.9 screen:  Sequences scratched and over-painted in colour of wandering kittens scampering to and fro across screen, intercut with camera wandering over flowers and plants in Cullompton garden, eye contact with b/w cat on doorstep, swirling fun fur hat (clockwise and widdershins), cat in sun scratching under chin with hind leg, occasional black frame, pure plum red frame, my shadow (head shot) on deep red ground,</p>	<p>cut it up into little sections, and then ordered them so that they were visually pleasing sequence. Um, and then I joined the London Film-Makers' Co-op, and went up to London and edited the film on a Steenbeck - so, that was on two Fridays...  <i>[Looks Familiar soundtrack playing softly in background up to this point, then sound level fades up as K stops talking]</i></p>	<p><i>K voiceover, then fade up to Looks Familiar soundtrack</i></p>
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02.04		<p>Black, then CU of K's hands holding strip of <b>NUCLEAR FAMILY</b> 16mm film artwork across lightbox glass [shot from front of rostrum, to K's right], K runs fingers over film, and moves strip over glass so different frames can be seen [the children Xtal and Keif as Toni and Betti, my imaginary childhood friends] and the space between frames where two sections have been spliced together. K rubs the filmstrip.</p>	<p>[Looks Familiar soundtrack fades down]  Then the next film that I made was <i>Nuclear Family</i>. That was a film about my imaginary childhood friends, um... that was shot on reversal, colour reversal, as well... And the thing I didn't like aesthetically was this crispy, candy coating on the surface of the film. I sort of started to sandpaper it ... and, one of the nice things that results from colour reversal is that you get this gorgeous blue colour being revealed ... when the yellow pigment layer comes off ... and, that's actually really lovely to work with [and] feels really nice as well. (And uh) This was a film that was coloured using my granny's food colouring dyes ... and pens. But I also started to use photographic dyes, and to work (much more) in a much more abstract way with some of the filmed material [crunching sound of flexing filmstrip]</p>	K voiceover
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03.06	BCU 6 frames, handheld, K's sister Nakki as silhouetted head and shoulders of Betti pulling faces and sticking tongue out [ <i>we can see sprocket holes clearly and lines and patterns engraved on emulsion layer and alternate colouring of frames, yellow and red</i> ]	One of the things that I thought when I was working with this was, really (you know), what am I doing, and why am I doing it? - in terms of the... subject matter of the film, but kind of connected with the time that I don't remember because I was (like) under three and a half years old, I don't actually really remember having these imaginary childhood friends – my mother does, but I don't. I (sort of) thought that what I'm starting to do is to work as I used to as a small child with those... wax crayon ... pictures that (I) used to make – you put down layers of coloured wax crayons and the cover the whole lot with black, and then scratch through it (erm).	<i>K voiceover</i>
03.48	Cont/d Moves strip through to show sandpapered frames where emulsion layer has been worn away (with sandpaper), and varied imagery of frames, some very abstract	In that sort of way, I made a connection to my memories ... or what was retrievable from the memories of that time, through the process of making the film ... and working in a very physical way - with sandpaper and scalpels and (erm) dyes and inks - to make a film that was aesthetically pleasing, both as a still object	<i>K voiceover</i>
04.14	Cont/d Finger rubs up and down strip	but also as ... a moving image experience	<i>K voiceover</i>

04.18	<p>Cut to <b>NUCLEAR FAMILY</b> TK, full 16.9 screen: view from train window, moving through silhouetted landscape at sunset, intercut with dark and light frames with swirling abstracted marks scratched into emulsion then coloured, and K's mother Jonni eating yoghurt with a spoon on the platform of Cambridge station, patterned sequences of moving along train tracks, abstract spiral sequences, sky at sunset lightens as we emerge from beneath the cloud, moving patterns of small cuts, wavelets and checks, then the face of K's brother Miles as Toni, Xtal's face as Betti, zoom to carving in stone of miners' cottage in Pensford, then glittering stretch of water, patterns of spots and cuts, moon high in the sky and decorated with colours and lines, Keif and Xtal waves goodbye, overhead lights filmed from a moving car snake through.</p>	<p>as well</p> <p><i>Mmm... Yes. I remember. / In a certain kind of light /when clouds came over at evening / their hair flamed orange / it glowed really red.</i></p> <p><i>I can remember this / when it was damp / and when it rained</i></p> <p><i>they were called the fiery twins / and they came down from the stars</i></p>	<p><i>K voiceover</i></p> <p><i>Jonni, K's mother's voice – Nuclear Family soundtrack</i></p>
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04.43	Black then back to WS of K sitting at rostrum holding roll of film artwork for <b>CAGE OF FLAME</b> (filmed more from the front); curtains darker as it's now early evening.	So, in the nineties I made three films that are all about ten minutes long: <i>Unknown Woman, Cage of Flame, and ... Walking Out</i> . And, they ... all derive from dreams – my own dreams. (Um) <i>Cage of Flame's</i> probably the best known	<i>K speaking on screen</i>
04.57	Cut to <b>CAGE OF FLAME</b> TK, full 16.9 screen: Silhouette of the head of K's sister Nakki, shot from below, slowly turning against light yellow/red background patterned with K's fingerprints, pumpkin flesh turning with black wipes hand drawn opening and shutting, some small circular shapes (blinking eye effect), coloured shadows of rotating glasses, then back to pumpkin sequence and progression to blood drops, increasing until pumpkin is fully moist red.	It's a commission for Channel 4 and the Arts Council, for the Animate Award ... [ <i>Sunset Strip soundtrack playing softly in background throughout</i> ]  and it's ... originates from my dreams that I had immediately before, and during menstruation, over a nine month period.  And there's a whole range of different techniques involved in (in) the making of it. [ <i>Sunset Strip soundtrack fades out</i> ]	<i>K voiceover</i>
05.18	Cut to BCU 4 - 5 35mm frames of <b>SUNSET STRIP</b> titles, handheld, illuminated by lightbox below	So. <i>Sunset Strip</i> . (Um, er) I've actually	<i>K voiceover</i>

05.22	Cut to <b>SUNSET STRIP</b> TK, 4.3 in 16.9 frame: procession of half second setting suns, showing different texturing techniques – masking tape strips, magnolia petals, engraved circles, dyeing and over-printing, net curtain, and Letratone.	dispensed with the camera (um) in this film (um). It's a year of sunsets, and each sunset – including the ones where it rained – are given twelve frames on the film [laughs]. And to er make (make) the titles and credits, it's (um)... I typed ...	<i>K voiceover</i>
05.42	Cut back to ECU 4 35mm frames of <b>SUNSET STRIP</b> titles, handheld, illuminated by lightbox below; stationary, then	I fed the film through an electric typewriter and [laughs] actually typed it on every single frame. It originated as a piece of black film, that I was given by the South West Film and Television Archive, and I've actually bleached the film to ...(to) er,	<i>K voiceover</i>
05.55	Cont/d Strip pulled upward (to top of screen) to shown circular marks scratched onto black leader between titles, fingers rub surface of filmstrip,	actually release the clear film underneath – that's it in its original state with (er) my sort of ... etching on it	<i>K voiceover</i>

06.10	Cut to wider CU 6 frames (half a sunset day), index finger of K's left hand rubs against left hand edge of filmstrip over sprocket holes, and feels the edge of the strip	So this is (this is) actually a continuous strip of film – there are no edits at all within the film itself. Um, that's the first day – 12 frames there – which is about half a second when the film is passed through a projector or pic-synch at twenty four frames per second. And (er, um) ... I'd begun to use bleach as a way of removing the emulsion layer – the colour layer on top of the film – and used this extensively in Sunset Strip. Using lots of different masks, and different materials that I'd find when I was on my way to draw the sunset every day – as I did time-lapse drawings of the sunset. And,	<i>K voiceover</i>
06.55	Cont/d Strip pulled upward (to top of screen) to show days of sunsets passing by, spool of 35mm artwork visible to right of screen resting on glass as strip is unfurled, clearly displaying blue section of rainy sunset, then gold and black sunsets	again, it relates to the body, and memory and experience very very closely. (Em) but also, it begins to make a connection w-with place, as well. [ <i>sound of film being handled</i> ] [Laughs] So [laughs] that's a rainy, a little rainy run there – the net curtains. [ <i>sound of film being handled</i> ] There's 365 days...	<i>K voiceover</i>

	07.35	Cut to Extra BCU 2 frames, examination of individual frames, markings on edge of strip visible, such as Kodak and hand-written frame numbering, finger moves across surface of frame, touching the artwork, incremental differences clearly visible between consecutive frames	And what's quite strange is that (you know) looking at film (sort of) the original here now, and feeling it – 'cause it's quite tactile as well where I've cut through the emulsion layer – is, I begin to remember actually making these images (um) ... Again, (sort of) making them in the back bedroom of the house I happened to be living in at the time.	<i>K voiceover</i>
	08.04	Cut to MS filmed from front of rostrum over K's shoulder, K holding roll of <b>SUNSET STRIP</b> artwork over lightbox, winding film back onto spool	So I did make the film chronologically (um), in the same order that I'd lived through the 365 sunsets ... of the year. And as I went through the film, day-by-day each sunset, I found that more and more additional material began to accrete to the film surface. Um, I mean, my fingerprints – there's quite a lot of fingerprinting	<i>K voiceover</i>

08.33	Cut to <b>SUNSET STRIP</b> TK, 4.3 in 16.9 frame: procession of half second setting suns, very red, from towards end of film (long hot summer), dramatic tension, highly coloured frames, more variety, hair and magnolia petals visible	going on (on) both sides of the film surface [ <i>Sunset Strip soundtrack playing softly in background throughout</i> ] ... and, also, things being stuck to it – um, such as, petals and leaves that I'd picked up on my way to (take) to draw sunsets each day. And [laughs] there's also bits of skin, where I'd sort of cut off a bit with a scalpel by mistake - off my finger ... (and), blood. And, when I was working with the lab (um) we did some test strips to see what would go through their printer, and (er) lovely Len Thornton said, As long as we can get it through – it's fine! And, (er) ... so that's what we did. <i>[Sunset Strip soundtrack fades up, then down at the end of shot]</i>	<i>K voiceover</i>
09.36	Cut to mid CU from above lightbox, 3 16mm strips of artwork from <b>VERGE</b> arranged diagonally across the screen: top is negative strip, middle is petals and sepals on clear film (being pulled slowly upward), lower strip has bee wings in pairs	Ok. This is a film called <i>Verge</i> . In fact it's a two-screen piece of work, originally for a gallery ... And, 16mm, working with clear film and with black colour reversal film, which, when it's bleached (is) reveals that gorgeous blue colour ... and, it's used ...	<i>K voiceover</i>

	10.02	Cont/d K's left hand pointing along the edge of the negative strip, then moves middle strip upwards	the negative – as we tend to think of it – screen is made using a (sort of) photogram technique, which is the (the) actual materials of the walk along the verge of an industrial (um) outskirts of (of) Plymouth. That's like little ...	<i>K voiceover</i>
	10.20	Cut to Extra BCU 3 - 4 frames of negative strip, backlit from lightbox below, black with mottled blue watery imagery spread down the length, edge marking of COL-UM-BINE scratched along upper edge between sprocket holes, film moves down to reveal SEEDS and beginning of strip, scratched with an arrow, HEAD and 19 July 05	These are actually columbine seeds here - wild columbine that grows along the verge	<i>K voiceover</i>
	10.24	Cut back to previous mid CU from above, K's left hand indicating along edge of upper strip, then moving middle strip down and pointing	(sort of) set on the film itself, and then it's bleached. And the positive screen - which is this one - has the material actually stuck on to it.	<i>K voiceover</i>

10.35	Cut to CU 6 frames of bee wings strip, backlit from lightbox below, diagonally across screen, slowly moving upward to right to reveal more frames	And it actually started - the idea for it started – there’s lots of dead bees along the verge, which apparently get buffeted by the lorries that (sort of) thunder down there. And so I started collecting the bees, and the bees’ wings.	
10.54	Cut to BCU 6 frames of positive strip with petals in centre, backlit from lightbox below, diagonally across screen, slowly moving upward to right to reveal more frames, negative strip and bee wings strip visible to side	The sound for the film derives from the wind blowing across the sign at the entrance to (like) a business park ... and, the walks were done at dusk and so the business park was empty. So it’s quite a lonely (sort of) eerie, very atmospheric, sound. [ <i>Verge soundtrack fades up</i> ]	<i>K voiceover</i>
11.15	Cut to <b>VERGE: FLUX</b> digital film, full screen: Procession of fern leaflets overlaid, light green and brown (fading chlorophyll), pale translucent green of wood sorrel leaves and leaf stalks (bubbles of carrier fluid visible)	[ <i>Verge: Flux soundtrack plays</i> ]	

11.49	<p>Cut to <b>VERGE: NOCTURNE</b> digital film, full screen: Fluttering leaf skeletons of deep radiant ultramarine blue, with flickering white markings where all the black emulsion has burned away to reveal the base material, with some delicate organic structures in lilac and violet (wood sorrel leaves, reminiscent of x-ray images), vibrant spirals speckled with blotches and scratches twisting through the field of vision, structural hydrangea leaves in bright blues and bleached white detail</p>	<p>[<i>Verge: Nocturne soundtrack plays</i>]</p> <p>So, one of the things that's become important to think about is</p>	<p><i>K voiceover</i></p>
12.22	<p>Cut to mid WS of K in studio, sitting at rostrum, 16mm Steenbeck in background. NIGHT. White curtains are drawn over the windows (behind). Later that day, evening has fallen.</p>	<p>the idea of a camera, and the idea of projection. And, leading in to my more recent work with film material, as a physical medium, in relation to my own body, and memory and place - I did a project with Plymouth Arts Centre, a residency, it's called</p>	<p><i>K speaking on screen</i></p>



12.41	<p>Cut to <b>MEASURE</b> digital film, full 16.9 screen:  white scratched lines etched in black emulsion (b/w film artwork), dancing outlines of leaves, a magpie, view under a tree, seagulls in the sky, abstract mesh of lines, scribbled marks like rain, sun's reflection in a puddle, the words END BIT scratched on one frame, then black, scratched on one frame  The Measure of It, STARTS, 24 October 2009, more controlled scratched images, shapes and leaves, a brighter day, more cross-hatching and shading, detailed lines and shapes</p>	<p><i>Measure.</i> And (um) I was working with black and white black film. And, the strips that I worked with, the loops that I created, were actually relating to the dimensions of my own body. They ... some of them would be the length from the tips of fingers, or my height, or (my) around me. (um) and I would draw from memory what I'd seen</p>	<p><i>K voiceover</i></p>
13.06	<p>Cut to still colour photo full 16.9 screen of K behind the glass pane of a window, cutting a 16mm filmstrip for Measure with a scalpel,</p>	<p>out of the window in the studio that I was working in.</p>	<p><i>K voiceover</i></p>

13.10	Cut to WS from above, rostrum lightbox, K walks from left with green M+S 5p plastic carrier bag full of 16mm film from <b>STITCH</b> , and places it on the lightbox glass, then reaches inside the bag and pulls out a bundle of double perforated film (a seam of white stitches is visible), K holds strips of the film	[ <i>sound of slight rustling, then light soft crunching impact of bag of film on glass sheet, then more pronounced rustling noises as film is handled</i> ]  So, I did another residency – this was in the Foyer Space of Scott Building at Plymouth University. (Erm)	<i>K voiceover</i>
13.30	Cut to <b>STITCH</b> video documentary of film sewing performance 16 March 2012, close MS of K over her right shoulder, showing her sewing film	and at the end of the residency, I (ah) I made a film. And (ah) this is the film I made. It's made from 400 foot of colour negative, that I was given – the stock's actually from the 1980s. (And um)	<i>K voiceover</i>
13.48	Cut to close MS detail of hanging film, camera moving to right through the strips, butterscotch and black, then moves back leftwards, and down diagonally to right, pulls back and down to curls of film on the gallery floor	But of course, as soon as I got it out of the can, it was exposed to light so it can't be used to create any photographic images now. And the film itself is made by sewing ... and (um) by cutting and joining the film together three dimensionally – it's of course not possible	<i>K voiceover</i>
14.14	Cut to close MS of spine and ribs of hanging film, camera moves along strips to the right	to pass the film through a projector. And ... it's a kind of (sort of) film body	<i>K voiceover</i>

	14.22	Cut to CU looking up from ground level into hanging film strips, trembling slightly	that occupies the space ...	<i>K voiceover</i>
	14.24	Cut to WS <b>STITCH</b> film body cut loose on the floor, K's feet to left of screen, film is lifted up, revealing the rich matt Caramac underside (the exposed emulsion), the film strips are bundled together and lifted right off the floor	and has meaning, and movement, and is made of film. But it's not film as most people would understand it.  It does something more than that.	<i>K voiceover</i>
	14.42	Fade to <i>black</i>	<i>[low rustle of film gathering continues]</i>	
credits	14.44	presented at Living Film, no.w.here / 16 October 2013	<i>silence</i>	<i>White text on black ground</i>
credits	14.49	Filmed and edited by Stuart Moore / production: Sundog Media	<i>silence</i>	<i>White text on black ground</i>
credits	14.54	© 2013	<i>silence</i>	<i>White text on black ground</i>
	15.02	<i>black</i>	<i>silence</i>	<i>White text on black ground</i>

## **Appendix C: Film Experiments 2008-2014**

A selection of film artworks, additional to the thesis, provided on DVD

### *Blue Window Drawing* (2008)

Documentation, improvised drawing performance (11 January 2008) as DV (1 min 51 sec)

The inward surface of a double-glazed window is marked in blue watercolour crayon moistened with spit, by the gestures of the artist's hand in response to what is seen outside, beyond the glass. Postgraduate studio, first floor, Roland Levinsky Building, Plymouth University.

Filming: Siobhán Mckeown.

### *Resubjection* (2008)

Documentation, durational (2 hr 45 min) 16mm film-drawing, with simultaneous projection (5 March 2008, 6.45pm to 9.30pm), two colour photographs.

Positioned on the first floor balcony of the Roland Levinsky Building, Plymouth University, the artist responded to her experience of being fixed 'in place' by engraving a succession of marks onto a long length of black 16mm leader, as the film passed across a lightbox placed next to her Specto analysis projector, running at 2fps. Her incisions were visible almost immediately, projected onto the adjacent wall. Once the film had passed through the projector, it traveled around the first floor railings across the void above the ground floor - after the film had completed the loop, it was subjected once more to being marked by the artist's scalpel.

The artist's 16mm film *Walking Out* (2000) played repeatedly from DVD throughout the performance, on a large flatscreen monitor sited on the other side of the void.

Photographs: Melanie Morrell.

### *Verge: Nocturne* (2009)

Super 16mm colour, as HD video, colour (1 min)

The leaves of small wild plants, growing along the verge where the south west coastal path enters the industrial area on the outskirts of Plymouth, were printed onto the emulsion of colour reversal film, using household bleach. The sound design originates from the wind blowing across the sign at the entrance to a trade estate at dusk.

### *Twenty Foot Square* (2009)

Digital stop-motion and time-lapse, as HD video, colour (1 min)

The title refers to a small, walled, city garden, a space that is literally twenty foot square. The film captures intimate moments within the garden on an early summer's day: microscopic stop-frame animation of insect life in flowers and time-lapse photographs of sunlight moving across leaves is counter-pointed by the sound of birdsong, tadpoles and fish feeding in the pond. Site, sight, sound and memory, on a perfect afternoon in summer.

A 'foot' is an English unit of measurement related to the scale of the human body (there are approximately 3 'feet' in a metre). The film looks at how we understand our place on the earth, as part of the natural world. *Twenty Foot Square* also recalls a psychic place, measured out in frames of time; a mythic garden of eden.

*Measure* (2009-2010)

Documentation, and 16mm b/w filmstrips (scrolls), as HD video, colour (1 min 34 sec, and 1 min 10 sec) 4.3

Durational film-drawing performance, with projection: one 16mm scroll completed each day of a four-day Studio One residency at Plymouth Arts Centre (23 to 26 October 2009).

The four scrolls are strips of 16mm black leader into which the artist has engraved the emulsion using a surgical scalpel, from the head (the beginning) of each strip to the tail (the end), scratching the emulsion in a gestural response to the world seen outside through the glass pane of the window in the studio. The length of each scroll was determined through a measurement of the artist's body between different points, such as the length from the tips of her fingers with both arms outstretched, her height, and the circumference of her waist.

The first part of the video documentation, 'Inspector Specto' shows the first scroll being projected from the artist's Specto 16mm analysis projector onto the studio wall, followed by the frames of the four scrolls running in chronological order at 25 fps.

Supported by a research award from MADr, the Centre for Media, Art and Design Research at Plymouth University.

*Brighton Road Movie* (2010)

16mm colour, as HD video, colour (3 min) 4.3

Images of cruising along the seafront at night explore film materiality and memory. The sequences are selected from 300 feet of 16mm Video News Film (VNF), shot handheld on a clockwork 16mm Bolex camera mostly from a moving car, on a visit to Brighton in 1989 or 1990 to experience the Bow Gamelan at the Zap Club. The film was free stock donated by Television South West (TSW) and shot in three (approximately) 100 foot lengths. BBC technicians in London then processed the exposed footage for the bargain price of two pound coins per 100 foot.

Supported by a research award from MADr, the Centre for Media, Art and Design Research at Plymouth University.

*STITCH* (2012)

Documentation, colour, as HD video (2 min 44 sec) 16.9

Durational performance (4 hours), for which the artist hand-sewed 400 feet of unexposed colour negative 16mm film, using crochet yarn and a darning needle (10am to 2pm 16 March 2012). The Foyer Space, Scott Building, Plymouth University.

Supported by a research award from MADr, the Centre for Media, Art and Design Research at Plymouth University.

*As Yet Unseen slow speed and normal* (1994/2013)

16mm film, as HD video, colour (11 min) 16.9

The film *As Yet Unseen*, slowed down to a quarter speed, lasting just over eight minutes, followed by 'normal' speed of 25 frames per second, lasting two and a quarter minutes.

Presented as part of 'Reading silence: a performance with film and light' (15 min) at

*Textually Active*, The Plymouth Atheneum (28 May 2013).

Available: <https://vimeo.com/67496087>

The film *As Yet Unseen* is a personal view of the relationship between daughter and mother, set in a room which is poised on the threshold of birth or death. The room is at first blank, colourless; we enter through the window like an intruder or ghost. The room becomes literally a 'living room' as elements within it come to life; memories of early childhood are activated and set in motion.

The film evolved from the combined dreams and memories of the artist's mother and herself, using stop-motion animation of fireplace tiles and 35mm projections within a life-size set - originated from old black and white family snapshots, and the patterns on her mother's dresses when she was a child.

Commissioned and funded by BFI Production (1994).

*Dairy Lane* (2013)

16mm found footage (various) (silent), as HD video, colour

Film strips pressed along the 'left hand' walls of the alley whilst walking the length of Dairy Lane, Stoke, Plymouth between sunset and dusk; west to east (18 November 2013), east to west (22 November 2013).

*Reach* (2014)

Full frame 16mm found footage (various), as HD video, colour (loop, 3 min 7 sec) 16.9

The people who live along the Tamar form a close relationship with the river; each affected by the other. Artist film-makers Kayla Parker and Stuart Moore used this idea of symbiosis to create *Reach*. By laying raw film in the silt of the river, they have created a work which has been shaped by the river: its organic emulsion changed by the tides' ebb and flow, by physical abrasion and the organisms living in the alluvial mud.

"The river will make the film - we will be there to navigate to its completion."

Commissioned by The River Tamar Project for *It's All About the River Festival*, with additional support from an ICCI Support Fund Grant and Creative Skills Cornwall.

## **Appendix D: Short Films: Other Works**

A selection of film artworks, additional to the thesis, provided on DVD

### *Looks Familiar* (1989)

16mm colour, as HD video (3 min 15 sec) 4.3

Playful choreography between the 16mm Bolex clockwork camera, the subjects it sees, and the looks it receives in response to its gaze: frames of kittens and cats, the flickering face of a Hallowe'en pumpkin, spooky ghosts, a dead badger, a faux fur stole, and flowers in people's gardens, are edited, engraved and hand-tinted to a rhythmic psychedelic intensity, accompanied by improvised music recorded live to the projected film at Spacex art gallery in Exeter.

Supported by Exeter Film Workshop.

### *Nuclear Family* (1990)

16mm colour, as HD video (4 min 15 sec) 4.3

Autobiographical film in which the artist's mother recalls incidents from her daughter's childhood in a Somerset mining village, and the three imaginary friends, two with red hair and one with dark hair, who "came down from the stars".

Her mother has told her daughter this story - her own personal fairy-tale - ever since she can remember. The artist has no memory of the time her mother speaks, and can only experience it vicariously, coloured by her mother's nostalgia and maternal feelings. The artist attempted to recover a meaning of her own by drawing directly on the surface of the film - like the wax crayon and scratch pictures she had made as a child - but the persistence of her mother's memory overpowered anything she almost remembered.

Commissioned and funded by a TSW-SWA Major Film Award from Television South West and South West Arts.

### *Unknown Woman* (1991)

16mm colour, as HD video (8 min 45 sec) 4.3

A woman's psychological journey filled with suspense and pursuit, which uses a mixture of drawn animation, stop-motion and live-action footage; originated from dreams of a woman and a crow, in which the two beings shared one sentience.

*Unknown Woman* is the first of a group of three 16mm films that explore interior female landscape from a personal perspective - *Cage of Flame* (1992) is the second, *Walking Out* (2000) the third.

Funded by The Arts Council of Great Britain, and South West Arts.

### *Canntaireachd* (1992)

16mm colour, as HD video (1 min 15 sec) 4.3

Sung bagpipe music by Mary Morrison of the Isle of Barra. The music was used to keep time when the herring catch was being landed and whilst waulking cloth.

Canntaireachd means 'chanting' or 'mouth music'. It was used traditionally by pipers to pass on their bagpipe music to another person. Morrison was famous for her canntaireachd singing - she also sang at parties, and would stand still in the centre of

the room, singing whilst everyone danced around her.

Commissioned for *Canan nan Gaidheal (The Language of the Gaels)*, a documentary programme (50 minutes) about unaccompanied singers of Gaelic music, produced and directed by Graham Strong for Scottish Television.

*Cage of Flame* (1992)

16mm colour, as HD video (9 min 40 sec) 4.3

A bewitching celebration of menstruation which uses a variety of animation techniques from pixillation to scratch on film. An antidote to the vacuous sanitised view of menstruation promoted by advertising.

Animate Award, Arts Council of England and Channel 4.

*Night Sounding* (1993)

16mm colour, as HD video (1 min 15 sec) 4.3

An aural and visual sounding from the shoreline of an industrial, fishing and military port. The film describes the experience of living where land, sea and air meet, of being on the edge of the world.

A One Minute Television commission for The Arts Council and BBC2's The Late Show.

*Sunset Strip* (1996)

35mm colour, as HD video (4 min 15 sec) 4.3

A day-by-day animated diary of a year's sunsets, recorded directly onto a continuous strip of 35mm film using a variety of materials such as magnolia petals, net stocking, lacquer and ink, to create a dazzling expression of the visual music revealed by 365 setting suns.

Animate Award, Arts Council of England and Channel 4.

*Project* (1997)

BetaSP video and Super 8mm colour, as HD video (1 min 15 Sec) 4.3

A series of experiments with light, time, and sense of place: a journey through the history of making visible the invisible, using naturally occurring pinhole phenomena and constructed pinhole devices for seeing, recording and apprehending the world.

*Project* is made up of hundreds of pinhole photographs taken on location across the south west peninsula, and includes time-lapse sequences of Mên-an-Tol and other ancient Celtic holed stones on Penwith moors and the Lizard. Images were taken using a home-made shoebox camera, 35mm colour and infrared film, and Kodachrome 40 Super 8mm film.

A One Minute commission for the launch of the Lux Centre; London Film Makers' Co-op and National Lottery through the Arts Council of England.

*Walking Out* (2000)

16mm colour, as HD video (10 min) 4.3

The film explores subjectivity through a woman's journey within an interior landscape and describes the interior frames of reference that are constructed to make sense of the experience of sexual abuse. In an attempt to reclaim the past and reframe the unspeakable, the artist has personalised the recorded film images by cutting into and



re-dyeing the emulsion.

Funded by the Arts Council of England, Artists' Film and Video Production Award; and the South West Arts Film and Video Production Award.

*Physic* (2001)

27 rotoscoped digital video frames, colour, as DV (loop) 16.9

Lavender in bloom sways to and fro in a restless summer breeze, accompanied by monks' singing and a tolling bell. Digital embroidery, stitched pixels of a late summer visit to the monks' physic garden at Buckfast Abbey, Devon.

Commissioned by Aune Head Arts for *Dartmoor Lives and Landscapes*; funded through a Key Fund grant.

*Wort Wall Water* (2004)

16mm colour, as HD video (loop, 2 min 28 sec, silent) 4.3

The first of the three pieces 'wort' reveals a shifting, flickering light across leaves of navelwort; the second piece 'wall' looks at the top of a crumbling wall, radiating the heat of the day, and beyond to the rhythmic movement of ripened grass and a glimpse of turquoise sky. In the third piece 'water', a fountain reaches the top of its jet, and tumbles back, in perpetual motion.

Commissioned for the re-launch of *Filmwaves* journal at the Lux Centre, London.

*Verge* (2005-2010)

Documentation, 360 re-imagining Super16mm colour diptych, as HD video (3 min 44 sec) 16.9

Found objects collected on a circular walk are printed directly onto 16mm filmstrips: the fallen bodies of bees and flies picked from the dirt, and the vegetation growing up in the stony rubbish along a roadside verge which snakes around the perimeter of an industrial area along the Plym estuary.

Commissioned by Salt Gallery, Hayle, for the solo exhibition of Stuart Moore and Kayla Parker (16 July to 19 August 2005).

*Verge 360*, commissioned by Innocation for the Creative and Cultural Industries (ICCI), is a digital re-mastering first presented in a 9-metre dome during *Immersive Experimental Week* at Plymouth University.

*Poppies* (2006)

Super16mm colour, as HD video (loop, silent) 4.3

Petals of wild flowers gathered by the artist from the roadside verge during a walk along the south west coastal path through the industrial Cattedown area of Plymouth on 27 May 2006. Once home, the petals were pressed onto a clear strip of 16mm film. The filmstrip retraces the steps of a short walk when the artist left the path, drawn towards the intense saturated crimson of the poppy flowers colonizing the waste ground that had been scraped bare earlier in the year.

Exhibited with triptych of framed photographs, printed from film frames.

*Small World* (2007)

HD video colour (2 min) 16.9

Play with found objects discovered on the pavement or in the gutter during a circular walk along the Laira and part of the south west coastal path in Plymouth.

Commissoned for the AHRC research project into HD aesthetics; University for the Creative Arts and University of Dundee, for the Definitive Stories section of the National Review of Live Art (NRLA) screening programme at the Tramway Gallery in Glasgow.

*Teign Spirit* (2009)

Digital photographs, HD video colour and b/w 8mm (2 min 50 sec) 16.9

An animated 'séance', in which modern day Teignmouth, a seaside resort on the coast of south Devon, is haunted by joyous summers past, conjured up though archive footage.

Commissioned by Animate Projects for CABE's Sea Change.

*Maelstrom: The Return* (2014)

HD video colour and b/w 8mm (2 min 56 sec) 16.9

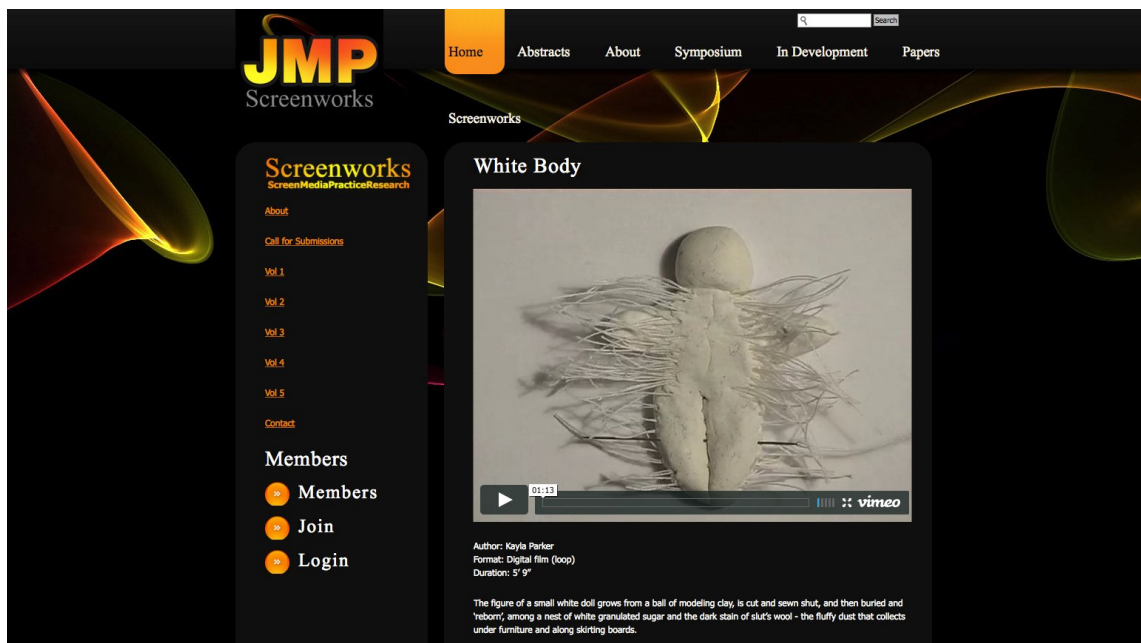
The first in a series of films inspired by the turbulent waters of Devil's Point, Plymouth. Mysterious upwellings and whirlpools combine with cinematic memories of long-forgotten arrivals and departures.

## Appendix E: Copies of Publications

Copies of publications of PhD thesis research, provided on DVD:

- E1. 2008/2011. 'White Body' [film, with research statement and peer reviews] *Journal of Media Practice* 9.3 'AVPhD issue' [DVD]; *JMP Screenworks* [online] vol. 2. Bristol: Intellect.
- E2. 2010. 'Memories wanted' [written response to film frame 29, with photographs and video, 16 December 2010] *REQUIEM // 102 minute #29* [online]. Detroit: University of Detroit Mercy.
- E3. 2011. 'White Body' [film and artist's written statement] *HerStory* [DVD]. Winchester: Women's Work.
- E4. 2011. 'White Body: animating feminine pleasure' [paper, written critical reflection, and still from film; with film embedded online] *Body, Space and Technology Journal* vol. 10 no. 2 (Summer 2011) [print and online]. Brunel University, West London.
- E5. 2012. 'Making Glass' [video essay, and video art] (2012) *Ex-trauma: the opposite of the traumatic* [online] 'Experiments and intensities' series vol. 2 (November 2012). Winchester: University of Winchester Press.
- E6. 2013. 'Jamming the machine: the personal-political in Annabel Nicolson's *Reel Time*' [chapter] in Rebecca Emmett (ed.) in *The arts and popular culture in history: proceedings of The Role of Arts in History cross-disciplinary conference*. Plymouth: University of Plymouth Press (UPP).
- E7. 2014. 'Blobs in tartan colours: Margaret Tait's *Painted Eightsome*' [essay] *Frames Cinema Journal* [online] vol. 5 'Framing animation' issue (November 2014). University of St Andrews, Fife, Scotland.

## Appendix E1



### Supporting material for 'White Body' (2008)

Digital film (loop)

Stop-frame animation of white modelling clay, cotton thread, granulated sugar and slut's wool

Silent/ambient sound

### AVPhD DVD ScreenWork Vol 2 submission

**PhD candidate: Kayla Parker**

**Title: Every Frame Counts: Gender and creative practice in animation**

**Director of Studies: Ms Liz Wells**

**First Supervisor: Dr Roberta Mock**

**Kayla Parker**

**Research Statement**

#### Parameters and context

At the heart of my project is my response as an artist to the context and cultural implications of being a female film-maker working in the field of expanded animation practice at the beginning of the twenty first century, within the specific focus of UK-based and English-speaking practice.

Practice-led research study has enhanced my critical evaluation skills, together with my personal and professional development, by establishing a personal perspective on how feminist creative practice has shifted in relation to animation from the 1970s onwards. In addition my research informs and deepens understanding of my own creative practice, helps me develop my critical and contextual writing, and establishes links between praxis and theory.

## **My Key Aims**

- 1 To explore the processes of subjectivity and materiality within expanded notions of animation practice, and, in relation to feminist theory, how practice has been situated within patriarchal discourse, and in what ways makers have responded.
- 2 To investigate 'the maternal and the material' through auto/biographical narratives of mother/daughter relationships, from a personal perspective and through engaged/inclusive practice with other women.
- 3 To examine how meaning is embodied in the artefact and constructed by the subjective and experiential transactional processes between maker and audience.

## **My Questions**

My investigation is practice-led and conducted from the position of a UK-based feminist artist working in the field of animation film in the first decade of the twenty first century. The central lines of inquiry underpinning my doctoral research are:

- 1 In relation to my own expanded animation practice as an artist, and situated within heterosexist patriarchal discourse, what are the processes involved in constructing a subjective position, and by what characteristics is the gendered subject recognised; can we identify qualities of methodology, including materiality, that frame the practice as 'feminine' and/or feminist, and, if so, how may these be defined and better understood?
- 2 Through practice-led research from a personal perspective, by collaborative work with other women, and with reference to French post-Structuralist feminist theory, what do we understand as 'the material and the maternal'; and to what extent are we defined by our auto/biographical narratives as daughters and m/others?
- 3 What qualities, embodied in the artefact, communicate the integrity invested in a work of art, and what are the subjective and experiential transactional processes that link maker and audience?

In addition, through my research I address further questions arising from the primary research, such as: 'How may we best address ethical issues that arise through collaborative practice?' and, in relation to practice-as-research in arts and humanities, 'What are the mechanisms by which praxis becomes theory?'

In my practice-led doctoral research I work intuitively to create series of interconnected media artefacts, realised as digital photographs, performance, drawing, and animation. The themes emerging in response to these research experiments are framed as key aims and questions above: these have been determined through my own critical reflections on what I have made, my experience of making, and sharing the outcomes with others; writing about my methods and processes; my study of the work and writing of others; my scoping or review of the fields of animation, artists' moving image, and feminine/feminist practice; a consideration of exhibition strategies; discussions with my supervisors and colleagues; and presentation of outcomes at seminars, talks and exhibitions.

## **White Body**

### **Making**

A series of performance engagements under an animation rostrum, recorded by stop-frame capture onto a computer via a High Definition video camera set up at 180 degrees above the blank white sheet which forms the 'ground'. The raw materials from which the animation is made were selected and assembled intuitively, drawing upon memories of play during early childhood: white modelling clay; the fluffy dust known as slut's wool that collects under furniture and along skirting boards; white granulated sugar; a steel sewing needle; and white cotton tacking thread. The work has not been edited or submitted to post-production image manipulation. The final frame of one performance becomes the first frame of the following performance: 'White Body' records the process of the artist's intuitive tactile interaction with the ingredients, becoming a representation of embodied subjectivity (Irigaray, 1990) and materiality evolving frame-by-frame. By intuition I mean an absence of thought: an 'un-thinking' which creates a potent field of action into which the semiotic (Kristeva, 1980) can slide and play freely. When conscious thought is suspended, as in a state of trance (Deren, 1943, 1944, 1945, 1948) a space is revealed, within which an animated form of *l'écriture féminine* (Cixous, 1975) may materialise.

### **Presentation**

The digital film 'White Body' was screened as a continuous (looped) projection from DVD for the 'Immersion' exhibition by the LOCATE Research Group in the Scott Building at University of Plymouth during June/July 2008. The exhibition was held in association with the LAND/WATER Research Centre annual symposium 'Landscape and Beauty'.

The film was projected onto the gallery floor, in resonance with the rostrum set-up of the making process, but with a reversal of scale (Bachelard, 1994) so that the miniature white clay figure was enlarged to the size of an adult human. The gallery was darkened, and the animation upon the floor surface was the first work that a visitor encountered on entering the space. The position of the projection caused the 'shadow' of the visitor's body to fall across the image and so obliterate part of it: as people approached the projection to examine the animation more closely, they entered the projection beam and prevented light from reaching its target upon the floor. 'White Body' became an interactive work through its staging and the strategies by which people negotiated their encounter with it. Several visitors responded by approaching the projection and lying down on the gallery floor, positioning their body so that it fitted within that of the animated clay figure projected upon them.

The next research piece will be a reflexive response to the experience of making and showing 'White Body', a performance that follows on from the final frame, as the end becomes the beginning.

**Kayla Parker**

25 September 2008

## Kayla Parker 'White Body', 2008

'Immersion', LOCATE exhibition, June/July 2008

An androgynous white plasticine figure unfolds itself into existence, tightly contained within the frame. Immediately we see the body of the figure suddenly pierced by the determined action of a needle and thread that does not choose to repair the slightly visible crack down the body, but rather unexpectedly sews a series of white threads upwards across its torso, so that it resembles some sort of sea creature with a mane of amalgamated threads that begin to wave themselves into existence. The continuation of this action extends to a more violent act, provoking a disturbed reaction in the viewer, whereby the legs are sewn and bound together, restricting any kind of human movement. Yet this constraint is purely a metamorphosis, as the newly created 'sea creature' takes flight, finding a new form of motion, one that allows it to immerse itself in the sand, disappearing from view.

The energy of this creature buried underground sends reverberations that appear as successive circles that puncture the surface of the sand until the creature resurfaces for just a moment, before retreating back underground. However, the white threads break free, dancing like windswept grasses on a sand dune and emitting circular energy pulses. The obvious shape of a vagina then begins to take form and the act of menstruation is suggested through the leakage of dark fragmentary matter from the phallic crevice.

We witness another burial and we return the blank canvas, yet this time a series of white punctured balls enter the frame emulating a synchronised dance routine until two lines are formed and parted slightly to create a darkened line that divides the frame crudely in half. The cycle begins again, as the needle and thread reappear and attempt to sew them together, but are thwarted by the eruption of duplicate spawn-like balls with eye-holes that overpower the action and spill into the frame, after battling with the encroaching net of thread. The phallic crevice resurfaces again amongst the chaos, but this time gives birth effortlessly to a new 'white body', which emerges triumphantly onto its 'nest'.

The work is both aesthetically and metaphorically feminine and reminds us of Julia Kristeva's notion of the 'monstrous feminine' and the 'abject' through female body expulsions. The cyclical nature of the reproductive imagery could suggest Kristeva's thoughts on childbirth in her essay, 'Revolution in Poetic Language': "By giving birth, the woman enters into contact with her Mother; she becomes, she is her own Mother; they are the same, continuity differentiating itself." (Butler, 1999, p.107)

As a woman I am both intrigued yet repulsed by the overtly bodily nature of the visual imagery that seems to be explicitly sexual and overwhelming, recalling Cixous's assertion that women must 'write from the body', equating feminine writing with feminine sexuality. Janet Wolff refers to Nancy Spero's appropriation of the term '*la peinture feminine*' to describe her own work (Wolff, 1990, p.132), which could also be applied to 'White Body', as '*la film feminine*' since it is similarly occupied with repetition and the continuing cyclical pattern of birth and death; that of emergence and submersion.

Sally Waterman  
29<sup>th</sup> July 2008

Butler, J (1999) Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York and London: Routledge

Wolff, J. (1990) Feminine Sentences: Essays on Woman and Culture. Cambridge: Polity Press.

# REQUIEM 102

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THIS IS THE TUMBLR SITE FOR ENGLISH 3750: PSYCHOLOGICAL  
HORROR CINEMA AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DETROIT MERCY

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ABOUT ARCHIVE RANDOM RSS SEARCH

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16TH DEC 2010 | 1 NOTE

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## POST #29


**"There is no daylight, no moon, nor starlight. The shutters are down in the always night... this film is something that happened to me many years ago, but I can't remember the details."**

29. A haunting **essay with video and still images** by **Kayla Parker**, a faculty member in the School of Art and Media at the University of Plymouth in the UK. Parker's work has been shown on the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, and worldwide at numerous film festivals.



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 **lesalayyy** reblogged this from **requiem102**

 **requiem102** posted this

Text from the website above:

"There is no daylight, no moon, nor starlight. The shutters are down in the always night... this film is something that happened to me many years ago, but I can't remember the details."

29. A haunting **essay with video and still images** by **Kayla Parker**, a faculty member in the School of Art and Media at the University of Plymouth in the UK. Parker's work has been shown on the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, and worldwide at numerous film festivals.

**Kayla Parker's submission:**

This is my contribution to Nick Rombes' experimental film project, which marks the 10th anniversary of the release of Darren Aronofsky's *Requiem for a Dream*. Nick said that REQUIEM // 102 "aims to expand and push the boundaries of writing and thinking



about film in the digital era [and] examines/explores/riffs on/detours from/responds to/aggravates/ supplements/ one frame from each minute of the film. 102 minutes = 102 frames." He sent me this jpg, taken from minute #29.

### **Memories Wanted**

I watched the film when it came out on DVD in 2001: that's over 100 months ago. I watch around 5 features a week, so my memory has piled at least 2000 films on top of Requiem for a Dream. When I opened the jpg, my eyes bounced around the upended triangle formed by the look-lines of youth/clown/green balloon, then shot off right into the darkness. I felt disappointed. I didn't recognise this image, and I realised that I couldn't recall much about the film either, although I know at the time it had a big impact on me. My experience of Requiem for a Dream comes around the half-way point of the twenty years I've lived here in Plymouth, a city on the far south west coast of Britain. I decided not to watch the film again, but to respond subjectively to the 'essence' of this frame when I finished work at the University (1) at 3 o'clock on Wednesday afternoon 15 December 2010, the day before publication. Minute #29 became a digital Alice-mirror (2) which I entered to see what I could bring back.

First glance

green / shut / waiting / wet / dark / neon / grime

evil clown with sunglasses / bandit mask

bobble hat raccoon

There is a sign: B(AL)LOON RACING (OOs like eyes)

tense mouldy lemon / the youth coated in shadow has the look / caught between the clown on the left and death on the right

I read #29 as a found image, discovered within a dream of favourite cinematic drug moments; taken by an unknown photographer of someone whom I know/I've never met. There is no daylight, no moon, nor starlight. The shutters are down in the always night.

Detection/divination: this film is something that happened to me many years ago, but I can't remember the details. I read the gender: its wandering rooted in a moment stopped from a stream. Memory X, composed for the dead. A private eye, I search the city with my camera (3), looking for...

Materiality, the place of remembrance: "the feminine must be deciphered as inter-dict: within the signs or between them, between the realized meanings, between the lines" (4).

I walked down the Mayan temple steps of the Faculty of Arts building into the syrupy light of a low winter sun. Outside the Drake Circus shopping mall I met a group of architecture students, collecting favourite memories of Plymouth from passers-by. I wrote mine on a slip of card attached to a helium-filled balloon with a thin red ribbon: "swimming in the bathing pool (no clothes, under moonlight) in the rocks off Plymouth Hoe after the clubs kicked out X". My balloon is the green one: it is this fugitive colour that allows me to pass through #29 into an/other place.

The students are planning to set all the memories free, but the camera battery is running out, so I go home to charge it up and download my jpgs and mpgs. The next section is my return journey: the photos are all hand-held, and record a living moment stretched between the shutter opening and closing. Light is falling fast as I walk across to Beaumont Park and along Regent Street to the back of Maison Terry hair salon.

But the students and all the balloons have gone.

So I walk down Cornwall Street, past a green balloon in the window of the British Red Cross charity shop and through the smeech of cut-price burgers. I swerve around a purple-faced drunk who has no front teeth, ignore three men doing a dodgy deal in a side alley, and reach the indoor market at the bottom end of town, which is about to shut as it's almost 4.30.

The glass doors part, and I'm t/here, just in time.

### Thanks to

Nick Rombes, for inviting me; Stuart Moore; the architecture students from University of Plymouth, who were doing a project set by their tutor Dr Gursewak Aulakh; and my PhD supervisors Professor Liz Wells and Professor Roberta Mock.

### Notes

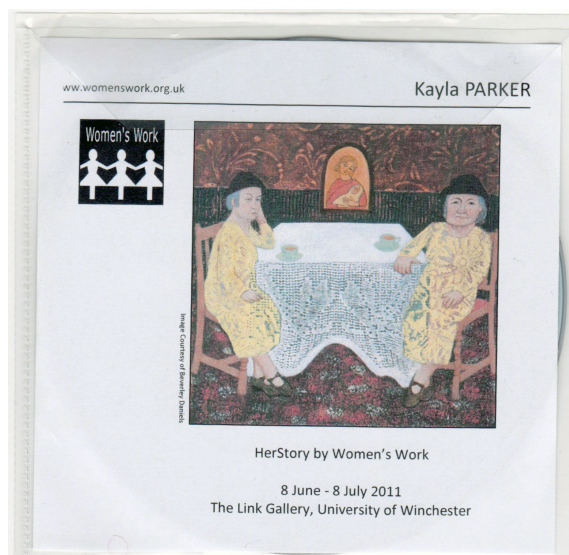
1. I'm a lecturer in Media Arts at the University of Plymouth. I am also a PhD student. My thesis title is *Every frame counts: gender and creative practice in direct animation*, and my doctoral research draws on the writings of feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray. She argues that Western philosophy is both specularizing - a mirror back to the self - and specular - invoking the 'presence of an absence' (coded as feminine). This argument draws upon Lacanian psychoanalysis. Irigaray states that Western philosophy therefore does not provide a framework for understanding sexual difference because the masculine determines the parameters.
2. A large mirror above the fireplace allows the girl Alice to get through to the other side in Lewis Carroll's *Through the looking glass and what Alice found there*; published in 1871. I have a copy of the Penguin 1970 revised edition of *The annotated Alice*.
3. The camera is a 6.2 Megapixel HP R717 Photosmart compact. It actually belongs to film-maker and sound artist Stuart Moore, who won it in a competition a few years ago.
4. The quotation is from the beginning of Luce Irigaray's essay 'The blind spot of an old dream of symmetry' in *Speculum of the other woman*; translated by Gillian C. Gill, and published by Cornell University Press in 1985. The book was published originally in French under the title *Speculum de l'autre femme* by Les Éditions de Minuit in 1974.

**Read more info** about the project in a piece by Scott Macaulay: [102 celebrations of Requiem for a Dream](#) in *Filmmaker*, the magazine of independent film (2 November 2010)

## Appendix E3

### KAYLA PARKER: BIOGRAPHY

Kayla is an artist film-maker who explores subjectivity and sense of place in her practice using animation, photography, sound, film, performance, found objects, drawing, writing, and digital technologies. She is interested in embodied experience, and the intersection between the natural world and urban environments, in particular liminal spaces such as the industrial outskirts of the city. Kayla is a lecturer in media arts at the University of Plymouth and a member of the *Land/Water and the Visual Arts*, and *art + sound* research groups; her doctoral research area is gender and creative practice in direct animation.



Her films have received numerous network screenings on the BBC, ITV and Channel 4; her work is shown worldwide at film festivals and in touring programmes, with television broadcasts in Australia, Canada, France, Austria, and Germany. She has shown in recent exhibitions at the Nunnery, Whitechapel, Tate (Modern, Britain), Arnolfini, and the Saatchi Gallery; with presentations of her work at *Cine-City* the Brighton Film Festival (2010) and at the 2011 London Short Film Festival (*Shorts a la Carte* programme).

Works since 2000 include **Walking Out** (2000) a woman's retracing of the interior landscape of sexual abuse; **Inner City** (2001) for *The Year of the Artist*; and the Super 16mm diptych **Verge** (2005) for Salt Gallery, Hayle, Cornwall. Recent commissions include the High Definition film **Small World** (2007) for the *Definitive Stories* screening programme at the *National Review of Live Art*; and **Nectar** (2010) for ICCI, as part of the *London 2012 Cultural Olympiad* programme in the South West. She has made three films for **Animate: Cage of Flame** (1992), **Sunset Strip** (1996), and **Teign Spirit** (2009), the latter in collaboration with film-maker and sound artist Stuart Moore. Kayla is currently working on a 16mm direct animation project, **Brighton Road Movie**, based on personal archival material shot with a clockwork Bolex camera from a moving car in Brighton in 1990: this project investigates the materiality of memory and film, and the remediation of meaning through digitization, and is funded by an award from the Centre for Media Art and Design Research at University of Plymouth.

### WHITE BODY

2009 / 1 minute / digital stop-motion

The figure of a small white doll grows from a ball of modeling clay, is cut and sewn shut, and then buried and 'reborn', among a nest of white granulated sugar and the dark stain of slut's wool - the fluffy dust that collects under furniture and along skirting boards.

*White Body* explores my early childhood memories of secret play: locked in a silent room for a rest after lunch, aged five years, I would sculpt tiny figures from the balls of Plasticine I had hidden in the dust under the piano.

### Audience comments

"I can see insect eggs. There's menstruation, and death too... a little cloth doll."

"The piece is very symbolic of life birth/death and all the threads of baggage in between."

"It really reminds me of baking a cake."

"It reminds me of fronds, and little insect eggs."

"It's a little voodoo doll..."

## Appendix E4



The screenshot shows the BST Journal website. On the left is a navigation menu with the following items: EDITORIAL, PAPERS, PERSPECTIVES, REVIEWS, PERFORMANCES, SUBMISSIONS, LINKS, and JOURNAL LIST. The main content area on the right features a paper by Kayla Parker titled "White Body: animating feminine pleasure". The paper includes a link to the performance, an abstract, and an introduction. The abstract discusses the relationship between the moving image screen, feminine pleasure, and the body, using the film *White Body* (2009) as an example. The introduction discusses the author's practice as an artist film-maker, connecting it to their childhood and the film *Nuclear Family* (1990).

**BST**  
JOURNAL

02.

**PAPERS**

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**KAYLA PARKER**

**White Body: animating feminine pleasure**

[Link to Performance](#)

**Abstract**

Following Luce Irigaray's perspective that femininity 'may be recovered only in secret, in hiding' (1985a: 30), my paper investigates the relationship between the moving image screen, feminine pleasure and the body, through critical reflection as an artist film-maker on the plasticine animation *White Body* (2009): in this practice-as-research film, I manipulate modeling clay, sugar and dust with my fingers under the animation rostrum camera to explore my early childhood memories of secret, transgressive play; seeking to liberate a cascading feminine sensibility through the creative process of working 'intuitively' frame-by-frame with materiality and digital technologies.

**Introduction: there is a thread**

One strand of my practice as an artist film-maker connects to my childhood. For the film *Nuclear Family* (1990) I collaborated with my mother on writing a script from her story of my imaginary friends, and sought to recover memories of my own; another film *As Yet Unseen* (1994) was based on the dreams of my mother and my maternal grandmother. More recent research experiments, such as *Heirloom* (2008), seek to explore my memories of childhood play and the process of creating animation 'as (a) woman' in order to question a system of representation that negates/effaces feminine voices.

**Brunel**  
UNIVERSITY  
WEST LONDON

### Paper: Body, Space & Technology

BST Journal, Brunel University, West London

For the attention of:

Susan Broadhurst [susan.broadhurst@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:susan.broadhurst@brunel.ac.uk)

Barry Edwards [barry.edwards@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:barry.edwards@brunel.ac.uk)

KAYLA PARKER

## ***White Body*: animating feminine pleasure**

### **Abstract**

Following Luce Irigaray's perspective that femininity 'may be recovered only in secret, in hiding' (1985a: 30), my paper investigates the relationship between the moving image screen, feminine pleasure and the body, through critical reflection as an artist film-maker on the plasticine animation *White Body* (2009): in this practice-as-research film, I manipulate modeling clay, sugar and dust with my fingers under the animation rostrum camera to explore my early childhood memories of secret, transgressive play; seeking to liberate a cascading feminine sensibility through the creative process of working 'intuitively' frame-by-frame with materiality and digital technologies

### **Introduction: there is a thread**

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In the following text I reflect on the film *White Body* (2009) created through a series of 'finger performances' that were filmed one frame at a time. The movements of my hands in making the film are not recorded: what remains is a chronological animated account which depicts the figure of a small white doll that grows from a ball of modeling clay, is cut and sewn shut, then buried and 'reborn' amongst a nest of white sugar and the dark stain of 'slut's wool' - the fluffy dust that collects under furniture and along skirting boards. Play performed alone and in secret was the source of much delight to me when I was a child: in making *White Body* I enter the silence of that 'play space' as an artist, to connect with the past, and give form to feminine pleasure.

The rhythm of my fingers whilst performing stop-motion animation is an outward expression of my embodied psychic rhythm, a gentle *jouissance* that overflows to fill the silence. *Jouissance* is attributed to feminine language by Luce Irigaray: the word embodies rapturous sexual pleasure and blissful and diffuse fluidity 'within the intimacy of that silent, multiple, diffuse touch' (1985a: 29). As my hands interact with the clay, my fingers communicate with each other through their contact with the material, which has no differentiated 'skin': its interior is the same substance as the exterior, the outer layer of the form exists in direct contact to the world/space beyond its boundary.

In this article I am thinking through my practice with the aid of two texts by Irigaray: principally *This Sex Which Is Not One*, and *Speculum of the Other Woman*. I am drawing particularly on her discussion of the key term *jouissance*, and of possible connections between female sexuality and writing. As an artist I'm positioning myself with feminine

mark-making, which I understand as a form of 'writing'. I see my animation practice as *écriture féminine*: a writing of the feminine that I associate with my white modeling clay. Irigaray uses the term *parler femme* (in French, 'to speak (as) woman') whilst Hélène Cixous refers to *écriture féminine* ('feminine writing'): both are concerned with experimental process and 'writing the body's language', and both agree that this is a body-centred practice. Cixous says that a woman speaks through 'writing' with 'white ink', a 'physical materialisation' of 'her thought', expressed through the 'little of that good mother's milk' which is 'always within her' (1975: 251). Moulding the white modeling clay I manipulate the solidified, but still malleable maternal milky essence of Cixous' 'white ink', giving form and substance to 'writing the body', that is by its nature transgressive and continually in a process of transition, of metamorphosis, of 'becoming'. The digital animation *White Body* remains as a residue of performance, a chronological trace of the play of my silent and invisible fingers.

### **Making White Body: moving into the silence**

The technical set up is a digital video camera attached to the rostrum in my studio that was once an upstairs bedroom. The camera connects to a laptop with a FireWire cable; iStopMotion software enables me to record individual frames and playback the sequence as the animation builds up. The camera looks down onto a sheet of white paper and is set to film in colour: in the RGB system red, green and blue light combine in equal intensity to yield white light. I fix a single soft light to the back of the rostrum so that there is a slight shadow that falls away to the left, giving an impression of three dimensionality to the screen image. At this stage my mind is blank. I create a space for absence, a silent place in my mind where the film will be, projected onto the rostrum stage under the camera. The blank whiteness of the paper waits to be inscribed with 'feminine writing', a space that is doubly bounded: once by its edge, but also upon the screen by the framing of the camera.

Over the next two weeks I complete seven sessions on the rostrum, animating in silence on my own without a break for sixty to ninety minutes each time. I perform the animation standing up, poised over the set I have created on the rostrum: the area in view to the camera fits into a circle made by my outstretched middle fingers and thumbs. Working at such a small scale requires an intense focus of concentration: as my fingers push and pull and tweak and stroke, I need to control my breathing so as not to disturb the fragile artwork.

In the practice of stop-motion animation I am led by the sense of touch: my fingers move my material into incremental positions, which I record as a single photograph in my computer. These still images build up when played back, and are seen on the screen to create an animated gestural visual language of feminine pleasure. For Irigaray, female pleasure and language grow 'indefinitely' through their 'passage in and through the other' (1985a: 31).

In stop-motion the inanimate appears to possess agency, a thing becomes a being, an object lives as a subject: there is intense pleasure in this magical transformation, which is multiplied when the material being manipulated has plasticity, and can be moulded and sculpted and made to appear to shift from one shape into another.

The animation technique originates in the 'trick films' created by professional stage magician Georges Méliès in the early days of cinema. In stop-motion animation an

illusion of moving image is created through stitching together successive frames or still photographs that have been recorded of a view of the three dimensional 'real world'. Méliès recreated his illusionist stage acts for cinema and translated the sleight of hand, illusion or 'trick' of the live stage performance - in which the magician manipulates the audience's attention and directs us to see what we believe we see - by filming one frame at a time: on the screen we only see the 'finished' moments of the performance of the animator's hands.

I have to film at night because it is summer and my curtains let in too much light during the day. Although the scenes are created on different days, my animation-in-process lies untouched on the rostrum in between filming sessions so that each sequence follows on from the one before. I do not watch what I have filmed in between: during these pauses in production the animation exists in my mind as I move from making (touch) to being a spectator (seeing). I remember the magic transformations I have effected, which are intensely pleasurable for me, and I imagine the people who will experience the embodied visuality of the film on the screen, once it is made, and the pleasure that will be affected.

In my animation work I choose to seclude myself in my studio and place myself voluntarily 'in hiding'. This is in contrast to my imprisonment as a five year old, when silence was imposed upon me in the piano room by the authority of a childminder, an adult whose word was law. For me the absence of sound is the place of nothing, an erasure, a space between words, a silent place between my body and language: when 'two lips' touch, there is at first silence. Irigaray emphasises the *voluntary* state of silence, which she considers to be a gesture that must be 'safeguarded' in order for a woman to find her language and express her identity (2002: 103).

### **Memories: finger exercises**

I am five years old and we live on the other side of the country near Wisbech in the East Anglian Fens; our flat is part of a large old house. My mother now works the night shift as a nurse at the local hospital. In the school holidays a childminder comes to look after me during the day while my mum sleeps. After lunch I am put in a room on my own for an hour to 'be quiet and not move'.

My play is set by the piano, an upright instrument made of polished wood that sits on four small wheels. After carefully pushing aside the wooden stool with its prickly seat, I sit on the floor, my legs apart, under the overhanging bosom of the shuttered keyboard, next to its pedals. The two pedals are smooth brass feet, cool and slightly pitted: piano and forte, one softens the note, the other amplifies; quiet and loud. Bending slightly, I slide my hands under the piano, and retrieve the collection of plasticine I have hidden: it has been moulded many times and is now marbled grey-purple, a combination of several colours, and furred with dust.

Once a week I visit a crotchety music teacher for an hour's piano lesson. She sits hunched by my side and raps my knuckles with a ruler if the backs of my hands aren't horizontal and level with my wrists and forearms: I am not allowed to look at my hands while I am playing, but am taught to stare ahead and fix my eyes on the sheet of music. The ivory keys are yellowing, some are mottled with grey, like old people's teeth. The long black keys are smooth chocolate fingers that rest between the flat off-white keys.

In between my weekly lessons, I practise for an hour every day after my mother has woken up: my fingers feeling their way up and down the keyboard through scales and my first music exercises.

While playing, I try to focus my vision on my music book and not look down, but I have to keep checking that the backs of my hands are flat. It is a strange experience to look at black notes on a stave printed on white paper whilst my hands perform and create sounds that together make something that is music. I cannot reach the pedals whilst playing the piano as my five year old legs aren't long enough.

During my hour of enforced rest after lunch I am told by the childminder to be silent and still. I sit alone on the floor downstairs at the piano's feet whilst my fingers perform. The body of my mother lies breathing in her bed upstairs. I hear the waves of a distant ocean beating in slow motion and the rhythmic breeze of my breath, and the tiny noises made by cold plasticine as I squeeze and warm the clay between my hands: these sounds are accompanied by the almost imperceptible vibrations of the piano's body, as it hums and sings along to my secret play.

### **Sequence 1**

The first ingredient I choose to make the film white body is a corrugated strip of white plasticine, left over from a commissioned animation. To start the film I slice off a third of the modeling clay with a surgical scalpel fitted with a 10A blade. I roll the pliable material between my fingers and sculpt a rudimentary human figure, which I curl inward on itself and place in the approximate centre of the sheet of paper. A soft white lumpy shape appears on the screen: it could be a hand that is made of dough or the mulberry-like cluster of cells known as a *morula* that is the early human embryo.

There is no referent by which the scale of the image may be judged, but the clump has slight irregularities in its surface that reveal the imprint of fingers, and so the sense is of something small and round that can be cupped in the palm. The object's appearance of three dimensional roundness conveys the sense that the mass is resting upon the 'ground', and that we are looking down and in close-up. I record a frame, and another, and another... the shape opens out and reveals itself to be the figure of a white doll, and there is also the sense that it is 'standing' upright within the frame.

Immediately a cut appears slashed from groin to chin and stainless steel darning needle cuts through its body from right to left several times, leaving a fringe of white threads on either side of the torso; the crack is sealed, the legs close, and are sewn shut by the needle and thread. These closely spaced parallel rows of running stitches are used to fill or reinforce worn areas of a textile; the thread is 'woven' in rows along the grain of the fabric.

The shallow incision that runs up from between the legs of the doll suggests the vulval groove of a young girl's body where her 'two lips' meet. The dough-like softness of the small body and its virginal whiteness reinforce our perception of its vulnerability as the sharp needle pierces laterally through the plasticine flesh on either side of the cleft, and it heals over. I recall Irigaray's description of the women's genitals within the scopic paradigm of patriarchy as being 'simply absent, masked, sewn back inside their 'crack'' (1985a: 26).



When the body is sutured for non-medical reasons, it is an action of control and of transgression that crosses boundaries of acceptable behaviour and mutilates the inviolate human body. Examples include infibulation, sewing up a girl's vagina to 'protect' her virginity and ensure purity, undertaken for cultural, social or religious reasons, in order to ensure that (vaginal) sexual intercourse cannot take place until the threads are cut (World Health Organization, 2011); and sewing the lips around the mouth together; an extreme strategy practiced by both women and men, as a last resort, often in desperation, to draw attention to inhumane treatment by the law and as an appeal for their (silenced) voices to be heard (Mail Online, 2011).

The suturing of the doll's pudendum (in Latin, literally 'a shameful thing') to conceal its presence and protect its value as a commodity to be exchanged within patriarchy merely creates a second vulva, one that is larger, hairy, more delineated, bolder. The doll becomes a vulval body with vestigial wings and a clitoral head, whose form and animation convey the sense of something alive. The suturing control that closes the female body is metamorphosed into an autonomous, joyous plurality of defiance that Irigaray describes as 'always in the process of weaving itself' (1985a: 29).

## Sequence 2

The fringe of cilia around the torso and fused-together legs flutter to and fro in rhythmic beats. More hairs grow out of the creature's head, and sway as if moved by underwater currents. At this point I feel a desire for my fingers to work with white granulated sugar, so I walk to local Co-op store and buy some. The waving of the threads becomes more agitated; grains of crystalline white emanate from the head, cover the white body and then fill the whole screen with a gentling rippling ocean floor of fine white sand.

As I work on alone into the night, I flick the cotton threads and manipulate the sugar grains repeatedly with my fingers that they will appear to move; and I can taste the scent of candyfloss: moving the sugar around with my hands releases small particles of sugar into the air.

In this sequence the animation of the threads and the grains of sugar that 'little girls are made of' goes 'off in all directions', a characteristic of the *jouissance* Irigaray attributes to feminine language (1985a: 29). As a child I was intoxicated by my knowledge of my corporeal body and my affect upon the secret world I inhabited, a phenomenological domain of *jouissance* that was multi-layered, interactive and continually 'flooding' between modes of experience (Irigaray, 1985b: 229).

## Sequence 3

I make a depression with my finger in the middle of the smooth white crystals, the whole surface becomes alive with dimples, and the hairy white figure excavates itself, its body crazed with sugar grains that I have pressed into the plasticine. The threads waft backwards and forwards, the figure flattens and is covered in sugar once again.

In retrospect I see this has a lot to do with Deleuze and Guattari's 'Body without Organs' (BwO), an egg, a multidimensional Earth-being that allows all 'flows' to pass freely through it. Modeling clay is a vegetable form, a rhizome-like BwO that is capable of assuming any form, and all parts are interchangeable: it possesses infinite

possibilities and is in a continual state of becoming. All the same: matter in a constant state of becoming through the touch of my fingers, its poetic sensibility overflows with *jouissance*. The white body is a dough creature, a doll-familiar created by kneading and squeezing. Yeasty, soft and unbaked, unfixed in form, the material is moist and pliable: it responds to my touch, becomes warm. A living substance, it embodies the kneaded maternal breast plumped with milk that writes my body, and becomes me.

#### **Sequence 4**

Ripples of movement spread out from the white threads that are clear of the sprinkling of sugar over the figure. During a series of seismic pulses created by the edges of both my hands, more of the threads are revealed, curving around a circular depression.

#### **Sequence 5**

I harvest fluffy grey dust known as slut's wool from the corridor outside the room, and apply a fingerful to the centre of the image where the squashed body is just visible. A stain appears, then a slit, which I sculpt into the folded edges of a seam while the threads wave magically in front. The fleshy material folds back on itself, bending into itself so that outside and inside are proximate and visible at the same time. A vulval opening has been created, which swells and disgorges hanks of fluffy grey woollen dust as the now slightly grubby threads wave to and fro. Dirty materiality spills from the pure white plasticine, made from the finest China clay 'newly born' from the earth. My hands smooth a layer of white sugar across so that no features are visible, just the protrusion of a pubic mound.

#### **Sequence 6**

I cut another third off the plasticine strip and chop this up into small chunks, which I roll into balls: these swirl around the screen in a spiral and line up in two vertical rows running from the top of the frame to the bottom. A muscular spasm: a line of dust splits the screen down the middle forming a wound. The needle reappears and sews across from right to left in a series of stitches, leaving a trail of threads behind. A larger white ball or egg appears in the centre, more balls become visible; some are encrusted with sugar and appear bound with threads. The bundle of eggs and woven threads expands in a series of pulsing waves, expelling more and more slut's wool. This is the second iteration of sewing, a suturing that does not close, which evokes Irigaray's statement that feminine pleasure flows from 'the non-suture of her lips' (1985a: 30)

#### **Sequence 7**

The mass of crunchy white eggs in their nest of sugar and dust continues to erupt. I use a paintbrush with hog's hair bristles to sweep away an oval area in the middle of the screen: a slit appears, which I mould with my fingers to create a vulval crevice, nestled by a ring of threads and dirty fluff.

I make five balls from the modeling clay, that gradually increase in size from a dried pea to a small button mushroom. I place the smallest ball in the approximate centre of the

orifice and record a frame, I replace this ball with the next in size and record a frame, and so on until a white egg appears to inflate like a balloon or blister and then suddenly becomes the curled body seen in the first sequence, unfurling as a white figure with rudimentary arms, legs and head which I have formed from the last third of the plasticine strip. More and more dust is ingrained on the white body until it is completely covered in fur, and the screen fades to white.

### **Writing White Body**

In *This Sex Which is Not One*, Irigaray counters Freud's view of the female child as a little man, with her clitoris a rudimentary penis (Freud, 1991: 151). Instead she focuses on a woman's two sets of lips as a metaphor, making a connection between the labia/lips that embrace the orifice of speech, the mouth, and the labia/lips that embrace the vulval opening. Irigaray states that woman is 'already two – but not divisible into ones' (1985a: 24).

The seven animation sequences joined together create a film that lasts for just over a minute. After its first public exhibition the film was screened as a loop that continuously cycled through the sequences in an endless cycle. Projected onto the gallery floor the white clay figure as long as my thumb was enlarged to human scale. After this initial presentation, a title and credits were added, along with an audio track of ambient watery sounds so that the film can be shown either on a monitor or projected in a range of exhibition contexts.

The audio recording that accompanies the animated images was chosen to suggest interior sounds of the body and liquidity. Water is associated with 'woman', a feminine element that ripples and trickles and is in continual flux of form. The title *White Body* is descriptive of its principal character, the clay doll. In fact the body is a multiple, as the second white body is, essentially, 'born' from the body of the first figure which is buried in the nest beneath it and which metamorphoses into the labia and vulval orifice.

The completed animation recalls the deep archaeological excavation that Sigmund Freud suggested is necessary to uncover the long-forgotten nature of woman's sexuality. We cannot see 'behind' the modeling clay and dust figure on the screen at the end that conceals the first vulval-doll buried within: what lies beneath is invisible, hidden. What occurred is in our memory: the succession of still images, moments viewed at 25 frames each second that combine to create an illusion of movement, as they pour through the present and spin off into the past.

As a child I infiltrated the space of pristine silence with small clumps of dirty plasticine, secreted below the radar of the controlling gaze of the 'minder'. A prison became a delight, a rebellion, as I undermined the law and entered willingly into the silence. I embraced the hushed absence and found myself through the circular discourse of my lived experience within my body and the evolution and expression of my 'body's language' through gesture and images, 'invented' - to use Irigaray's word - through transgressive play and silence (1985a: 214).

When I animate, the action of my fingers performs letters and words, gestural traces of an 'other' alphabet, writing the body. The voice emerges from deep within the body, given ephemeral form through breath, sound waves travelling away and rippling back, vibrating the body. Oral music of the lips, electromagnetic energy experienced aurally

and in the body, passing through the membrane of the skin into and beyond the humid dark interior: writing the body.

### **Biography**

Kayla is an artist film-maker who explores subjectivity and sense of place in her practice using animation, photography, sound, film, performance, found objects, drawing, writing, and digital technologies. She is interested in embodied experience, and the intersection between the natural world and urban environments, in particular liminal spaces such as the industrial outskirts of the city. Her work is screened worldwide across public, gallery and online spaces, and in festivals and touring programmes. She has shown in recent exhibitions at Tate Modern, and at the Nunnery, Whitechapel and Saatchi galleries. Kayla is a lecturer in media arts with Plymouth University.

### **Acknowledgements**

Thank you: Roberta Mock, Stuart Moore, Sally Waterman, and Liz Wells.

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White Body (2009) directed by Kayla Parker [film]. Plymouth: Sundog Media.

## Appendix E5

The screenshot displays the website for 'experiments&intensities', volume 2. The main navigation bar includes 'Vol 1 • Previous Volume', 'All Published Volumes', and 'Vol 3 • Next Volume'. The featured article is 'Vol 2 • Ex-Trauma: The Opposite of the Traumatic' by Annette Arlander, Yvon Bonenfant & Mary Agnes Krell (cur/eds), published in Nov. 2012 with ISBN 978-1-906113-04-9. Below this, a section for 'Making Glass; Glass' by Kayla Parker & Stuart Moore is visible, with a small image of a glass fragment and a description: 'In this practice-led exploration of modalities of écriture féminine, I map the shifting subjectivities generated by Glass, a stop-motion animation that performs femininity through close examination and play with glass fragments found among the briny debris of an urban beach.'

### **Ex-trauma: The Opposite of the Traumatic**

Part of the \*Experiments and Intensities\* Series published by University of Winchester Press

For the attention of:

Yvon Bonenfant [yvon.bonenfant@winchester.ac.uk](mailto:yvon.bonenfant@winchester.ac.uk)

**KAYLA PARKER**

**Title of audiovisual artwork**

**Making *Glass*: documentation and the film *Glass***

**Description**

This stop-motion animation performs the feminine through close examination and play with glass fragments, smoothed by the movements of the sea and found among the sand, pebbles, bladderwrack, and briny debris on the strandline of an urban beach.

## Appendix E6

### Jamming the machine: the personal-political in Annabel Nicolson's *Reel Time*

Kayla Parker (2013)

Rebecca Emmett (ed.) *The Arts and popular culture in history: proceedings of The Role of Arts in History cross-disciplinary conference*. Plymouth: University of Plymouth Press. ISBN: 978-184-102-355-7. Publication date: 1 September 2013. pp. 217 – 233.

#### Introduction

This chapter concerns a performance of cinema that was presented on only a handful of occasions at a few London venues, such as the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) and the London Film-Makers' Co-op cinema space, which was located at that time in a former Victorian dairy, during the early 1970s. Entitled *Reel Time* by the young woman who created it, this artwork is ephemeral, only existing for the duration of the few minutes of its live performance. There is no record of these events beyond some brief, written accounts of audience members and the artist herself, and a few black and white documentary photographs. Yet this 'projection performance' resonates almost forty years later with a nuanced complexity that is breathtaking, seen from our perspective here in the twenty first century: for its thinking-through-practice and inscription of the feminine, and for its articulate address of the very real issues faced by women at that time, and in the years following.

#### Context

Annabel Nicolson is a woman whose practice has been most often viewed, by male historians and scholars, in the context of her contribution to the formalist concerns of 'materialist' film and expanded cinema. Her 1973 film-sewing performance *Reel Time* is cited as a key work of Structuralist film, with reference to her membership of Filmaktion, the informal group of film-makers based in London in the early 1970s, which presented live film projection events (Dusinberre, Curtis, Gidal, Le Grice, among others). Structuralist film, also referred to as formalist or materialist film, is a set of critical approaches and practices adopted by the pioneers of avant-garde film of the 1960s and early 1970s who rejected a commodity based gallery system and the outdated film production models of mainstream, commercial cinema. The evolution and development of the expanded cinema of live film events, experimental moving image performance 'happenings' and installations is illustrated by the Filmaktion group, of which Annabel Nicolson was a member. David Curtis describes Filmaktion's principal concerns as being: 'to dramatise the film-projection event, to give viewers an active role in which they construct their own experience, and become aware of the elements that have contributed to it.'<sup>224</sup> In recent years Nicolson's work has been subject to reappraisal by female commentators and has been discussed in broader

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224. David Curtis, 'A Century of Artists' Film In Britain: Programme 1: Filmaktion', *Tate Britain* [website] (London, 2003). Available: <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/century-artists-film-britain/century-artists-film-britain-program-5> Accessed: 11 February 2013.

contexts and in relation to her wider practice as an artist (Hatfield, Reynolds, Sparrow, Gaal-Holmes).

Nicolson's *Reel Time* is cited also as a canonical example of the early work of expanded cinema originating from members of the London Film-Makers' Co-op. The audience position in expanded cinema is different to that of conventional cinema, which presents a two dimensional photographic illusion of reality projected onto a highly reflective fixed screen within a proscenium arch, with the technological components of moving image and audio presentation being concealed. Proponents of expanded cinema sought to expose the illusionism of film as a carrier of photo-real meaning and to foreground the mechanics of representation. Nicolson and her contemporaries presented film in spaces other than a 'proper' cinema with fixed seating directing the audience's attention forward and upward to the screen, projection equipment hidden in a booth, and so on. They sought to free the constituent elements of film presentation and reception, by liberating the audience from its fixed position as a passive unified mass and encouraging participation, and by giving prominence to the audiovisual experience of the processes and material aspects of film presentation.

In common with many pioneers of the film co-op movement, avant-garde film and expanded cinema in Britain, during the 1960s Nicolson studied drawing and painting at art school, then turned her focus to the potential of film as a material in order to explore what she describes as the 'paradoxes' of film'.<sup>225</sup> Nicolson explains her movement away from the directness of mark-making to film in 1969 as: 'thinking out from the screen into the actual projection space', and focused on the 'physical reality of the situation and further into qualities of circumstantial phenomena'.<sup>226</sup>

### **Woman: seeing for herself**

For me, Nicolson is an artist whose feminism is integral to her identity as a creative practitioner. She takes a stance which is explicitly feminist in the statement *Woman and the Formal Film*, co-written with the group of women film-makers who collectively withheld their work from the 1979 Arts Council of Great Britain major retrospective exhibition 'Film as Film: Formal Experiment in Film 1910 – 75' because of the 'dominance of the masculinised modernist canon patronised by the Arts Council'.<sup>227</sup> The statement, written with Felicity Sparrow, Jane Clarke, Jeanette Ijlon, Lis Rhodes, Mary Pat Leece, Pat Murphy and Susan Stein, was included towards the end of the exhibition publication.<sup>228</sup> The signatories felt that the rich diversity of their practices in film, video and tape/slide was being forcibly constrained within the 'formal abstraction'/anti-narrative or 'art cinema'/narrative categories of a male-dominated

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225. Annabel Nicolson, in David Curtis and Deke Dusinbere (eds.), *A Perspective on English Avant-Garde Film* [touring exhibition publication], (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, and British Council 1978), no page numbers.

226. Judith Nesbitt (ed.) *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain 1965-75* [exhibition catalogue], (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2000), p.73.

227. Jackie Hatfield, 'Expanded Cinema and Narrative: Some Reasons for a Review of the Avant-Garde Debates around Narrativity' *Millennium Film Journal* MFJ Numbers 39/40, 'Hidden Currents', (Winter 2003). Available: <http://mfj-online.org/journalPages/MFJ39/hatfieldpage.html>

Accessed: 1 January 2013

228. Annabel Nicolson, Felicity Sparrow, Jane Clarke, Jeanette Ijlon, Lis Rhodes, Mary Pat Leese, Pat Murphy, and Susan Stein, 'Woman and the Formal Film', in *Film as Film: Formal Experiment in Film 1910-1975* [exhibition publication], (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, and Hayward Gallery, 3 May-17 June 1979), pp.118-120.



canon. In protest against the way that the history of women's work was being represented in the exhibition, Nicolson, Lis Rhodes and Peter Gidal resigned their places on the curatorial panel.<sup>229</sup> Further, in a direct response to women's lack of recognition in the history of the moving image, she co-founded Circles, the feminist organisation which distributed films and videos by women. Moreover, although her own commentary about her work does not adopt an overt feminist perspective, I would suggest that her engagement with the possibilities of film embodies her gendered position 'in' and 'of' the feminine and centres on her presence 'as (a) woman'.

Felicity Sparrow refers to *Reel Time* as a 'proto-feminist' work,<sup>230</sup> and the focus of Nicolson's practice shifted away from film during the 1970s as she addressed female subjectivity more directly. Exemplars of feminist artwork include the 'menstrual hut' installation she created for the 1981 exhibition 'Concerning Ourselves' at Norwich Art Gallery, at the end of her year as John Brinkley Fellow at Norwich School of Art (1980 – 1981). For this exhibition, Nicolson collaborated with other women, 'all of whom are concerned with the numerous issues that arise from women's creativity'.<sup>231</sup> The shifts in Nicolson's practice during the 1970s resonate with the changes in the theoretical contexts of formalist film centred on the London Film-Makers' Co-op at the time. During that decade, theories of feminism and feminist film developed in academic environments from the impetus created by the largely pragmatic focus of the women's liberation movement in Britain and other cultural and socio-political factors. From the mid-1970s Nicolson sought to involve the audience in works such as the performance *Matches* (1975) and her work became more collaborative in nature. In 1978 she performed *Circadian Rhythm*, a long-duration performance with seven others, at the London Musicians' Collective. One of the ensemble, Evan Parker, writes that the group intended "to play for a whole day", but they ended the performance after 13 hours.<sup>232</sup> For 'Women and Creativity' at the Hayward Annual she presented audio recordings of artists talking about their practice and encouraged the audience to contribute their own experiences. In addition, Nicolson increasingly developed her interest in the spontaneous, the ephemeral and the elemental, working out of doors in her performances *Sweeping the Sea* (1975) and *Combing the Fields* (1976).

From the late 1970s she became more actively feminist in her involvement with avant-garde film: her central role in Circles is evidence of her politicisation. Founded as a collective in 1979 by Nicolson with ten other women, this 'small network of resistance'<sup>233</sup> questioned dominant modes of representation and aimed to reconsider

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229. Michael Mazière, *Institutional Support for Artists' Film and Video in England 1966–2003* [research paper], British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection [website], (London: AHRB Centre for British Film and Television Studies, 2003), 1/1979. Available: <http://www.studycollection.co.uk/maziere/paper.html>  
Accessed: 1 January 2013

230. Felicity Sparrow (2005) 'Artists: Annabel Nicolson: The Art of Light and Shadow' in *Luxonline* [website], p.2. Available: [http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/annabel\\_nicolson/essay\(1\).html](http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/annabel_nicolson/essay(1).html)  
Accessed: 1 January 2013

231. Norwich School of Art, *Concerning Ourselves: 1980 – 81 John Brinkley Fellowship Exhibition*, [press release] (Norwich: Norwich School of Art Gallery, 22 June–8 July 1981).

232. Annabel Nicolson, with Evan Parker, Paul Burwell, Max Eastley, David Toop, Hugh Davies, Paul Lytton, and Paul Loven, *Circadian Rhythm*, Incus Records No. 33 [LP vinyl record] from audio recordings of the 1978 concert given at the 'Festival of Music/Context', (Incus Records, 1980).

233. *Seeing for Ourselves: Woman Working in Film*, directed by Margaret Williams [DVD copy of television documentary programme] (Arbor International for Channel Four Television and the Arts Council of Great Britain,

cinematic histories and confront an industry totally dominated by men, seeking to 'redress the balance'. Initiatives included creating a public place for showing work by women, holding screenings with women-only audiences followed by discussion, and conducting research into women's history. The work of Circles was funded in its early days by eleven women, who each contributed £20: Annabel Nicolson, Felicity Sparrow, Jane Clark, Jeanette Iljon, Joanna Davis, Lis Rhodes, Mary Pat Leece, Pat Murphy, Rachel Finkelstein, Susan Stein and Tina Keane.<sup>234</sup> Circles created new contexts for showing a range of work by women in film, video and tape/slide. The organisation 'brought back into circulation' work by early women film-makers, showing their films alongside contemporary work, and stressed the importance of nurturing different thoughts and developing ways of expressing them using moving image (Seeing for ourselves, 1983). Along with its sister organisation Cinema of Women, the other major distributor of feminist film in Britain, formed in 1979 as a collective by a group of women including Audrey Somerville and Caroline Spry, Circles played a critical role in the independent film and video culture of the 1980s for its advocacy and dissemination of historical and contemporary feminist practice. In 1991 a re-structuring of feminist distribution in Britain took place when Cinema of Women lost its funding. Circles kept its funding and relaunched as Cinenova: this organisation lost its revenue funding in 2001 and has since been run by volunteers. During the early 1980s Nicolson became more involved in feminist initiatives, including direct action peace protests associated with the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp. She was involved the independent film sector in Britain and was a founder member of Falmouth Film and Video Workshop in Cornwall, an organisation which was set up in 1985 and funded by South West Arts to support independent film-making, screenings and community based projects. Nicolson continued to exhibit her work, but by the mid-1980s she had ceased to use film in her creative practice, although she continued to perform and worked increasingly with cloth and organic materials, such as bark. For Annabel Nicolson, the emphasis was on the live event, of 'being there'. Felicity Sparrow, her contemporary and co-founder of Circles, affirms Nicolson's wish for her performance work not to be captured on video or by audio recording, and states that she was, 'fiercely resistant to having her work documented'.<sup>235</sup>

### **Artwork: Reel Time**

Annabel Nicolson 1972 and 1973

Variable duration. Black and white 16mm. A performance with sewing machine, projectors, long loop of film and two readers.

Felicity Sparrow describes one event in her Prologue *The Art of Light and Shadow* for LUX:

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1983), 56 min.

234. Mel Taylor, quoted in Michael Mazière, *Institutional Support for Artists' Film and Video in England 1966 – 2003* [research paper], British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection [website], (London: AHRB Centre for British Film and Television Studies, 2003), 1/1979. Available: <http://www.studycollection.co.uk/maziere/paper.html>  
Accessed: 1 January 2013

235. Felicity Sparrow (2005) 'Artists: Annabel Nicolson: The Art of Light and Shadow' in *Luxonline* [website], p.2. Available: [http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/annabel\\_nicolson/essay\(1\).html](http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/annabel_nicolson/essay(1).html)  
Accessed: 1 January 2013

North London 1973, a Victorian dairy, a former industrial space designed to be cold, now housing artists' studios. Up a worn staircase to the third floor, a door gives onto a dimly-lit hall, the cinema space of the London Film-Makers' Co-op.

The audience is gathered, standing and sitting to the sides and behind a woman seated at a small table bearing a Singer sewing machine. In front are two screens, one at an angle; behind is a film projector. Light glints off a long strip of film which is strung on a loop from the ceiling, descending to the sewing-machine table and back to the projector. House lights dim and the show starts.

From one side a second projector starts running, throwing a silhouette onto the angled screen: a life size shadowgraph of the woman as she begins to operate the sewing machine. As the first projector starts an image appears to the front: the black and white picture is of the same woman operating the sewing machine.

The room is full of noise: the steady whirring of the projectors, the clacking and clicking of the filmstrip as it passes over pulleys and through the projector, the hum of the sewing machine as the woman turns the handle, intent on her sewing... she's sewing the filmstrip! Carefully she manoeuvres the loop of film so that it passes beneath the machine's needle before passing back to the projector. There's no thread but the perforation of the film's surface soon becomes evident, as tears and holes of leaking light begin to appear in the onscreen image. This continues; the film getting more and more damaged as it continues its perilous journey, sometimes spilling, gathering dust and scratches, slithering along the floor, spectators picking it up and passing it along. Intermittently the image blurs as the film clatters and slips in the gate until it snaps altogether.

In the lull, while the projectionist mends the break, one can discern the voices of two audience members, as they read occasionally from separate instruction manuals: 'how to thread a sewing machine' and 'how to thread a film projector'.

Once repaired the film starts again, but the pauses become more frequent as the brittle filmstrip deteriorates, needing further splices. The screen image becomes all-but-obliterated by light, unlike the real-time moving shadowgraph which remains constant. The performance ends with the film's destruction, when the projectionist announces that it can no longer pass through the projector. The house lights come on.<sup>236</sup>

### Thinking through practice

Nicolson punctures, literally, the illusion of cinema through her manipulation in 'real time' of the apparatus, breaking down the experience of cinema into its constituent parts. If we were there, we would see her feeding an unbroken loop of celluloid through her Singer sewing machine, and turning the handle by hand to punch holes with its needle in the filmstrip, which then passes through a film projector so that we can see an enlarged black and white recording on the screen of her working at the same sewing machine, damaged and shot through with holes that appear as shards of blazing white light. Eventually the film snaps, is mended, and the cycle continues, but

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236. Felicity Sparrow (2005) 'Annabel Nicolson: The Art of Light and Shadow' 'Artists: Annabel Nicolson' in *Luxonline* [website], p.1. Available: [http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/annabel\\_nicolson/essay\(1\).html](http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/annabel_nicolson/essay(1).html)  
Accessed: 1 January 2013

finally the film and the cinematic projection falls apart, the procession of cinematic images is disrupted, and the performance ends.

### **Women's work**

Nicolson deployed textile-based practices within her engagement with celluloid, adopting a 'craft skills' methodology like many women artists of that time. The film scholar Gregory Zinman sees Nicolson's earlier work, the 1971 film *Slides*, for which she sewed together cut-up colour transparencies of her abstract paintings and then passed the joined-together images by hand through a film printing machine as, 'staking her claim for a space in two areas of artistic production dominated by men: abstract painting and abstract filmmaking'. He states that, 'the technique of sewing also connotes an ironic stance toward the notion of 'women's work,' even as it provides a new means of manipulating film by hand. For *Reel Time*, Nicolson put even more pressure on this concept - as well as on the material of the film itself'.<sup>237</sup>

### **Wounded bodies**

Nicolson wrote this reflective 'handwritten stream of consciousness' about *Reel Time* twenty years after its performance:

I was sitting with my back to them sewing  
a beam of light coming at me from the projector the film  
trying to hold the film in the sewing machine trying to sew fast enough  
to keep up with the projector the tension on the film realising  
the thing that holds it down so it wouldn't break trying again  
the holes in the film getting very torn another beam of light  
from the side casting my shadow on to a wall shadow of what  
I'm doing the murky image of me sewing in the film loop  
getting more light as the holes as the holes get more tears and breaks  
such a loud sound as it snaps aware of people trying to mend it  
I can sit for a moment hear the voices of the two readers  
words about threading the sewing machine threading the projector  
so similar the time the pace so slow just to read now and again  
don't have to allow spaces where nothing is happening  
the light catches the film loop so shiny because it is new  
light reflecting onto walls film very slack trickling through the room  
along the floor between people they help it along pass it back  
to the projectionist or to me I can't see any of them only the  
murky image of me sewing now very ripped and hard to get through

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237. Gregory Zinman (2011) 'Annabel Nicolson' in *Handmade Cinema* [website]. Available: <http://handmadecinema.com/> Accessed: 1 January 2013.

the sewing machine let alone the projector how long will it last  
I keep going just keep doing it until they can't get it  
through the projector and it breaks down more and more often  
and it really can't go on and this jagged broken film  
the task done lies still people start to move tread carefully  
over the film I pick it up not sure what to do with it  
a tangled heap all broken spilling everywhere<sup>238</sup>

Nicolson's account conveys the immediacy of the occasion and its rich, interactive sensorium. She communicates the variable pace of the film loop's movement and suggests slowness by her use of 'trickling' and 'allow spaces where nothing is happening', and urgency through the phrase 'trying to sew fast enough/to keep up with the projector'. These rhythms are punctuated by the sound of the film breaking, 'such a loud sound as it snaps', and the finality of the film's destruction. She also recalls the projected film image of herself working at her sewing machine as being 'murky', in contrast to the clarity of the, 'beam of light/from the side casting my shadow on to a wall'. In addition, Nicolson suggests the vulnerability of the film loop and her empathetic connection to its irrevocable deterioration through her use of the words, 'this jagged broken film' and the final line, 'a tangled heap all broken spilling everywhere'.<sup>239</sup>

Through her words, the work is positioned firmly as a site for the wounded maternal body, spilling its guts. In psychoanalytic feminism the body is, 'the embodiment of the subject',<sup>240</sup> a key term in redefining subjectivity and its locus. As the Dutch feminist Rosi Braidotti explains, 'the redefinition of the female feminist subject starts with the revaluation of the bodily roots of subjectivity, rejecting the traditional vision of the knowing subject as universal, neutral and gender free'.<sup>241</sup>

### **Inscribing femininity: 'as (a) woman'**

The French philosopher, psychoanalyst and writer Luce Irigaray argued that the structure of specularization underlies all western thought and culture. By the term specularization, she refers to Jacques Lacan's revisioning of Freud in the mirror-stage, a corporeally focused developmental fantasy that precedes the formation of a child's ego and the 'I' of language - subjectivity, because in Lacanian terms, one-who-is-male becomes a subject through language. Lacan constructed a paradigm in which the

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238. Annabel Nicolson, 'Annabel Nicolson - 'Handwritten Stream of Consciousness' Written in 1994: A Statement on Reel Time (1973)' in Jacqui Hatfield (ed.), *Experiments in Moving Image* (Luton: Epigraph Publications, 2004), p.65.

239. Annabel Nicolson, 'Annabel Nicolson - 'Handwritten Stream of Consciousness' Written in 1994: A Statement on Reel Time (1973)' in Jacqui Hatfield (ed.), *Experiments in Moving Image* (Luton: Epigraph Publications, 2004), p.65.

240. Rosi Braidotti,(1992) 'On the Female Feminist Subject, Or: From 'She-Self' to 'She-Other' in Gisela Bock and Susan James (eds.),*Beyond Equality and Difference: Citizenship, Feminist Politics and Female Subjectivity*, (Taylor and Francis, 2005, e-Library edition), (London/New York: Routledge, 1992), pp.177-192 (p.173).

241. Rosi Braidotti,(1992) 'On the Female Feminist Subject, Or: From 'She-Self' to 'She-Other' in Gisela Bock and Susan James (eds.),*Beyond Equality and Difference: Citizenship, Feminist Politics and Female Subjectivity*, (Taylor and Francis, 2005, e-Library edition), (London/New York: Routledge, 1992), pp.177-192 (p.171).

young boy, offered a imaginary reflection of himself in a mirror, (by) his (m)other, who supports the processes of the male imaginary, identifies with this unified image, 'outside of himself', and then projects his male ego onto whatever he looks at. His image reflected back at him by the world, he sees himself everywhere.

Irigaray's use of the mirror as a metaphor posits woman as the tain. Women are matter. We are body. We constitute the mirror: we are the material of which it is made and therefore we can never see ourselves. In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray reiterates that man sees himself reflected back at him in the mirror of his 'sister', and the impossibility for her to see or be her own self (as 'nothing to see') within 'traditional sociocultural organization'.<sup>242</sup>

### Mapping the theoretical terrain

'Making as a woman' is a creative strategy proposed by Irigaray as a subversive modality of thinking and writing that 'jams the machinery' of patriarchal discourse and specular logic, and enables other discourses to reveal themselves. Writing in *This Sex Which Is Not One* Irigaray stressed that what was important was not a complementary theory in which women could become subjects, but that of 'jamming the theoretical machinery itself'.<sup>243</sup> *Écriture féminine* is a term used by Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, and others to denote 'feminine writing', the transformative practices that come through the body, a language of the body. Note that a man can also produce feminine writing if he takes an appropriate structural position: in other words, one that is not phallogocentric. Irigaray uses the term *parler-femme* for feminine writing, a practice that enunciates a position of/by/with the feminine that is doubled. The English translation of Irigaray's term 'speaking (as) woman', retains the pun of the original French, 'par les femmes' (by women). The film critic Catherine Constable in her recent book *Thinking in Images* argues that Irigaray's critique in *The Speculum of the Other Woman* enables the creation of 'spaces for subversion within philosophy',<sup>244</sup> and creates openings into the phallogocentric theorising of film, women and the feminine. Margaret Whitford in her commentary *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* used the model of psychoanalytic practice to propose that *parler-femme* is like the analysand's unconscious making itself heard during an analysis session, something that can modify the structures of the unconscious itself. She writes,

we might understand the idea of a woman's language as the articulation of the unconscious which cannot speak *about* itself, but which can nonetheless make itself heard if the listener is attentive enough.<sup>245</sup>

In her film-sewing projection performance *Reel Time*, Annabel Nicolson listens to her body speaking, feeling her way in the *espacement*, the space in between. As an artist she practices a sensuous and tactile engagement with her surroundings and the

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242. Luce Irigaray 'An Ethics of Sexual Difference' in Luce Irigaray *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* translated by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C Gill, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp.99-112 (p.100).

243. Luce Irigaray, (1985) *This Sex Which Is Not One*, translated by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke from the French *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1977), (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp.76-77 (p.78).

244. Catherine Constable, *Thinking in Images: Film Theory, Feminist Philosophy and Marlene Dietrich*, (London: Bristish Film Institute, 2005), p.25.

245. Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1986), p.39.

substances that are present, both material and psychic. Her presence 'as (a) woman' is an essential constituent of her work, which embodies the feminine.

## Real women, real issues: 1970s to twenty first century

### Gendered machines

The sewing machine is a mechanical device operated by hand, foot or electricity that was intended for use in the home by women from the mid-1900s onward. It is the first machine to occupy a position in the living room. Sewing was a naturally 'feminine' (sedentary and 'passive') activity done by women to care for their family and maintain their home, and the 'needle' was a metaphor for maternal devotion and domestic bliss. In contrast to her sewing machine, the operation of which Nicolson felt comfortable and confident, the technological aspects of film-making and projecting were challenging. The freelance curator Felicity Sparrow has referred to the 'proto-feminist aspect' of Nicolson's performance *Reel Time*.<sup>246</sup> Sparrow's doctoral research looks at the formation of Circles, the feminist distributor of women's moving image, which she founded in 1979 with Nicholson, and has published essays about the expanded cinema of the 1970s and the work of Annabel Nicolson. Her observation highlights gender as being *the* issue in the live encounter between 'the domestic sphere of sewing and the public space of performance', established by the machines themselves. Sparrow considers Nicolson's linking of the domestic sewing machine with a film projector in 1973<sup>247</sup> to be 'revelatory' for that time.<sup>248</sup>

### Conclusion

In this artwork we see the personal politicised. Almost one hundred years ago the filmmaker Alice Guy wrote, 'There is nothing connected with the staging of a motion picture that a woman cannot do as easily as a man and there is no reason why she cannot master every technicality of the Art'.<sup>249</sup> She is considered to be the world's first female director. Guy was a pioneer of narrative film, responsible for a phenomenal output of hundreds of short films and twenty two features in a career that stretched from the beginnings of cinema in 1896 to 1920. Yet she was absent from cinematic history for most of the twentieth century, excluded and made invisible by her gender, although her achievement and importance were more widely recognized after the publication of her memoirs in 1976.

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246. Felicity Sparrow (2005) 'Annabel Nicolson: The Art of Light and Shadow' 'Artists: Annabel Nicolson' in *Luxonline* [website], p.2. Available: [http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/annabel\\_nicolson/essay\(1\).html](http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/annabel_nicolson/essay(1).html)  
Accessed: 1 January 2013

247. Almost all sources give the date for *Reel Time* as 1973. However, in her essay published in the journal *Vertigo*, Sparrow dates the illustrative photograph of Nicolson performing the work as 1972 (Sparrow, 2001); Nicolson's filmography on page 134 of the publication for the exhibition 'Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain 1965 – 75', held in 2000, gives 1972-73 for *Reel Time*.

248. Felicity Sparrow (2005) 'Annabel Nicolson: The Art of Light and Shadow' 'Artists: Annabel Nicolson' in *Luxonline* [website], p.2. Available: [http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/annabel\\_nicolson/essay\(1\).html](http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/annabel_nicolson/essay(1).html)  
Accessed: 1 January 2013

249. Alice Guy, 'A Woman's Place in Photography Productions', *Moving Picture World*, (11 July 1914), reprinted in *Film as Film: Formal Experiment in Film 1910 – 1975*, (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979), pp.124-125 (p.125).

In her work, Irigaray explores the association of woman and the maternal with nature and 'unthinking matter', material that is inert, lifeless and unthinking. Mimesis and 'strategic essentialism' are deployed by Irigaray to create an ingress into masculinist discourse, using repetition as a means to affect change and create an opening through which a reconstitution of femininity on its own terms may be effected and 'her own' genealogy created. Mimetic practices can be risky as they re-affirm the subordinate position of woman and the patriarchal model of femininity through imitative behaviour: Irigaray 'uses 'mimicry' and 'mimesis' interchangeably, thus fully exploiting their connotations'.<sup>250</sup> However, Hilary Robinson considers mimicry to be a form of mimesis that is 'non-productive', and associated with mime and the masquerade of femininity 'which maintain patriarchal structures'.<sup>251</sup> Robinson uses the term 'productive mimesis' for sites of resistance to patriarchal femininity and the hypothesisation of feminine subjectivities that could exist beyond the masculinist paradigm. Unproductive mimetic strategies include hysteria and paralysis, and the ultimate annihilation of the self through death.

Art can be seen as a specularized simulacrum of nature, a re-production of that which exists 'naturally' in the world. Irigaray states that, 'women can play with mimesis ... because they are capable of bringing new nourishment to its operation ... re-producing (from) nature ... giving it form in order to appropriate it for oneself'.<sup>252</sup> Braidotti suggests that mimesis, when it is in its 'productive' mode, enables women to revisit and repossess territory, 'where 'woman' was essentialized, disqualified or simply excluded'.<sup>253</sup> For Robinson, the maternal body is the, 'most poignant of all [these] discursive and material sites'.<sup>254</sup>

Irigaray's theorisation of the feminine, and in particular the modal strategy of mimesis, is criticised by some commentators as essentialising. However, Braidotti, amongst others, refutes this, and sees Irigarayan 'productive mimesis' that is sited within the area of reproduction as supportive of, 'the project redefining female subjectivity', rather than reducing woman to a biological function as a mother.<sup>255</sup>

To draw my chapter to a conclusion, in her film-sewing 'performance projection' *Reel Time*, I believe that Annabel Nicolson is practicing a mimetic strategy that is 'productive', to use Robinson's term. In her performance, the artist destroys her specularised representation by piercing the celluloid through the needle action of her hand-cranked sewing machine: her living breathing corporeal body thus damages

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250. Alison Martin, 'Luce Irigaray and the Question of the Divine' *MHRA Texts and Dissertations* Volume 53, (Leeds: Maney Publishing for the Modern Humanities Research Association, 2000).

251. Hilary Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: The Politics of Art by Women*, (New York and London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), p.8.

252. Luce Irigaray, (1985) *This Sex Which Is Not One*, translated by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke from the French *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1977), (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp.76-77.

253. Rosi Braidotti, (1992) 'On the Female Feminist Subject, Or: From 'She-Self' to 'She-Other' in Gisela Bock and Susan James (eds.), *Beyond Equality and Difference: Citizenship, Feminist Politics and Female Subjectivity*, (Taylor and Francis, 2005, e-Library edition), (London/New York: Routledge, 1992), pp.177-192 (p.187).

254. Hilary Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: The Politics of Art by Women*, (New York and London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), p.43.

255. Rosi Braidotti, (1992) 'On the Female Feminist Subject, Or: From 'She-Self' to 'She-Other' in Gisela Bock and Susan James (eds.), *Beyond Equality and Difference: Citizenship, Feminist Politics and Female Subjectivity*, (Taylor and Francis, 2005, e-Library edition), (London/New York: Routledge, 1992), pp.177-192 (p.177).




irrevocably the illusory moving image of herself projected large onto the screen through the tattoo of her mechanical needle, which is unthreaded.

In *Reel Time*, the activity of sewing is foregrounded within a proto-feminist methodology that is based in, 'the politics of the personal, in which women's subjectivities and experiences of everyday life become the site of the redefinition of patriarchal meanings and values and of resistance to them'.<sup>256</sup> In *Reel Time* a personal-political drama is performed by, with and through the body of the young woman artist and the focused violence of her empty needle in the cinema space she has created. Through effecting a live encounter between a domestic sewing machine and a film projector, Nicolson takes on the most pressing issues of that time: a woman's struggle for identity within her family, personal and sexual relationships, and for equality and autonomy at home, at work, and in the world. In *Reel Time* she positions her own experience and those of other women at the heart of her work, and, in doing so, 'jams the machinery' of dominant masculinist film culture and wider society: her image captured on film is shredded and destroyed, can never be reconstituted, the projector breaks down, there is darkness... then the houselights come on, the performance is over, and the 'personal-political' continues in real time.

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256. Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p.5.



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## Framing Animation

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**Blobs in Tartan Colours: Margaret Tait's Painted Eightsome**  
BY KAYLA PARKER

### **Blobs in tartan colours: Margaret Tait's *Painted Eightsome***

This essay explores the ways in which the Orcadian film-poet Margaret Tait's creative processes, including the physical engagement between her body and the filmmaking materials, effect and inflect the interplay of Julia Kristeva's concepts in her hand-painted audiovisual artwork *Painted Eightsome*, in which the music of a Scottish reel is combined with animated imagery painted frame-by-frame onto clear 35mm film. Methodologically, I am responding to the material itself and the materiality of semiotic and symbolic in Tait's 'painted surface' as a maker of direct animation films, attuned to certain types of processes, in order to generate a particular reading of the work.

As a creative artist, Tait used a range of forms. She wrote prose and poetry, and made short films, usually shooting on 16mm with her clockwork Bolex camera. In her cinematic work she explored an array of highly experimental techniques, including painting and scratching on the film surface, from the beginning of her filmmaking career in Italy in the early 1950s. Tait regarded her short films, of which she made over 30 across almost half a century, as 'film poems'. Notable for her experimentation, improvisation, and innovation, she pursued a uniquely individual and independent engagement with filmmaking in relation to concerns and interests arising from her concern with the everyday. In her hand-painted works she engaged directly with the materiality of film and the creative potential of its physical properties. *Painted Eightsome*, made over a period of 14 to 15 years and completed in 1970, combines music and painting within the artform of poetic film. The running time of the film, just over six minutes,<sup>1</sup> is determined by the length of the accompanying music. The frames

of the 35mm filmstrip are delineated with hand-drawn lines and have been painted with aniline dyes<sup>2</sup> in a range of vibrant colours.<sup>3</sup>

In her Foreword to Sarah Neely's book *Margaret Tait: Poems, Stories and Writings* (2012), the poet Ali Smith refers to Tait as a "film-poet",<sup>4</sup> in acknowledgement of her duality as an artist who created films that are visual poems and wrote poems that conjured cinematic images. Poetic language is distinct from our everyday verbal communication, in that our attention is drawn to the words through which meaning is constructed. To use Margaret Tait's own words, "In poetry, something else happens".<sup>5</sup> The words are no longer transparent, we become aware of the language being used and the words themselves, their sounds and rhythms and juxtapositions.<sup>6</sup>

The philosopher Julia Kristeva's views are aligned to those of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan in her understanding that the speaking subject is a duality divided into a conscious mind and an unconscious mind.<sup>7</sup> However, she positions the body within discourse and argues that we should consider unconscious and conscious processes of language, as both are needed to create meaning. For me, Kristeva's re-imagining of Freud and Lacan, and her theorisation of the connection between mind and body, suggests a conceptual framework within which the film poem *Painted Eightsome* may be 'read' in order to open out thinking about Tait's practice. Kristeva's emphasis is on the maternal and pre-oedipal in the constitution of subjectivity, in that she is interested in the development of subjectivity before Freud's oedipal stage or Lacan's 'mirror' stage, and foregrounds the interplay between the 'symbolic' structure of language and the 'semiotic' of rhythms and the maternal body.<sup>8</sup> In *Painted Eightsome*, the dancing music of the Scottish reel that drives the animated imagery forwards, together with the materiality of the 'hand made' visuals, foregrounds the presence of the filmmaker and her making processes. In addition, the continually mutating pictorial forms of Tait's poetic moving image language convey an 'open' subjectivity, enabling a cascade of meanings to be generated through the interplay of the viewer's conscious and unconscious.

My own critically reflective praxis as an artist filmmaker gives me a spectatorial perspective on Margaret Tait's direct animation that is inflected by my 'know how,' the term used by Robin Nelson for the "practical knowing-through-doing" of embodied knowledge and understanding that is acquired through practice.<sup>9</sup> I have an understanding of film as a physical substance and the processes of direct animation filmmaking from working with the materiality of photochemical analogue film for over 20 years.

In Greek, a spectator or onlooker is *θεατής*, from which the word 'theory' comes. Philosopher Hannah Arendt states that thinking derived from Greek philosophy rests on the premise that only the spectator, who is removed from the action taking place, is in a position to see and comprehend the entirety of what is occurring before their eyes: "as a spectator you may understand the 'truth' of what the spectacle is about; but the price you have to pay is the withdrawal from participating in it ... only the spectator occupies a position that enables him to see the whole play - as the philosopher is able to see the kosmos as a harmonious ordered whole."<sup>10</sup>

My position as a spectator is informed by my 'know how.' When I watch Tait's film poem *Painted Eightsome*, her work 'speaks' to my body. I cannot 'un-know' the embodied knowledge of direct animation filmmaking acquired through years of experience. As an artist filmmaker, my research is practice-led; as a researcher, I adopt

a dynamic multi-layered approach that modulates across the modes of maker and spectator, accentuating the fluidity between these positions.

Tait described *Painted Eightsome*, completed in 1970 and made by her over a period of 14 to 15 years, as:

“An eightsome reel played by Orkney Strathspey and Reel Society, recorded in about 1955 - 1956, later transferred to 35mm optical stock with clear picture,<sup>11</sup> and gradually painted over the years. Eights of different things - figures, antlers, or sometimes just blobs in tartan colours - dance their way through the figure of the reel.”<sup>12</sup>

The eightsome reel is both traditional fiddle music and its accompanying energetic dance, a complex combination of a Scottish reel and the quadrille. Intended for four couples to dance at social gatherings, such as weddings, the beat is fast and regular, driving the motion of the dancers ever onward as they twirl and interlink. The dancers form into different positions and move to counts of eight beats, such as: all holding hands in a circle for eight steps and then moving back to their original positions, women and men each making a chain, with women moving clockwise and men anti-clockwise, and individual women taking turns to dance alone in the centre of the circle while the rest of the dancers move around.

Tait's film has received few public screenings, but a digitised version is freely available for viewing online at the National Library of Scotland's Scottish Screen Archive website. Here, at the *Full record for 'PAINTED EIGHTSOME'* page,<sup>13</sup> a doughy white face with a quizzical look peers from a small video window, pressed against an almost-square pane of tropical turquoise. Despite the pixelation that presents the image as tiled, like a mosaic, I can discern that this is an image painted by hand with a brush using colours in liquid form. In the upper left corner, deep cerulean brushstrokes form the letters: PAI / NT / E.

An azure curl with an inner crotchet of orange-yellow curves around to make the left eye, the right eye a swirl of diluted orange squash. These shapes remind me of musical notes seen in a mirror, one crotchet or quarter note with its stem upmost, like the letter 'b' makes the left eye; the other crotchet, the right eye, has its stem pointing down, like 'g'. The artist has left a dot of amber in the centre of each eye. Amber on cobalt makes greenish cheeks: slashes for the left cheek, a circular swab for the right. The muted peach hook of the right eye reaches down to suggest a nose, and the mouth sits on the windowsill as parallel strokes of pale gold and ultramarine.

As I look, I respond to the work as a maker, and become aware that my body is following the actions of the artist's hand at the time of creating this image. My fingers' memory feels their pressure on the paintbrush as Tait loads the sable hairs with liquid colour, pauses momentarily to concentrate the energy, then releases by stroking the surface of the picture. She has created the face from the transparent field of the unmarked film surface which appears here as a white ground, patching in a blue wash at the frame edges to leave a rough oval free of colour except for a suggestion of features. The face looks surprised and melancholic, as if caught inside the confines of a digital prison cell, its window branded National Library of Scotland / Scottish Screen Archive in white letters at the top right hand corner. This is accompanied by a white icon of an open laptop, or a book open at empty pages, pictured in stasis, caught in the act of flying away through an imaginary sky. So far, I have looked through the surface of my screen to the space beyond, where the face stuck in the frame implores me to press that flat dark grey square with a white arrowhead facing right, placed dead centre,

seemingly on top of the picture. I adjust my focus, then click to set the face free, and animate...

Neely and Riach, among others, place Tait within the international avant-garde and consider her film poetry to share a common heritage with moving image work made by other avant-garde filmmakers such as Maya Deren.<sup>14</sup> They observe that a “fecund relationship between cinema and poetry ... developed through her experimental film work”<sup>15</sup> and consider that the constraints of budget and equipment she experienced throughout most of her filmmaking career influenced the development of her unique film language. She was driven through necessity to economical and resourceful ways of capturing and representing the world cinematographically “in a way comparable to written poetry”.<sup>16</sup>

Margaret Tait said of her filmmaking: “The kind of cinema I care about is at the level of poetry - in fact - it has been in a way my life's work making film poems.”<sup>17</sup> Her work explored the lyrical potency of the everyday, and sought to reveal the transcendence of the ‘ordinary’ she intuited through her deep connection to the things, places and people she loved. She often quoted the poet Lorca’s notion of “stalking the image”<sup>18</sup> to explain her own position as a film-poet. Tait practiced an acute observation of the world and her embodied and knowing psychic responses to being in place, patiently lying in wait, hunting ‘mind images’.

Tait’s partner Alex Pirie wrote the following about her filmmaking in 1977:

In 25 years of unremitting application to the film medium, Margaret Tait has evolved the style that allows her to display and offer what Alfred Kazin, writing of Simone Weil, called ‘a loving attentiveness to all the living world’. That definition of her philosophy, of her method, holds true, whether the setting is an Edinburgh street, the banks of an Orkney burn, a domestic interior or a human face. Unlike so much that is called experimental and avant-garde, her films are not merely exercises in perception. Her film images are accessible (A thistle is invariably a thistle), they are of the everyday, and, at one level, a presentation of things as they are. But, in their framing, in their rhythmical patterning, in their duration, those images offer a vision of the mystery and ambiguity with which so-called common objects are saturated.<sup>19</sup>

Her insights into her own creative process as a film-poet can be seen in Tait’s comments about her work. Of her film poem *Where I Am is Here* (1964), Tait wrote: “my aim was to construct a film with its own logic, its own correspondences within itself, its own echoes and rhymes and comparisons, all through close exploration of the everyday, the commonplace”.<sup>20</sup> Tait’s notes for her seven short film poems,<sup>21</sup> released in 1974 under the collective title *Colour Poems*, indicate the organic, evolutionary, ‘to and fro’ relationship between experience and psychic processing in the generation of film poetry: “memory gets somewhat lost in the present observation, although it never disappears, and there are reverberations back ... Out of one’s own memory and thought one then finds (or arranges) the external scenes which can be filmed and made into something else again.”<sup>22</sup>

Kristeva’s paradigm of ‘semanalysis’ (*sémanalyse*) combines de Saussure’s semiology, or semiotics (*la sémiotique*), with Freud’s psychoanalysis. She explains that the ‘bodily drives’ of the unconscious display their energy through language: Kristeva’s ‘living’ language is interwoven with the unconscious and its drives (energies/forces). The semiotic (*le sémiotique*) oscillates with the symbolic, it is preverbal, feminine,

connected to the body, and associated with the maternal (although it is available to the masculine). Tait allowed the memories, dreams, and imaginings of her unconscious to emerge, catching these 'mind images' and then setting them free within the dynamic visual poetry of her films. When I watch Tait's film poem *Painted Eightsome*, I feel her connectivity with the 'living world' she experienced and I am touched by its vibrant energies. I am, in effect, feeling 'affect', a collective term that embraces both feelings and emotions. When these embodied processes reach consciousness, they are perceived as feelings, and emotions when they are experienced as more complex physical sensations. Watching *Painted Eightsome*, I am 'brought back' to my body, and it is through this interwoven conscious and unconscious processing that I, the spectator, create meaning and the work becomes meaningful, significant, to me.

It seems to me that the playfulness of the animated imagery in Tait's film evokes Kristeva's semiotic, which has its origins in childhood play, before language. The painted drawings are unsophisticated and communicate the immediacy of Tait's response as a film-poet to the everyday things of the world, and her remembered experience of the musical dance of the eightsome reel. She applies sufficient motor control to her mark-making within the 35mm frame to suggest shapes that can be recognised by the audience, but these childlike images have an affinity to Kristeva's pre-oedipal *chora*, her term for the symbiotic dyad of mother and child. The dyes, in the colours of Scottish tartan, were chosen for their affect, the feelings they generate and their emotional impact. *Painted Eightsome* is reminiscent for me of our first coming to language as children, and becoming part of the socialised world. The animated imagery presents a child's view of the world, a sensorial encounter of kinaesthetic immersion that is initially experienced directly in relation to the mother's body.

In contrast, the formal structure and complex choreography of the dance aligns with the Kristevan symbolic, which can be seen as the child's post-oedipal identity, when the child separates from the maternal, acquires language and submits to the 'rules' of the masculine in order to enter the social world of patriarchy. The eightsome reel is a dance for eight people, it is an ordered activity governed by a specific series of moves that requires an individual to be socialised, to 'belong' to the symbolic order.

Through my encounter as a spectator, *Painted Eightsome* conveys a fluid intertwining of semiotic and symbolic. Kristeva's conceptualisation of the semiotic is as a pre-oedipal 'underground space' of bodily pulsations that interacts with, and gives meaning to, the 'empty' symbolic of syntax and grammar, and the judgement position of language is embodied by the energies of the semiotic rhythmic 'bodies' in motion. The animated coloured light enters my body and affects me, generating feelings of rhythmic motion, drawing forth sensory memories and tactile sensations and a deep, unspoken level of immersive engagement with the screen world of Tait's film. The play of the pictorial forms on the screen and my body's response to my experience of watching the film connects to Tait's own movements as she painted the artwork and her recollections of the Scottish reel, woven through with the oscillating rhythms of the maternal *chora*. Film has a specific size, weight, thickness, and material composition. Small rectangular holes punched through the material at regular intervals have rounded corners to avoid tearing when the film is advanced through the teeth, or sprockets, that pull or turn the strip. The picture area shown on the screen is within a 'frame'. These 'picture' frames are arranged in a ladder formation along the width of

the filmstrip, the rungs acting as a line between the bottom of one frame and the top of another. Each frame occupies the same area as the other when the filmstrip is projected or seen in a mechanical viewer. The filmstrip is moved at a regular pace so that the small changes in the images are not discernible by the spectator's brain as individual frames, but are perceived to be a continuous flickering stream of movement or change of shape, colour or texture. The symbolic of film's form and the controlled actions of its presentation therefore produces a structure which contains the semiotic of the marks within its frame borders, and creates a spectatorial experience of the moving image.

Photochemical analogue film has a material presence. Even if no image has been created photographically on the emulsion layer or marked by other means, the film surface on both sides picks up debris and detritus, dust, fluff, fibres and flakes of matter discarded from the body. The film is marked further through the touch of fingers and scratched by contact with hard objects and surfaces. Film only exists in a pure, pristine state when it emerges newly coiled and sealed in an airtight wrapping after its manufacture.

As a maker of films, when I watch *Painted Eightsome*, an immediate question is, How is this made? From my position as a spectator, I can tell from the 'look' of the moving pictures on the screen that the imagery is painted by hand at a small scale, because of the quality of the brushstrokes (the traces of pressure and direction applied have resulted in changes of width and shape of the marks), and the imperfections caused by detritus caught in the coloured liquid medium used. From my 'know how', I understand that the artist has painted directly onto successive frames of movie film because of the visual 'shiver' produced by imperfect registration, and that the gauge used is 35mm because of the size of the flecks of dust and dirt embedded in the images, relative to the size of the frame. There is a pellucid quality to the colours onscreen that suggests the images were painted with dyes rather than with pigments.

The animated imagery of the title sequence unfolds, then a hiss and rustle on the soundtrack as the musicians of the Orkney Strathspey and Reel Society ready themselves and their instruments. A traditional Scottish reel begins, and the coloured figures appear to dance in time with the sound. To me, there seems to me to be a synchronous relationship between the up-and-down quick tempo of the music and the nimble shape shifting of the painted imagery. I want to know how Tait kept track of the music for this film during the decade and a half in which she painted the images, and how she contrived and maintained such a complex synthesis of audio and visual elements while she was making the animation.

According to Peter Todd, Tait worked through the visual elements of her films first, adding the sound components after the imagery was edited.<sup>23</sup> Todd reports that, as an integral part of her filmmaking process, Tait would screen her 16mm work-in-progress to her partner Alex Pirie. This allowed her to experience her work 'within an audience' and to discuss the films as they evolved over a period of months, or even across several years of intermittent production.

Todd comments on the importance of editing for Tait, and describes her process in terms of an 'evolution'.<sup>24</sup> In filmmaking, Tait's post-production was iterative and practice-led. She would edit, project the work-in-progress to her partner Alex Pirie, discuss it, then resume editing. Her method involved a triangulated engagement: firstly herself working with the film material; then the reception of the projected rough cut by

a critical audience of herself and Pirie, feedback from him and her own response as spectators; and finally she would return to editing, reflexively informed by feedback from Pirie, her own response, and their subsequent discussion. Todd explains also that Tait would incorporate film from previous projects and “often reworked and reused bits of film and sequences.”<sup>25</sup> She continually revised and re-edited her work, and there are several versions of many of her titles. For Tait, language is alive, and its heterogeneousness, its diversity and infinite possibilities, is stressed. The modalities co-exist: for Kristeva, the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, and in process; in Tait’s film poems, film was material to be used, and creativity was fluid and constantly in process.

Other women makers of poetic film, such as Maya Deren and Marie Menken, share with Tait the key role of editing in the construction of their films. These artists also used the ambulatory hand-held camera as a ‘seeing eye’, feeling their way to capturing the world photographically in an intuitively choreographed dance. The filmmaker’s body here in contact with the ground, the mobile camera in hand, her eye looking there through the viewfinder, and her body moving towards the framed image. Deren in particular used editing as a process of organisation and transfiguration, reinforcing visual rhythms, patterns of movement, the relationship between a performer and the space of filming and the film space seen within the frame.

However, the making of work for cinema through the direct animation techniques used by Tait for *Painted Eightsome* requires a different set of strategies and psychological processes. Here, the artwork is a continuous strip of ‘found’ 35mm film, the length of which is fixed by the soundtrack it contains: in order to retain the flow of the Scottish reel, the film cannot be physically edited. In contrast to Tait’s methodology used in her ‘photographic’ work for cinema, for her films which were entirely hand-painted, the audio pre-existed the visual element: the music track was laid along the edge of a 35mm filmstrip, leaving the ‘picture area’ empty so that Tait could paint each frame using aniline dyes, intense colours that stain the analogue film base. The imagery of *Painted Eightsome* is created entirely through colour, which is for Kristeva, pure semiotic.<sup>26</sup> The presence of the drive energies is a continual manifestation on the screen. Even where Tait has used a line to ‘contain’ an infill of colour, the line is itself coloured, a gestural mark rather than a controlling perimeter. The pictorial forms are crudely sketched, the coloured squiggles suggest representation and their interpretation remains with the viewer - a wiggling hoop of reddish-brown becomes a worm, then the body of a writhing snake, as an exuberant kaleidoscope of carnival flags, bright yellow sun, forget-me-not blue sky, and swathes of rose pink, plays within the frame. For Kristeva, “all colours... have a non centred or decentring effect” and therefore bring the spectator back to the maternal *chora*.<sup>27</sup>

I would suggest that Tait followed a similar ‘evolutionary’ method for her ‘hand-made’ films to that used in making her ‘photographic’ films, and that she and her partner would have viewed and reviewed *Painted Eightsome* ‘in progress’ at several times during its 15 year period of making. Whilst I have found no record of Tait owning a 35mm projector, Todd mentions that Tait edited her 16mm films on a pic sync, a film viewing device that allows the film-in-progress to be seen at speed and for its accompanying soundtrack to be heard. Once editing was completed, she then sent her films to London for sound dubbing and printing in the laboratory.<sup>28</sup> It is likely, therefore, given her self-sufficiency and independence as a filmmaker, that she would have had a



35mm pic sync or other motorised editing device, such as a Moviola or Steenbeck flat-bed editing table, which allow the filmmaker to control the speed at which the film moves through the machine and enables the soundtrack encoded in the filmstrip to be heard at the same time as viewing the moving images. If this is not correct, then Tait could have arranged to have access to 35mm projection in a cinema, as she did for checking her 35mm *Calypso* filmprint when she moved to Edinburgh from Italy in 1954.

The self-reflexivity of Tait's methodology sustained her creative focus and the evolution of animated imagery over a lengthy period of time, during which she made several other films. From my 'know how' as an experienced practitioner, I would suggest that the symbolic structuring of the film's material specificities to enabled Tait to return repeatedly to the process of making the visual artwork, the semiotic drives within her body responding to the music as she conjured rhythmic patterns with her brush loaded with coloured dye, for almost one and a half decades. In addition, it seems to me that Tait demonstrates an integrated shifting between modes that is symbiotic, a form of 'dispersed subjectivity' described by Kristeva's 'subject-in-process', who, "accentuates *process* rather than identification, *projection* rather than desire, the *heterogenous* rather than the signifier, *struggle* rather than structure." (Author's emphasis)<sup>29</sup> For *Painted Eightsome*, its process - the extended act of making - remains visible in the work and the space of the film frames in which the creation occurred; when projected, or viewed as a moving image work on a screen, the spectator is aware of the filmic material and its materiality through the presence of brush marks and accumulations of detritus; it is heterogeneous - as a dynamic procession of continually evolving and mutating coloured shapes, its meaning is contingent; and struggle is evident in the instability of the pictorial elements, as the figures made of coloured dyes wrestle to emerge from the clear ground and continually refresh the imagery.

Additional research would be most welcome in order to confirm the methodology used by Tait for *Painted Eightsome* and *John MacFadyen (The Stripes in the Tartan)*, the artwork for which is contained on the first part of the same, unbroken roll of 35mm film with its optical soundtrack. Records available at the time of writing, by Winn and from the Scottish Screen Archive, and LUX, among others, indicate that Tait hand-painted these two films 'consecutively' between 1955 and 1970. The total length of the combined length of the artworks is given as 880 feet,<sup>30</sup> with *John MacFadyen* having the first 316 feet of the roll and *Painted Eightsome* having the remaining 564 feet. From my 'know how' as an experienced practitioner of direct animation, I know that an artist can unravel hundreds of feet of 35mm film in order to work directly onto the surface of the film in a precise manner, without any specialist film equipment, although one must take care not to damage the sprocketholes, which are vulnerable. Also, the dyes can take several hours to dry, especially if colours are overlaid as they are in *Painted Eightsome*, and newly painted artwork must be left exposed to the air until all the moisture has evaporated, and the surface is no longer tacky, before 'winding on'. From making *Calypso* with Peter Hollander's assistance whilst in Rome, Tait was already an experienced practitioner in the art of painting on film, and Winn notes that Tait began work on *Painted Eightsome* shortly after *Calypso*, and it is likely that she used the same aniline dyes. However, from the records available to me, I cannot know for certain whether Tait was able to listen to the *Painted Eightsome* soundtrack during her making process - as I believe she did - and, if so, exactly how she did this.

Tait was familiar with the Len Lye's *A Colour Box*, made in 1935 for the GPO Film Unit, and was inspired by this work, which chimed with her own ideas of making a film to a 'musical beat'. From his conversations with Tait in the 1970s, Mike Leggett reports her as saying: "I had always enjoyed the Len Lye films which used to appear in the cinemas in the '30s... The use of sheer colour, screen-wide, coloured my idea of film (and perhaps colour) from then on."<sup>31</sup>

*A Colour Box* on a large cinema screen is a powerful experience, and stunned audiences around the world from its release in the mid-1930s. Horrocks considers it a "breakthrough film," which "demonstrated the potential of the direct method in such a thorough and sophisticated way that the paint-brush had to be accepted ... as a viable alternative to the camera."<sup>32</sup> Lye was drawn to experimental film by the potential the form offered for movement and colour, and used "expressionistic automatic drawing and free association techniques".<sup>33</sup> Although it is not known whether Tait had a deeper knowledge of Lye's hand-made film practice, in particular his interest in Freud's theories of the unconscious and psychoanalysis, it is clear that *A Colour Box* influenced Tait's decision to paint visual music onto film. Joss Winn cites several similarities between Lye's film and Tait's first hand-painted work *Calypso*, such as, the adoption of the hand-painting process as a means of making a short film 'on the cheap' - because it didn't require a camera and didn't use much film stock; the exuberant rhythmic style of mark-making, and both films painted with the aniline dyes used in histology to study cell structures.<sup>34</sup>

Tait was familiar also with the work of Scottish-born experimental animator Norman McLaren, including his innovatory techniques in expressing music as imagery through direct animation.<sup>35</sup> His films inspired the making of her first hand-painted film *Calypso* (1955), which used as source material an unwanted 35mm optical track of some music, 'found' while she was in Rome. Lye's *A Colour Box* was a pivotal influence for McLaren, who reported that he was "electrified and ecstatic" when he saw the film for the first time: "Apart from the sheer exhilaration of the film, what intrigued me was that it was a kinetic abstraction of the spirit of the music, and that it was painted directly onto the film."<sup>36</sup> This experience was such a powerful one for McLaren that he was compelled to watch the film over and over again at every opportunity, and said that he "felt like a drug addict".<sup>37</sup> McLaren's reflection is resonant for me with the Kristevan *chora*, a pleasurable immersion in the materiality of existence, a chaotic swirl of undifferentiated feelings, needs and perceptions when one feels a 'one-ness' with the mother and the world.

McLaren was a pioneer in experimentation with film sound and developed a sophisticated notation system for creating music by marking the optical track area of a 35mm filmstrip, which he referred to as 'animated sound'. I would suggest that Tait was aware of his use of the optical track to inform the painting of sequences within the picture frames of the filmstrip. There is a regular 'beat' marked along the edge of Tait's 35mm artwork for *Painted Eightsome* - a painted mark along three frames at intervals of approximately every nine frames - which I think would be used during the making process as a visual reference for rhythm.<sup>38</sup> Throughout the lengthy process of painting over nine thousand individual frames, the visual representation of the film's sound was a constant presence.<sup>39</sup> Tait was highly observant and attuned to small changes in things: "It's the looking that matters, / The being prepared to see what there is to see. / Staring has to be done: / That I must do."<sup>40</sup> She looked at the world in detailed close-up

with an intensity of vision, and I believe she used the wavering lines of the optical track as an additional guide or score as she painted the frames, though not necessarily in an analytical manner - the visual appearance of the miniature optical code's symbolic structuring providing an opportunity for the embodied semiotic of the film-poet's imaginary to emerge as chromatic mark-making.

Additionally, there is evidence that Tait had an interest in codes. Peter Hollander, Tait's fellow student at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome and collaborator, remembers that she "devised an arcane system to indicate the opus numbers of our films in their titles", which he referred to as "Margaret's code".<sup>41</sup> I believe that Tait would have been interested in the visual coding of music within the 35mm filmstrip, and would respond to it during the protracted period in which she painted the frames. There is no evidence that Tait attempted a detailed analytical correlation between the visual waveform and the marks she made, and I am not suggesting this. Tait, with her acutely 'peering' eye, did refer to the variations of the sound wriggles as she painted. This affected her mark-making performance and reinforced the "elasticity and multiplicity of meaning" which, as Ali Smith observed, is embedded deep in Tait's cinematic work.<sup>42</sup>

So that the reader may gain a deeper understanding the translation processes by which live sound is recorded and then played back during the traditional making and presentation of a cinematic film such as *Painted Eightsome*, I describe the key stages of coding and decoding:

Music is played and recorded onto magnetic audiotape. Sound waves, produced in the air by the actions of the musicians' bodies upon their instruments, vibrate the diaphragm of a microphone, which registers the changes in atmospheric pressure and converts them into a variable electric current. An electromagnet then represents the acoustic sound wave as magnetic particles of ferric oxide arranged on a thin plastic tape. This audio analogue is transposed cinematographically into juddering waves of light embedded within a perforated strip of cellulose acetate or polyester film: the audio waveforms are translated into a visual code, rendered photographically by the laboratory as an optical soundtrack printed throughout the length of the filmstrip next to the sprocket holes. This is an analogue of the stereo sound waves, their variations of loudness and frequency converted to changes in the shape of two clear (white) lines. In 35mm film the optical track takes the form of a pair of wavering clear lines within the black ground of the film stock, running alongside the perforations on the left hand side.<sup>43</sup> These allow varying amounts of light to pass through: changes of brightness correspond to changes in volume and pitch. When decoded via the bright light of a projector or pic sync, the embedded optical track can then be heard by the listener: the film projector converts the optical code to electrical pulses, which move the diaphragm of a loudspeaker, an electroacoustic transducer, to create changes in atmospheric pressure, audio waves which act upon the bodies of the listeners and re-embodiment the original sound.

The optical sound embedded in the *Painted Eightsome* filmprint is an analogue of the music. Its waveforms bear a direct relation to the original audio recording and to what the audience will hear 'played back' during projection. In the film, the animation is integrated with the sound and becomes visual music, a film poem in which the body's presence is reinforced by the highly mobile, intensely coloured imagery that seems inseparable from the Scottish reel.

My 'know how' suggests that the eightsome reel's swell of tiny waves, with its pattern of troughs and crests, informed the creation of the film's visuals in a similar way to that in which Tait's experiential observations were processed, embodied, then flowed... and became inscribed rhythmically and metaphorically in her poems. These short lines capture of the relentless pushing and pulling movements of the Orcadian sea in its watery connection to the Earth's lunar satellite: "It never gets anywhere except to where it came from, / But keeps up that regular surge and heave / Of the tides / As it hurls itself / for ever towards the moon".<sup>44</sup> Then, in these lines from another poem, she draws on a deep genetic and cultural memory to evoke the dominant force of the Vikings, who came first to Orkney at the end of the eighth century: "With the swift sides of their longships entering between two lips of water / And at speed rushing ... And the dream of the deepest sea in their eyes / Took them spinning down the coasts, / Ripping out into the ocean".<sup>45</sup>

For Kristeva, human subjectivity is a dynamic open system 'driven' by the constant movement and 'ceaseless heterogeneity' of the maternal *chora* that underlies the process of subjectivity and 'significance', a term used by her to indicate the infinitely changeable, unbounded and never-ending vibrations of the drive energies, which transform language through an vibrant fluctuation of organisation and superabundance.

All Tait's work, both films and writing, carries many layers of meaning within it. This is evident particularly in her use of light. Throughout her career Tait was fascinated by the phenomenon of light and its perception, and was clearly aware that is electromagnetic radiation that has observable behaviours such as refraction and reflection, and with different colours being 'seen' because of absorption. In her poem *The Scale of Things*, she refers to the "stunning frequencies" that are absorbed close to the ground so that the "full light of the sun" becomes calm, but not too blue.<sup>46</sup> As well as her detailed observation of light and its affects in microcosm, Tait also possessed a 'macrocosmic' understanding of the seasonal rhythms and cyclical changes of light, particularly on Orkney. In her long form poem *Cave Drawing of the Water of the Earth and Sea*, Tait wrote of making "an abstract picture out of magic water", and how a rainbow can be "water particles, refracted light, curvature of space" yet still "irrefutably a miracle."<sup>47</sup>

This deep knowingness of 'how things work', and the interconnectedness of the world and ourselves, can be clearly seen in these lines:

"The world is reeling out to its very utmost once again  
Until it must shudder to stop and turn  
And let the light back to us,  
Back into the lower dark storeys and the foot of the valleys.  
And the time of all-light is half a year away"<sup>48</sup>

Finally, to return to my point about Tait's likely use of the 35mm filmstrip's optical sound code to inform her markmaking for *Painted Eightsome*, in her poem *Light*, she refers directly to the electromagnetic waves of which light is constituted, with its final lines evoking Kristeva's immersive semiotic:

"Did you say it's made of waves?  
Yes, that's it.

*I wonder what the waves are made of.*

Oh, waves are made of waves.

Waves are what they are,

Shimmeringness,

Oscillation,

Rhythmical movement which is the inherent essence of all things." (Author's emphasis)<sup>49</sup>

In cinema, previous frames of films, 'aspects of experience', are 'expelled' from the mind as their place is taken by a succession of new images. The phenomenon of cinema can only come into being because we cannot recall, precisely, the single, still images once they are not present before our eyes for the fraction of a second they appear on the screen. We see an illusion of movement and change: distance travelled, shifting form and changes of colour, texture and pattern. By the stroking action of her brush, Tait ensures that we cannot sink beneath the surface, and drown in the seamless, illusory moving image stream, unaware of the underlying material processes by which it is constructed. Each frame is newly created, unique; a dynamic moment that enfolds past, present and anticipated future. In parts, alternating images produce a flickering effect in the brain, sand and ocean seen in a rapid shimmer of yellow blue. This oscillating instability ensures that we retain the awareness that we are watching a series of static frames whilst simultaneously perceiving the phenomenon of moving image. The coloured light has no indexical link to a material presence in the world, other than its own materiality. The marks and washed grounds are simultaneously suggestions of recognisable objects and coloured splodges, "figures, antlers, or sometimes just blobs in tartan colours",<sup>50</sup> continually forming and re-forming, becoming a multiplicity of possibilities. In Tait's poetic film *Painted Eightsome*, this contingency is the 'structuring and de-structuring practice' of signification. Tait's hand-painted animation embodies what Kristeva refers to in her doctoral thesis, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, first published in 1974, as the 'negativation' of representation, in which 'revolution' signifies the disruption to subjectivity.<sup>51</sup> In *Painted Eightsome*, nothing is still. Like the sea, there is change in each moment of consciousness, every frame, as it is eclipsed by memory. The film is a life lived, a linear event wound on a reel, energised by the revolutionary action of the projector, made visible by the light that shines through its frames, and transformed in the mind and body of the audience to the 'animated shiver' that signifies the living.

In her later work, *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva links the maternal to abjection: that which is revolting and repressed becomes revolutionary through its emergence in patriarchal symbolic systems.<sup>52</sup> Here, Kristeva's key notion is that subjectivity is established through expulsion. In other words, in the dynamic system of subjectivity, something must be expelled, excluded, cast out beyond the border into formless death-womb, the abjected maternal, as an integral part of the process of significance and the maintenance of one's identity and psychic health. This aspect of Kristeva's thinking is developed from her theorisation of the anal stage, in which the young child expels faeces from its body and derives pleasure from this expulsion. The waste matter is an excess, something that cannot be contained indefinitely within the biological body, and must therefore be 'rejected'. However, for Kristeva, the prompt for the child's process

to language and subjectivity is generated by the *jouissance* of pleasure and material excess, rather than a merely a lack and separation, as argued by Freud and Lacan.

Tait left the residues of excess dye to dry on the surface of her filmstrip, unlike Lye, who cleaned his painted film artwork.<sup>53</sup> During drying, these deposits have accumulated flecks of fluff and dust. This waste matter, expelled from the body of the world, is caught in the surface of the dried aniline dye. The dancing flickers of dust seen by the spectator on the screen are a disruption to the visual synthesis of the painted animated imagery. They mark the presence of an excess of materiality, an over abundance of *jouissance*. There is a knowing pleasure for the spectator in this: the dust reinforces awareness of the materiality of film, and the time and place of making is inscribed in the work through the particles of air-borne matter that landed on the sticky dye residue, and which cannot be erased.<sup>54</sup>

Kristeva argues that the 'logic of signification' is present within the materiality of the body from birth. The infantile body incorporates food, digests and expels what is left over as waste, prefiguring the identification and differentiation processes that create and maintain signification. The mother regulates these bodily functions, and therefore 'maternal law' predates and displaces the 'paternal law' with its threats of castration. The Kristevan paradigm is counter to that of Jacques Lacan, who, following Freud, foregrounds separation (a lack) as the causal event of the mirror stage, through which castration, or signification, is effected. Kristeva's semanalysis argues that the corporeal body of the young child carries within it the 'logic' that will lead to signification.

The artist, the mother/parent and the psychoanalyst all share a similar relationship to the semiotic. The artist channels her drives and gives this energy form; a mother/parent teaches their infant to recognise and then control its bodily rhythms; the psychoanalyst gives structure to their patient. Each of these roles brings the pre-verbal, and the non-verbal, into the structuration of the symbolic where socialisation may occur, and so facilitates access to culture and language. In recent work, Kristeva refers to a lively, poetic and musical language as revealing, "a carnivalesque, playful body that joins opposites and exults in its skilfulness in manipulating language."<sup>55</sup> It seems to me from my 'know how' as a maker of direct animation, that in *Painted Eightsome* Tait is speaking to us with what she called the "blood poetry",<sup>56</sup> using a chromatic pictorial language that emerges from the maternal *chora* and is 'directed' by *jouissance*, the unbounded, embodied pleasurable exuberance of the feminine, being alive and in the world, interwoven with the symbolic of the film structure as a material in 'living motion.' The abstracted animated imagery of the *choral* drive energies in *Painted Eightsome* push to the very limits of possibility, threatening to burst forth at any moment from the screen to rupture the symbolic order. Within the affective dimension, the sensorium of Tait's audiovisual Scottish reel recreates itself anew through the fluency of her 'mother tongue' each time I play the film.

The avant-garde artist is allied to the avant-garde poet in that both rupture and break apart the meaning, syntax and grammar of their respective realms of language in order to render visible and/or audible what is unnameable. For the film-poet Margaret Tait, sight was the primary sense that connected her to the world. She transformed wave particles of light into film poetry. In *Painted Eightsome*, as in much of her cinematic and written work, we, as viewer-audience/reader-listener, 'become' her experience of seeing and being. Tait's vision is mediated through her embodied experience of living. She connected with the things she saw and her seeing became transmuted through

time spent within her body. Sight emerging from embodied memory, as the 'blobs of tartan colours' are transformed through animation into something 'other': the transcendent visual poetry of the screen.

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## Filmography

*8Some*. 1970. Margaret Tait. Ancona Films. Scottish Screen Archive. Reference number 4444A. Accessed 14 May 2014. <http://ssa.nls.uk/film/4444A>

*A Colour Box*. 1935. Len Lye. GPO Film Unit.

*Calypso*. 1955. Margaret Tait. Scottish Screen Archive. Reference number 6226. Accessed 14 May 2014. <http://ssa.nls.uk/film/6226>

*Colour Poems*. 1974. Margaret Tait. Ancona Films. Scottish Screen Archive. Reference number 3697. Accessed 14 May 2014. <http://ssa.nls.uk/film/3697>

*John MacFadyen*. 1970. Margaret Tait. Ancona Films. Scottish Screen Archive. Reference number 3697. Accessed 14 May 2014. <http://ssa.nls.uk/film/4445>

*Painted Eightsome*. 1970. Margaret Tait. Ancona Films. Scottish Screen Archive. Reference number 4444. Accessed 14 May 2014. <http://ssa.nls.uk/film/4444>

## Notes

1. There is another, longer and slightly different version of *Painted Eightsome*, at *Scottish Screen Archive*, "Full record for '8SOME'", reference number 4444A, accessed 14 May 2014, <http://ssa.nls.uk/film/4444A>
2. Aniline dyes are synthetic organic compounds used to stain biological samples in order to make cell structures more visible when studied through a microscope. They come in a range of colours, from deep saturated primaries to subtle hues. Margaret Tait was medically trained, and was familiar with aniline dyes and their use in the laboratory.
3. Joss Winn, "Preserving the Hand-Painted Films of Margaret Tait", (MA diss., University of East Anglia, 2002). For Winn's technical report on the artwork for *Painted Eightsome* and another hand-painted film by Margaret Tait, *John MacFadyen* (*Scottish Screen Archive*, 4445), both of which are contained on the same roll, see pdf 24 – 26 (University of Lincoln, 2004), accessed 11 January 2011, <http://eprints.lincoln.ac.uk/2004/> Also available, *Joss Winn*, 2009, accessed 14 May 2014, <http://tait.josswinn.org/tag/london/>
4. Ali Smith, "Foreword", (2011), in *Margaret Tait: Poems, Stories and Writings*, ed. Sarah Neely (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2012), xiii.
5. *Ibid*, xiv.
6. Ruth Robbins, *Literary Feminism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 126.
7. In the context of this essay, I intend 'consciousness' to mean our awareness of various mental processes such as thinking and speaking, and also the rational aspects of our being. I refer to 'unconsciousness' as the mental processes which are generally 'hidden' from the conscious mind, and the bio-physiological processes of the corporeal body. The unconscious may be accessed in the recollection of dreams and is evident in



the 'gaps between' consciousness, such as 'slips of the tongue'.

8. Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi, trans. Séan Hand and Léon S. Roudiez (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).
9. Robin Nelson, "Modes of Practice-as-Research Knowledge and Their Place in the Academy", in *Practice-as-Research in Performance and Screen*, ed. Ludivine Allegue, Simon Jones, Baz Kershaw and Angela Piccini (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 112 - 130; and Robin Nelson, ed., *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
10. Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: Thinking and Willing* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 93.
11. Winn, "Preserving the Hand-Painted Films of Margaret Tait", 25. Tait used a Kodak black and white Comopt (optical) print of the music recording, as a single roll.
12. *Scottish Screen Archive*, "Full record for 'PAINTED EIGHTSOME'", reference number 4444, accessed 14 May 2014, <http://ssa.nls.uk/film.cfm?fid=4444>
13. *Ibid.*
14. Sarah Neely and Alan Riach, "Demons in the Machine: Experimental Film, Poetry and Modernism in Twentieth Century Scotland", in *Scottish Cinema Now*, ed. Jonathan Murray, Fidelma Farley and Rod Stoneman (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 1 - 19.
15. *Ibid*, 3.
16. *Ibid*, 6.
17. *Luxonline*, "Margaret Tait", (2005) accessed 14 May 2014, [http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/margaret\\_tait/](http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/margaret_tait/)
18. Ali Smith, "The Margaret Tait Years", in *Subjects and Sequences: A Margaret Tait Reader*, ed. Peter Todd and Benjamin Cook (London: LUX, 2004), 26.
19. *Scottish Screen Archive* "Full record for 'COLOUR POEMS'", reference number 3697, accessed 14 May 2014, <http://ssa.nls.uk/film/3697>
20. Todd and Cook, ed., *Subjects and Sequences: A Margaret Tait Reader*, 161.
21. Winn, "Preserving the Hand-Painted Films of Margaret Tait", 14. Joss Winn quotes Tait as saying that this title contains nine short films.
22. *Scottish Screen Archive* "Full record for 'COLOUR POEMS'", 3697.
23. Peter Todd, "Margaret Tait", January 2004, in *Luxonline*, 5, accessed 14 May 2014, [http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/margaret\\_tait/essay\(5\).html](http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/margaret_tait/essay(5).html)
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*
26. Julia Kristeva, "Giotto's Joy", in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 210 – 236.
27. *Ibid*, 225.
28. Todd, "Margaret Tait", 5.
29. Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject* (Boston and London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1977), 145 – 146.
30. Winn, "Preserving the Hand-Painted Films of Margaret Tait", 24 - 26.
31. *Ibid.* The original source is Mike Leggett, *The Autonomous Film-Maker. Margaret Tait: Films and Poems 1951 - 76* (unpublished article, 1979).
32. Roger Horrocks, *Len Lye: A Biography* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2001), 141.

33. Ibid, 52 - 56. For more detail on the development of Lye's first engagement with film, and his initial "fiddly scratches", please see the chapter on kinetic theatre.
34. Winn, "Preserving the Hand-Painted Films of Margaret Tait", 10 and 19.
35. Todd, "Margaret Tait", 3. Shortly before her death, Tait suggested McLaren's direct animation *Fiddle-de-Dee* (1947), in which he painted onto clear film stock, for inclusion in a programme about animation in film. McLaren broke new ground with this work, and largely ignored the lines to the top and bottom of the frames, although there are some animation sequences created frame-by-frame.
36. Winn, "Preserving the Hand-Painted Films of Margaret Tait", 9. The original source is Horrocks, *Len Lye: A Biography*, 2001, 145.
37. Ibid.
38. The beat punctuates sections of 12 frames, which last for half a second.
39. The running time of *Painted Eightsome* is 6 minutes 16 seconds at the customary cinema projection speed of 24 frames per second; this is equivalent to 376 seconds, or 9024 individual 'picture' frames.
40. The opening lines to Tait's poem "Seeing's Believing and Believing's Seeing", dated 7 November 1958, reprinted in *Margaret Tait: Poems, Stories and Writings*, ed. Sarah Neely, 2012, 109.
41. Winn, "Preserving the Hand-Painted Films of Margaret Tait", 7. Winn quotes from Hollander's unpublished autobiography.
42. Ali Smith, 2005, "Margaret Tait: 2. Where I Am Is Here", *Luxonline*, accessed 14 May 2014, [http://www.luxonline.org.uk/tours/margaret\\_tait\(2\).html](http://www.luxonline.org.uk/tours/margaret_tait(2).html)
43. The edge along which the soundtrack runs is termed the 'S side' or 'sound side' of the filmstrip; the opposite, right hand edge is the 'P side', or 'picture side'.
44. Neely, ed., *Margaret Tait: Poems, Stories and Writings*, 2012, 50 - 51. From "Cave Drawing of the Water of the Earth and Sea", published in Tait's collection *origins and elements*, 1959.
45. Ibid, 113. From "That's Them off on Their Spring Forays", published in *The Orkney Herald*, 13 January 1959.
46. Ibid, 85. From "The Scale of Things", published in *The Hen and the Bees*, 1960.
47. Ibid, 49 - 55. From "Cave Drawing of the Water of the Earth and Sea", published in Tait's collection *origins and elements*, 1959.
48. Ibid, 122. Tait's unpublished poem "Winter Solstice".
49. Ibid, 88. Poem dated March/April 1958, originally published in *The Hen and the Bees*, 1960.
50. *Scottish Screen Archive*, "Full record for 'PAINTED EIGHTSOME'", reference number 4444, accessed 14 May 2014, <http://ssa.nls.uk/film/4444>
51. Julia Kristeva, "Revolution in Poetic Language", in Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi, trans. Séan Hand and Léon S. Roudiez (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 89 - 136.
52. Julia Kristeva, "Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection", trans. Léon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
53. Winn, "Preserving the Hand-Painted Films of Margaret Tait", 22.
54. The aniline dyes used by Tait are soluble in water and alcohol. It is possible to clean up the film artwork to some extent, but even gentle rubbing with a dry cloth will remove some of the surface material and density of the dyes.
55. Julia Kristeva, "The Impudence of Uttering: The Mother Tongue", trans. Anne Marsella, in *Julia Kristeva*, 2010, accessed: 11 July 2014, <http://www.kristeva.fr/>

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56. Sarah Neely, “Introduction”, in Sarah Neely, ed. *Margaret Tait: Poems, Stories and Writings*, 2012, 17 and 18.