Be(com)ing Reel Independent Woman

An Autoethnographic Journey Through Female Subjectivity and Agency in Contemporary Cinema with Particular Reference to Independent Scriptwriting Practice

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains, as its main content, work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

__________________________________________________________________________

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Abstract

Women exert only a modicum of production power in 21st century cinema despite its growing accessibility and spectatorship through the developing technologies of the digital era. In 2007, of the top 250 grossing films in Hollywood, only 10% were written, and 6% directed, by women, and just 16% contained leading female protagonists. Why, after the gains of the film feminist movement, is there such a significant gender imbalance in mainstream film, and an imbalance that is only increasing over time? More significantly, what are the possibilities and limitations for reel woman’s subjectivity and agency, in and on screen, in this male-dominated landscape?

As a female filmmaker in this current climate I conduct an autoethnographical scriptwriting-based investigation into female subjectivity and agency, by writing the feature length screenplay Float, which is both the dramatic experiment and the creative outcome of this research. The exegesis works symbiotically with my scriptwriting journey by outlining the broader contexts surrounding women filmmakers and their female representations.

In this self-reflexive examination, I use an interdisciplinary methodology to unravel the overt and latent sites of resistance for reel woman today on three interdependent levels. These comprise the historical, political and philosophical background to woman’s treatment both behind, and in front of, the camera; my lived experiences as an emerging writer/director as I write Float; and my representation of the screenplay’s central female character.

I use the multiple logic of screenplay diegesis to explore the issues that have a bearing on women’s ability to be active agents in the world they inhabit, including: the dichotomising of female desire, the influence of familial history, the repression of the mother, the dominance of the male gaze, the disavowal of female specificity, and women’s consequent dislocation from their self-determined desire. These obstacles are simultaneously negotiated as I map my process of writing Float and deal with the challenging contexts in which the screenplay was created. In the course of my scriptwriting investigation, film feminist and French poststructuralist paradigms are considered and negotiated as I experiment whether it is possible for female filmmakers, and their female characters, to overcome the seemingly insurmountable odds facing women’s actualisation today.

My research brings to light the critical need for more inclusive modes of practice across the film industry, discourse and pedagogy that are cognisant and respectful of reel women’s difference, and allow them to explore their own specificity. The thesis argues that it would be advantageous for female filmmakers to challenge their ‘fixed’ status in phallocentric discourse, and to deconstruct their patriarchal conditioning through engagement with forms of identity and writing resistance that recognise the fluidity of their subjectivity, and the consequent potential for change. I also highlight the importance of an accessible and affirmative feminist cinema pertinent to the 21st century, to integrate feminist ideals into the mainstream, and finally bring reel woman out of the margins.
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Niall; the lighthouse I swim to in every storm.
Introduction

To those who still ask, ‘What do women want?’ the cinema seems to provide no answer. Mary Ann Doane

At the outset, it is necessary for me to start with a rhetorical question to establish some sort of context for the origin of my thesis, and to provide a framework to how this research project developed, created nodal points of learning experiences, and moved me to significant areas of personal growth and awareness. What is this strong desire that compels me to make films? Part of it is my conviction that we can “use stories to try to figure out how to live our lives meaningfully”:

that film does not simply represent the social world but also has the ability to change it. I embarked on this autoethnographical project because I wanted to understand this desire, and my subjectivity and agency as a filmmaker, more comprehensively. In this thesis I must therefore speak from my own perspective, my own subjectivity, my own agency, which is not fixed, but is in an ongoing process of becoming that developed significantly through this thesis.

I define agency as an intuitive energy, fuelled by corporeal and psychosocial desire that motivates will and action. This is not too dissimilar to Freud’s theory of libido, and Nietzsche’s will-to-power: a concept he used to describe the instinctive force within all of us to exercise our individual desire and power in some way. Subjectivity and agency are broad and complex topics that it would be impossible to do justice to in the confines of this thesis. I will, however, try to rigorously investigate these concepts in relation to reel woman today. My use of the term reel is a reference to the practice of feature filmmaking, which increasingly has to compete with the production of new media forms to maintain its popularity. Through the consumer capitalist era and its explosion of digital technology, we are now, more than ever, saturated in images. For this reason, I suggest that it is critical for women to (re)gain a stake in screen production and
representation, in order to exercise greater control over their own future, and the future imagery of woman. In this thesis I deal with female subjectivity and agency in the feature film tradition, which I offer as a foundation for the future consideration of the representation of women in new forms of media.

In this progressive era of the arts we are required to be articulate practitioners: to write about our practice in sophisticated and contextualised ways. Sociologist Laurel Richardson (2000) calls this reflexive research that performs culture through an artistic form, ‘creative analytic practice’ (CAP) ethnography. I am attracted to writing in the way that Richardson describes, as a ‘method of inquiry’, a journey of discovery through which we can “investigate how we construct the world, ourselves, and others, and how standard objectifying practices…unnecessarily limit us”. Employing scriptwriting as both my “mode of reasoning and a mode of representation”, in this thesis I position myself as a cultural agent, a subject-in-process. I use a self-reflexive, practice-led investigation to experiment with my identity as a female writer/director during the scriptwriting development of the original feature length screenplay *Float*, in which I further test the limits of reel woman’s subjectivity and agency, through its fictional narrative and central female character, Hannah.

Encouraged by CAP ethnography and arts-informed research (Neilsen, Knowles and Cole (2001)), I adopt a ‘scholartistic’ methodology to my investigation that outlines how the project’s theoretical developments transpired in parallel to, and in extension of, the scriptwriting and its findings, and vice versa, as the two texts enter into a dialectical relationship. Richardson advocates this approach, emphasising that CAP research should involve deep concentration and theoretical rigour that:

> displays the *writing process* and the *writing product* as deeply intertwined; both are privileged. The product cannot be separated from the producer or the mode of production or the method of knowing.
Accordingly, this thesis comprises two components: an exegesis that documents my exploration in film, specifically screenwriting, and the feature length screenplay, *Float*. The exegesis and the screenplay are separate documents, and are also symbiotic in that they aim to interrogate, challenge, and complement one another. These documents represent my research discoveries in two disparate languages - theoretical and artistic - as I marry theory in practice and practice *in* theory.

Inspired by anthropologist and autoethnographer, Ruth Behar (2003), who asserts that “[o]ur thinking is not separated from our feeling” and that it is possible “to do rigorous scholarship and be personal”, I identify autoethnography as critical to my research, given that it enables me to use my first-hand account as a female filmmaker to research the broader situation of reel woman’s subjectivity and agency today. Richardson affirms that we can use personal narratives to make sense of our own lives and circumstances, and those of others. Autoethnography (Ellis (2000), Reed-Dahahay (1997), Richardson (2000), Etherington (2004), Denzin (2000)) is amongst an emerging tradition of methodologies that examine personal stories within cultural landscapes. It is categorised as a methodology *and* a text, and its focus on self-reflexive writing and experiential investigation places it within the same genre as life writing. In contrast to traditional ethnographers, who research a cultural group from an objective distance and with critical detachment, autoethnographers attempt to explore the human social condition by examining what is universal to a cultural group, via the particularities of their subjective experiences as an individual existing in this group. The researcher’s subjectivity is therefore always the primary subject matter, yet this personalised data is positioned within a social milieu to locate the researcher as both a translator of culture and a co-creator of it.
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Behar stresses that the ‘vulnerable writing’ employed in personal research “takes as much skill, nuance, and willingness to follow through on all the ramifications of a complicated idea as does writing invulnerably and distantly”.15 In light of this counsel, and following her insistence that “[t]he exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn’t otherwise get to. It has to be essential to the argument, not a decorative flourish”,16 I employ measures to try to ensure that the project’s personal insights offer an opportunity to examine the culture of contemporary cinema, and woman’s place within it, from an otherwise unattainable level of authenticity. In order to “not simply chronicle “what happened next,” but place the “next” in a meaningful context”,17 I locate my autobiographical memories and lived experience within institutional, theoretical and phenomenological discourses to contextualise and analyse my research findings more scrupulously. This requires me to take up dual writing identities in this thesis, where I occupy shifting points of view. At times I put myself under the autobiographical lens: zooming in, seeing and revealing close up the secret-self desires that inform my scriptwriting; and at other times being forced to zoom out, to observe myself from an objective viewpoint, with a critical gaze, in a wide shot within a cultural scenery.18 Through this twofold investigation, I am then both the observer and the observed.

This creative research project is literal as well as figurative, and I take the liberty of leading the reader through my carefree earlier years of simple childhood narratives, into the intricate and complex adult world of negotiating contradiction, difference, injustice, and desire as a female filmmaker. The project has been influenced and shaped by my independent scriptwriting practice, theoretical research, teaching in the areas of film and television, and by the regular conversations I have had with my supervisor, himself a
filmmaker, who contributes a male counterpoint perspective with regard to female subjectivity and agency, to awaken and raise awareness of dormant disparities.

Through CAP exploration, experimentation and theorisation, I set out to investigate whether reel woman can overcome the prevailing androcentric limitations in contemporary film culture, and perform an active agency of her own production in a discourse that still “insists on our absence even in the face of our presence”.19 To do so, I use an eclectic methodology that is informed by developments in a range of disciplines, including existentialism, psychoanalysis, postmodernism, feminism, screenwriting, and film. However, I primarily draw on film feminist and French poststructuralist theory, employing the analytical tools of deconstruction, reflexivity, plurality, and the body. Working with this hybrid approach of analysis, I switch the emphasis away from exclusively employing the traditional quantitative research tools of testing, measuring, classifying and theorising, to rely predominantly on qualitative research techniques involving a practice-led narrative inquiry, in which I “weigh and sift experiences, make choices regarding what is significant, what is trivial, what to include, what to exclude”.20

In addition to framing this discussion within the theoretical and philosophical understandings gained while carrying out my practical work, I use the films and insights of a selection of independent female filmmakers as an interpretive lens to (in)form and refine my scriptwriting and thesis. While I do not wish to flatten out the differences between deconstructive feminist films and those feminist films which are more straightforwardly narrative in construction, given the specific theoretical focus and parameters of this research project, my discussion will inevitably, at times, lead to a curtailing of these differences.
Similarly, it is important to further highlight here that I employ the title ‘independent’ in this thesis to refer to both personal autonomy and independent cinema. In cinema, the title was once reserved for films that were made without the financial backing of a studio or funding body. However, given that these independently financed films generally also pushed the boundaries of populist aesthetics and ideology, the label is now more broadly used to encompass any film that displays an anti-Hollywood sentiment. My employment of the title follows this latter definition.

Saying that, however, it is still necessary to emphasise that no simple line can be drawn between mainstream and independent cinema today. Independent film has become rather difficult to define as the title is now awarded to a large array of works that possess multiple characteristics, and is sometimes even used for films that have been commercially financed. Moreover, there have also been many progressive, groundbreaking, character-centred mainstream films that subvert the traditional Hollywood canon. Nevertheless, while I do not wish to generalise about either type of cinema, or flatten out the differences inherent in each category, for the sake of theoretical discussion and summary, henceforth I will use the terms, ‘mainstream/commercial’ and ‘independent/personal’, to represent opposite ends of the film continuum.

I choose to predominantly focus on the techniques of independent film in my scriptwriting because, as encapsulated by film theorist Mary Ann Doane’s opening quote for this introduction, mainstream cinema tells us very little about women’s subjectivity and agency, and presents significant problems for women’s status in society. Its linear storytelling structure, deriving from Aristotle, generally restores the dominant order, and thereby only offers women minor access to desire and power. Moreover, this commercial cinema is usually plot-centred, which sees it recycle a
generic typology of archetypal, one-dimensional, goal-oriented protagonists. In this anti-psychological presentation of character, subjectivity is generally not explored in any great depth as characters are reduced to performing action and plot: defined by what they do rather than by who they are. This is problematic for female identity, because women are usually not involved in the main action of Hollywood narratives, and therefore remain in the sidelines as passive and dehumanised objects of male circumstance. In this thesis I set out to privilege reel woman. I hope to offer a more comprehensive analysis of subjectivity and agency through turning the focus primarily onto independent cinema, which tends to be character-centred and involves more inclusive conventions for representing marginalised subjects (such as women), thereby enabling them to exert a stronger degree of agency.

In my contextual research of independent female filmmakers, I primarily limit my examination to writer/directors who, while not necessarily defining themselves as feminists, display feminist qualities in their films by involving subversive, central female characters as desiring agents of the narrative, and allowing these reel women to experiment with the social boundaries of femininity. As I am the primary research subject of this work, it is out of the scope of this thesis to expound the work of any filmmaker or theorist in great depth, to rigorously prove or disprove a theory, or to offer a comprehensive summary of the historical trajectory of women in film. Instead, to encourage the emergence of new possibilities for female subjectivity and agency in film, and to allow difference its space within this experimental text, I aim to pose questions rather than to offer unequivocal answers. By positioning my experiential findings within this larger theoretical and filmic context, I hope to establish a female consciousness that illuminates the wider community of feminist filmmaking and rhetoric.
In the narrative inquiry of this thesis, I adopt the postmodernist and French poststructuralist notion of be(com)ing woman as a metaphor for both my subjectivity-in-process, which develops through the research, and to represent resistance and otherness, all that is absent in traditional signification. Ethnographer Arthur P. Bochner (2000) describes narrative inquiry texts as:

stories that create the effect of reality, showing characters embedded in the complexities of lived moments of struggle, resisting the intrusions of chaos, disconnection, fragmentation, marginalization, and incoherence, trying to preserve or restore the continuity and coherence of life’s unity in the face of unexpected blows of fate that call one’s meanings and values into question.

This exegesis documents my ‘lived moments of struggle’ in a discipline still deeply rooted in male narratives, as I negotiate the complex and historically patriarchal landscape of cinema and its related discourse. Through personal exposition and creative reflection, I closely chart Float’s evolution, and detail the challenging contexts and contingent moments in my life during which I worked through each draft stage of this screenplay. Float is itself a filmic conceptualisation of be(com)ing woman; a narrative inquiry in which I explore how oppressive discourses (patriarchy, capitalism, sexual violence, trauma, motherhood, death) condition female desire, and investigate the limitations and possibilities of contemporary female agency. I locate the screenplay as the ‘other-in-process’ inside me, as I attempt to reach for some kind of resolution and clarity to the chaos of my lived experience.

Let us begin by retracing how the journey of this narrative inquiry began for me. I start this examination with my entry into cultural and gender difference and its impact on my ‘Weltanschauung’, so as to offer an example of how my early social conditioning had repercussions on my creative expression as a young storyteller, and influenced my eventual path towards becoming a screenwriter/director.
A Question of Influence: Framing a Personal History

There are two types of influence in the life of a writer: those influences that come so early in childhood, they seem to soak into the very marrow of our bones and to condition our interpretation of the universe thereafter; and those that come a little later when we can exercise more control of our environment and our response to it, and have begun to be aware of the strategies of art.  

Joyce Carol Oates

My family moved from Germany to Australia when I was six. Through this migration and crossover into a different educational system, I missed the first half of my year one schooling. The formative months in my new home, while exciting, were also challenging, not only because I was behind in my learning, but also as I could only speak a few tokenistic words of English. My first year teacher was a little unsure of how to deal with my limited language. She asked a young boy in the class, Jan, to look after me, as his mother was German. This turned out to be an unfortunate pairing because, unbeknown to the teacher and the other students, Jan spoke very broken German, mixed with English and traces of an imaginary childhood language he had created. His role of relaying instructions to me subsequently became more of a hindrance, because I was unwittingly assumed to be a little slow on the uptake during the first few confusing months of my education. This was a frustrating existence in which I became alienated by my lack of linguistic ability. In those days, the limits of my language were, quite literally, the limits of my world.

During this integration period I remained isolated from the other children at the small West Australian school I attended, a few of whom used to taunt me by calling me “Little Hitler”. I distinctly remember one day asking my mother what this strange ‘word’ meant. She did her best to try to explain but I still could not understand why these children seemed to dislike me so much. I did not like the sound of this Hitler guy either. I think it was through these challenging childhood experiences of difference and
limited communication that I first became conscious of my strong desire to find a voice with which to express myself and change my circumstances.

In an attempt to cope with my marginalisation in the first few years of school, I developed into a bit of a dreamer. Home movies reveal my introversion. It is strange now to watch myself shying away from the camera. My eyes are a little glazed over, as if I am trying to shield myself from the foreign place that had become my new home. I am often found reading, or sitting with my siblings too close to the television, trying to make sense of a programme.

It was at this early age that I began to demonstrate an autoethnographic temperament. During a school meeting, my teacher mentioned to my parents that I was “the conscience of the class”. She remarked that I had an ability to pick up and comment on the emotional goings-on between students before they materialised into classroom conflicts or an individual’s distress. She said she often relied on this characteristic of mine to alert her to the needs of particular students of which she was unaware. It appears that, as a substitute for traditional language and verbal communication, I developed a sensitivity for multi-sensory understanding, which I used to read others’ situations, especially those on the fringes of group acceptance through ethnicity, weight, or gender.

This bodily way of reading and understanding the world is commonly referred to as emotional intelligence, somatic knowledge, or, most frequently, trivialised as ‘feminine intuition’. Psychology professor Mary Field Belenky (1986) calls this attribute subjective knowing, and, along with feminist theorist Lorraine Code (1991), maintains that, on account of women’s oppositional positioning as border voices in society, and continued subordination in most areas of organised culture, over time a large majority
have developed stronger skills in, and learnt to engage more successfully with, bodily impulses and non-rational processes of communication and comprehension that fall outside normative discourse.\textsuperscript{31} Nietzschean theory supports this assertion by claiming that we create an ‘inner world’ to the degree that our will-to-power is inhibited externally.\textsuperscript{32}

In my employment of subjective knowing I do not mean to take recourse to the essentialist claim that women are naturally more connected to, or dependent on, their bodies for meaning-making.\textsuperscript{33} Rather, for me, it is through a combination of biological and social determinants, in addition to my migratory experience and my difference to the symbolic order, that subjective knowledge has become my preferred approach to knowledge. As I discuss in chapter five, in contrast to anti-essentialist feminists, who contend that women’s bodily connections should be wholly rejected, given that this link has historically been used to undermine women’s status as rational agents in society,\textsuperscript{34} I find that this connection, which forms the fundamental basis of French poststructuralist theory,\textsuperscript{35} can be used as a powerful tool of agency and resistance against patriarchal discourses, without reinforcing limiting essentialist notions.

Feminist theorist Diana Fuss (1989) likewise affirms that, “there are such ways to elaborate and to work with a notion of essence that is not, \textit{in essence}, ahistorical, apolitical, empiricist, or simply reductive”\textsuperscript{36}. She defends French poststructuralism’s defining of women from an essentialist position, by highlighting that this is not to:

imprison women within their bodies but to rescue them from enculturating definitions by men. An essentialist definition of “woman” implies that there will always remain some part of “woman” which resists masculine imprinting and socialization.\textsuperscript{37}

Fuss points out that the notion of feminism itself could, ironically, be argued to be essentialist given that the discourse “presumes upon the unity of its object of inquiry
(women) *even* when it is at pains to demonstrate the differences within this admittedly generalizing and imprecise category”.

Considering this, I would like to note here that I do not classify woman as a homogeneous entity and therefore do not presume to represent all female filmmakers in this autoethnographical research. I recognise women’s cinematic experience can be highly disparate, dependent upon many factors including race, sexuality, and class. For this reason, while I do not mean to overlook or trivialise the works of, say, black or lesbian female filmmakers, or to construct a ‘white, middle-class, heterosexual’ canon for feminist cinema, in the contextual research for this thesis, I purposefully do not venture too far outside of my lived experience. This project joins a large and diverse culture of feminist cinema and discourse that equally informs the experiences and status of ‘woman’ in and on screen.

Saying that, however, while I wish to respect these critical differences among female filmmakers, and acknowledge the need for multiple subjectivities within film feminism, I do believe that a selection of female-made films today share a voice of resistance: a commonality of subversive themes, and the reworking of conventional film techniques and constructions. I propose that this is most likely due to our mutual exclusion, as women, from the main power sources of film. Consequently, this collective difference to the prevailing framework of cinema can be used as a political strength.

While my desire to undertake this journey into female filmmaking has more to do with necessity, curiosity, and personal agency than with an excess of feminist attitude, in this research I advocate notions of third wave feminism. These should not be confused with postfeminism, which I see as fundamentally conservative and capitalist in its agenda.
Third wave feminism possesses a greater appreciation of plurality and difference among women than second wave feminism does, and recognises that:

[The state of economic, political and technological flux which characterises modernity presents opportunities and dangers for women which the feminists of the first and second wave could not have imagined.]

Feminist Kylie Murphy (2002) affirms that the third wave’s advanced literacy into how popular mediums influence women’s identity “enables both a critical approach and a willingness to work within systems critiqued for being patriarchal” by second wave feminists, making it more pertinent to this research.

**Personal Cinema as Agency**

For many years of my childhood I was embarrassed by my difference. I slowly limited expressing my autoethnographic observations of the human unconscious at play, and asked my parents not to speak German around other children. I just wanted to be like everybody else. I consequently worked hard to learn English, which I picked up relatively quickly. Interestingly, a big part of this linguistic development was my love of reading and writing short stories, which became a significant part of my social persona. Teachers’ report cards state that I wrote many “engaging and well-received stories” that I regularly read to the class: a memory I still recall vividly.

I think I initially became a storyteller to try to fit in and connect with other children who seemed to find my cultural difference intimidating. I used storytelling to bridge the gap. I read stories to be lost in fiction, to forget my anomaly. Paradoxically, I wrote stories to feel connected, to be validated by those who read and enjoyed them. I find these observations to be relevant milestones in my early development as a filmmaker and autoethnographer, since they illustrate how, through my experience of marginalisation
and the loss of an active language as a child, the seeds of desire for personal agency and voice were well sewn.

Today, I still have a keen interest in the subtext of life: the meanings behind what people do not say or do. I tend to perceive and process experiences first and foremost on a corporeal level. I read people and places by absorbing their nature beyond their physical occupancy, through what is intrinsic and concealed, rather than what is revealed in their external presentation. From the travels I made as a child and during my early twenties, I remember intimate and fine details of felt moments: smells, images, emotions, sounds and tastes, as if it were yesterday. It is more foreign for me to recount the name or geographical position of any of these places I have visited, as such factual information seems to come second to my bodily perception of the world. This sensory intelligence cannot be underestimated as a significant contributor to my cumulative life values.

I now choose the medium of film with which to tell my stories. I am attracted to this art form due to its ability to stimulate and draw on so many visceral levels. I fell in love with film at a young age. In our initial weeks in Australia, my parents took us to our first drive-in cinema. It was a double feature - *E.T.* (1982) and *The Dark Crystal* (1982) - under the stars of the vast Australian sky. I could only understand a few words, but I did not care; the images and sounds fascinated me. As we drove away, I looked back and saw the bright lights of the drive-in’s magical screen turn off for the night, and cried. I thought the films and this wonderful feeling I had experienced were lost forever.

As I grew older I noticed that films seemed to affect me more than they did other people. They stayed with me long after the final credits had rolled. I wanted to talk about them, to re-watch certain scenes, and relive the way they made me feel. In my late
I developed a special fondness for the richness and intimacy of independent, character-centred cinema: for the insight it offers into the human condition and the enigmatic way it evokes rather than explains. Now, as a filmmaker, this pleasure has grown into a strong passion to tell personal stories that represent some truths about humanity and offer the same emotional resonance as the many character-centred films that have provided me with inspiration over the years.

While I certainly also enjoy the occasional plot-centred blockbuster, and do not mean to deny Hollywood cinema’s value as entertainment, its mainstream films serve a different purpose for me. Their pleasure is more ephemeral, and they usually do not resonate with me or enhance my life on any more than an immediate escapist level. After I walk out of the theatre and re-enter the real world, I generally have no desire to watch these films again, as the moment of their limited enjoyment has passed. Independent character-centred films, however, hold no expiry date for me. These poignant films continue to revisit me: a particular line of dialogue; a character; a piece of music; or a shot striking a personal chord with my life as if it was part of my own lived memory. They change the way I perceive the real world and my place within it. Their focus on the beauty and suffering of everyday life and characters challenges my indifference in the daily grind of ‘9 to 5’ existence, by awakening all my senses, breathing their way into spaces of my body and mind I never even knew existed, and helping me understand how to live my life differently. Over the years, they have enlightened me, disturbed me, and reminded me of what it means to be human.

On finishing high school I enrolled in a university film degree. I wanted to learn how to bring my many stories to life. I wanted to understand how to translate them into the arresting and evocative films I so admired. These ideals lived on after I completed my honours in screen arts, specialising in writing and directing. I experienced success in my
early film endeavours and had a collection of short films to my name. I planned to enter the industry and build on this showreel by writing and directing a feature length film in the near future. I had a desire for my films to be screened to full theatres and international audiences. I wanted to try to make a difference in the world, or at least in my world. My horizons appeared to be within reach.

However, after graduating and entering into the industry, these dreams started to fade, fast. Like most of my peers, not long after graduating I found myself at a dead end with regard to my filmmaking; a dead end that evoked a looming sense of apprehension that comes with the dreaded ‘where do I go next?’ we all ask ourselves at some point in our professional lives. Yet, it felt chronologically unjust to be asking myself this question at the beginning of my career. Mixed with this apprehension at the time was frustration that my first class honours, and the number of significant screen accolades I had won, opened no doors, and offered me no clear path to gaining full-time employment as a writer/director in Australia’s precarious film and television industry.\(^{42}\)

I watched numerous peers actively pursue their hopes of ‘making it big’. Now, nine years later, none of them have yet managed to even come close to this goal. Some continue to ‘suffer’ for their art, working in unskilled jobs on a casual basis, so that they have the time to write film scripts and endless funding application packages, just to get the opportunity to present to administrative film panels, hoping that their script is one of the meagre 20 to 30 feature films that are made in Australia each year.\(^{43}\) Even if they were given the chance to make a feature film, the longevity of their career in the industry does not look promising. A recent article by Western Australia’s Film and Television Institute reveals that:

> across the last thirty years of feature film production in Australia...80% of directors and 83% of writers have managed to make only one film. More
alarming, the percentage of writers and directors who have made three or more films is in single digits.\textsuperscript{34}

While this scenario makes it difficult for all Australian filmmakers, female filmmakers are particularly disadvantaged. As a consequence of the country’s small export market, and little distribution power internationally, most film funding bodies in Australia look for commercially marketable screenplays that have universal appeal, and thereby generally adhere to a dominant patriarchal ideology. Emerging female writer/directors who attempt to make the quantum leap from short to feature length film subsequently face the extra challenge of resisting the effort by funding bodies to modify their narratives to suit these mainstream demands.

After experiencing this unsupportive culture for female filmmaking, in addition to witnessing the proliferation of digital technology, and the distribution and exhibition sites such as Myspace and Youtube, which are increasing the number of self-proclaimed filmmakers, I felt the need to establish a point of difference. I was adamant I would not become another film school statistic and sensed that, despite the four years of screen education behind me, my voice was still too undeveloped to have the impact I wanted it to have in the feature film industry if I was ever given the opportunity. My desire to be knowledgeable and equipped for a long career in film, and to become more honest and defined as a writer/director, saw me enrol in my postgraduate studies in order to pursue my goals.

**Finding Feminism**

Through the process of doing this autoethnography, my work has become significantly influenced and defined by feminism and its emphasis on the embodiment of the senses, subjectivity and multiplicity, which resonates with my preference for experiential
Introduction

learning. Prior to this project however, my view of feminism was not a positive one. I was born in 1977, a time when gender revolution was in the air, but the height of the feminist movement had evolved, flourished, and subsided before I even learnt to speak. I was therefore never directly exposed to its ideology in any form other than its ‘ugly’ representation in the individualist culture of my youth. Like many young women, I was lulled into accepting the pejorative images disseminated by the mass media. To me, feminism was therefore a radical, antiquated movement to do with activism and women’s rights, that was instigated by oppressed housewives and bitter, man-hating lesbians with ‘hairy armpits’ and ‘burnt bras’. This, sadly, was the superficial extent of my knowledge. Although I was grateful to my mother’s generation for contesting and changing society to allow women like myself to live the ‘freedom’ we do today, I had never taken the time to discover exactly what feminists were opposing in their revolt.

In my undergraduate years as a film student in the social egalitarianism of laidback Australia, seemingly without prejudice, I became a naïve young filmmaker. In hindsight, unlike my childhood years, I was unaware that I was still in many ways voiceless in society, as this time the obstacles facing my expression of self were less obvious. I felt that I did not suffer from any obvious gender repression and, consequently, saw no need for politics in my filmmaking. I identified myself as an independent filmmaker, as opposed to categorizing myself specifically as a female filmmaker or, (God forbid), a feminist. As a product of my generation, I inadvertently adopted postfeminism’s problematic ideology of meritocracy, advocating utopian notions similar to those of anti-victim feminism. I believed women had to take responsibility for their individual positions in the world and no longer blame the evils of patriarchy for their discontent. Murphy suggests that my subscription to this ideology derives from young Western women having been immersed in the commercialisation
and social mores of a new age, pop psychology of ‘self-help’ and ‘free agency’, propagated by the mass media and Oprah Winfrey-like “[g]o girl, refuse the role of the victim, you can be anyone you want to be”45 statements. Murphy asserts that these individualistic notions propose that, “[n]o longer is there systemic social injustice; there is only personal psychology”,46 which promises so much but offers little to the global position of women as this conservative new age movement generally, “wip[es] out context, and eras[es] socialisation”.47

Having been brought up in the ‘easy-life’ existence of Australia, I took my liberty for granted. Given the individualistic ethos surrounding me at the time, I was blind to my privileged position as a white, middle-class woman. If I had ever actually been challenged regarding my universalist ideas on womanhood, by, say, being confronted with the ongoing oppressive treatment of women living in misogynist and militant regimes, for whom this notion of individualism is not feasible, or even deadly if acted upon, I would unquestionably have rethought the need for a more compassionate and united politics for women. Hypothetical confrontations aside, statistics might have been more convincing. If it had ever been brought to my attention that, of the top 250 grossing films in Hollywood each year over the past decade, on average only 16% contain leading female protagonists; 6% are directed by women; 10% are written by female screenwriters;48 and that only 6% of Oscar winning writers have been women and no female filmmaker has ever won an Oscar for Directing,49 I would no doubt have questioned the reasons for these inequitable statistics and thought differently about my responsibility and future as a female filmmaker.

The point I want to emphasise is that such critical insights were never demanded of me in my insular existence, and this remarkable imbalance in the industry and its sites of resistance for women were not readily addressed (or even revealed), either during my
screen education, or in the less commercial medium of short film in which I worked. I managed to move through these spaces unaware of my indoctrination and so, like many other precariously complacent young women, became seduced by the media’s postfeminist imagery and its superficial sense of female empowerment. I consumed whatever popular culture fed me (as long as it was fat free), and regurgitated its trendy notion that all women had the ability to achieve anything that they put their minds to. My thinking changed, nevertheless, once I embarked upon this research project.

Initially, when I started this PhD, I set out to investigate how to make personal cinema that challenged an audience. I planned to write a character-centred screenplay with a central female protagonist. I wanted the narrative to offer a subjective insight into the experience of being a woman in the 21st century. I had no idea what a challenging, complex and enlightening task this would turn out to be.

This thesis’s introspective nature, and the demands of its ambitious feature length script, made it obvious to me early on in my candidature that I was struggling to connect with my female identity and agency on anything more than a superficial level. By setting out to write a narrative driven by a female character, I discovered that the weakness of voice I had sensed after completing my honours year seemed to be intrinsically related to my gender. At first, I was unsure what to do about this worrying realisation, and therefore attempted to deny that there was a problem. My feelings of self-doubt were, however, reconfirmed in the initial meeting I had with my supervisor, whose confronting feedback to Float’s first draft made me finally face up to my problem of agency as a woman. Let us return to that moment.
Flashback 2003

It feels like I’ve been sitting here for ages like an obedient student. I have. My pen is ready. I’m listening, wondering, waiting, hanging on every movement you make.

But you, you take your time because you can. You stir your coffee. You wave to a colleague. I, too, try to act nonchalant. I can’t. Come on, say something.

You finally look up. I feel like giving you sarcastic applause. I don’t. You ask me to take notes, ignoring my pen as you begin.

“What I feel about your script is...nothing. What I feel for your characters is...nothing. Your writing is constipated, childish, and idealistic”.

My stomach mimics your grim feedback, right at the gut level. I feel sick, ashamed. This reminds me of when my year one school scripture teacher humiliated me for spelling God back to front. I knew I had but I liked the look of it. Dog. Besides, English was not my mother tongue. Neither is this, it seems.

I write a big NOTHING across the page in spite of you. You don’t seem to notice as you continue.

“There is some potential in your script and its undercurrent of feminist notions, but it’s clouded”.

I cringe at this only compliment. Feminism? I’m not a feminist. I’m not angry. Am I? I’m definitely not oppressed. Am I? I want to write personal, not political, cinema.

You don’t seem to hear me as you calmly drink your coffee. Oh, did I forget to say that out aloud?

“Where are you in these words? They’ve all been written at a distance. You’re pulling the punches. You’re not writing authentically”.

Your self-assurance is getting on my nerves. What do you mean? I’ve worked hard at this script. I’ve honoured all the things that I was taught and now teach my scriptwriting students. It contains a solid three-act structure, well-developed
characters, economical dialogue, and a compelling storyline with a strong
dramatic drive. What more do you want?

You haven’t finished.

“Who is this woman in your script? What are her desires? What are her
limitations, her strengths, her sexual fantasies, her dreams, her fears, and
her contradictions? What are yours?”

I am alone in the safety of my car, sobbing, holding onto my 140 pages of
‘nothing’. I feel constipated, childish and idealistic.

But I’m not crying because of your unwanted psychoanalysis. This goes beyond
you. I’m crying because something in what you said tells a truth. Why couldn’t I
answer that last question?

My identity and postfeminist armour endured several heavy blows in this meeting with
my supervisor. His comments made me come to understand the meaning behind the
feminist adage ‘the personal is political’, by forcing me to recognise the fragility of my
personal freedom as a reel woman. In retrospect, I realise that I was writing the
Zeitgeist of my generation; reflecting the latent sites of resistance facing contemporary
female filmmakers as a collective. My patriarchal conditioning and its pacifying
influence on my sense of self had been exposed, making me relive my childhood
feelings of alienation and silence. I began to seriously question my claims of free
agency, as this notion now just felt like learned lip service - impressive in theory, yet
inadequate in my creative praxis - since I evidently could not internalise this ideology
and engage with a strong sense of personal will in my scriptwriting. Why did I struggle
to write my female character as an active desiring agent? How could a reader feel
‘nothing’ about her and her story? What had happened to my affective storytelling
skills? Why could I not write subjectively or, more importantly, not know something as
fundamental as what I desired?
This was a disconcerting position to find myself in, not only as a writer/director wanting to make personal cinema, but above all, as a woman. Once this crack appeared in my postfeminist façade, I could not hold back the flood of truth that came spilling out, compelling me to remove my individualist blinkers and open my eyes to the fact that on a subconscious level, I felt extremely unconvincing, like a fraud.

A good starting point to the scriptwriting analysis and focus of this thesis is to look at some of the primary themes and problems present in the first draft of *Float*, and the troubling implications that they suggested about my agency at the time.

**The First Draft: Endings and Beginnings**

> How do the specific circumstances in which we write affect what we write? How does what we write affect who we become?  

Laurel Richardson

> In the beginning, there is an end. Don’t be afraid: it’s your death that is dying. Then: all the beginnings.

Helene Cixous

In *Float’s* first draft I found myself writing about identity, language, trauma, death and family, through the story of Hannah, a young writer and English language teacher, recently diagnosed as HIV positive. This diagnosis caused significant conflict in Hannah’s relationships with others, as she attempted to deny her mortality and withdraw into a private world of chaos and self-destruction. In particular, it became a catalyst for her to revisit painful memories regarding her mother’s emotional absence throughout her life. The narrative saw Hannah form a bond with Martha, an elderly German woman in her English language class, who soon became Hannah’s maternal substitute in her time of need.
From a theoretical perspective, the existential underpinnings of *Float’s* first draft reflected a number of personal concerns I was facing in my mid-20s, which evidently found their way into my scriptwriting. Bruno Bettelheim (1976) affirmed that our fictional narratives, “speak to us in the language of symbols representing unconscious content…[as our] inner psychological phenomena are given body in symbolic form”.

Just prior to beginning the first draft of *Float* I had lost someone in my immediate circle through ovarian cancer. In this woman’s final weeks, I found it difficult to think of things to say to her: to find words with which to comfort her. Everything seemed so futile, but she always managed to put me at ease. She told me it was okay to feel uncomfortable around her, and not to be afraid. As the life was drawn out of her body, her mind became more lucid and honest than I had ever known before, as though death was bringing out the potency of her agency, previously subdued by the social decorum of her middle class existence. I would sometimes sit quietly with her, watching her drift in and out of sleep, checking to see that her chest was still rising and falling. After every visit, I would leave her dimly lit bedroom and walk outside, back into the commotion of the world, taking in a deep breath of air in appreciation.

On a wet winter morning, I kissed this woman goodbye for the last time. I was shocked by the stiffness of her skin, which no longer moved to my touch. After her body was taken away I walked outside. The air was fresher than usual that day. I distinctly remember the feeling of it as it hit the back of my throat, and I wondered when my own time would come.

I struggled to integrate this tragic event into my daily consciousness. By witnessing this relative’s slow and painful decline and the sorrow it caused those around her, my outlook on life, my sense of security in the world and the security of my loved ones, felt severely threatened. Sartre (1965) asserted that this awareness of our mortality and the
futility of life results in a sense of psychic nausea. His existentialist conviction echoed Nietzsche’s earlier proclamation that through our gained knowledge of death we are “aware everywhere of the ghastly absurdity of existence” to which “no comfort avails any more”.

My feelings of anxiety and hopelessness regarding our fragile existence manifested itself in the early version of the screenplay. Overwhelmingly Float was filled with representations of endings and death: death of identity, death of individuality, death of sexuality, death of family, and physical death, as the fictional characters played out my existentialist dilemma. I see my feelings of alienation and chaos as a young woman, as a female filmmaker, and as a sexual being capable of giving life, reflected in the script’s early undertones as I searched for a deeper meaning for my existence. The choice to explore Float’s themes primarily through a mother/daughter relationship suggests that I must have sensed my ambivalence toward my female identity, the disengagement I had with the (m)other in me. Like Hannah, it seems I too was struggling with my identity; using this fictional narrative to express the tension I experienced in my own body, as well as my crippling fear of our becoming non-entities through death. Perhaps Hannah was the woman inside me asking to not be denied or killed off. Perhaps she was calling for me to finally face my inactivity; the negative association I had formed with my femaleness, and my consequent neglect of the actual fullness of life as a woman.

The decision to use an immigrant language school as the primary location of the screenplay’s first draft not only echoed my childhood migratory experience, but also signified my (Hannah’s) conscious desire for a voice with which to express my (her) feelings of exile as a woman and my (her) existentialist anxiety regarding our transient position in the world. All the other locations of the film, for that matter, were places of limbo and transit, filled with displaced individuals in new and traumatic circumstances,
Jung (1970) maintained that, “[d]eath is the end of empirical man [sic] and the goal of spiritual man”.

Taking this on board, it appears that through Hannah’s terminal illness and these transitional locations I desired a spiritual transformation, using the notion of death and diaspora as metaphorical themes for my search for self-actualisation and truth. This journey was initially impeded, however, by the fact that my early scriptwriting was largely superficial. It seems that I was only prepared to pick lightly at the tough skin of these salient topics to avoid giving myself a permanent scar. I was not equipped to step out of my comfort zone and commit to writing consciously and vulnerably about this challenging reality of human existence that had come to inhabit my psyche.

Jung attested that through various forms of self-denial, we try to protect ourselves from the trauma that comes with acknowledging the nothingness, the absurdity of our existence, “thus preventing ourselves from becoming conscious of the self and preparing for death”. Similar to Nietzsche’s theory on the suppression of the will-to-power, which he termed ‘bad conscience’, Sartre called this inhibition of agency acting in ‘bad faith’, in that, by denying death, we ultimately deny ourselves the richness of life and our psychic freedom. In bad faith we live inauthentically: we behave like an inert object, as if we are solely controlled by external forces, and fail to take up the responsibility to make choices as free-willed agents, since this acknowledgment of our autonomy reinforces the daunting fact that our futures are non-determined and in many ways, of our own doing.

Looking back, during the writing of Float’s first draft I acted in bad faith. I wrote in a self-protective mode, most poignantly highlighted by my supervisor's comment that he felt “nothing” regarding this initial script and its characters. I can see my intention to have Hannah as the main protagonist in this early version. She is screaming out to be
heard, yet every technique of plot, structure, narration, and character that I incorporated in my scriptwriting methodology gagged her, working against her centralisation and voice. One of the script’s major problems was that it contained numerous plotlines involving the individual stories of Martha, and some of Hannah’s other students, who shared her feelings of displacement. These supporting characters were given almost equal weighting with Hannah in the narrative, which left little possibility for her character elaboration. I believe that this issue occurred not only because I was intimidated by the idea of attempting to write about death through Hannah’s character but also because I was intimidated by the prospect of writing a feature length screenplay that was primarily sustained by a woman. I flirted with the idea of writing Hannah as a fearless protagonist. Yet, as I began to write her, I became increasingly uncomfortable with the confronting silence and space around her. I tried to fill these gaps with other (male) characters and plotlines, and consequently wrote more of an ensemble piece that resulted in Hannah’s characterisation being diluted.

Another issue with the first draft related to its representation of female subjectivity, which was markedly repressed and one-dimensional. The women of Float - Hannah, her mother (Mrs Brannigan), and Martha - were polarised and stereotypical, possessing a limited number of characteristics from either end of the continuum of femininity, and failing to represent the complexity and diversity of the female condition. Hannah was a virtuous victim: insecure and self-effacing. Mrs Brannigan symbolised the bad mother: selfish and unsympathetic; and Martha represented Mrs Brannigan’s idealistic shadow character: nurturing and altruistic. Moreover, unlike their male counterparts, I moralised about these women and their desires, resulting in all three female characters completely lacking sexual agency. It was as though I was hesitant to let reel woman move, to allow
her to step out of the confined space of femininity. In particular, my choice to make Hannah HIV positive annihilated any possibility of her sexual emancipation.

Looking to my undergraduate short films for some direction, I was surprised to discover that I had only ever written leading male characters, and that it seemed to feel more ‘natural’ for me to do so, as if they were old friends or lovers. Woman, on the other hand, was a stranger to me. Around her I felt inexperienced; like a blushing teenager. It seems that I was afraid of where female desire may lead me, so I resisted its pull. I therefore produced a didactic and lifeless text, in which I rendered myself, Hannah, and the other female protagonists silent as sexual beings. Why, given the ubiquity and explicitness of sex in our media-driven society, did I find it so difficult to write erotic material from a female perspective? Why did this feel like foreign, or even forbidden, territory?

Psychoanalytical theory’s claims that an individual’s anxieties regarding sexuality often mask a fear of death, offers one possible explanation. The French have long claimed that sex and death are deeply connected, going so far as to call the experience of an orgasm ‘la petite morte’ (the little death), since this event involves an expenditure and depletion of life force, and a momentary synthesis between our mental and physical consciousness that induces a kind of spiritual transcendence. Today, this association between sex and death is especially the case for women, given that random female murders in Western society are generally motivated by, or linked to, a sexual act, and graphically recreated in most high-rating criminal television dramas and films that enter our living rooms on a nightly basis. We are repeatedly exposed to this equation of female sexuality with death. Film critic and cultural theorist B. Ruby Rich (1998) acknowledges that “the link for women between sexuality and danger…is a real one...[and is] both psychic and physical”. Interestingly, French poststructuralist
Helene Cixous (1993) directly associates writing with the body, sexuality, and death, proclaiming that “[w]riting is learning to die. It’s learning not to be afraid, in other words to live at the extremity of life, which is what the dead, death, give us”.

My difficulty writing about women’s sexuality in these early script stages could very possibly have been heightened due to my close proximity to death at the time. It appears that I was unable to embrace the freedom that death’s limit can give us in life. For this reason my writing was rather contrived and perfunctory, as I simply followed mainstream storytelling conventions, which inadvertently repressed female desire. I wrote Hannah with detachment as though she were an object devoid of desire. She comprised a collection of safe and empty words in which I was absent. Sartre wrote that we make objects of others and of ourselves in an attempt to control the uncertainty of life and the ever-changing nature of humanity. He claimed that making something into an object is to deprive it of life (and death); it is our attempt to keep ourselves ‘safe’.

While I recognise that this death-sex connection was no doubt part of the reason for the inactive presentation of woman in Float’s initial draft, at the time I sensed that there were more complex personal and cultural reasons behind my self-objectification and self-censorship as an agenic being, which deeply concerned me. Canadian female filmmaker Paule Baillargeon suggests that the problem I encountered was related to the fact that:

women have never had the luxury to really desire. They were told what to desire. They were forced for so many hundreds and thousands of years. All these things are inside us. It’s a legacy.

Although I did not want to face this daunting and complex situation, when I received my supervisor’s feedback I could no longer continue to feign ignorance. Following my initial anger and resistance towards him, his comments eventually made me rethink my
position, and became the catalyst for a critical change of direction in my research and filmmaking path, and my life in general, as they sent me off in search for answers.

I decided to refine my thesis’s area of focus as I realised that before I could ever write personal cinema, before I could authentically articulate my self in my work and warrant any possibility of moving beyond this impasse I had reached in my writing, I needed to address this notion of the ‘nothing’ of female agency in my generation: a phenomenon I have not only experienced personally but have also witnessed in other women in my life.\(^2\)\(^2\) I wanted to investigate my ambivalence towards my female identity: to try to understand my poverty of self-determined desire and overcome my great fear of death.

Why was I writing woman with such a red pen? Why did I feel so compelled to censor and/or ‘kill’ her (me)?

This is what brought me to autoethnography, which became a change of methodological focus that turned out to be a much more painful and rewarding research process than I could ever have imagined. Everything broadly remained as planned, but the personal revelations associated to \textit{Float}'s first draft gave outward expression and urgency to, an internal process that profoundly altered the aims of my earlier research. In order to understand my problematic more comprehensively and exercise a stronger agency in \textit{Float}'s rewrites, it was necessary for me to shift to a theoretical examination as a backdrop to my life experiences. Autoethnographer Christine E. Kiesinger (2002) affirms that:

> When our stories break down or no longer serve us well, it is imperative that we examine the quality of the stories we are telling and actively reinvent our accounts in ways that permit us to live more fulfilling lives.\(^2\)\(^3\)

She calls this agenic, autoethnographical process of reinventing our selves, \textit{narrative reframing}, which involves “contextualizing our stories within the framework of a larger
picture”, so as to remain open to the possibility that there might not be anything ‘wrong’ with us, per se, as individuals, “but rather something very wrong with the dynamics that dominate the communicative system” within which we operate: in the case of this project, the wider community and the discourse of film.

Narrative reframing required me to use my mutually informative positions as a female filmmaker; film tutor and lecturer; spectator and student to reflect on the broader ethnographical context of female subjectivity and agency in film. I wanted to analyse my gender construction, and the complex relationship between my scriptwriting praxis, and the personal, social and historical context within which it is produced. I therefore set out to deconstruct my lived experience as a reel woman: to investigate my familial, educative, and pedagogical history and culture, and their conditioning of my agency, so as to ascertain whether I could write a different future for myself, and for Hannah. Feminist psychologists Polly Young-Eisendrath and Florence Wiedemann (1987) advocate this autoethnographic approach, suggesting that:

the experience of a relatively coherent female self is an ongoing project of consciousness building that encompasses a woman’s personal history and the history of female identity in her society.

Rich similarly validates this methodology in female filmmakers’ pursuit of agency, asserting that, “[w]e need to begin analysing our own films, but first it is necessary to learn to speak in our own name”.

**Pulling Focus**

This project presents matters of personal and professional importance for reel women. Through both my praxis and pedagogy, I have come to learn more about the needs of female filmmakers who often experience considerable alienation in university film courses and the filmmaking industry, which, in their design, are still intrinsically
gendered institutions, encoded with phallocentric signification that rejects a woman’s specificity and approach to knowledge. Unfortunately, my story is not unique. I regularly witness the same troubling agency and passivity in many of my female students, who seem to take on the persona of honorary men in their filmmaking, in which they inadvertently repeat normative representations of femininity that privilege patriarchal desire and render them absent as women. My research therefore has important implications for other women in film. To the best of my knowledge, there is no significant body of work that directly addresses the topic of this research. Film theorist Lisa French (2007) confirms that:

> discussions of female authorship in the cinema have been “surprisingly sparse”…particularly in regard to how the female author’s sex and gender might be expressed in, or influence, her films.  

Additionally, I feel that most of the prior attempts to analyse female agency in film have been somewhat compromised because of the politics of representation involved. A number of reasons can be suggested for this and these reasons deserve elaboration in this context.

Firstly, central writings on reel woman are often politicised interpretations of an outsider-looking-in. Not only is dominant film literature generally written by male authors who mostly adopt phallocentric models of analysis that, in their psychoanalytical construction, pathologise women, but moreover, these authors generally also lack a true first-hand understanding of filmmaking praxis. This discourse therefore presents an incongruent position of authority that Rich equates to a wine connoisseur who has “never seen a vineyard”. Subscribing to Bertolt Brecht’s statement in which he described the exile as “the ultimate dialectician in that the exile lives the tension of two different cultures”, Rich identifies the female filmmaker as an “inevitable dialectician” as she participates in a construction that equally denies her
existence. In light of this, I propose that this thesis, written from my first hand experience as a reel woman, offers an original contribution to the field.

Secondly, there is the issue of the exclusivity of existing film scholarship’s theoretical framework, which mainly focuses on commercial cinema. This insufficient research into independent film presents a problematic impression of female subjectivity and agency due to the capitalist agenda at play in the commercial medium, which prevents the active expression of reel woman’s voice. To clarify the reasons for this it is necessary to briefly outline the differing ideological backgrounds of the mainstream and independent filmmaking industries that give rise to a significant variation in authorship and scriptwriting praxis.

Film production today could be said to fall into two distinct, but by no means exclusive, categories: artisanal or capitalist. In the business of commercial movie making, films generally tend to be commissioned works focussed on financial gain and financed and governed by large studios mostly managed by men. Mainstream scriptwriters work under the pressures of film executives who, for the most part, have little to no understanding of the creative process, but possess a thorough knowledge of what will gross well at the box office. They understand that mainstream cinema-going audiences go to the movies for escapism and entertainment and want this experience to be pleasurable. Commercial scriptwriters are therefore generally employed to produce plot-based narratives that are familiar and appealing to mass culture. Put simply, film is treated as a commercial product, and filmmaking, a moneymaking business. In such a mass-culturally targeted climate, creative license and personal stories (particularly those by women) are rare, if not non-existent. The screenwriter is normalised and could be anyone as “imitating everyone [s/he] stands effaced and is an ideal, invisible agent that reproduces, without comment, events that have happened”.83
In contrast, with its limited distribution, resources and income, independent cinema attracts more intimate expressions and ‘labours of love’. Independent filmmakers work against the capitalist odds to exert creative control over their mostly character-centred scripts and bring their unique (and predominantly marginalised) stories and characters to the screen. Film in this milieu is considered a personal and artistic expression to provoke audience reflection. Its narrational style gives the impression that a particular “intelligence outside the film’s world is pointing out something about the events we see”, as though the filmmaker “stands between us and the events and consciously interprets them”. The majority of female writers/directors today work in independent cinema. The medium therefore provides an abundance of representations critical to informing female subjectivity and agency in film scholarship.

Film feminist research, at times, also seems to suffer from a restricted focus. The current feminist literature that does exist regarding independent female filmmakers generally tends to fall back on discussing reel women and landmark films of the 1970s and early 1980s. It is deleterious for film feminists to continue to focus so heavily on the ‘good old days’ when women’s film culture was thriving, because this can unwittingly perpetuate the denial of today’s female filmmakers and their works. Not only does this omission of contemporary feminist films deny the important maverick voices of my generation, and thereby devalue the pertinence of feminism to our modern lives, it also tends to work against the establishment of an intergenerational dialogue between filmic women and the possibility for a future trajectory of female filmmaking. It is critical to promote this evolution in film culture. In this thesis, I therefore examine some of the underrepresented female-made films of the late twentieth century to today, drawing closely on analyses of Float’s feature film script for significant parallels. By
helping to fill this thematic gap in existing scholarship, I hope to unveil new horizons for the contemporary independent female filmmaker.

Finally, although I do not wish to overlook the vital role that film feminist criticism has played in improving the culture of cinema for women, a further limitation of general writing in the field lies in its usefulness to female filmmakers today. The majority of this literature continues to concentrate on the political and theoretical injustices against reel woman (of the 1970s and 80s), yet seems to offer little to serve a progressive praxis for emerging filmmakers like myself, who want to move beyond this rhetoric and understand how to deterritorialise androcentric constructions in our films. Film theorist Sue Thornham (2001) acknowledges that:

[w]hat is missing in these accounts is a theoretical framework capable of both explaining the persistence and power of these representations in structuring women’s sense of identity and seeing them as culturally constructed and thus open to change.86

This creative project pursues Thornham’s call for a pressing need for new feminist research to “find ways of reorganising film’s visual and narrative structures if it is to genuinely challenge mainstream representations”.87 I push beyond simply analysing reel woman’s current positioning, and actively experiment with ways in which to overcome this positioning in my scriptwriting practice. I test out various feminist theories and techniques of resistance, in the hope of moving from my alienation and my ‘nothing’, to finding female specificity and agency.

Borrowing Bochner’s words, it is my hope that the evocative and vulnerable design of this thesis sees it “offer lessons for further conversation rather than undebatable conclusions; and to substitute the companionship of intimate detail for the loneliness of abstract facts”.88 Given the, at times, ‘open’ nature of this text, I condense Richardson’s
informative evaluation techniques on CAP ethnography\textsuperscript{89} to suggest some of the possible criteria for assessing this autoethnographic thesis:

1. Substantive contribution: Does this project contribute to the understanding of social life with new perspectives and ethical considerations?
2. Aesthetic merit: Is it successful aesthetically in its form, content, complexity and emotional resonance?
3. Reflexivity: Does it describe how I came to write this text, how the information was gathered, and how my subjectivity was both a producer and a product of this text? Is it self-critical and accountable; providing adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view?
4. Impact: Does this work affect the reader emotionally? Is it thought provoking: generating new questions, and promoting dialogue, empathy and action?
5. Expression of reality: Does it demonstrate an embodied sense of lived experience? Is it an honest and reliable account of my understandings as a cultural and social individual? Does it offer an active journey of transformation to some communicated truth about my self, and my institutional and societal contexts?

It is out of the scope of this thesis to provide infrastructural solutions to reel women’s situation. That is another important subject and one that requires separate consideration in the future. However, for this research project to make a significant contribution to the field, I aim to accomplish three primary things.

Firstly, through demystifying my lived experience as an emerging female filmmaker writing my first feature length screenplay, I set out to reveal some of the challenging truths of reel women’s contemporary situation, with an intention to broaden the scope of understanding regarding the independent female filmmaker today. Secondly, by exposing some of the main sites of resistance facing female filmmakers and characters today, I hope to assist film scholars, teachers and industry practitioners to recognise the critical need for more inclusive modes of practice - across the film industry, discourse
and pedagogy - that are cognisant and respectful of women’s difference. Thirdly, I aim to provide other aspirant writer/directors with an insight into how female identity construction may be negotiated and resisted on both a diegetic (in the internal world of the film) and non-diegetic (in the external world of the film) level. I seek to encourage them to reflect critically on their own lives and praxis, and honour their difference to mainstream conventions by actively living by their own codes of reference. It is my hope that this project therefore inspires these female filmmakers to tell their personal stories, so as to strengthen the presence of the female voice in contemporary cinema, and re-energise a feminist film culture pertinent to the 21st century.

Now to preview the writing that follows. The thesis is divided into three parts: parts one and two form the exegesis, which sets out the parameters of my project, and part three consists of the feature length screenplay, *Float*. Using this tiered structure, I analyse female subjectivity and agency on three interdependent levels. These comprise the historical, political and philosophical background to woman’s treatment both behind, and in front of, the camera; my lived experiences as an emerging writer/director as I write *Float*; and my representation of the screenplay’s central female character.

To try to unravel some of the possible reasons for my difficulty writing my-self-as-active-woman in my scriptwriting, and to uncover the possible reasons for the minor presence of female agency in film today, in part one I explore the broader situation of female subjectivity and agency in, and on, screen since the inception of cinema. I investigate the historical and contemporary contexts and debates surrounding woman’s representation in dominant film and philosophical discourse. I shed some light on the inherent power dynamics in the film industry, discourse and pedagogy, by drawing on my experiences as a reel woman: as a film student, an academic, and most significantly,
as the scriptwriter of Float; and outline how other female filmmakers have variously addressed these obstacles facing women’s agency.

In part two, I continue to examine my authorial agency as the writer of Float, and detail the journey of the screenplay itself. I document the regular meetings and discussions I had with my supervisor regarding the script, and how these interactions with him - sometimes harmonious, often discordant - led me to critically understand and define my intentions for the screenplay. I describe and analyse my methodology and rationale for various draft stages of Float, and reveal my challenging experience of trauma during this rewriting process, which critically impacted my understanding of subjectivity and agency. Part two then explains how, in an attempt to resist and subvert my social programming and overcome this trauma, I used the insights gained from my research findings, most particularly with regard to a number of forms of subjectivity and writing resistance, to try to transgress limiting identity discourses in the final draft of Float and its representation of Hannah.

Part three, the screenplay Float, is a meta-narrative in which I reveal my research discoveries in a diegesis, and use the character of Hannah to conduct a dramatic experiment that tests the limits and possibilities of female identity and agency. The screenplay acts as “an agent of self-understanding and ethical discussion” regarding the complexities of be(com)ing reel woman today, and questions whether Hannah and I can perform as active agents of our own sovereignty. Although Float is fictional, it in part tells the story of a number of significant people and events in my life, which I have reframed through composite characters and blurring factual details with poetic licence. In it, I represent, imaginatively and evocatively, the ‘larger picture’ of my subjective experiences, employing the screen elements of structure, characterisation, point of view, voice-over, metaphor and subtext to present my argument.
I cannot be certain whether this thesis successfully represents my transformation from a passive state to an active one. I guess that is up to you, the reader, to decide, as this agenic shift requires an effective undoing of my social conditioning and the translation and actualisation of an internalised desire that, in many ways, is beyond my immediate comprehension. Issues of my own transformation aside, a further challenge in my search for a female individuation and agency is to not fall into reinforcing individualistic notions that work against the communal good of other reel women. In using a personal lens, I therefore also actively attempt to help strengthen the voice of the contemporary female filmmaker, and that of the female characters she writes.
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Notes

1 Part of this introduction was presented as a paper at the Australian and International Feminisms Conference, 12-14 December 2004, Boston University, Sydney Campus.
6 These forms include animation, computer-based gaming, and Web2 user-generated forums such as Youtube, Myspace, and Facebook.
8 Ibid, 924.
10 This is a French poststructuralist term, used to describe the fluid and continuous process of subjectivity, first taken up by Julia Kristeva. 1977. *Polylogue*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 55-106.
16 Ibid, 14.
18 Bochner and Ellis. Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject, 739.
22 Saying that, however, no simple line can be drawn between mainstream and independent cinema today. Independent film has become rather difficult to define as the title is now awarded to a large array of works that possess multiple characteristics, and is sometimes even used for films that have been commercially financed. Moreover, there have also been many progressive, groundbreaking, character-centred mainstream films that subvert the traditional Hollywood canon. Nevertheless, while I do not wish to generalise about either type of cinema, for the sake of theoretical discussion, henceforth I will use the terms, ‘mainstream/commercial’ and ‘independent/personal’, to represent opposite ends of the film continuum.
25 Bochner and Ellis. Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject, 744
26 This is a Kristevean concept that relates to our alterity: the repressed unconscious other that inhabits our psyche and often reveals itself in artistic endeavours. See Julia Kristeva. 2002. *Strangers to Ourselves in The Portable Kristeva*, edited by Kelly Oliver. New York: Columbia University Press.


Diana Fuss. 1989. Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference. New York: Routledge, 2, defines essentialism as “a belief in true essence – that which is most irreducible, unchanging, and therefore constitutive of a given person or thing”. She continues that in feminist theory essentialism can be read “in the accounts of universal female oppression, the assumption of a totalizing symbolic system which subjugates all women everywhere, throughout history and across cultures”.


As I will discuss in chapter two, the Australian film industry has at times prospered with local and international success, and, at other times, experienced great slumps of inertia, particularly between 1940–1969 when there were almost no feature films made in the country. Film critic David Stratton (1990) has referred to this local industry as one of “boom and bust” given its fluctuating and unstable nature.


Ibid, 51.

Ibid, 27.


Although I did not realise it at the time, this was a word that would follow me throughout this research project.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


60 These locations included a church, a graveyard, a hospital, a housing commission, a car, a bar, a rehabilitation clinic, and the ocean.
62 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
67 This includes popular American television series such as *Crime Scene Investigation* (2001), *Law and Order* (1990), *Criminal Minds* (2005), *Cold Case* (2003), and *Dexter* (2006).
72 These women include my grandmother, my mother, my two sisters, my close friends and my female film students.
74 Ibid, 108.
81 Ibid, 60.
88 Bochner and Ellis. *Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject*, 744.
89 Richardson. Writing: A Method of Inquiry, 937.
90 Bochner and Ellis. *Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject*, 748.
91 Richardson writes that autoethnographies strive for “honesty, revelation, the “larger picture””. Richardson. Writing: A Method of Inquiry, 931.
Part One
Contextualising *Float*’s First Draft

In this first section of the thesis, comprising of chapters one, two, and three, I present the initial stage of my process of narrative reframing. In the hope of gaining a greater perspective on my subjective experience, and acquiring a good leverage on the facts surrounding reel woman today, I temporarily suspend my autoethnographic voice in the first two chapters, and take up a more objective position, in which I focus on gathering information to contextualise and inform my scriptwriting dilemma. The last chapter in this section returns to a more personalised examination as I begin to integrate these findings into my self-reflexive analysis.

Chapter one traces woman’s historical representation and status in the twentieth century celluloid landscape. It provides a summary of the political, theoretical, and philosophical motivations behind the feminist film movement, and outlines its impact on the treatment of reel woman, both behind, and in front of, the camera. It would be inordinately difficult to examine this trajectory without first briefly discussing the independent film movement that emerged in post World War II Europe, as this counter-cinema encouraged the participation of disenfranchised subjects in film, and thereby helped to engender the film feminist revolution. The movement also had a significant influence on the aesthetics of feminist cinema, and subsequently enables us to understand its subversive techniques more comprehensively. Ironically, while the contextual focus of my thesis is on female writer/directors, I begin my analysis in chapter one with a brief look at a number of male filmmakers. I do so because in order to set the scene for the arrival of feminist cinema and the surfacing of independent reel woman, I suggest it is helpful to first understand the political agency driving the pioneer filmmakers of the independent film movement, who
were all men. I conclude the chapter by outlining feminist cinema’s primary trends and techniques of resistance, which are experimented with throughout the exegesis and the screenplay.

Chapter two moves my contextual research into a contemporary setting. It identifies a number of the obstacles that have faced reel woman from the late twentieth century to today, including capitalism, commercialised sexism, psychoanalysis, postfeminism, and the dichotomising and commodification of woman in popular imagery. I reveal how, through the normalisation of these sites of resistance, many female filmmakers, as women, have come to internalise feelings of inadequacy, which in turn inhibits their gendered representations on screen. In this analysis I set out to debunk the justifications behind women’s sites of resistance, and to question the possibility of female filmmakers and their female characters overcoming limiting discourses of identity.

In chapter three, I focus specifically on the ways in which female compliance and alienation is enforced in the film industry, and (re)constituted in film discourse and scholarship. I expose how female filmmakers, who make films that attempt to radically redefine the parameters of traditional femininity, are unjustly ghettoised through incongruent censorship, and forced into independent or underground distribution. To demonstrate the negative impact of more subtle forms of female censorship in film culture and scholarship, I use a self-reflexive methodology that enables me to deconstruct my educative and pedagogical experiences, and consider the influencing factors on my identity as a filmmaker. The important points pertaining to the core of my argument come together in a disconcerting, but painfully typical, demonstration of the issues that I outline as I present a case study of a film made by a group of female students from the university
where I teach. Not only the troubling film itself, but the thinking and counter-arguments of those students defending their work, as well as the views of other people at the public screening of the film, exemplify, in the paucity of the debate, just how little we have really come to grips with the situation of woman’s subjectivity and agency in film, and how barren discourse on the matter is.
Chapter One

Skirting the Margins: Female Subjectivity and Agency in 20th Century Cinema

[I]n order for woman to reach the place where she takes pleasure as woman, a long detour by way of analysis of the various systems of oppression brought to bear upon her is assuredly necessary.¹

Luce Irigaray

During the twentieth century, mainstream cinema arguably developed into the most powerful and popular medium of our time. Today, it remains a critical form of cultural identification that embodies and (re)creates pervasive gender myths. Its imagery acts as a mediating principle in western culture’s visioning of human agency and the Self, and its representations (re)organise the identity politics and power structures of society.² Film theorist Richard Dyer (2002) confirms that mainstream images “have real consequences for real people…[they] delimit and enable what people can be in any given society”,³ since “how social groups are treated in cultural representation is part and parcel of how they are treated in life”.⁴

This is a troubling notion for women, given that female filmmakers have historically occupied a tenuous position of power in the commercial industry. The few reel women who were exceptions to the exclusive male canon of early cinema, yet still continue to be disregarded by most film historians, include Lottie Lyell, Ida Lupino, Germaine Dulac, Dorothy Azner, and Maya Deren.⁵ While notable filmmakers, these women’s films reflected the ideology of their time and were therefore “not feminist in our contemporary sense”.⁶ They consequently did little to challenge the growing androcentric imagery of woman on screen. More recently, the contemporary works of Hollywood filmmakers Mimi Leder (Deep Impact (1998), The Peacemaker (1997)), Nora Ephron (Sleepless in Seattle (1993), You’ve Got Mail (1998)), Nancy Meyers (The Holiday (2006), Something’s Gotta Give (2003)), and even the more subversive...

Given this tendency in mainstream female filmmaking, a male perspective and agency has consequently come to dominate popular depictions of female subjectivity and agency in Hollywood, which, as I will discuss in chapter two, tend to be derogatory and/or purely decorative: or as Dyer bluntly summarises, “a relentless parade of insults”.

It is not only female under-representation in the mainstream industry that has cultivated this censorious portrayal of woman, but also the conservative three-act structure traditionally employed in popular cinema. A rudimentary explanation of this storytelling construction will help to clarify my argument. Canonised in Syd Field’s book *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* (1979), this linear narrative structure comprises a beginning (act one), middle (act two) and end (act three). In act one, we are introduced to our leading protagonist and witness her/him in some sort of conflict that sets the plot into action. This conflict generally involves a dilemma of normative morality, which poses a dramatic ‘question’ for the audience that provokes their desire to have this question answered by the film’s denouement. Act two contains the unravelling of the plot and the confrontation of this conflict by the lead character, who erroneously attempts to deal with her/his moral dilemma. In this act, the audience is ‘ahead’ of the character, watching them stumble and make mistakes. Act three involves the character eventually resolving the conflict by recognising her/his wrongdoings and, in doing so, gaining redemption through her/his restoration of normative morality. This, in turn, provides a catharsis for the audience.
The problem this didactic structure presents for women, is that it propagates the Enlightenment notion of a universal subjectivity, based on free will and reason, which neutralises the power structures of society (and film) and repudiates the influence of social positioning on our opportunity for agency: discounting “the particular historical, social, political, economic, and familial circumstances that also condition fate”.¹¹ This Cartesian model of subjectivity is fatally limiting to reel women since it derives out of a bourgeois, white, male referent that establishes a mind/body duality, which gives precedence to the former entity. Fuss affirms that in such a hierarchical paradigm, man is conventionally aligned with the (active) mind and thought, whereas, due to her reproductive capabilities, woman is limited solely to her (passive) body and drives.¹² Given commercial cinema’s assumption of this universal subjectivity, female characters, who do not possess the privileged attributes of traditional masculinity, are not generally agents in the narrative, and consequently hold little authority on mainstream screen.

Moreover, the three-act’s restorative final act fixes female characters (and spectators) into a continuity of subjectivity by enforcing their reinstatement as an ‘acceptable’ semblance of femininity. Screenwriting theorists Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush (2002) concede that this narrative construction seemingly offers a female character the freedom to transgress social conventions, yet only permits her to do so without endangering the dominant power structures of male entitlement:

> It is as if the character is running away from her history, her background, and her circumstances with a rubber band tied to her waist. The character doesn’t see the rubber band, but we do. We wait for the band to be stretched to its limit and snap her back.¹³

Through its omniscient consciousness, which seeks to efface the presence of a specific narrator, the three-act structure normalises female passivity and absolves any specific individual of responsibility for the inherent phallocentricism within mainstream
cinema. Dyer confirms that power in contemporary imagery “habitually passes itself off as embodied in the normal as opposed to the superior”. This latent form of indoctrination in popular film seduces an audience into accepting inhibited and disparaging representations of woman, which perpetuates female subordination in society.

The emergence of independent film during the mid twentieth century significantly altered the landscape of cinema and woman’s status within it, by contesting this privileging of the unified subject in popular film, and inspiring marginalised individuals to use the medium as a tool of agency. Issues relating to agency and to subjectivity resistance were key to the ideological premise behind independent cinema, which provided an alternative site for disenfranchised voices to challenge the mainstream Hollywood canon.

The Rise of the Independent Filmmaker’s Voice

The independent film movement’s early foundations were shaped by the philosophical and political advancements made in the theoretical continuum of subjectivity during the twentieth century, through such discourses as psychoanalysis, existentialism, and modernism. The later theoretical influx of postmodernism, poststructuralism and feminism continued to inform this progressive cinema and its contemporary offshoots. Although differing in theoretical orientation and ideas regarding the primary factor constituting our sense of selfhood, these schools of thought all undermine the Cartesian subject by recognising the overdetermined condition of human nature, and the influence of the body and social discourses of power on subject formation and agency. By exposing the constructed nature of subjectivity and its consequent changeability, these theories helped inspire filmmakers to emancipate subordinated subjects from their
minor positioning in mainstream representations. The materialisation of alternative subjectivities during the postwar period, along with the growing recognition of film’s influential power on the psyche of society, saw a schism occur in the film industry, as many European filmmakers began to challenge the conventions of mainstream cinema and contest the monopoly that Hollywood had over the international film industry. This political dissidence eventually led to the rise of independent film.

Early independent filmmakers from the Italian Neorealist movement (1945-1952) and the French New Wave movement (1958-1964) contended that Hollywood’s narrative film is an apparatus of capitalism that breeds passive audiences by manipulating what spectators think and feel through its employment of mesmerising, dream-like qualities, generic storytelling conventions, and emotive techniques of identification. Having recently surfaced from over twenty years of Fascist rule, Italian filmmakers such as Vittorio de Sica, Roberto Rossellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, Federico Fellini and Cesare Zavattini were particularly distrustful of Hollywood’s regimenting ideological mechanisms and distribution control, claiming that this cinema cajoles an audience into accepting a parochial, bourgeois (American) view of the world that constructs a monolithic model of subjectivity.

French film critics of the influential film magazine Cahiers du cinéma (1951), among them Andre Bazin, Alexandre Astruc, Claude Chabrol, Jean-Luc Godard and Francois Truffaut, most of whom eventually became French New Wave filmmakers, equally objected to classical narrative cinema. While admirers of the spectacle of commercial Hollywood film, they contended that by aiming for mass appeal and financial gain, its standardised studio system of filmmaking generally (re)produces normative thinking. In his essay The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Camera-Stylo (1948), often abbreviated to ‘the camera-pen’, Astruc announced that a filmmaker should not be
inhibited by the unimaginative limits of conventional filmmaking, but instead could make a film with the same flexibility and intimacy as a writer when s/he writes.\textsuperscript{21} In his critique of traditional French cinema and the industrial process of Hollywood film, Truffaut likewise argued that a director should not give in to mediocrity by merely putting the ‘frames around the screenplay’\textsuperscript{22} adaptation of classic novels, plays, and/or scripts written by other people, as was the status quo within the studio system at the time. He was adamant that directors must express an idiosyncratic vision of the world by embracing independent authorship and telling their own stories on screen.\textsuperscript{23}

Through the culture of these writings, the authors of \textit{Cahiers du cinema} developed the theory of the auteur: a title they awarded to a selection of directors who wrote their own scripts and whose films possessed a distinct personal style. This list of independent writer/directors included the likes of De Sica, Rossellini, Antonioni, Chabrol, Fellini, Godard, Truffaut, and Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman. Auteurism transformed the culture of cinema by recognising the director over the producer, playwright and/or studio, as being the author of a film, thereby, arguably, democratising the landscape of cinema. However, as I will examine shortly, this view has been widely contested, considering that the title ‘auteur’ was, ironically, solely reserved for white, male filmmakers.

Auteur filmmakers used film as a polemical tool. They included subversive tracts in their works, which expressed a patent anti-establishment message and embodied a strong element of subjectivity resistance, both in its style of narration, and its representation of character. Creative writer Hazel Smith explains that:

\begin{quote}
[n]arration determines the degree of involvement and ideological investment of the narrator; the distance or nearness to the material, and the degree of empathy and control.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}
In auteur cinema, narration and agency were deeply interconnected and transparent. This personal cinema was “largely about voice”, as it included a strong degree of self-reflexivity that used the film’s form to make a statement on its content.

Following the theories of Brecht, who saw art as a political discourse that should involve an audience intellectually rather than emotionally, most auteur filmmakers denied an audience the Aristotelian-style intoxication and sentiment of mainstream cinema. Adopting an anti-illusionist stance in their films, they drew attention to the ‘strings being pulled’ in the production, including distancing techniques to alienate an audience from the normative conventions of interpretation and identification used in Hollywood film. For example, monumental films such as De Sica’s *The Bicycle Thief* (1948) and *Umberto D* (1952); Fellini’s *La Strada* (1954), *Le Notti di Cabiria* (1957) and *8½* (1963); Truffaut’s *The 400 Blows* (1959); Rosellini’s *Rome, Open City* (1945) and *Paisa* (1946); Chabrol’s *Le Beau Serge* (1958); Bergman’s *The Seventh Seal* (1957) and *Wild Strawberries* (1957); Godard’s *Breathless* (1960) *Vivre sa Vie* (1962), and *Week-end* (1967)), and Antonioni’s *Il Grido* (1957) and *L'Avventura* (1960) commonly used disjunctive editing, elliptical narratives, confronting performance styles, direct address, long takes, arresting mise-en-scene, and startling diegetic and non-diegetic soundtracks to break the suspension of disbelief for an audience; to go against the grain of Hollywood cinema’s ‘faceless’ storyteller by giving the impression that there is a “self-conscious narrator organizing the material”. Godard in particular was fascinated with the conventions of Hollywood cinema, and used his films to openly interrogate and deconstruct its spellbinding techniques.

Early independent directors rejected classical film’s restorative construction, asserting that this formula’s reductive question-and-answer logic, causality, and deadline plot structures oversimplifies human existence, and stifles political and philosophical
Dancyger and Rush affirm that the three-act narrative’s cathartic resolution belies the injustices of society by supporting “the basic premise that good motives triumph, that the world is understandable, consistent, manageable, and responsive to goodness and truth”. Postwar filmmakers contested this limiting narrative model, by commonly including a challenging element of ambiguity in their films, that required the spectator to “fill in the gaps, and to try out different interpretations”. Loosening the narrative sequencing of cause and effect, their political modernist works broke all of the rules of mainstream storytelling through their digressive, anti-climatic, non-resolution narratives in which little dramatic action occurred in the film’s plotline, and no catharsis was provided in the third act. This transgression of familiar narrative codes forced an audience to become active in the navigation of the story and the symbolic meaning-making process, demanding that they consider the ideological implications of the subject matter rather than be absorbed by emotional involvement with the action and characters on screen.

Not only did the independent film movement strengthen the subjectivity and agency of the individual filmmaker; it also revolutionised the human subject on screen, especially in its empowerment of marginalised subjects. Advocating more realistic and heterogeneous subjectivities in film, auteurs generally privileged the development and exploration of character over action, and adopted a fluid view of subjectivity that presented character “not as a static state of being but as a dynamic process of becoming”. Screenwriter and author Andrew Horton (1999) calls this the carnivalesque, which he explains is:

an ongoing, ever-changing state in which character is recognized as being made up of many “voices” within us, each with its own history, needs, flavor, limitations, joys and rhythms.
Independent cinema’s carnivalesque protagonists challenged the spectator to go beyond a superficial understanding of subjectivity, as they embodied numerous paradoxes and flaws that, like the curious phenomena of life, were sometimes difficult to comprehend or accept. This ambiguity proposed that, in subjectivity, “there is mystery and a realm of the unresolved – that area that we cannot fully or totally know, understand, embrace”. Smith suggests that the benefit of this open-ended approach to character found in independent film is that it produces a more liberal model of subjectivity, since it has “the advantage of being highly polysemic”.

Opposing mainstream film’s dissemination of a universal free will, and its simultaneous masking of a subject’s restricted access to power in society, independent filmmakers awarded underrepresented individuals agency, as central characters in the narrative. Their character-centered films told unconventional subjects’ stories of struggle and injustice from a deeply personalised perspective that evoked a strong element of subjectivity in the viewer: inviting them to experience the world through the lives of everyday individuals on the periphery of society, who found themselves in challenging personal predicaments. For example, these films followed: the tribulations of a poor, unemployed man searching for his stolen bicycle, which he desperately needs in order to find work in *The Bicycle Thief* (1948); a young naïve circus girl, sold by her mother to a brutal strongman in a travelling circus, who then emotionally and physically abuses her in *La Strada* (1954); a working-class teenage delinquent, neglected by his parents in *The 400 Blows* (1959); a seriously ill man attempting to help a childhood friend who has become an angry drunk as a result of losing a child in *Le Beau Serge* (1958), and an elderly professor seeking redemption as he recalls the regrets and joys of his life in *Wild Strawberries* (1957).
Through contesting the dominant narratives and centrality of white, middle-class, male characters in most Hollywood cinema, European auteur filmmakers created a more democratic and accessible medium of film that empowered the expression of marginal subjectivities, not traditionally seen or heard on screen. Auteurism is perhaps the greatest contribution with which reel women were endowed by postwar independent film. Nevertheless, the concept has not been without controversy due to its exclusivity to white, male writer/directors, which directly contradicts the school’s socialist roots.\textsuperscript{36} A number of film feminists, such as Anneke Smelik (1998), have pointed out that the auteur school “precludes any conceptualization of female authorship in cinema as well as the actual presence of women directors”\textsuperscript{37} and thereby inhibits serious consideration of their work. She confirms, however, that auteurism is “paradoxically close to a fundamental feminist belief in the importance of self-expression”\textsuperscript{38} and still ultimately assisted the plight of female filmmakers, since it helped to break the centralisation and omniscience of the studio system’s Law of the Father in cinematic authorship. This helped to establish a fervent cinema of resistance that inspired the emergence of numerous counter-cinema movements around the globe, particularly from oppressed social groups, including Queer Cinema, Black Cinema and, most pertinent to this project, Feminist Cinema.

Before discussing the theories and mechanisms underlying this feminist cinema, which were largely inherited and developed from independent film, it is necessary to take a cursory look at psychoanalytic film theory, since many techniques of feminist film principally engage with elements of psychoanalysis. Film theorist E. Ann Kaplan (1988) assures us that, while psychoanalysis is a problematic theory for women, it enabled female theorists and filmmakers to understand the asymmetrical power bias of apparently neutral discourse. This saw them use the problematic theory “against itself;
as a tool…to decode Hollywood films so as to expose the abject placing of women that results from the psychoanalytic discourse underpinning the films”. 39

**Woman and the Cinematic Apparatus**

The growing politicisation of cinema in the 1960s and 70s, due to the medium taking up residence in academia, greatly assisted by *Cahiers du cinema* and the British film journal *Screen* (1959), became a further influencing factor in the materialisation of film feminism and the changing performance of reel woman. This move into academia, along with the theoretical developments of postmodernism, poststructuralism, semiotics, and, in particular, psychoanalysis, substantially broadened screen discourse regarding subjectivity and agency. It turned the focus away from the heavily theorised filmmaker-text relationship, to that of the spectator-text, in which theorists contended that the meanings and pleasures of a film text are subject to the context of reception: the spectator’s decoding of signs and symbols, based upon his/her lived experience, desires, and social positioning. 40

Prominent film scholars Jean-Louis Baudry (1976) and Christian Metz (1982) drew on psychoanalytical theory in an attempt to understand film’s connections to the unconscious, and the human fascination with images in general. Predominantly calling on the concepts of Freud and Lacan, they investigated how common structures within the psyche determine how a film is both constructed and received, and analysed the impact that this has on a character, and on a spectator’s subject formation. Employing Freud’s concept of the id and its essentially sexual drives, these theorists asserted that the primary drive that film engenders in a viewer is scopophilia: the overwhelming desire we have to see, and the (sexual) pleasure we derive from looking at something. 41

Freud claimed that scopophilia immobilises the subject of the gaze in the mind of the
observer and renders them as a fetishistic object for the observer’s voyeuristic pleasure.\textsuperscript{42} In his theory of the \textit{cinematic apparatus}, a metapsychological term that refers to the “entire context, structure and system of meaning production in cinema”,\textsuperscript{43} Baudry adopted this concept to argue that the pleasures of scopophilia are intensified in film spectatorship because, in the magical darkness of a movie theatre, the spectator regresses to a dreaming, child-like state.\textsuperscript{44} He claimed that the cinematic apparatus constructs the ‘impression of reality’ in the cinema and acts like the psychic apparatus, as it recreates the pleasures of our first visual object of desire - the mother, allowing us to relive the comfort and sense of wholeness associated with this symbiotic relationship.\textsuperscript{45}

Metz called upon Lacan’s theory of the \textit{mirror stage} to also link cinema with the pre-Oedipal maternal relationship, and to describe how the visual field is critical to the construction of subjectivity in film.\textsuperscript{46} While the theory of the mirror stage is well known, let us briefly review its fundamental points, in order to identify its connections to the medium of film. For Lacan, the mirror stage is an important phase of human subject formation that takes place between the ages of six to eighteen months; a period when an infant becomes aware of its separate existence from the mother for the first time by noticing its reflection in a mirror, which can be a mirror in the figurative sense, such as the mother’s face. The infant primarily mistakes the mirror image as part of its undefined reality, yet soon starts to realise that it can determine the reflection’s movements. Through this visual fascination and mastery, Lacan proposed that the infant experiences \textit{jouissance}, which is a blissful sense of completeness felt through merging with the other.\textsuperscript{47} He named this pleasurable realm the \textit{imaginary} and asserted that the only other time that the infant had experienced this wonderful feeling of oneness was during the pre-Oedipal stage, when it believed it was part of the mother’s body. For this
reason, Lacan claimed that the mother becomes associated with the imaginary and the visual field and forms the object of desire in the subject’s unconscious.\(^{48}\)

In the mirror stage, an infant is subjected to the contradictory experience of identification \textit{and} alienation, a process that Lacan argued is necessary for the creation of human self-consciousness and desire. He theorised that during this stage the child develops a narcissistic identification with its reflection, falling in love with its uniformity and independence and initially failing to separate itself from the mirror image: an experience he called \textit{meconnaissance}.\(^{49}\) However, it is not long before the child recognises that this image is disconnected from itself, a mirrored perfect other. This external reflection reveals a whole and coordinated entity that differs from the infant’s internal experience as a disjointed and vulnerable being, still reliant on its mother and not yet in control of its bodily drives and motor skills. Lacan maintained that in order to move to a level of self-awareness, the infant is required to accept this moment of alienation: to both recognise itself as this unified image depicted in the mirror, yet also negotiate where this idealised reflection of itself ends, and its own disorderly body begins. He claimed that this process of individuation involves a traumatic separation from the (m)other, as the subject enters the realm of language and the symbolic order and becomes an \textit{“I”}.\(^{50}\) This, therefore, sees the mother represent a lifelong threat to the subject’s autonomy and unity in organised culture, as she reminds the subject of its time of dependence and vulnerability.

Metz employed this concept of the mirror stage to propose that the cinema screen operates like ‘that \textit{other mirror},’ by recreating the pre-Oedipal imaginary and offering the spectator an exhilarating return to meconnaissance.\(^{51}\) The viewer identifies with the images on screen, and awards them an authority as his/her ideal ego: seeing the fictional characters and their world as improved versions of themself and their reality, and
deriving gratification through a glorification and narcissistic identification with the other (character and/or situation) on screen. Alternatively, Metz aligned the voyeuristic act of spectatorship with sadism. He pointed out that, in the darkness of a cinema, the spectator experiences anonymity and a powerful sense of omniscience as s/he secretly watches the fetishised other exposed in the bright lights of the silver screen. Metz proposed that this evokes sadism in the viewer as s/he experiences an illusionary sense of control over the objectified other, which s/he ultimately sees as a dehumanised being.

Along with independent postwar cinema, this psychoanalytical film theory incited the emergence of film feminist writing during the early years of the women’s movement. Film feminists genderised Baudry’s and Metz’s theories to pull focus on the negative treatment of woman in and on mainstream film. In the first issue of the American feminist film journal *Women and Film* (1972), its authors identified reel woman’s subordination on three levels of representation: on screen (as ‘sex objects, victims, or vampires’); in film theory (through its privileging of the male subject and the male auteur), and in film production (in their minor roles as ‘receptionists, secretaries, prop girls’ etc). In their ‘images of women’ writing, also known as reflection theory, feminist film critics Molly Haskell (1974) and Marjorie Rosen (1973) employed psychoanalytical film theory to provide an historical analysis of the stereotyping and mythification of woman in Hollywood film. These authors examined the sexist nature of twentieth century representations, which commonly objectified and eroticised woman as the Popcorn Venus: “a delectable but insubstantial hybrid of cultural distortions” that acts like a “celluloid aphrodisiac – talking, walking and comforting a patriarchal society”. They further claimed Hollywood film reinforces the notion of female inferiority by producing recurring images of women’s ‘subjection and sacrifice’ through
the virgin/whore dichotomy, that positions woman as either the venerated or disgraced foil to man.\textsuperscript{57}

Haskell and Rosen highlighted that this imagery turned more erotic and misogynistic in the postwar era, during which woman’s typology moved from comprising the ‘Victorian virgin, the Venus, the glamour goddess, and the self-sacrificing mother’ of the 1920s and 1930s, to including the later ‘diabolical femmes fatale, the vamp, the prostitute, and the impenetrable bitch’.\textsuperscript{58} Both film scholars contended that this shift was a symptom of men’s increasing anxiety regarding women entering into the work force as a result of the war, thereby threatening men’s social status. These disparaging images of women equally served to inspire male fantasies, \textit{and} to abate their fears regarding women’s growing power in society.\textsuperscript{59} Haskell uncompromisingly classified this changing iconography as a move from ‘reverence to rape’.\textsuperscript{60}

In their texts, Haskell and Rosen argued the need for more positive images of woman for female spectators to identify with. Feminist scholars Claire Johnston (1973) and Laura Mulvey (1975) emphasised, however, that it would take more than positive reflections of women to change their position in film and in society. Johnston, especially, denounced reflection theory for failing to offer a space for female resistance, through its lack of a theoretical framework to deconstruct \textit{how} sexual difference and patriarchal thought is encoded and naturalised in film structures to produce meaning.\textsuperscript{61} To elucidate the ways in which to subvert the phallocentric constructions of cinema, Mulvey and Johnston assumed a semiotic-psychoanalytic model of investigation, which provided a more sustained critique of how the structural and unconscious operations of a cinematic textual system negate woman.
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Johnston recognised that mainstream film involves a semiotic sign system that produces and reproduces (negative) myths about woman. In her seminal essay *Women’s Cinema as Counter-Cinema* (1973), she pointed out that, “despite the enormous emphasis placed on woman as spectacle in the cinema, woman as woman is largely absent”.

Drawing explicitly on Roland Barthes’s semiotic analysis of myth (1972), Johnston contended that male-dominated cinema uses the repetition of this ‘woman-as-no-thing’ sign to invoke “the law of verisimilitude”, which disguises film’s sexism and further perpetuates the negation of screen woman by “plac[ing] man inside history, and woman as ahistoric and eternal”. In a move reminiscent of the political modernist cinema of postwar Europe, she contended that female filmmakers should demystify the workings of popular film by using self-reflexivity within the narrative film form, so as to abolish its male-serving pleasures and create new meanings (and pleasures) for woman on screen.

Mulvey similarly argued that the constructions of mainstream film make the experience of cinema an exclusively male prerogative. Her landmark essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), works closely with Baudry’s and Metz’s psychoanalytic concepts to argue that the cinematic apparatus of narrative film is not just structured by the unconscious but rather by the “unconscious of patriarchal society”, which merely serves a male desire and point of view: a concept she coined as the *male gaze*. Mulvey claimed that the male gaze operates on three levels of oppressive engagement. The first of these is through the voyeuristic look of the camera, which is usually determined by a male director and thereby assumes a male spectator; the second, through the diegetic gaze of the leading protagonist, who is nearly always male and with whom we are encouraged to identify; and the third, through the spectator’s gaze, which is physically limited by theatre projection logistics, and determined by the former two.
Mulvey used Lacanian theory to point out that the male gaze is organised like a language, as it sets up an active/passive binary that is determined by sexual difference, and privileges masculinity.68 Calling on the mirror stage, she asserted that a male character is more often than not the active subject of the narrative, the ‘bearer of the look’, who moves the action and controls the film’s point of view. He masters the spatial elements of the film’s world as the camera follows his line of sight and flight.69 Mulvey emphasised that a female character, on the other hand, is generally the passive image, trapped by the physical limits of the frame as the male gaze fixes her in a permanent state of powerlessness. Her presence on screen “tends to work against the development of a story-line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation”, as she, like the mother in the mirror stage, becomes immobilised and fetishised as an object of desire, her subjectivity reduced to her image as she “connote[s] to-be-looked-at-ness”.70

Despite providing visual stimulation and pleasure for a man, Mulvey posited that, as the stand in for the mother, and the signifier of sexual difference, woman on screen simultaneously provides ‘unpleasure’, since she elicits the castration complex. She concluded that the male filmmaker/character/spectator therefore has two options through which to project this repressed fear of castration onto the female character and escape his anxiety. The first is through voyeuristic scopophilia, whereby he bestows guilt onto the female character and inhibits her ability to castrate by sadistically subjecting her to “punishment or forgiveness”.71 The second option is to deny woman’s ability to castrate altogether through fetishistic scopophilia. In fetishistic scopophilia woman’s physical beauty is overemphasised, making her an erotic spectacle for the male filmmaker/character/spectator, who transforms her into a representative of the
phallus: a wondrous fetishistic object that “becomes reassuring rather than dangerous”.  

In this latter process, woman is equally chastised, as the camera’s fetishistic gaze dismembers her body. She is fragmented into the pieces of her visual appeal; split into erogenous zones as she becomes composed of mostly close up shots of her breasts, legs, buttocks, lips and so on. Through this ‘cutting up’ by the camera, man can “live out his fantasies and obsessions…by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker of meaning” as she becomes disarticulated and objectified into parts. Fetishistic scopophilia dehumanises woman as a sexual commodity that the man can possess and ultimately restrain. In both of these dominant voyeuristic and fetishistic viewing positions constructed by the male gaze, the all-powerful mother is repressed and the patriarchal order restored, providing a powerful catharsis for the man as his castration anxiety is abated. Kaplan affirms that this domination of women by the male gaze:

> is part of men’s strategy to contain the threat that the mother embodies, and to control the positive and negative impulses that memory traces of being mothered have left in the male conscious. 

Like Johnston, in her polemical essay Mulvey called for a destruction of complex film mechanisms that use pleasure and beauty as oppressive forms against women. She contended that filmmakers must “dar[e] to break with normal pleasurable expectations in order to conceive a new language of desire” that does not reinforce male supremacy. Resembling postwar cinema’s Brechtian mandate, Mulvey argued that, to do so, it is necessary to “free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics and passionate detachment”. Johnston and Mulvey’s progressive discourse engendered a plethora of film feminist writing that further helped to inform female filmmakers’ political resistance. This
provided the theoretical foundations for a feminist counter-cinema aimed at correcting women’s misrepresentation on screen, and their underrepresentation in film production. In turn, there were revolutionary changes in the representation of reel woman, both behind, and in front of, the camera.

The Birth of Women’s Counter-Cinema

Simultaneous to the arrival of film feminist rhetoric, and together with the legacies of political independent cinema, women in the mid 1970s came to recognise film as a powerful cultural tool with which to challenge female oppression. They subsequently formed independent production and distribution groups around the globe in order to break into the male-exclusive arena of film. These groups included New Day Films (1971-) and Women Make Movies (1972-) in America; Cinema of Women (1979-1990) and Circles (1979-1990) in the United Kingdom; and The Sydney Women’s Film Group (1972), The Feminist Film Workers (1970s-1980s), and Reel Women (1979-1983) in Australia. The blossoming of these female-oriented film groups internationally, in addition to the emergence of women’s film festivals such as the New York International Festival of Women’s Films (1972), Women’s Event at Edinburgh Film Festival (1972), Toronto Women and Film Festival (1973), and Chicago Films by Women Festival (1974), as well as screen journals Women and Film (1972-1975), Jumpcut (1974-) Frauen und Film (1974-), m/f (1978–1986), and Camera Obscura (1976-), soon mobilised a thriving feminist culture and cinema. It is important to emphasise, however, that feminist films were sometimes also in direct antagonism to the developments of film feminist criticism, given the multivalence of their feminist agendas.
A little closer to home, the 1970s and 80s was an especially prosperous period for Australian female filmmakers. During this time, the Gorton and Whitlam governments, which both viewed the cultural arts as a means through which to “bring profit and prestige to the nation”, made a financial commitment to revive the indigenous film industry that had been suffocated by the dominance of American product. This was as a consequence of many large Australian cinemas signing exclusive deals with U.S. distributors during the 1920s, which stipulated that only American films were to be shown on their screens. Not only did this contract greatly restrict the production and exhibition of Australian films, it also eventually resulted in Australian audiences desiring films that were of equal scale to the lavish Hollywood studio productions they had become accustomed to; a demand that Australia’s small industry simply could not meet. Subsequently, between 1940-1969 there were very feature films made in the country.

After almost thirty years of this inertia in the local industry, the Gorton and Whitlam governments’ introduction of subsidies, along with content regulation, film training courses, and tax concessions for private investors who funded local films, facilitated the rebirth of Australia’s film industry. There were more feature films produced in this era of Australia than had been made in the country’s entire cinematic history. During this renaissance period, a number of funding schemes were specifically allocated to female filmmakers, due to the Whitlam government’s commitment to affirmative action, most notably the Women’s Film Fund, which was established by the government-funded Australian Film Development Corporation (now called the Australian Film Commission (AFC)) in 1976. In addition to this funding assistance, the Whitlam government launched the Australian Film and Television School (AFTS) in 1973, which, along with the aforementioned female focussed production and
distribution groups, offered training opportunities for women, thereby helping them to gain entry into the film industry.\textsuperscript{87}

Early feminist films around the world were mostly in documentary form (Growing Up Female (1971), Three Lives (1971), Janie’s Janie (1973), Maidens (1978), Daughter Rite (1979)), which some film feminists, such as Michelle Citron (1990), argued was the “politically appropriate film form”\textsuperscript{88} for women given its economical and logistical accessibility; consciousness-raising capacity; autobiographical character; and common voice over narration, which enabled women to tell their ‘real stories’, quite literally in their own voices. This documentary trend, however, came under scrutiny from Johnston, who asserted the impossibility of eradicating patriarchal ideology simply through a realist “effort of will”.\textsuperscript{89} Johnston was adamant that women’s counter-cinema must do more than simply attempt to ‘reflect’ reality, which she saw as an impossibility given the constructed nature of the film form. Rather, she argued that it must consciously destabilise this reality and its own artifice to genuinely improve women’s circumstances:

if we accept that cinema involves the production of signs, the idea of non-intervention is pure mystification…Women’s cinema cannot afford such idealism; the ‘truth’ of our oppression cannot be ‘captured’ on celluloid with the ‘innocence’ of the camera: it has to be constructed/manufactured. New meanings have to be created by disrupting the fabric of the male bourgeois cinema within the text of the film.\textsuperscript{90}

As if in response to this call, writer/directors such as Mulvey and Peter Wollen (Riddles of the Sphinx (1977)); Agnes Varda (One Sings, the Other Doesn’t (1977), Vagabond (1985)); Chantal Akerman (Je Tu Il Elle (1974), Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles (1975)); Sally Potter (The Gold Diggers (1983)); Marleen Gorris (A Question of Silence (1982), Broken Mirrors (1984)); Margarethe von Trotta (The Second Awakening of Christa Klages (1977)); and Gillian Armstrong (My Brilliant


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Career (1979)), produced narrative films with a politically charged cinematic style similar to that of postwar independent film. These reel women used the medium as a strategy in resistance and an assertion of agency, as they personalised and politicised their works from a distinctly female perspective.91

The techniques of resistance used in this early feminist cinema are of great significance to the understanding of reel woman’s subjectivity and agency today. For this reason I will now demonstrate the ways in which feminist filmmakers attempted to reclaim female identity and status on screen, most specifically in relation to genre, character, narration and structure. I will take up this analysis again in the following chapters, in which I discuss the employment and development of these techniques in contemporary feminist cinema, and in Float’s dramatic experiment.

The Anti-romance Narrative

The anti-romance narrative was a common genre in early feminist cinema. This involved an unrelenting exposition of female resistance, which demystified romanticised notions of women’s supposed contentment and salvation through the male-serving institutions of romantic love, marriage and/or motherhood. It did this by emphasising the cruel realities and personal risks for women, particularly those related to female objectification and commodification. Film scholar Patricia Mellencamp (1995) explains that anti-romance ideology sees romance as “a fiction that keeps women captive” because it is “primarily defined by male desire”.92 Its popularity in feminist film was influenced by Simone De Beauvoir’s existentialist book The Second Sex (1949) and Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique (1963), two influential texts that helped women to recognise their culturally constructed subjectivity.
De Beauvoir’s famous assertion that, “[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”, in addition to her analysis of the history of female oppression through cultural, literary, and mythical sources, argued that women (and men) are raised to see maleness as the natural human state, and femaleness as Other. She demonstrated that woman is constructed as the myth of the eternal feminine in patriarchy, “she is a false Infinite, an Ideal without truth”; a non-entity lacking a stable meaning. Unlike psychoanalysis, however, De Beauvoir protested that this status was not biologically but socially arranged, claiming that woman’s mystification is perpetuated through culture, in “religions, traditions, language, tales, songs, movies”, and is a projection of male desire and dread related to the powerful (m)other. De Beauvoir drew attention to the fact that, as this dominant mythology normalises female inferiority, many women have become complicit in their own subordination, internalising deep feelings of inadequacy that makes it difficult for them to accept that they equally possess the ability and right for freedom. Her revolutionary writings became fundamental to much social and political inquiry into the sexual division of labour in the public and private sphere of postwar western society, as well as to the representation of women in popular culture.

Influenced by De Beauvoir’s text, and predicating the theories of the feminist movement, in 1963 Friedan remonstrated against female domestication, arguing that women have been socialised over centuries to see themselves solely as mothers and housewives whose role it is to nurture not only the bodies but also the egos of their husbands and children. She argued that this predicament of selfless agency, which she named the Feminine Mystique, denies women the opportunity to develop their self-determined identities. Friedan took issue with society’s Enlightenment notion of the free-willed agent, calling it incongruent to women’s lived experiences since it directly contradicts the tacit social expectation for women to be self-sacrificing caregivers. She
stated that this disavowal of female subordination created “the problem with no name”, resulting in many women feeling guilty for their discontent, believing their loss of identity was due to their own ineffectiveness.

Informed by this discourse, anti-romance films of the time generally involved female characters attempting to gain status higher than mere domestic workers and sex objects: to find more meaning for their individual lives. These films featured defiant female characters who broke out of the normative shackles binding the traditional image of femininity at the time, sometimes taking extreme and/or violent measures to do so. An example of this genre is Armstrong’s *My Brilliant Career*. The film is centred on Sybylla, a working-class, headstrong young woman living with her family on an Australian cattle ranch in the late 19th century. Sybylla dreams of becoming a writer and, against the wishes of her family, turns down a proposal of marriage from a wealthy man, Harry, whom she loves, in order to keep her independence and pursue her career. When, near the end of the film, Harry arrives, like a prince on horseback to propose to her for the second time, Sybylla explains to him:

> The last thing I want is to be a wife out in the bush, having a baby every year. Maybe I’m ambitious, selfish, but I can’t lose myself in somebody else’s life until I’ve lived my own.  

*My Brilliant Career* gained international acclaim, and this unconventional ending was groundbreaking for its time: a woman on screen, especially an underprivileged and ordinary-looking one, in love with her suitor, saying “no” to the traditional happy ending, and actively living by her own desires instead of surrendering to societal and familial pressure. It is ironic to discover, therefore, that the primary investors in the film, the AFC, rejected this anti-romance ending on three separate occasions, informing Armstrong and the film’s producer, Margaret Fink, that Sybylla must accept Harry’s
proposal so that the film had a more ‘satisfying’ ending. Armstrong, however, held her ground, pointing out to the AFC’s funding panel that, “the whole point of the film is that they don’t [marry]”. Sybylla’s dilemma was topical in the feminist era of My Brilliant Career’s release, as women were returning to the workforce and also facing the challenging decision between pursuing a career and starting a family.

Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles (hereafter abbreviated to Jeanne Dielman) and Riddles of the Sphinx, provided the counterpoint to My Brilliant Career, by observing what “‘happily’ means for women...[and what] “ever after” costs women” who follow the conventional path of marriage and motherhood. In Jeanne Dielman we experience the excruciatingly mundane and numbed existence of Jeanne, a widowed, middle-class housewife and single mother, who, in order to support herself and her teenage son, ritualistically tends to her domestic chores before prostituting herself every afternoon to a series of men who visit her in her home. The film is a harrowing portrait of the frustrated and disconnected lives of many housewives within patriarchy, forced to repress their own agency and cater to men’s needs for survival. Jeanne shows no emotion as she goes about her tasks and services her clients in a fastidious, clinical fashion. Similar to Sybylla’s declaration in My Brilliant Career, yet with a different sentiment, Jeanne pitifully reveals to her son that she had initial reservations about marrying his father because she wanted to have her own life: a far cry from her servile existence in which she now dutifully tends to her teenage son in the same way she would a traditional husband. To reinforce the endless and unjust servitude of the feminine mystique, experienced by many women, Akerman purposefully ensured that all the characters in Jeanne’s life are men: her son, her clients, and even her neighbour’s crying baby son, whom she agrees to baby-sit.
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*Riddles of the Sphinx* likewise investigates the denigration of women and motherhood within patriarchy. In the film, Mulvey and Wollen parallel the myth of Oedipus’s encounter with the terrifying Sphinx at the gates of Thebes, with the story of Louise, a young single mother, recently separated from her husband, who is struggling to cope on her own. The film interweaves dramatised sequences of Oedipus attempting to answer the Sphinx’s riddle, with Louise juggling work and childcare; searching for a solution to her and her young daughter’s challenging predicament.

Anti-romance films such as *The Gold Diggers, Broken Mirrors, and A Question of Silence* examine the colonisation and commodification of women as objects of patriarchal desire and exchange, involving female characters who help each other to “reason their way out of deathly, self-sacrificial conclusions”\(^\text{104}\). *The Gold Diggers* involves the story of Ruby, a blonde, white movie star (notably played by the iconic star Julie Christie) and Celeste, a black woman working in a bank, who, through interaction with one another, come to see the connections between money, gold and women in capitalism. The film interrogates “the illusion of female powerlessness”\(^\text{105}\) within patriarchy, and in the romantic iconography of women in mainstream cinema. Through the character of Ruby, Potter investigates the history of female representation in film and the treatment of the female star, who, like gold or money, is circulated as part of the male economic system, and has come to form “our collective memory of how we see ourselves and how we as women are seen”.\(^\text{106}\) Through self-realisation and Celeste’s friendship, Ruby rescues herself from a life ruled by the direction and gaze of men. In a monumental scene, Celeste carries her away on a white horse, reversing the fairytale iconography of the white knight, the prince charming, saving the leading lady.

In *Broken Mirrors* women also work together to overcome their subordination as objects of male desire. The film is an unsettling anti-romance tale that tells two stories
of male violence against women. The first is that of Diane and her colleagues who work as prostitutes in an Amsterdam brothel, undergoing daily humiliation, exploitation and abuse by their male pimp and clients; the other, that of a housewife, Bea, who is abducted, chained to a bed, and tortured through starvation by a married, bourgeois serial killer who has been rampant in the area, and who ritualistically photographs his female victims in each phase of their physical demise. Diane’s and Bea’s stories dovetail when we eventually discover that the serial killer is a regular customer at the brothel. Gorris makes explicit her symbolic intention in paralleling these seemingly unconnected narratives, when, in response to a radio news bulletin regarding the murders, one of Diane’s colleagues, Dora, remarks, “it’s not much safer being a middle-class housewife than a whore”. Smelik confirms that the film’s two narratives “become each others metaphor: to objectify women equals prostitution equals murder”.

Gorris’s other well-known anti-romance film, *A Question of Silence*, observes the harmful effects of the repression of female agency in capitalism, exploring “the force of women’s energy and the social containment of that force, the nature of women’s rage and the threat of its eruption”, but on a much more confronting level. The narrative involves three female strangers of different backgrounds: Christine, a catatonic housewife; Andrea, a savvy secretary; and Annie, an unrefined waitress, who are all shopping in the same boutique and who brutally murder the owner of the store after he catches and berates Christine, whom he has caught shoplifting. Janine, a court-appointed psychiatrist, is assigned the job of uncovering these women’s motivation for murder, and of determining whether they are psychologically fit to be held accountable for killing the man. Through gradually unraveling the personal histories of the accused, and, to her surprise, forming an affiliation with them, Janine determines that they are
indeed ordinary, sane women, lacking any direct motive for the spontaneous murder, other than suffering for years under cruel, masculinist conditions. By examining the private lives of the female murderers, *A Question of Silence* humanises them as victims within an unjust society and “economic system that denies [women] significant power and prohibits direct satisfaction of desire or need”. In her commentary on the film, Rich affirms that it is precisely the normality of these women, and the random nature of their attack, that rendered the film so shocking and “unnerving to the male order” on its release.

Akin to early independent film, the character-centered nature of feminist cinema was also a conscious technique of resistance against the objectification of women. Paralleling postmodernism’s rejection of centralisation, which opened up new horizons for the understanding and representation of character, especially female characters, feminist cinema radically reworked the popular representation of woman as a unified subject on screen, instead depicting her as a fragmented being.

**The Fragmented Female Subject**

Postmodernism rejected the Enlightenment claim that a subject is the originator of meaning and truth, and is born an isolated, predetermined entity with a unique essence that develops through its “spontaneous encounter with the world”. This progressive theory instead emphasised subjectivity’s interdependence on the body, the unconscious, and language, and argued that our subjectivity is established first and foremost through our interactions with culture. This exposed the fluid nature of subjectivity, and helped reel women to recognise the possibility of overcoming their subordinate positioning in patriarchy.
This view of subjectivity as fluctuating and interdependent can be traced back to the writings of both Nietzsche and Freud. Nietzsche was one of the first philosophers to challenge the notion of a rational self, free of corporeal and social government, by professing that “mankind [sic] is not a whole: it is an inextricable multiplicity of ascending and descending life-processes”\(^{113}\). Nietzsche recognised the creative-destructive forces of the psyche, which is ‘eternally self-creating’ and ‘eternally self-destroying’, and asserted that our subjectivity derives from a dynamic interplay of these conscious-unconscious energies he termed the Apollonian and the Dionysian.\(^{114}\) Apollo, the Greek God of order and harmony, represents the borders and clear consciousness of western civilization and philosophy, based on rational Socratic thinking. Dionysus, the God of intuition and chaos, embodies the non-rational elements of life, the intoxication of emotions and unconscious drives that disintegrate the boundaries of the subject.\(^{115}\) For Nietzsche, the push-pull of these two energies determines an individual’s agency and identity.

Freud also recognised the split nature of the human psyche, which struggles to keep a balance between chaos and order, through his psychosexual concept of the tripartite subject: the superego, the ego, and the id.\(^{116}\) With this concept, Freud asserted that we enter a world that is already organised by accepted cultural conventions and power structures, and must establish our place within this social construction, while attempting to negotiate our often contradictory desires and bodily drives. The influence of both Freud’s and Nietzsche’s theories were evident in feminist cinema’s anti-romance narratives and characters, which explored the multiple corporeal and social forces constituting and ‘splitting’ female identity in patriarchy.

It seems that these representations of female subjectivity and agency were further informed by postmodernism’s development of this notion of fragmentation.
Postmodernism argued that the contemporary subject has no essential core but is, rather, a fluctuating and fragmented function of discourse; a nexus through which various power relations of the external world are played out in order to control and manage us. This proposed that subjectivity is an effect of power and knowledge, a relativistic and ephemeral experience lacking consistency, as it is organised outside of our immediate control and is an endless journey of becoming. The writings of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) suggested that reel woman’s positioning could be transgressed by using her difference and plurality as positive signifiers for her resistance against the patriarchal order. These theorists’ concept of becoming-woman, which they saw as a process of deterritorialising subjectivity from capitalism’s homogeneous standardisation and Freud’s Oedipalised desire, helped to enlighten feminist filmmakers to think of female characters as fluid and plural agents of desire. By using their female protagonists to experiment with woman becoming-other than her fixed image in mainstream film, these filmmakers gained an understanding of the ‘transformative possibilities’ of resistance, “the ways in which identity might escape from the codes which constitute the subject”. Unlike the operations of mainstream cinema, which locks a female character (and spectator) into a continuity of subjectivity and passivity, these filmmakers presented commanding displays of woman through incongruous and multifaceted female characters of varied class, ethnicity, education and sexuality, reinforcing the heterogeneous nature of female subjectivity.

Michel Foucault’s theory also helps to explain these subversive representations of woman found in feminist cinema. His notion, that our cultural system is constituted at both micro and macro discourses of power that control who has access to status and authority in society, was particularly significant to female filmmakers and their female characters, considering that patriarchy had bestowed the label of alterity onto
reel women, which excluded them from the primary power centres of cinema. Foucault’s concentration on the politics of the body and of how gendered behaviour is governed by complex ideological systems, offered female filmmakers an understanding of the mechanisms of their oppression, and the opportunity to conceive of alternative subjectivities that resisted their marginalised positioning. Foucauldian theory suggested to these filmmakers that they could embark on a ‘dynamic process of self-creation’; which was possible at a local level of resistance, through daily self-consciousness and “an experimental expansion of the possibilities of subjectivity in open defiance of the modes of being”\textsuperscript{122} that were imposed on them. It was at the minutiae, individual level of organisation that Foucault believed power is most effectively resisted,\textsuperscript{123} a viewpoint that is also echoed in feminist theory and cinema, as reflected in the women’s movement manifesto that ‘the personal is political’, and in the intimate stories of feminist cinema, which embodied transgressive characters whose everyday existential dilemmas provided the drama of the film, making these reel women the generators and controllers of the action.

A central goal of feminist cinema, however, was not simply to tell a narrative in which female characters pushed the boundaries of their identity, but to also explore ways in which to strengthen reel woman’s voice through the most powerful tool available to a filmmaker: narration.

**The Female Gaze**

This story is going to be all about me.\textsuperscript{124}

Sybylla in *My Brilliant Career* (1979)

Feminist theorist Teresa de Lauretis (1984) explains that the construction of reel woman’s subjectivity and agency is directly related to the style of narration employed by a film, since:
subjectivity is engaged in the cogs of narrative and indeed constituted in the relation of narrative, meaning, and desire; so that the very work of narrativity is the engagement of the subject in certain positionalities of meaning and desire.\textsuperscript{125}

Early feminist filmmakers were particularly concerned with narration, no doubt as a consequence of women’s historical exclusion from dominant cinema and its traditional androcentric apparatus, which Kaplan claims made female filmmakers “especially sensitive to issues of form and style, and prevented any blind following of previous conventions”.\textsuperscript{126} This saw them rework conventional mechanisms to the benefit of female agency in the construction of the \textit{female gaze}: a narrational technique of resistance, used to counter the male gaze, that set out to actualise and empower reel woman by allowing her subjectivity and desire to govern the point of view and plotline of the film.

This gaze employed an aesthetic greatly influenced by French poststructuralism, particularly the writings of Cixous, Luce Irigaray (1985) and Julia Kristeva (1974), who share with postmodernism a celebration of multiplicity, deconstruction, and difference, and view the subject as a ‘subject-in-process’, an entity made up of a myriad of competing discourses that is constantly shifting and negotiating its understanding of self.\textsuperscript{127} Concerned with the inextricable link between female subjectivity, pre-linguistic language, and the body, these theorists maintain that it is in all systems of representation that power relations and forms of social organisation are both established \textit{and} resisted.

Employing a post-Freudian and post-Lacanian framework, all three writers, especially Kristeva, strongly oppose the minimisation of the mother in traditional psychoanalysis and representation, emphasising her significant role, and that of her pre-linguistic language, in subject formation.\textsuperscript{128} Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva assert that creative forms which subvert the symbolic order’s strict margins allow a subject to transgress their social construction and experience \textit{jouissance}, which they identified as a free
flowing joy that arises through (re)engagement with the plurality of the repressed maternal realm.\textsuperscript{129}

Feminist filmmakers were encouraged by French poststructuralists’ challenge to the Freudian vision of the feminine as “described in terms of deficiency or atrophy, as the other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly on value: the male sex”.\textsuperscript{130} In this criticism, Irigaray questions:

How can we accept the idea that woman’s entire sexual development is governed by her lack of, and thus by her longing for, jealousy of, and demand for, the male organ? Does this mean that woman’s sexual evolution can never be characterized with reference to the female sex itself? All Freud’s statements describing feminine sexuality overlook the fact that the female sex might possibly have its own “specificity”.\textsuperscript{131}

It appears that it was this specificity that feminist filmmakers set out to define in their films’ construction of the female gaze. Poststructuralism’s insistence that “[w]omen’s exploitation is based upon sexual difference; its solution will come only through sexual difference”\textsuperscript{132} and the theory’s view of woman as a symbol for resistance that represents all that is not visible in organised culture, suggested to these feminist filmmakers that they could benefit from their exile in the industry and society, and find definition in the limitlessness that exists outside of these oppressive discourses; using their anomalous position as a critical one for contestation.

Inspired by Cixous’s concept of the Newly Born Woman - which, in similarity to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of becoming-woman, involves woman continually renewing herself through passages of the other in herself, and of herself in the other\textsuperscript{133} - and following French poststructuralism’s claim that the ambiguity of creative forms can strengthen woman’s jouissance and status in society,\textsuperscript{134} feminist filmmakers employed a less formulaic approach to plot, character and narration that gave precedence to the maternal realm. They investigated the androcentric codes of narrative cinema, and
presented an alternative female-oriented gaze and language that created new meanings and images of woman and the mother on screen.

A demonstration of this is in *Riddles of the Sphinx*, in which Mulvey and Wollen use a polyphony of diegetic and non-diegetic female voices belonging to Louise, her friends, co-workers, and Mulvey herself, to evoke the multiplicity of the female condition. They pose a variety of questions regarding the mother that, like the Sphinx, “has been forgotten or repressed, left outside the gates of the city” but which, unlike the Sphinx’s riddle, cannot be answered by a single male solution. Within this poststructuralist framework, Mulvey asserts that what occurs in her character-driven film is:

> a constant return to woman, not indeed as a visual image, but as a subject of inquiry, a content which cannot be considered within the aesthetic lines laid down by traditional cinematic practice.

Feminist filmmakers used a variety of narratological techniques to construct the female gaze in their works, including sound manipulation, point of view shooting style, symbolic mise-en-scène, direct address, selective composition, minimal editing, voice-over narration, and flashback sequences. These techniques emphasised female subjectivity by revealing a woman’s private reality, allowing a spectator to be privy to her history, inner thoughts, and psychological motivations. Borrowing from narrative theoretician Gerard Genette (1980), Smelik calls this personalising narratological technique that refers to the overall perspective of a film, *focalisation*. Focalisation is dependent on the proximity of the narrator to the story, and can be either external or internal. In external focalisation, the narration remains exterior to the character’s inner world, yet the character is still presented as a ‘narrational centre’ through her spatial relationship with the camera; she is given precedence in the frame and action. Internal
focalisation, on the other hand, enables a director to reveal the inner thoughts of a character through flashbacks, dreams, hallucinations and fantasy sequences.\textsuperscript{138}

While popular film at this time also occasionally used focalisation techniques, feminist cinema delved still further into the minds of characters, especially female characters who were generally overlooked in these mainstream revelations. Moreover, feminist film’s focalising techniques of identification did not follow mainstream cinema’s tendency to play on audience emotion through spellbinding and/or sentimental elements. Contrary to the traditional cinematic apparatus, which “conceal[s] its own process of construction and present[s] itself as pure perception”,\textsuperscript{139} early feminist works were disrespectful of illusionistic viewing strategies, involving a patent element of self-consciousness in their narration. Its filmmakers generally also incorporated forms of Brechtian distanciation, to divorce the spectator from the text rather than being absorbed by it.\textsuperscript{140}

The aim of these contradictory techniques of focalisation and distanciation was to involve an audience on both an emotional and an intellectual level of engagement: to create a space for them to experience a woman’s situation from a personalised and implicated level, at the same time as encouraging them to consider the film’s political statement by disrupting the possibility of immersion in her spectacle. This is seen in 	extit{Riddles of the Sphinx}, where Mulvey uses direct address. Mulvey speaks directly to the audience to discuss the myth of Oedipus's encounter with the Sphinx, as well as her theoretical intentions in making the film. Visual pleasure is also denied in 	extit{Jeanne Dielman}, in which we are left with little to watch but Jeanne’s domestic movements. Akerman’s regimented shooting style reinforces Jeanne’s mechanical daily routine. The scenes daringly play out in real time with non-elliptical editing, as Jeanne cleans the house, washes dishes, prepares food, and makes the bed, forcing us to experience and
contemplate the lengthy tasks and tiresome monotony of Jeanne’s domestication. From the first image of Jeanne facing away from the camera, to Akerman’s continued disregard for frontality; her paucity of close-ups of Jeanne as she goes about her daily duties; and her decapitated composition of Jeanne as she receives her clients at her front door, taking their coat and hat, the audience is kept at a detached distance from Jeanne; in this way sharing her own disembodied and emotionally removed existence.

Told from an unsentimental perspective, these films possess a cerebral quality, employing modernist aesthetics and self-reflexive techniques of narration that break classical visual pleasure and require audience participation in the text’s interpretation. Mulvey confirms that in this cinema:

> Pleasure and involvement are not the result of identification, narrative tension or eroticised femininity, but arise from surprising and excessive use of the camera, unfamiliar framing of scenes and the human body, the demands made on the spectator to put together disparate elements.\(^{141}\)

One of the defining features of this arresting female gaze was its refusal to objectify and fetishise female characters as docile objects of patriarchal desire and circumstance. Female filmmakers actively deconstructed the male gaze: they humanised and empowered reel woman by reworking the specular imaging of the female body, and stripping it of its conventional signification in mainstream imagery. In her article, *Woman’s Stake: Filming the Female Body* (1981), Doane explains the theorisation behind this counter-gaze, which she asserts:

> addresses itself to the activity of uncoding, de-coding, deconstructing the given images. It is a project of de-familiarization whose aim is not necessarily that of seeing the female body differently, but of exposing the habitual meanings/values attached to femininity as cultural constructions.\(^{142}\)

This uncoding of woman’s body is illustrated in the bedroom scenes of *Broken Mirrors*, in which the prostitutes are not victimised or fetishised by Gorris’s camera as they
undress for their clients. Instead of employing the conventional voyeuristic gaze that lingers on the female body, in these scenes Gorris desexualises the women by focussing predominantly on their faces, and composing the mise-en-scene for them to dominate the frame; to be “powerful controllers of their spaces”. Armstrong also flouted the eroticised representation of woman on screen in her depiction of Sybylla. Abolishing narrative film’s pleasure in gazing at displays of female beauty, Armstrong uses her unconventional heroine to expose woman’s natural, unglamourised body. Sybylla belies mainstream ideas of femininity and beauty: she has coarse, freckled skin; unruly, red hair; and unrefined mannerisms that match her “wildness of spirit”. Even after Sybylla’s aunt Helen gives her a makeover, attempting to help her appear more ‘ladylike’, the film does not provide the Cinderella-type catharsis and ‘beauty equals marriage’ ending. When Harry proposes to Sybylla for the second time in the final moments of the film, she has returned to her ‘unfeminine’ state: her hair is again wild and unkempt, and she is covered in mud from working her family’s drought-ridden land.

Revealing her own filmmaking experience of “‘speaking’ the female body differently”, Varda notes the disparities between the male and female gaze, claiming that female filmmakers more commonly honour the integrity of women’s bodies:

> What seems obvious to me, either in my own films or in others’, is that men seem to cut up women’s bodies more frequently and show more often what we might technically call the erogenous zones. They show women’s thighs, women’s breasts, women’s behinds. It seems to me that when women film women, they show their entire bodies, the parts are not as small, there is a tendency to show the entire woman, the entire body of a woman.

This observation is evidenced in *Jeanne Dielman*, in which Akerman persists with keeping her female character from the exploitation of close ups even as she starts to unravel. By contextualising Jeanne’s tragic circumstances within the backdrop of her domestic confinement and subjugated social positioning, this restricted female gaze
focuses the audience’s attention away from assigning total responsibility onto Jeanne for her murderous breakdown. Similarly, in *Riddles of the Sphinx*, Mulvey and Wollen frequently use 360-degree panning shots of Louise at home, and at her work place, to both emphasise the imprisoning nature of these oppressive social spaces, and to use the shifting gaze - this “continual displacement of the gaze which ‘catches’ the woman’s body only accidentally, momentarily, refusing to hold or fix her in the frame”\(^{147}\) - to prevent Louise’s isolation and fetishisation as an erotic spectacle.

Throughout *My Brilliant Career*, Armstrong also uses panoramic mise-en-scene shots of Sybylla in the challenging and untamed Australian landscape, to signify both the tension between Sybylla’s dreams and desires for sophistication and worldliness, over her harsh, marginalised reality as a woman in the outback of Australia, as well as her attraction to the freedom of the land, given her inability to fit in with rigid, societal expectations. Mellencamp affirms that in Armstrong’s gaze, Sybylla:

> is constantly drawn outside, into the world, into space. Her body cannot be still or confined. Her restless, untamed spirit is akin to the land. She wants the freedom, the adventure, represented by open spaces rather than the confinement, the entrapment, represented by domesticity (and codes of femininity).\(^{148}\)

A more explicit example of Varda’s observation is exemplified in *Broken Mirrors*, where Gorris purposefully switches from the intimacy of the female gaze, which presents the female characters as subjects and establishes an emotional connection between them and the spectator, to the jarring sadism of the male gaze. The juxtapositioning of these two disparate shooting styles enables the audience to directly experience the violent affects of the male gaze on women.\(^{149}\) Two notable scenes, in which Gorris momentarily attaches the gaze to male characters, include an opening scene in the brothel, and a scene between the serial killer and his victim. In the brothel scene, we are introduced to each prostitute as they sit around in the parlour conversing,
laughing, and preparing for another day’s work. The scene is shot with a hand-held camera that “travels freely through the room…filming the female bodies with intimacy but not erotically”\(^\text{150}\). When a client arrives, interrupting the women’s blissful bonding time, the camera work abruptly changes to a rigid, motionless shooting style. As the madame introduces each prostitute one by one to the client, so that he can choose whom he would like to be serviced by, we see the women in the way that the man does: commodified and eroticised into isolated close ups of body parts for his own consumption and pleasure.\(^\text{151}\)

For the majority of the film, Gorris prevents the audience from identifying with the serial killer’s oppressive gaze, going so far as to occlude his face until the end of the film when Diane disempowers him.\(^\text{152}\) The only time that she allows us to see woman through his eyes, is when he takes photographs of dying Bea, quite literally ‘freezing’ her in his gaze. Smelik highlights that, while the man does not sexually abuse Bea, his “camera as phallus replaces the sexual act with the physical penis…She is metaphorically raped when being photographed”.\(^\text{153}\) It is through this jarring, momentary employment of the male gaze, that Gorris invites the audience to consider the violence of the objectification of women by men.

In the end of *Broken Mirrors*, however, the female gaze prevails as women fight back. Perhaps the most moving moment in the film that involves the radical shift between gazes, this time from the male back to the female gaze, occurs in Bea’s final scenes of starvation and death. When Bea realises her unavoidable fate, she retaliates the only way that she can, psychologically, telling her oppressor: “You get pleasure in hearing us plead and beg. I'll say no more now. I will not plead or beg. Not for you”.\(^\text{154}\) This subversion through silence flusters the man, who offers Bea a plate of biscuits to prolong her death, instructing her that she must beg for her survival. Bea responds by
spitting in his face, leaving the plate untouched and choosing silence and death over submission. Up until this scene, her interactions with the serial killer are all presented with a grainy faded film stock and muted colour palette that reinforces Bea’s ominous fate at the hands of her torturer. However, at the moment that she exerts her agency and psychologically triumphs over the man, Gorris symbolises the shift in power by introducing colour back into the scene, signifying the strength of woman’s life force just before it is snuffed out, and making explicit and painfully real for the audience, through this cinematographic change, the tragic consequences of woman’s objectification.  

The female gaze is most radically affirmed in Diane’s final scene. When a client stabs one of Diane’s colleagues, the serial killer, visiting the brothel, comes to the rescue, driving the victim, accompanied by Dora and Diane, to the hospital. On their return to the brothel, the prostitutes, still traumatised by the horrific attack on their friend, are astounded when the man requests sex. They ask him to leave but he refuses. With a smirk on his face he begins to pull more and more notes out of his wallet assuming one of the women, unable to resist the excessive amount of money he is offering, will eventually give in to his demand: they don’t. Instead, Diane takes a gun and shoots at the serial killer, purposefully just missing him and hitting a large nearby mirror that breaks into hundreds of pieces of glass which ricochet in his direction, cutting him.

After the man, shocked and fearing for his life, runs out of the brothel, Diane proceeds to shoot every mirror in the establishment as the other women watch on in solidarity. Gorris uses this highly symbolic gesture to signify the destruction of the male gaze. By breaking woman out of her objectified and commodified confinement, Diane/Gorris perform:

a ritualistic act of resistance...against cultural representations of femininity, against the objectifying look that make women into whores, against the distorted self-images of women.
This scene offers a form of catharsis for the female viewer, as it provides some justice for Bea’s death, and marks Diane’s decision to leave prostitution for good.

The female gaze in feminist cinema relied not only on its de-eroticised and transgressive portrayal of character, but also on its conscious departure from the traditional three-act structure and its Oedipal roots.

**The Anti-Oedipal Structure**

In *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Mulvey noted that the three-act structure in mainstream film narratives relies on a sadistic demand that involves “forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an end”.¹⁵⁷ She drew attention to the fact that, due to the structure’s phallocentric framing, this sadism is customarily inflicted on female characters who are relegated to performing as passive/defeated pawns of phallocracy, whereas men are active/victorious heroes of the narrative. In light of this statement, along with the political revelations of independent cinema, many feminist filmmakers came to reject the three-act structure, given that its restorative conclusion generally involves reel woman’s subjectivity being ‘killed off’, either physically or metaphorically, through forms of rape, marriage or motherhood. These outcomes serve to return female characters to a realm of immobility and innocence, while representing the male character’s “resolution of the Oedipus complex”.¹⁵⁸

Feminist filmmakers demonstrated a refusal to subdue reel woman, or to subscribe to a ‘satisfying’ sense of closure at the expense of female agency, by subverting the traditional storytelling model. Their films “create[d] friction between building up narrative expectations and thwarting them”,¹⁵⁹ and embodied an element of moral ambiguity in their open-ended conclusions, which denied the sadistic Oedipalised
denouement of mainstream cinema, and left fundamental issues unresolved for the audience. This reworking of an Oedipal fate is, quite literally, exemplified in *Riddles of the Sphinx*. Mulvey and Wollen not only privilege the female character over the Oedipal hero on screen through positioning Louise, her daughter Ana, and the Sphinx, as central figures in the narrative, but also deny Oedipus the ability to solve the Sphinx’s riddle, and thereby prevent him from killing this symbol of woman. The film’s unconventional ending undermines Freud’s minimisation of the mother in the Oedipus complex, a theory he developed from this Greek myth, and signifies that the powerful archaic traces of the exiled pre-Oedipal mother in the unconscious of patriarchy cannot be repressed.

A further example of this digressive structure and open-ended conclusion in feminist cinema is found in *Jeanne Dielman*, in which Akerman “construct[s] a suspense without expectation”. For almost three hours we watch Jeanne, like a laboratory rat, performing her repetitive, immutable household labour. With little apparent dramatic drive these scenes work against the classical three-act structure’s building to a climax by seemingly not advancing the narrative in any deliberate way. It is, therefore, a great shock to the audience when, on a day that Jeanne’s alarm clock rings too early, throwing her daily routine and fragile equilibrium into disarray, she unexpectedly stabs one of her clients to death, postcoital.

In the closing scene of the film, Akerman deprives the audience of any conventional character revelation or explanation for Jeanne’s violent outburst. Instead, she suggests the possible consequences of women’s continued subordination and alienation in patriarchy by revealing the silent anguish and internalised calamity behind the façade of the perfect housewife. The film ends abruptly after the murder with a long take of Jeanne sitting, blood-soaked at her dining table as darkness falls outside. Through this
open-ended conclusion, Akerman allows the audience to ruminate over Jeanne’s potential motivation for killing her client, and to come up with their own interpretation for the film’s unresolved yet thought-provoking ending, that fails to chastise its female character.

Likewise, as opposed to the conventional courtroom drama that is constructed around the moral system of guilt and redemption, *A Question of Silence* interestingly sets out “to try not the criminal but the society that created the crime”. This is most evident in the closing courtroom scenes during the women’s sentencing, when Janine is drowned out by the arguments of the male lawyers, during her attempt to justify the female murderers’ actions. In response, the women, one by one, begin to laugh: first the accused, then four female witnesses who were in the boutique during the murder and did nothing to stop the crime, and finally, Janine herself. Gorris uses this scene, in which the courtroom is thrown into chaos by female laughter, to diminish the Law of the Father that works to silence women and restrict them from agency. Laughter has long been considered a poststructuralist form of defiance and deconstruction, and is a powerful feminist technique of resistance that “cuts patriarchy down to size”. Interestingly, this courtroom scene also appears to have had an emancipatory impact on female audience members during public screenings of the film, many of whom reportedly often also burst into laughter. Rich asserts that this scene:

> forges a bond among women – and between women viewers and the film – for this transgressive laughter that overflows its boundaries and manifests itself to excess is intimately connected to its flip side, the rage that does the same.

This film generated a lot of controversy when it was released, given the lack of guilt felt by the female murderers, and the fact that the film ends before male justice is served.
The dissident feminist cinema - by women and about women - described in this chapter, was a catalyst for change in the industry, and in society. Both diegetically and non-diegetically, its female gaze presented a woman’s perspective of the world and helped to strengthen reel women’s authorial agency in society. This progress was, however, derailed by the advent of postfeminism.

**Postfeminism and the Dea(r)th of Women’s Filmmaking**

By the mid 1980s, the mass media’s overuse of the feminist tag for anything specifically involving women in culture misleadingly gave the impression that women were ubiquitous and equal participants in society. This patriarchal propaganda generated the belief that feminist rhetoric was passé and no longer warranted. Marxist-feminists, including Michele Barrett (1988), Susan Faludi (1991) and Naomi Wolf (2002), argue that this feminist backlash came about through the rise of capitalism and the multi-national agenda of the 1980s, which attempted to bring women back to consumerism by telling them they could stop the ‘tired fight’ of feminism as they were now fair game and had the ability and capital to have, and to be, anything that they wanted. Put simply, the ethos was that women had made their point, and had been heard, so everyone could ‘lighten up’ on the political correctness and openly indulge in their desires and consumerist trappings without fearing oppressive forces at play. Feminism became publicly spurned in popular culture and replaced by an alleged postfeminist ‘freedom’ of individualism driven by capitalism.

This resulted in a precarious situation for women working in film production and criticism. Film feminism became increasingly unfashionable, carrying with it an unpopular stigma associated with hostility and radical politics that was patently unappealing to most film financiers. This postfeminist climate saw the majority of
female film organisations and funding schemes disband by the late 1980s, as separatism was seen “as a form of sexism ‘in reverse’”\textsuperscript{169}. Most female filmmakers therefore avoided overt feminist sensibilities in their work, in order to continue to receive funding support in a persistently male-driven industry.

Consequently, the decade between the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s produced a highly problematic cinema that seemed to have taken “feminist films and run the reels backward”\textsuperscript{170}. Not only did this period’s troubling representations of woman in and on screen give the impression that the film feminist movement had never happened, it also revealed that the revolution had incited a vehement agenda by some male filmmakers to teach reel woman a lesson by returning her to a more subordinate position on screen than ever before. Faludi asserts that commercial film had an even greater cultural power to castigate women and reinforce the postfeminist ethos than the media, as it was not limited by journalistic protocol. She argues that male filmmakers could therefore:

mold their fictional women as they pleased; they could make them obey. While editorial writers could only exhort “shrill” and “strident” independent women to keep quiet, the movie industry could actually muzzle its celluloid bad girls\textsuperscript{171}.

And that is exactly what it did. This decade of filmmaking witnessed the radical diminishing of reel woman’s agency and the silencing of the independent female voice that had gained force during the feminist film movement. Mainstream films were filled with patriarchal excess, machismo and sexually exploitative examinations of woman, as the male gaze returned with a vengeance.

Popular genres during this time included serial action films (\textit{Predator} (1987), \textit{Die Hard} (1988), \textit{Rambo} (1982), \textit{Indiana Jones} (1981), \textit{Superman II} (1981), \textit{Lethal Weapon} (1987), \textit{Mad Max} (1980)), in which women either played the incidental role of the victim who is saved by the male hero, or were absent altogether; teenage ‘tits ‘n’ ass’
style comedies and fantasy films in which pubescent boys went in search of their first sexual experience, and/or used magic to create their ultimate, artificial dream woman, and where female characters were generally bikini-clad bimbos or cheerleaders (Porky’s (1982), Revenge of the Nerds (1984), Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982)), or were, literally, inanimate sexual objects (Weird Science (1985), Mannequin (1987)); and finally, the return of romantic comedies, which involved women playing the passive love interest, waiting for Prince Charming to make their lives complete (Working Girl (1988), Pretty Woman (1990), Sleepless in Seattle (1993)), which De Lauretis suggests turned reel woman into a docile agent in the narrative, who only seemed to “wake up, like Snow White and Sleeping Beauty, if the film end[ed] with the kiss”.172

Echoing Haskell and Rosen’s observations regarding female chastisement in mainstream postwar representations, that arose in response to women entering the workplace, Faludi draws attention to a final prevalent genre in this postfeminist decade, the thriller film, which reflected a similar male anxiety toward women’s increasing sexual and economic power through the feminist movement. This was demonstrated in a trend of films that involved psychopathic and barren single working women (replacing the femme fatales of postwar cinema), who threatened the life and security of a man they had seduced (Basic Instinct (1992), Disclosure (1994)), and also often his wife and children (Fatal Attraction (1987), The Hand that Rocks the Cradle (1992)). Faludi highlights the fact that these films once more took up the sadism and didacticism of traditional Hollywood cinema by punishing women for their independence:

In typical themes, women were set against women; women’s anger at their social circumstances was depoliticized and displayed as personal depression instead; and women’s lives were framed as morality tales in which the “good mother” wins and the independent woman gets punished...Hollywood restated and reinforced the backlash thesis...women were unhappy because they were too free; their liberation had denied them marriage and motherhood.173
In the mid 1990s, there was a slight reaffirmation of feminist filmmakers through the impact of an alternative, leftist surge, which promoted egalitarianism and involved a subcultural grunge rebellion.\textsuperscript{174} During these more liberal-minded years it appeared that society was finally starting to recognise difference, particularly in regard to sexuality, ethnicity, and gender. The philosophy of the period showed much promise for reel women but unfortunately did not deliver. Due to the lack of a supportive framework with the kind of longevity needed to adequately (re)instate women in film, together with the absence of a positive language or name for the critical area of film feminism, the revival was short-lived.\textsuperscript{175}

By the end of the 1990s, silence in the face of adversity again became the accepted and safe response for most reel women. Postfeminism had well and truly arrived in the arts, and the presence of female filmmakers diminished dramatically.
Notes

1 Irigaray. *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 31.
3 Ibid, 3.
4 Ibid, 1.
11 Ibid, 35.
14 Ibid, 37.
16 These international offshoots included the French New Wave movement, the Italian Neorealism movement, British Kitchen Sink cinema, New German cinema, and the ‘Indie’ (independent) film movement in America.
23 Ibid, 36-37.
26 In Brecht’s plays, music, lighting and props were kept to a minimum, actors often wore masks, thereby preventing audience identification, characters spoke in fragmented and absurdist styles, and sometimes turned and directly addressed the audience, breaking their suspension of disbelief. For further reading on Brecht’s theories see Bertolt Brecht and John Willett. 1964. *Brecht on Theatre*. London: Eyre Methuen.
30 Bordwell and Thompson. *Film History: An Introduction*, 413.
32 Ibid, 5.
33 Ibid, 11.
35 These characters were generally also non-actors, thereby reinforcing independent film’s anti-bourgeois, anti-capitalist renunciation of the ‘movie star’.
36 Feminists such as Anneke Smelik (1998), Kaja Silverman (1988), Judith Mayne (1990), Rosi Braidotti, (1991), Pam Cook and Claire Johnston (1990) accused the auteur school of repeating the very system it
seeks to destroy by being elitist and exclusive to ‘white, bourgeois male’ directors and their vision of the world.

38 Ibid.
42 Freud further maintained that this looking pleasure can be so intense, that the observer feels as if they are almost touching the object of their fascination. Sigmund Freud. 1953. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, edited by Anna Freud, Angela Richards and James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 156.
49 Ibid, 6.
52 Ibid, 96.
53 These binary positions of spectatorship explain Western culture’s perverse obsession with screen celebrities; our tendency to both immortalise and, just as easily, viciously scrutinise and condemn them as though they are lesser beings. For an interesting discussion of this phenomenon see Richard Dyer and Paul McDonald. 1998. *Stars*. New ed. London: BFI Publisher.
54 Women and Film. 1972. 6.
56 Ibid, 154.
60 Haskell. *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid, 23.
65 Ibid, 30.
67 Ibid, 41.
68 Ibid, 39.
69 Ibid, 41.
70 Ibid, 40.
71 Ibid, 43.
72 Ibid, 42.
73 Ibid, 35.
76 Ibid, 47.


79 While I will shortly discuss a number of these disparities, it is not possible to outline all in the scope of this thesis. For a more comprehensive discussion of these issues see Rich Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement; Patricia Mellencamp. 1995. A Fine Romance: Five Ages of Film Feminism. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

80 Blonski, Creed and Freiberg. Don’t Shoot Darling! Women’s Independent Filmmaking in Australia, 38.


83 During the mid 1980s the Australian government came to recognise the commercial potential of Australian films and, in order to encourage private investors to fund local films, established a tax incentive system known as the 10BA tax concessions, which offered investors a 150 per cent tax return on their investment. This incentive proved to be so popular that more films were produced in Australia during the 1980s than in any other decade. (David Stratton. 1990. The Avocado Plantation: Boom and Bust in the Australian Film Industry. Chippendale, N.S.W: Macmillan, 4-6). However, as Blonski and others note, this meant that accountants, lawyers and other investors, who knew little about making films, “were able to decide, in 10BA’s heyday, what films were to be made”. (Blonski, Creed and Freiberg. Don’t Shoot Darling! Women’s Independent Filmmaking in Australia, 48). As a result, a number of poorly-received genre films were produced during the era.


86 This school is now referred to as the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS).


89 Johnston. Women’s Cinema as Counter-Cinema, 28.

90 Ibid, 29.


92 Mellencamp. A Fine Romance: Five Ages of Film Feminism, 76.


94 Ibid, 218.

95 Ibid, 290.

96 Ibid, 175.

97 De Beauvoir’s influence can be seen in the work of Betty Friedan (1963), Rosen (1973), Haskell (1974), Helene Cixous (1976), Luce Irigaray (1985), and Julia Kristeva (1974), along with the films of female filmmakers like Catherine Breillat, Agnes Varda, and Sally Potter.


99 Ibid, 15.


103 Mellencamp. A Fine Romance: Five Ages of Film Feminism, 8.

104 Ibid, 155.


106 Ibid.


108 Smelik. And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory, 106.
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110 Ibid, 321.
111 Ibid, 323.
113 Nietzsche. The Will to Power (1883-1888), 339.
114 Ibid, 1067.
117 See Deleuze and Guattari. A Thousand Plateaus.
118 Ibid, 277.
120 For example, the three murderers in A Question of Silence are of different class and education; the prostitutes in Broken Mirrors are of varied nationality, race, and age, and in The Gold Diggers, Celeste is black and Ruby is white.
122 Mansfield. Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway, 63.
126 Kaplan. Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera, 87.
127 Although these theorists are often referred to as French feminists, since they know reside in France, Kristeva is actually Bulgarian, Cixous is Algerian, and Irigaray is from Belgium.
130 Irigaray. This Sex Which Is Not One, 69.
131 Ibid.
133 Cixous and Clement. The Newly Born Woman.
134 Kristeva. Revolution in Poetic Language, 79-80; Cixous. The Laugh of the Medusa. 886; Irigaray. This Sex Which Is Not One, 205-218.
135 Doane. Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body, 88.
138 Smelik. And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory, 52.
139 Thornham. Passionate Detachments: An Introduction to Feminist Film Theory, 37.
141 Mulvey. Visual and Other Pleasures, 125.
142 Doane. Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body, 87.
145 Smelik. And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory, 52.
146 Thornham. Passionate Detachments: An Introduction to Feminist Film Theory, 37.
148 Doane. Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body, 87.
150 As labelled by her Aunt Helen. My Brilliant Career. Armstrong.
151 Doane. Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body, 97.
153 Doane. Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body, 97.
154 Smelik. And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory, 52.
155 As labelled by her Aunt Helen. My Brilliant Career. Armstrong.
156 Doane. Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body, 97.
Gorris limits the audience to only seeing the man in deep focus, from behind, and in silhouette. We observe him place down a pen and notebook in his office and take off his gloves, and we hear his voice as he interacts with his wife and with Bea, but we never see his face until the closing moments of the film.

Smelik. *And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory*, 111.

Broken Mirrors. Gorris.


Ibid, 117.


Smith. *The Writing Experiment: Strategies for Innovative Creative Writing*, 136. While this quote by Smith relates more specifically to postmodernist and poststructuralist narratives, it also encapsulates the unconventional approach to storytelling employed by many feminist filmmakers.


Doane. *Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body*, 98.


Ibid, 112-139.

Blonski, Creed and Freiberg. *Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*, 87.


Ibid, 113.


Today’s most renowned female filmmakers, including Jane Campion, Gillian Armstrong, Catherine Breillat, Sally Potter, Nicole Holofcener, and Deepa Mehta, emerged in the 1990s, and, as I will discuss in the following chapter, this decade has, to date, seen the highest number of Australian Film Institute (AFI) awards given to female filmmakers.

In Australia, this was mostly due to political volatility and the consequent unpredictability of funding for the film industry.
Chapter Two

Sites of Resistance: Contemporary Reel Woman’s Celluloid Ceiling

What we hear a lot of now is men asking women: ‘What else do you want? You’ve got all the rights.’ I don’t have all the rights…The freedom of women is very fragile – it has only existed for 20 to 25 years.¹

Filmmaker Catherine Breillat

During the twentieth century, the feminist movement, along with the theorisation and politicisation of the human subject, and the medium of cinema, significantly improved the status and material conditions of female filmmakers in the industry. These developments also brought about the transformation of woman on screen, who no longer performed solely as a fixed, marginal, eroticised being, but as a fluid and diverse agent in her own right, who could be just as shaped by personal and cultural limitations, as by resistance and agency.

Today, however, the growing separation between academia and popular culture, as a result of capitalism, has seen a major disparity arise between film theory’s more progressive and empowered notions of woman in comparison to her negative representation and inconclusive standing in dominant film and in society, both of which continue to view woman through a comparative male lens. This separation is theoretically and politically damaging for female filmmakers, given that popular culture reaches a much larger audience than the academy, and therefore has a stronger influence on the core values and ideology of 21st century culture.² It is further concerning that today’s individualistic culture fails to inform about the operations of structural inequalities, or to support the constitution of communal politics. The ongoing backlash against feminism further exacerbates this situation, presenting enormous challenges for the future of female sovereignty in film.
In the face of the capitalist power structures restricting the performance of reel woman in today’s screen industry, particular obstacles present as seemingly insurmountable, most notably relating to ideology, commercialised sexism, spectatorship, censorship and education.

**Female Filmmaking in the iGeneration**

At first glance, women in the 21st century appear to have ample opportunity to make films, given the increasing cheapness and accessibility of film equipment and digital technology, along with the availability of educational and industry-based training and resources. The digital medium is significantly more economical than film, with regard to both stock and equipment, and, given its efficiency and fast turnover, it is also markedly more cost-effective in relation to logistical production elements. Not only does this reduced financial outlay render the digital medium favourable to female filmmakers struggling to find funding to make their films, but also, the simplified technology of its lightweight high-resolution cameras and laptop editing software enables us to feel more in control of the overall filmmaking process. For this reason, writer/director Allison Anders, who shot her most recent feature film *Things Behind the Sun* (2001) using digital technology in a remarkable seventeen days,3 deems the medium “a tremendous thing for women and for non-white filmmakers”.4 She clarifies her reasons for this opinion:

> We were shut out pretty early on from a medium we created along with men…So I always felt like film was somebody else’s and I was just getting to use it for awhile. Whereas with digital I feel like, ‘I understand what we’re doing’.5

The explosion of digital filmmaking, and the accelerating global monopolisation of distribution and exhibition in the audio-visual market, through new technologies including web-based broadcast sites like *Myspace* and *Youtube*, integrated digital
delivery platforms such as digital television and interactive technology, and even an emerging mobile phone viewing market, present exciting possibilities for the future of female filmmaking. Troy Lum, the managing director of Australia’s leading independent distribution company, Hopscotch Films, acknowledges this changing landscape of image-based distribution and exhibition:

As filmmakers it is really important to understand that there are so many different ways that people are digesting film information. Theatrical releases are the most cumbersome thing you could do because you’ve got to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars to get a film out theatrically. There are really different ways now that films can be seen; whether they’re straight to DVD, over the internet, or over a mobile phone, we’re on the cusp of that now. There are all these different ways for filmmakers to get their creativity out there.⁶

Since the mid 1990s, Australia has had a comparatively favourable climate for female filmmaking to that of other film industries in the West.⁷ This women-friendly industry is most likely the result of a number of interdependent factors. There is the country’s near nonexistent film industry during 1940–1969, which has resulted in Australia lacking an established Hollywood-style film culture deeply rooted in male dominance and corporatisation by large studios and production houses. This reduced capital and commercial infrastructure benefits female filmmakers because it has seen the growth of a more accessible, independent screen culture, focussed on smaller scale productions. Canadian filmmaker Patricia Rozema recognises that “[t]here are more women writer-directors coming out of Australia per capita and in Canada than in the U.S.”,⁸ claiming that this is because, as opposed to America, film in Australia, as in Canada, “has been respected as more of an art form and more than a business”.⁹ This is most definitely also due to the fact that Australian film culture is not as dominated by white, male movie stars and epic androcentric narratives; instead following the trend of European postwar cinema, by privileging the stories of ‘underdog’ type characters dealing with the everyday complexities of being human.
Another contributing factor to this more favourable industry for women in Australia, is the history of targeted government funding for female filmmakers during the revival period of the 1970s and 1980s, and briefly in the 1990s, which enabled women to gain technical training, and to make films that shaped many of the themes and conventions of Australia’s national cinema today. Prolific Australian producer Jan Chapman, corroborates that:

[i]n Australia, we have really benefited from an independent industry which offers an alternative to the male dominated studio system, and this has only been possible because of government funding for film and television.

Nevertheless, while Australian female filmmakers may be better off than many other western reel women, due to this more inclusive culture, and have been actively involved in television and short film production since the 1970s, female writer/directors in our feature film industry are still few and far between, and those that do exist lack sufficient public recognition.

This is most evident in the statistics of the annual Australian Film Institute (AFI) awards. In the 50-year history of these awards, only nine times has a female-directed film won the ‘Best Film’ accolade, and only eight female directors have had the ‘Best Direction’ award bestowed upon them. Interestingly seven out of the nine ‘Best Film’ awards to women, and six out of the eight ‘Best Direction’ awards, have been since 1990. Among this recipient list of writer/directors are Gillian Armstrong with My Brilliant Career (1979), Nadia Tass with Malcolm (1986), Jocelyn Moorhouse with Proof (1991), Jane Campion with The Piano (1993), Sue Brooks with Japanese Story (2003), Cate Shortland with Somersault (2004), Sara Watt with Look Both Ways (2005) and Elissa Down for The Black Balloon (2008). These reel women seem to reflect a modest, yet growing status of female filmmakers in the country. Perhaps things are looking up for women in feature film production, or perhaps, as film critic Marsha
McCreadie asserts regarding similar recent female successes in America’s industry, these “recent bright spots may be just a surface shine”,16 since the culture in Hollywood reflects a much darker shadow.

Things in Hollywood appear to have come full circle since the writers of Women and Film first drew attention to female misrepresentation and under representation in 1972. As I outlined in the thesis introduction, the number of women working in commercial cinema today is abysmally low. Martha M. Lauzen, a University professor who conducts annual surveys into women working behind-the-scenes in Hollywood, indicates that, despite the gradual increase of female participation in most other industries, the number of reel women is actually decreasing over time.17 This directly contradicts the fact that, at large, women in western film schools and universities generally make up equal, if not higher, numbers of enrolments to men.18 What then happens to these budding female filmmakers, once they enter teaching institutions and the film industry, to justify such disproportionate outcomes?

As in many high pressure occupations, an accepted explanation for women’s under-representation in film is that the medium’s high pressure climate and demanding hours19 makes it impossible for aspirant female filmmakers to take time out to have children, given that a year out of the industry is the kiss of death to one’s career. This forces women to choose between filmmaking or a family. While this reality is no doubt a contributing part of the problem, Lauzen’s research statistics suggest that it is more directly due to ‘The Celluloid Ceiling’,20 a term based on the notion of the glass ceiling, which she uses to describe the implicitly male-dominated studio system that prevents women from moving beyond minor success in the film industry.21
This invisible ceiling works on many levels of control and indoctrination: take, for example, the fact that men own and run most of the film funding bodies, powerhouse production studios, and distribution companies in Hollywood; hold almost every influential film critic position in the mainstream media; make up the majority of Western film censorship boards; pioneered the overall narrative organisation and mechanisms of popular cinema, and continue to be the primary educators and facilitators in film universities and institutions, which teach us to favour androcentric characters and stories.22 In short, Lauzen attests that:

men dominate the reviewing process of films primarily made by men featuring mostly males intended for a largely male audience. The under-employment of women film reviewers, actors, and filmmakers perpetuates the nearly seamless dialogue among men in U.S. cinema.23

Talking about the support she received from film critics and governmental agencies early on in her career, Campion, unarguably the most recognised female filmmaker of the contemporary era, asserts:

I don’t think that same support exists for young women now. I think the eighties were a hard won, special time where people were skiting about having a woman film director or someone who was a woman in their group and there was a sort of male guilt at the time about it. But I think that’s all gone now and I don’t think that things are getting better at all.24

Campion recently publicly acknowledged the relentless suppression of women in film. The only woman in history to have won the Cannes Film Festival’s prestigious Palme D’or award,25 Campion was being honoured at the 2007 festival, along with her fellow recipients, and was given the opportunity to produce and screen a short film as a tribute to the award. Making a humorous metaphorical statement on women’s dire situation in mainstream cinema, Campion’s short fantasy film, The Lady Bug (2007), concerned a misunderstood woman dressed up in a bug costume, who is attracted to the spotlight of a movie theatre, but is ultimately trapped and crushed by a male janitor working in the establishment who finds her a nuisance.26 Ironically, Campion is often used as an
example to demonstrate that women are now ‘fair game’ in the industry, that we have equal opportunity for box office achievement. She, along with a handful of other writer/directors who have managed to find some commercial success, such as Sofia Coppola, Gillian Armstrong, and Deepa Mehta, are used tokenistically against the politics of women, as though their achievement marks an end to gender disparity in the medium.

Beyond the obvious sites of resistance inhibiting women from enjoying a long-term career in the industry, are subtler psychological forms of persuasion. It appears that for female writer/directors it is not as easy as simply picking up a digital camera and making a film. There are many more complex reasons for the paucity of reel woman’s agency in and on screen. This is even the case in Australia, as was reinforced by the former head of research at AFTRS, Julie James Bailey, who, in response to the termination of the Australian Film Commission’s Women’s Programme in 1999, declared that, “there is still so much to be done”\(^27\) to overcome the long term effects of female oppression. Although official cultural norms now supposedly uphold women’s equality and difference, commercial 21\(^{st}\) century cinema, and its industry, provide a smoke screen for female oppression that communicates masked messages of our apparent inferiority. Under the pretence of postfeminism, this indoctrination is mostly latent, and thereby even more damaging. Women are no longer invisible in and on screen, and are therefore not considered to be marginalised; yet from the point of view of female agency, women are now paradoxically silenced through this presence, which is akin to the Victorian adage, ‘seen but not heard’. What this means is that, although women regularly participate in film production, and appear on mainstream screen, they often do not perform as self-determined agents, but as manipulated objects for the purpose of male desire.
Part of this problem can be traced back to the fact that the notion of the universal (male) subject still greatly influences how we imagine and organise global communities today. As examined in chapter one, this homogeneous model of subjectivity, which, today, continues to deny the interdependence of our subjectivity, and levels out human difference for the sake of a mass-market consumerist agenda, has been highly contested throughout the modern era, yet the escalation of capitalism and globalisation has contributed to its return in mainstream discourse. This is disguised in an attractive ideology of individualism, disseminated by popular culture and the mass media, which sells the postfeminist illusion that reel women have an infinite number of positions of subjectivity and agency available to them. In reality, however, like most contemporary institutions, commercial cinema continues to afford women definition solely through male association, and curtails female authority by defaming reel women who attempt to exercise more than a modicum of power.

In today’s capitalist iGeneration, the philosophy of self is based on a consumerist “I shop therefore I am” adaptation of Descartes’ rational dictum. Dubbed the iGeneration due to popular culture’s increased dependence on, and favouring of, digital technologies such as the iPod and iPhone, along with its focus on the “cult of the self”, a large part of society today searches for selfhood through consumption. Individualism has become one of capitalism’s most saleable ideological notions. This is reflected in the logic of contemporary advertising, which targets our contradictory desires for autonomy and validation: we tend to define ourselves as distinct individuals through the clothes we wear, the house we own, the car we drive, the food we eat, the music on our iPods and so on, at the same time as trying to compensate for our lack by seeking approval from others, conforming to the latest trends, and endlessly striving to keep up with the
Jones’s.\textsuperscript{32} This capitalist ideology evokes Lacan’s cyclic concept of lack, desire and demand.

In a deviation from Freud, Lacan argued that the castration complex is “not only sexual…it is also linguistic”,\textsuperscript{33} since it involves a symbolic destruction of the subject’s \textit{jouissance} as s/he is castrated from the mother’s breast in the acquisition of language. In Lacanian theory, both sexed subjects share this experience of lack through the loss of the maternal imaginary. As a result, Lacan maintained that we are continually hoping to relive the imaginary’s fleeting promise of wholeness, “refusing to accept the truth of fragmentation and alienation”.\textsuperscript{34} His concept of lack, desire and demand emphasises, however, that we can never find this unity in the symbolic order, as language is impossible to master; ironically, “[t]he subject’s sense of itself is lost in the very field of signs that seemed to provide it in the first place”.\textsuperscript{35} Lacan consequently held the view that we experience a lifelong feeling of inadequacy, for which we demand compensation.

This demand sustains our eternal desire for the mother, in the \textit{objet petit a}, a fantasy object-cause of desire that can take many forms, such as a person, a job, a religion, a drug, a food, sex, money and so on, which we fool ourselves into thinking will provide a sense of stabilisation and fulfilment, yet which can never appease this maternal desire. Lacan argued that it is a subject’s \textit{jouissance}, related to this \textit{objet petit a}, that determines their status in society, not necessarily their sex.\textsuperscript{36} In the subordinate (feminine) power position, he claimed that the subject must become the \textit{objet petit a} to attain Other \textit{jouissance}, which either involves “‘the \textit{jouissance} the Other gets out of us’, or ‘our enjoyment of the Other’, or ‘our enjoyment as the Other’”.\textsuperscript{37} Other \textit{jouissance} cannot, however, provide us with a permanent sense of completion, as it requires us to
seek pleasure in an other’s desire, rather than in our own. In the dominant (masculine) position, Lacan maintained that the subject can pretend to possess the phallus and derive phallic jouissance by turning the Other into the objet petit a. He highlighted that this objectification also does not completely satisfy the subject, as it can only ever offer an ephemeral experience of unity and pleasure since it “functions retrospectively”, attached to unresolved issues of castration from the (m)other and the mirror stage during infancy. Phallic jouissance therefore centres around this sense of “(dis)satisfaction that always leaves something wanting”.

Lacan asserted that it is this paradox of jouissance that defines our subjectivity, and “is the very heart of the human tragedy”. This is most evident in the culture of capitalism, which externalises subject formation wholly onto the objet petit a, by entertaining the idea that our identification lies outside of ourselves. As Lacan warned, this eventually returns us to a state of lack, and reignites the cycle of desire and demand that serves capitalism’s consumerist agenda. Although differing in theoretical emphasis, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari supported this view, contending that, as the super power of morality, capitalism has brought about the destruction of desiring-production through creating the illusion that we are exercising our own will, when in actual fact it regiments us to “police and present ourselves in the correct way” so as to benefit consumerist society.

The rise of global capitalism has come to see subjectivities encompassing experiences of war, displacement, fragmentation, technology, and migration. Deleuze and Guattari argued that this splitting of subjectivity has evolved into the schizophrenic non-subject because we “no longer believe in a primordial totality that once existed, or in a final totality that awaits us at some future date”. By acknowledging the repressive influence of social stratification (gender, age, race, class, sexuality) in capitalism, these
postmodernist thinkers deemed the concept of individualism, based around the notion of the unified subject, an ideological construct of bourgeois capitalist entitlement that neglects to recognise the fragmented condition of the contemporary subject in capitalism.  

Capitalism has not only rigorously done away with the notion of difference, its new language of commodity has also generated the concept of disposable human beings to whom subjectivity is restricted, if not brutally denied. Its appealing ideology of individuality and meritocracy is particularly problematic for women because, although it suggests that merit is exploitable for all, this postfeminist ideology fails to acknowledge that merit is a quality evaluated by the power structures of capitalist society.  

Individuals whose characteristics and abilities do not meet the patriarchal paradigm consequently lack merit. Individualism supports female oppression through concealing this conditioning of society’s value systems, and disavowing women’s ongoing subordination as a collective group. This results in many disillusioned women believing that their fragmented condition, and inferior social status, is due to personal incompetence, which, as Wolf argues, sees them attempt to supplement their feelings of lack with the currency of beauty and sexuality.

Recontextualising Friedan’s theory of ‘the feminine mystique’ for the modern day, Wolf identifies this situation as a symptom of ‘the beauty myth’, an ideology generated by capitalist institutions that she claims now use images of female beauty, as opposed to images of the domestic goddess, as “a political weapon against women’s advancement”, with the purpose of safeguarding the masculine order and recovering from the economic fallout caused by the women’s movement. Paraphrasing parts of Friedan’s writing, Wolf explains:
Chapter Two – Sites of Resistance 126

When the restless, isolated, bored, and insecure housewife fled the Feminine Mystique for the workplace, advertisers faced the loss of their primary consumer…A new ideology was necessary that would compel the same insecure consumerism…Somehow, somewhere, someone must have figured out that [women] will buy more things if they are kept in the self-hating, ever-failing, hungry, and sexually insecure state of being aspiring “beauties”. 49

Propelled by a return of romantic mythology in mass imagery, the beauty myth works on women’s anxieties, and our wish to be accepted, respected and loved. It commodifies our bodies to sell us products and the illusion of power through a universal notion of beauty which, Wolf contends, “claims to be about intimacy and sex and life, a celebration of women…[yet it] is actually composed of emotional distance, politics, finance, and sexual repression”. 50 Women’s obsession with physical perfection confines them to a lifelong private battle of trying to meet a culturally imposed feminine ideal. This generates ongoing self-esteem issues in women who cannot live up to this inaccessible flawless beauty, causing them to spend endless amounts of money to try to ‘fix’ themselves with the likes of makeup, diets, clothing, beauty products, gym memberships, and plastic surgery, thereby (re)fuelling the corporate machine and industries that propagate the imprisoning beauty myth. 51

The beauty myth especially thrives in today’s iGeneration, which, on the whole, feeds narcissism and mass consumption, and works against the collective voice of women by encouraging us to be preoccupied with ourselves. 52 Its individualistic focus also conveniently prevents feminism’s agenda, by pitting women against one another as rivals for ‘beauty power’, and male attention; by encouraging competitive consumerism as opposed to communal politics. By simultaneously disseminating the powerful beauty myth, against an unattractive image of feminism, and, as I will examine later, censoring the important works of feminist filmmakers today, the mass media discourages most emerging female filmmakers from challenging their marginal positioning in the
industry, or from engaging with critical forms of resistance that subvert mainstream film’s deficit depictions of woman. This perpetuates the problem of a lack of female agency in film.

The absence of active reel women who are prepared to challenge the status quo is not helped by the increasing corporatisation of film, which has seen the industry become an even more political and competitive landscape. It is not surprising, therefore, that sexism is still a major site of resistance for women in the medium.

**Commercialised Sexism**

I would not have a career as a filmmaker without government funding.\(^{53}\)

Jane Campion

In today’s postfeminist climate, the notion of gender inequality is considered passé, as the cultural focus has shifted to other issues of disparity related to race, ethnicity and sexuality. This overshadows the fact that sexism is still an acute problem in male-dominated industries such as commercial cinema. Hollywood agent Elaine Goldsmith-Thomas wryly explains that the glass ceiling in the industry may have been raised slightly in the last half century, “[b]ut certainly when a woman hits her head on it, she can look up and see men’s loafers”.\(^{54}\) Lauzen goes so far as to proclaim: “Sometimes I think being labelled sexist in that community is not seen as negative but a badge of honor”.\(^{55}\) This was recently made most apparent in an announcement by Warner Bros’ president of production, Jeff Robinov. After two of the studio’s male-directed films (*The Invasion* (2007) and *The Brave One* (2007)) with Nicole Kidman and Jodie Foster as respective central characters, made little profit, Robinov reportedly told his colleagues that the studio would no longer make films with women in lead roles because they were ‘poison at the box office’, going so far as to proclaim that in future he would not even read a script if the main protagonist was female.\(^{56}\)
This type of overt commercialised sexism, still present in the mainstream industry, demonstrates that even when films made by men fail at the box office, women are generally blamed as the source of the problem. This prejudice also crosses over to female filmmakers. Film writer Victoria A. Brownworth affirms that critics are a lot harsher on women directors:

When a man makes a bad film or a box-office bomb, it’s simply a bad movie; that failure doesn’t translate into a conception that men are bad directors...But when a woman makes a movie that doesn’t do well, then all women are suspect.\textsuperscript{57}

Lauzen confirms that in today’s film industry, “[m]ale competency is assumed...Female competency is frequently if not always questioned”.\textsuperscript{58}

Co-president of independent film company Roadside Attractions, Howard Cohen, does not dispute Robinov’s observation regarding the general lack of success of mainstream films with women in central roles. However, he highlights that, “[i]t’s a more complicated thing that’s being reduced to something simplistic”.\textsuperscript{59} He describes the situation as a ‘chicken or egg’ scenario given that “[t]here’s no money put in women stars and genres, so it’s a self-fulfilling prophecy”.\textsuperscript{60} Interestingly, even though most female-directed films are made on a much smaller budget than male-directed ones, they still take in the same relative box office profit.\textsuperscript{61} This blatantly demonstrates the extreme paradox of commercialised sexism, argued to be a necessary evil for financial gain because men’s films make more money.

This continued disregard of female writer/directors in the industry implies that women do not possess the filmic ‘genius’ required to be an auteur. This brings to mind Linda Nochlin’s important article \textit{Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?}, in which she stresses that this common (title) question “points to major areas of intellectual obfuscation beyond the specific political and ideological issues involved in the
subjection of women” and “falsifies the nature of the issue at the same time that it...” After deconstructing many of the myths surrounding the possible reasons for an absence of ‘great’ female artists, Nochlin concludes that, unlike what such elitist concepts as auteurism suggest, “art is not a free, autonomous activity of a super-endowed individual.” She writes that instead:

the total situation of art making, both in terms of the development of the art maker and in the nature and quality of the work of art itself, occur in a social situation…determined by specific and definable social institutions.

The male ideological hegemony still present in the film industry today makes it extremely difficult for women to find funding for their films. This is even the case in Australia. Since the Australian government’s disbanding of the Women’s Film Fund in 1988, there have been no more film funding schemes specific to female writer/directors offered in the country. The only state funding available to female (and male) feature filmmakers today, is through government based film organisations. These subsidy schemes are highly competitive and inadequate when compared to the average cost of a feature film, thereby requiring ‘top ups’ from other corporate investors, with their own discriminations and apprehensions regarding backing a female filmmaker. Furthermore, as Jennifer Stott notes in her article, Celluloid Maidens: All Teched-up and Nowhere to Go (1987), the independent film industry in Australia is therefore also often “subjected to cuts in funding through changes in government policy”.

Ironically, there is the occasional film award especially reserved for Australian female filmmakers, such as in the popular annual short film festival Sony Tropfest, which introduced the $5,000 Balance Water Women in Film Award in 2006 to:

inspire female filmmakers and to provide an opportunity to screen their films to hundreds and thousands of people across Australia…with the aim of encouraging and supporting emerging female talent.
Of course, this festival is again aimed solely at short film, and, to be in the running for the award, a woman must first find funding to make a film to enter into the festival. As is the case internationally, there is a critical need for more grass roots and long-term focussed funding initiatives in Australia to foster the careers of female writer/directors. This is made most evident by the fact that the sole film organisation in Australia specifically directed towards women, Women in Film and Television (WIFT) - which is aimed at “improving the status of women, both on and off the screen” by providing female filmmakers with networking schemes and festivals to promote their achievements in image-based industries - is unable to offer production funding, and is often forced to forego one of its most promising schemes for emerging female filmmakers, industry mentorship, due to “financial constraints”.

Australia’s lack of an established film industry, due to its almost 30-year gap of activity, has proven to be both a blessing and a curse for female filmmakers. While, as mentioned earlier, Australian reel women in many ways benefit from the freedom of a relatively underdeveloped and uncolonised industry and film culture, the flipside of this is that there is not a strong history of female feature film production in the country. When Armstrong made *My Brilliant Career* in 1979, for instance, she was the first woman in 49 years to direct a feature film in Australia. Eminent Hollywood script consultant Linda Seger explains that this young history of women in film enables the damaging, self-perpetuating cycle of commercialised sexism in the industry:

> Many executives still believe that movies about women don’t make money…the woman’s voice has not yet clearly emerged in the art of screenwriting…women have few films as models about how to tell their stories and express themes that have not been shown before. If she’s found her voice, even if it’s considered by most to be a great script, many of the executives will probably consider it not commercial because it’s unlike the other films on the market.
A further downside of Australia lacking an established indigenous industry, and consequently struggling to compete in a capitalist marketplace, is that foreign-based entertainment and media corporations (mainly American) still largely run the country’s cinema chains, and therefore continue to have a stranglehold on film distribution in Australia. On average, over the past decade, 96% per cent of Australia’s cinema box office earnings each year have gone to foreign films (78% to the U.S.). This situation sees Australian female filmmakers limited by the same constraints as reel women working in more overtly sexist industries, such as Hollywood, since the country’s government funding bodies tend to look for commercially ‘safe’ films that will travel well on the international mainstream circuit, thereby not “encourag[ing] filmmakers to be original and to take risks”. Considering that female-made films are deemed a commercial liability, in the end, Australian female filmmakers inevitably still run into the same funding issues as other international screen women.

Even if Australian reel women are fortunate to receive government backing, they are tacitly pressured to tailor material to a male focus. It is still rare for a female writer/director to be given the opportunity to tell a female-oriented story. A likely demonstration of this can be found in West Australian filmmaker Elissa Down and her award winning film, *The Black Balloon* (2008). Down, an emerging writer/director, who graduated a year ahead of me from the same university of my undergraduate education, has garnered attention over the years for her short films, which have all contained a strong, recurring theme of female coming-of-age narratives. It was a surprise to discover, therefore, that in her debut feature film, *The Black Balloon*, an autobiographical story inspired by Down’s experience of growing up with two autistic brothers, she strangely cast a handsome, teenage boy to play the role of herself. In an interview regarding the film, Down remarked: “I have three brothers – two of whom
have autism – and I grew up knowing in my heart of hearts that one day my family story would make fertile ground for a film”.\textsuperscript{77} So why the change of sex of the story’s lead character? Was this radical choice to tell her personal narrative from a male perspective a result of funding pressure and/or Down’s attempt to increase the film’s marketability, so as to break into the feature film industry? Did she perhaps fear that this ‘fertile’ family story told from her point of view as a woman would not have the same impact?

In my hope to understand Down’s position, I interviewed her and asked her to explain her motivation for using a young male character, Thomas, as the central protagonist in \textit{The Black Balloon}. She explained that there were a number of reasons behind this decision, however, the part of her justification I found most disconcerting was when she stated that, “we expect girls in the family to be more nurturing so Thomas’s journey would not have been as defined [had he been a female character]”.\textsuperscript{78}

A more minor but relevant issue stemming from this problem of film finance for contemporary reel women relates to the matter of production quality. Female filmmakers who attempt to take matters into their own hands and ‘go it alone’, choosing to shoot on digital and organise independent funding for their films, experience the double-edged sword of this creative ‘freedom’. While their films may be less artistically determined by corporate control, the lack of financial power results in other sites of resistance. Generally speaking, limited funding also means limited equipment, and an amateur cast and crew who are often less committed to a project, given their voluntary employment. This inevitably results in a film lacking the production quality required for commercial cinema release. Consequently, as film theorist Annette Kuhn (1994) points out, female cinema experiences similar cultural marginality to independent cinema, which “manifests itself in problems of production funding and of making films available and accessible to audiences through distribution and exhibition”.\textsuperscript{79} Across the
globe, female filmmakers still struggle to have their works seen by broad audiences, as their films’ theatrical release is generally distributed through independent rather than commercial film agencies, and is therefore “limited to one-off screenings at film festivals and short seasons at subsidised exhibition outlets”.

As I outlined at the beginning of this chapter, the digital medium seems to offer a significant improvement to this predicament. Although there is still some tacit snobbery towards the use of digital over film for feature productions, the possibilities for broadcast quality video production, on a relatively low budget, are now rapidly increasing. Moreover, the proliferation of web-based exhibition and distribution mediums appear to present female filmmakers with the opportunity to eventually bypass the costly, competitive and political arena of cinema release distribution and exhibition, and enable their films to be seen by mass audiences. Female filmmaker and scholar Chantal Bourgault du Coudray, however, points out some of the shortcomings of web-based distribution:

Exhibitors and distributors are so central to film funding and film marketing, and, on the web, you’re even more dependent on marketing than you are when you’re at the mercy of the distributors. I can see how the web works for (some niche) rock musicians, but their production costs are lower. And from the consumer’s point of view, trying out a new song on the web requires less investment of time than trying out an unknown feature film.

Following on from Bourgault du Coudray’s observation, I suspect that, still for some time to come, audiences will continue to prefer to watch feature films on the big screen of a movie theatre with an opulent surround sound system. Lum presents a more precise timeframe for this prediction, asserting that, “[o]ur generation is still about going to the movies as an experience…but I think that’s going to change really dramatically over the next ten years”. No doubt it will, but for the time being the focus for reel women continues to be breaking into the feature film market, given that, as Lum admits, “at the
moment we’re still very theatrically driven and DVD driven”. Problems of commercialised sexism and finance, therefore, continue to burden female agency in film. Nevertheless, I suggest that the social transition of ‘going out to the movies’ to ‘staying in with a DVD’ is something for female filmmakers to be optimistic about, since DVD distribution is a less cumbersome and costly process, and thereby presents some encouraging signs for the future.

In light of the Australia-US free trade agreement, which came into force in January 2005, it is unlikely that the issues of funding, distribution and exhibition will greatly improve for Australia’s female film practitioners in the near future. This brings celebrated filmmaker Gillian Armstrong to lament:

I know how fragile this industry is, and how easily it could disappear. How it struggles to survive and desperately needs renewed funding and support. I worry that just one small shock caused by something given up in the USFTA [United States Free Trade Agreement] could be fatal… I fear that as time goes by our stories won’t be told, our talent won’t be heard, and our country won’t be seen. And that a career in Australia’s creative industries will once again be a hopeless dream.  

Armstrong’s statement again reinforces the need for a return of special funding schemes to support and assist female filmmakers in the increasingly competitive global marketplace, or else our numbers will continue to plummet.

In an attempt to make sense of the ongoing commercialised sexism in the industry, and to investigate some of the deeper potential causes of this problem, I now turn my attention once again to psychoanalysis.

**Images not Agents**

The assumption in the industry that women are just not ‘cut out’ for directing, that in essence we are ‘too passive’, ‘too nurturing’, ‘too emotional’ and/or ‘too bound and
driven by our bodies’ to not only handle the extreme pressures and big decisions of filmmaking, but also to write and direct films that have sufficiently compelling drama to attract a large audience, derives from essentialist arguments so often used in patriarchy to shroud sexism and justify female oppression.\(^{86}\) Psychoanalysis has significantly helped to shape this biologically determinist reasoning against female filmmakers, and thereby offers an explanation for the commercialised sexism within the film industry.

Freud saw women as fundamentally passive and self-defeating, since female agency stems from our apparent wish to compensate for our biological ‘inferiority’ due to our lack of the phallus.\(^ {87}\) Freud argued that it is this lack, along with woman acting as the signifier for the repressed, castrating mother, which leads to her inevitable oppression in patriarchy.\(^ {88}\) Woman does not come off much better in Lacanian theory, which supports the adverse assumptions made about female writer/directors by arguing that passivity is an innate female quality, as woman must inevitably make herself into the objet petit a to compensate for her exaggeration of lack.\(^ {89}\) Lacan argued that woman cannot actively partake in the symbolic discourses of organised culture since her association to signification is a negative one. He maintained that, like the unconscious, language is structured and is binary, as it is associated with our comprehension of sexual difference: we either ‘have’ or ‘do not have’ a penis. For him, woman therefore represented the deficit model in language; she is no-thing due to her lack of the phallus.\(^ {90}\) In some of his most controversial statements Lacan claimed that, “woman as a sign has no positive or empirical signified”, that she is indefinable in the symbolic order as she is situated as the Other and therefore “does not exist”.\(^ {91}\) This psychoanalytic theory sees woman remain trapped in the imaginary, forming the passive image in human consciousness, whereas man becomes the active thinking agent of language and culture. Lacan is well-known for having stated that woman, consequently, has a stronger desire to be desired
by men than a desire to be actualised, given that, as the image, she depends upon the male gaze to confirm her existence.\textsuperscript{92}

Many film feminists (Kaplan (2000), Mellencamp (1995), Rich (1998)), warn against the employment of a psychoanalytical framework for the examination of reel woman, as the theory uses a fallible model of analysis, based on male sexuality, to discuss female psychosexual development and desire.\textsuperscript{93} Not only does psychoanalysis deny reel woman any sort of specificity as a subject in signification, but even in the apparently limitless continuum of the imaginary, she remains lost in obscurity, positioned both “as other (enigma, mystery), and as eternal and unchanging, however paradoxical this may appear”.\textsuperscript{94} These film feminists argue that, to apply psychoanalysis’s deficit model of subject formation to reel woman’s analysis today, continues female mystification, and presents an extremely pessimistic outlook for the future of our authority in the industry. Mellencamp explains that “[t]he irony of women turning to Lacan for answers and for legitimation still can make me cringe…We still “second-class” our experience and thought”.\textsuperscript{95}

Feminist Juliet Mitchell (1975), however, raises a new line of thought: to reject psychoanalysis would be ‘fatal’ for women, because “psychoanalysis is not a recommendation for a patriarchal society but an analysis of one”.\textsuperscript{96} I share some of Mitchell’s conviction. As mentioned in chapter one, I propose that psychoanalysis is redemptive to film feminism by helping reel women to understand: the broader view of woman held by society; the ongoing sexist assumptions made about female filmmakers in the mainstream film industry; the mechanisms of the cinematic apparatus, and woman’s inferior treatment on screen. It thereby enables female filmmakers and theorists to identify how social institutions have “functioned to repress what we could potentially become”.\textsuperscript{97}
Nevertheless, there are many harmful consequences for reel woman by an over reliance on a psychoanalytical model, given that some men in the film industry, like Robinov, seem to appropriate its male-serving notions, backed by dubious physiological rationalisation, to naturalise patriarchal dominance in the medium, and discourage women’s participation by convince us of our ‘innate’ passivity and inferiority. Film theorist Julia Lesage more specifically identifies the destructive effect of accepting the psychoanalytic assignment of woman to the imaginary on female filmmakers:

When Lacanians associate women with the imaginary but not the symbolic, it’s like saying that women are structured from earliest infancy to deal with day-to-day things but they have no “drive” to accede to intellectual life, technology or power – as men do...that’s the kind of rationale used to drive women out of the film industry and keep them out, especially, for example, in “technological” roles”.

In relation to Lesage’s statement, it is interesting to discover that there are more than twice the number of female producers to directors in the AFI awards list, with the same pattern reflected in Hollywood. Without diminishing the importance and authority of the role of a producer, could it be that women are more prolific and accepted in this production role because, for the most part, a producer (like a ‘good’ wife or mother) acts as a supporting and organising companion to the creative (male) director, helping him to actualise his genius? Are men uncomfortable when a woman calls the shots in the primary role of director because this conjures up frightening memories of the almighty mother who threatens their autonomy?

The pop psychology regarding women assumed in the industry forces reel women “to accept a positioning that is inherently antithetical to subjectivity and autonomy”, leaving us with no concept of overcoming; merely stagnation. It positions female filmmakers in a quandary, as it normalises our marginalisation and lack of financial
pulling power, and does not adequately address what part resistance can play in frustrating the male power structures in the industry.\textsuperscript{101}

French poststructuralism offers reel women more productive ways through which to raise their profile. This theory is informed by the writings of early Freudian student Melanie Klein (1956) and analyst Karen Horney (1967), who highlighted the myopic and paradoxical nature of Freud’s foundational concept that the infant exalts the father and the male anatomy as a symbol of the phallus, because in the scopophilic act it naturally presumes that to ‘have’ something is more desirable than to ‘not have’ something. Klein and Horney pointed out that this concept neglects the significant pre-Oedipal phase of a child’s life, in which s/he is first and foremost dependent on, and intimately connected to, the abundant maternal container, and values all that the mother ‘has’ in comparison to the father.\textsuperscript{102} If we accept Freud’s theory of scopophilic desire, it would therefore be the mother’s body that is initially privileged by the child.

Klein’s theory relocates the primary castration complex away from the penis to the loss of the mother’s breast, through the child’s traumatic experience of being weaned, arguing that it is actually breast and womb envy that the male infant initially suffers from, and later attempts to redress, through the overvaluation of the phallus/penis.\textsuperscript{103} Horney’s writing asserts that in adulthood and patriarchy this male infantile envy develops into a deep resentment of woman’s ability to bear children: her opportunity to experience internally the invigorating energy of life’s force. Presenting a possible explanation for male dominance in the film industry, it posits that this drives many men to narcissism and the need to succeed in the social world and society’s status domains in order to (re)produce an identity that will also live on in the future:

\textit{Is not the tremendous strength in men of the impulse to creative work in every field precisely due to their feeling of playing a relatively small part in the creation}
of living beings, which constantly impels them to an overcompensation in achievement?\textsuperscript{104}

Kristeva elaborates on this theory to link female marginalisation with the patriarchal anxiety related to the mother. She claims that, in the process of weaning, the mother’s body becomes aligned with negativity, given that it must be rejected in order for the infant to establish its own separate identity and physical boundaries. Since this traumatic pre-Oedipal stage of development also involves the infant’s lack of control over its bodily drives and wastes, she asserts that the mother has come to represent the abject in the psyche of society.\textsuperscript{105} For Kristeva, the abject (m)other exists ‘in-between’ the conscious and unconscious realm, and forever endangers our psychic coherence by putting the “subject-in-process/on trial”,\textsuperscript{106} and destabilising any notion of a unified subject. In her theory of subjectivity, she draws heavily on this notion of abjectness to not only discuss the negotiation of the subject in discourse, but also to explain the dynamics of women’s oppression in patriarchal society, which she believes originates from the necessary expulsion of the maternal body during our psychosexual development.\textsuperscript{107}

In Strangers to Ourselves (2002) Kristeva uses the metaphor of the foreigner in society, with whom we live in tension, to represent our personal struggle with the estranged, repressed (m)other inside.\textsuperscript{108} She suggests that if this alterity is not accepted, it turns into the outward manifestation of xenophobia in western culture: any individual or group that appears foreign to the ruling white, male subject is regarded as abject (improper, unclean, evil and/or weak), and is rejected because their/its otherness disrupts normative categorisation.\textsuperscript{109} Kristeva affirms that, as the mother’s signifier, this misplaced abjection is most strongly forced onto women in society.
French poststructuralism’s emphasis on the significant figure of the mother in subject formation helps to explain the existence of the celluloid ceiling. This ‘blind spot’\textsuperscript{110} in Freud’s concept of our psychosexual development exposes the fallible cornerstone of psychoanalytical theory, from which almost all deficit analysis of woman has evolved.\textsuperscript{111} This oversight is nevertheless disregarded in the superficial adoption of psychoanalytical notions to repress female filmmakers by both popular culture and the film industry.

**The Dichotomy of Woman On Screen**

On the other side of the camera, things are not much different. For the most part, woman is still the image rather than the agent in mainstream film: the male hero moves the action and the woman supports him to do so, seldom holding a position of authority, and on the rare occasion that she does, she is ultimately punished for this power. Woman as a sign on screen is still largely indefinable as she continues to symbolise solely what she represents for man.\textsuperscript{112} Like most commercial enterprises, popular film predominantly conveys capitalism’s troubling reading of woman as an object of economic exchange, in its recurring woman-as-passive-body-commodity representation. Most audiences passively absorb and internalise this reinforcement of male supremacy and desire. Filmmaker Marie Mandy proposes that the demoralising depictions of woman in mainstream cinema today are “almost inversely proportional to the liberation of women in society”.\textsuperscript{113}

Generations after Haskell and Rosen’s chronology of Hollywood’s oppressive female imagery, dominant cinema still limits female subjectivity to sexuality, and, borrowing from the early film noir genre, continues to moralise over this sexuality by confining woman to the virgin/whore dichotomy. On one end of the silver screen continuum today
are the good girls: caricatures of dutiful, ‘virginal wives’; on the other end, are the bad girls: dangerous and seductive ‘femme fatales’.114 This simplistic dichotomising of woman on mainstream screen is reflective of what Young-Eisendrath terms the ‘double-bind’ of female authority in contemporary patriarchal society:

women are damned if they claim their authority (they are called controlling, dominating, bitches, or even feminazis) and damned if they don’t (they are called dependent, depressed, or worse, immature and self-defeating).115

Supporting the French poststructuralist claim that the maternal realm is a powerful influence in the construction of human desire and agency, Young-Eisendrath and Wiedemann suggest that, like the industry’s objection to the female director, these denigrating depictions of woman on screen demonstrate the complex traces of the pre-Oedipal mother, who continues to equally evoke pleasure and terror in the psyche of patriarchal society.116

In her writing on the performative nature of gender, Judith Butler (1990) claims women ‘perform’ normative and sanctioned gestures and enactments that abide by defined laws of acceptable heterosexual identification.117 Young-Eisendrath likewise affirms that the double-bind of female agency, along with the pervasive beauty myth in patriarchy, influences many contemporary women to take up the traditional feminine role of the Muse, in an attempt to distance themselves from the abject, and gain power and acceptance. She asserts that, alternatively, some women actively subvert this gender expectation and perform the unorthodox role of the (hag) Bitch, using the abject as a mechanism of resistance.118 Let us consider these common positionalities of reel woman as constituted by the male gaze in mainstream cinema, and examine their implications for female spectators and filmmakers.
The Muse and Bitch Dilemma

While Rosen’s popcorn venus became a rarity in film during the feminist era, capitalism and postfeminism has seen her return, wearing a much skimpier dress in her contemporary evolution as the muse. On screen, the muse appears in such archetypes as the submissive wife or love interest; the selfless mother; the erotic distraction; the subjugated victim of violence, or the hero’s reward. She personifies the prevailing aforementioned myths of femininity, the Feminine Mystique and the Beauty Myth, and is the more common and agreeable of the two performative roles for women on screen, as she embodies altruism and sexual beguilement. The muse reinforces the traditional psychoanalytic view of woman, as she lives primarily to satisfy men’s emotional and/or sexual needs. Functioning as the figurative mother through performing the object of desire (objet petit a), she serves as a male inspiration, and aims for an all-pleasing quality, so as to access power through beauty and the pleasure that she evokes in men.

Since the turn of the century, the muse has been enlisting women to identify with an increasingly more sexualised representation of femininity, that breeds in them an even greater narcissistic obsession than the venus did. Mainstream film today is imbued with soft-core imagery of the muse’s body, which New York Magazine writer, Ariel Levy (2005), claims is because popular culture is becoming more (in)formed by raunch culture, and now promotes the idea that female exhibitionism is acceptable, even emancipatory for women. Levy argues that this sexually explicit culture not only objectifies women, it encourages women to objectify themselves. This trend is reflected in many young contemporary women today, who play up to the mass media’s progressively (s)exploitative male gaze. These women actively strive to emulate the vacuous ‘sex kittens’ of woman-backed trash culture, who seem to have adopted the ‘if you can’t beat them, join them’ attitude, and are now capitalising on making sex objects
of themselves and other women. The most popular of these contemporary muses are Paris Hilton and Pamela Anderson who have both had homemade sex tapes ‘stolen’ from their houses and distributed across the globe, which shot them to instant infamy. Levy highlights that Hilton, who now has several sex tapes doing the rounds, and has earned multi-million dollar global endorsement deals, even marketing her catchphrase, “that’s hot”, is not “some disgraced exile of our society. On the contrary, she is our mascot”, and has, incredibly, become the new idol of young girls and teens globally, influencing them to ‘dumb themselves down’, and suggesting that it is more lucrative for them to access power solely through an overt sexuality.

Some contemporary women who play up to the role of the screen muse seem to accept their objectification and fixation with beauty as a ‘natural’ trait of being female. They vehemently declare that it is their choice to revel in commercialism, and to be sexually explicit, asserting that it makes them feel empowered to flaunt their physical assets, and to use their bodies and looks to their own advantage. Similar to the postfeminist trend of the 1980s, this capitalist ideology identifies sexuality, materialism and consumerism as beneficial to female authority. Murphy refers to this as makeover feminism, as it not only promotes the notion that women should improve their desirability in order to gain social status, but also because it is a purely cosmetic ideology, which “uses the system to gain the rewards usually denied to women…[yet] refuses to deal with deeper structural inequalities”.

Since the Sex Wars of the 1980s feminists have long been divided on whether sexually explicit imagery, such as that advocated by the muse, is imperative to women’s liberation, or whether it is to our detriment. Radical anti-pornography feminists Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon (1988) claim that all forms of erotica dehumanise women, by reducing them to their body parts, going so far as to propose
that graphic images of the female body encourage male violence and lead directly to women’s rape. Other, sex-positive, feminists like Wendy McElroy (1995) and Paula Webster (1981), argue that the visual medium is essential for women’s sexual autonomy and devictimisation, as it enables us to publicly reclaim our bodies, to experiment with our own desires, and to play a part in shaping future sexual discourse. Each faction accuses the other of betraying the fundamental doctrines of feminism.

This is complicated territory that I, myself, am still negotiating as a woman. I tend to agree with Wolf, who asserts that it is impossible to make a definitive statement about ‘authentic’ or ‘correct’ female desire, as it is “not inert or given but, like a living being, changes with what it feeds upon”.127 Sexuality is constituted through a combination of our social, economic, political, historical, cultural, and personal experiences and circumstances. I suggest that it is important that feminists do not dismiss the relevance of the screen muse and her makeover feminism, as this contemporary feminist interpretation is relevant to the lives of many young women today, who attempt to utilise what little social power they have, and enjoy the mobility that this grants them. However, it is critical to identify the personal and political implications for female subjectivity related to taking up such a sexually explicit persona.

The muse is an extremely limiting icon for female agency, as she sells women false empowerment through narcissism. Makeover feminism celebrates the commodification of woman through forms of beauty and sex, and leaves her in a state of dependency on man. Her excessively singular concern for physical desirability enslaves her personal autonomy, as she is too busy looking for approval from the male gaze. Women’s endless compulsion to meet this commercialised construct of femininity also prevents them from knowing their own desires, and concentrating their energies on feeding their psyches to be vigorous and fulfilled. Wolf concurs that, by according her agency only in
relation to male desire, the muse’s beauty myth displaces female agency from female desire and sexuality:

female sexuality is turned inside out from birth, so “beauty” can take its place, keeping women’s eyes lowered to their own bodies, glancing up only to check their reflections in the eyes of men.\(^\text{(128)}\)

Trapped in this narcissism, in the bondage of beauty and the male gaze, which women have been conditioned to believe is their only route to power, the muse becomes trapped in her own image, in the claustrophobic limitations of the frame, which shuts her off from self-actualisation, as she remains “always under the control of her master: he is the Subject and she is the Object of Desire”.\(^\text{(129)}\) Women who follow the muse’s postfeminist ideology must therefore come to recognise that the individualist ‘choice’ that they claim to be making when they perform her sexualised masquerade, is actually more likely the result of the larger capitalist machine engineering this notion of free will and choice, in order to sell us things. This machine defines femininity through a commercialised filter of the male gaze, and then, via a number of mechanisms, makes women believe that it is their own definition. Maureen Dowd succinctly encapsulates this situation, claiming that “[n]arcissism has trumped feminism. Women used to demand equality. Now they demand Botox”.\(^\text{(130)}\) Levy similarly expresses the paradox of this postfeminist ethos:

Only thirty years ago, our mothers were ‘burning their bras’ and picketing Playboy, and suddenly we were getting implants and wearing the bunny logo as supposed symbols of our liberation.\(^\text{(131)}\)

Levy rightly questions if this capitalist ideology really is a new version of feminism, or whether, instead, it is just the old objectification repackaged and sold to us through the beauty myth.

Assuming the role of the muse is not just financially and physically demanding for women, but also comes with a complicated emotional price tag. Her capitalist premise
measures women’s value by their appearance, and adheres to a deficit concept of femaleness in her suggestion that we must ‘fix’ ourselves.\textsuperscript{132} This fails to address the necessary internal work that many women need to do to re-engage with their self-determined agency. The screen muse also denies the diversity of the female condition, as she is exclusive to attractive, youthful, and middle class women in their sexual prime, who can afford the grooming accessories and beauty procedures necessary to fit her societal standards of femininity, thereby alienating the majority of women in society who do not fall into this narrow category of beauty. She is further incongruous to the naturally degenerative processes of the human body, since she cannot age or show imperfections, or else her precarious ‘beauty power’ will be lost.

The muse’s idealisation in patriarchal society serves to reinforce the denigration of the abject maternal body. Rather than encouraging women to accept their real bodies, she instils in them feelings of shame and inadequacy, which Kristeva (1989) explains is because women are unable to separate themselves from the maternal body, which they equally possess as women. In an attempt to distance themselves from their bodies and disguise their abjectness, many women therefore perform a depressive sexuality.\textsuperscript{133}

This raises a very important issue: the screen muse tells us nothing about female sexuality, and, in my experience, has very little to do with female desire, since her performative role is used far more often “as a device for avoiding anxiety than as a primary mode of sexual enjoyment”.\textsuperscript{134} Rather than exploring and staking out new ground to expand the horizons of women’s desire, the muse’s one-dimensional, commercialised construction of female sexuality presents woman’s body as wholly sexual, yet her own desire is absent on screen. On her own terms she is therefore completely asexual as she “is not actually responding sexually to anything”.\textsuperscript{135} A poignant demonstration of this disconnection between female desire and the mere
appearance of ‘hotness’ is found in an interview that Hilton, the most iconic sex symbol of the 21st century, did with *Rolling Stone* magazine, in which she admitted: “my boyfriends always tell me I’m not sexual. Sexy, but not sexual”.  

This muse phenomenon appears to have augmented a complex affliction in a large majority of young women today who have, by proxy, come to derive pleasure from their subjugation as they “have learned to associate their sexuality with domination by the male gaze, a position involving a degree of masochism in finding their objectification erotic”. Mulvey validates the opinion that, just as looking is a source of pleasure, there also exists a “pleasure in being looked at”. The mass media’s inherently desexualised depiction of female desire, through the imagery of the muse, means that men and women are not taught to eroticise women’s sexuality but, instead, eroticise only the woman’s body and the man’s desire. Perhaps the most disturbing trend that has evolved from this is the sexualisation of pre-pubescent girls who, in their formative years of sexual development, have shifted the feminine accent from wanting to be ‘pretty’ to wanting to be ‘sexy’ or ‘hot’, before they have even experienced sexual desire for themselves.  

As I have personally experienced in the writing process of *Float’s* first draft, this situation can lead to a worrying schism for many young women between our bodily pleasures and our sexual expression and activity, and can destabilise the healthy development of our sexual identities. This results in a conditioning towards self-deception, in which it is easy to “confuse desiring with being desirable”, and to imitate problematic stereotypes of the screen muse that lock us into an existence of bad-faith and sexual passivity. Levy reinforces that it is critical to recognise that sexual power “is only one, very specific kind of power. And what’s more, looking like a
stripper... is only one, very specific kind of sexual expression”, deeply inscribed with oppressive meanings that reinforce the notion of female inferiority.

The distortion of women’s sexual desire has given rise to the increase in female psycho-social issues, such as eating disorders, plastic surgery, and most recently, Botox, which, are quite literally turning the contemporary muse into a homogenised, artificial woman, who, like an object, is becoming more static in time, with no sign of desire or life pumping through her veins. This suggests that the revered muse will soon be the embodiment of the living dead: a mere corpse. Young-Eisendrath concedes that today’s muse is erotically dead, embodying a deeply internalised desire that sees her walk through life “with a blank stare” like an anorectic, hungry ghost.143 The muse also sells men short, by breeding the misconception that they desire gormless and lifeless women, who lack a strong sense of personal desire. Wolf parallels this slow death phenomenon of woman’s desire, masked by the muse’s masquerade of external beauty and femininity, with the analogy of the Iron Maiden:

The original Iron Maiden was a medieval German instrument of torture, a body-shaped casket painted with the limbs and features of a lovely, smiling young woman. The unlucky victim was slowly enclosed inside her; the lid fell shut to immobilize the victim, who died either of starvation, or less cruelly, of the metal spikes embedded in her interior. The modern hallucination in which women are trapped or trap themselves is similarly rigid, cruel, and euphemistically painted. Contemporary culture directs attention to imagery of the Iron Maiden, while censoring real women’s faces and bodies.144

The screen muse is evidently a problematic figure for contemporary women. This is most apparent when, time and again, we observe her death as a self-governing and desiring individual on screen, as she becomes a victim of patriarchal circumstance.145

On the other end of the screen dichotomy of femininity is the bitch. Threatening man’s power through a blatant disregard of the Law of the Father, the bitch is the manifestation of patriarchal society’s anxiety related to the mother, and is, not
surprisingly, the less popular role for women. The title ‘bitch’ alone demonstrates that, as opposed to authoritative men, who are generally admired for their ruthlessness, in today’s society commanding women continue to be disparagingly linked with anger and vengeance.\textsuperscript{146} Psychologist Harriet Lerner (1986) points out that, while our language, “created and codified by men”, denounces angry women as “‘shrews,” “witches,” “bitches,” “hags,” “nags,” “man-haters,” and “castrators”,\textsuperscript{147} it lacks:

\begin{quote}
\textit{one} unflattering term to describe men who vent their anger at women. Even such epithets as “bastard” and “son of a bitch” do not condemn the man but place the blame on a woman – his mother!\textsuperscript{148}
\end{quote}

Lerner maintains that due to this social disapproval, many women repress their anger. She argues however, that listening to our anger is imperative to the reclaiming of female agency, as it indicates “that our rights are being violated, that our needs or wants are not being adequately met”\textsuperscript{149} and thereby “signals the necessity for change”.\textsuperscript{150}

The bitch has become an important postfeminist label for women who refuse to take up the role of the all-accommodating muse and are trying to fight for their right to be “strong, angry, loud, assertive or selfish” and integrate these traits “as part of normative femininity”.\textsuperscript{151} The screen bitch performs an antagonistic agency that defies the conventions of female compliance. She can “prise apart a fissure in the cultural terrain and get her voice heard”,\textsuperscript{152} and appears in the caricatures of the demanding wife; the controlling mother; the manipulative boss; the debaucherous prostitute, and the cheating lover. Through their engulfing desires, these reel bitches are men’s ultimate enemy.

In the last two decades, a new type of revenge-seeking bitch has evolved in popular film: the violent vixen.\textsuperscript{153} The vixen comes in a variety of forms. Interestingly, Mellencamp notes that when male filmmakers attempt to create strong female characters, they masculinise and militarise them, producing “working-class or tough
women” and giving them “a gun, a drink, a swagger, a limited vocabulary, and savvy but unschooled minds”.\textsuperscript{154} She calls this primitive type of woman, who presents the fatuous delusion of the self-validation of male hegemony in mainstream cinema by mimicking the traditional patriarchal hero - by possessing rippling muscles, incredible fighting abilities, and the latest in cutting edge weaponry - a ‘protofeminist’.\textsuperscript{155} Examples of protofeminists include Linda Hamilton in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991); Demi Moore in *G.I. Jane* (1997), Sharon Stone in *The Quick and the Dead* (1995); Geena Davis in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (1996). A more sophisticated and heterosexually appealing representation of this protofeminist vixen can be found in such examples as Stone in *Basic Instinct* (1992); Cameron Diaz, Lucy Liu and Drew Barrymore in *Charlie’s Angels* (2000), Ziyi Zhang in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000); Milla Jokovich in *Resident Evil* (2002); Uma Thurman in *Kill Bill* (2003), Angelina Jolie in *Mr and Mrs Smith* (2005) and *Wanted* (2008), and Rose McGowan in *Planet Terror* (2007).

Through the increase in technology, and the popularity of comic book and computer game adaptations on screen, this more appealing semblance of the violent bitch has recently metamorphosed into the fantasy hybrid of woman and beast, or science fiction’s woman and machine (Jolie in *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001); Halle Berry in *Catwoman* (2004); Kate Beckinsale in *Underworld* (2003); Jennifer Garner in *Elektra* (2005); Charlize Theron in *Aeon Flux* (2005); Thurman in *My Super Ex-Girlfriend* (2006), and Jokovich in *Ultraviolet* (2006).

Film theorists Barbara Creed (1993) calls this revenge-seeking bitch who brings a male character to his downfall via metaphors of castration and the annihilation of symbols of phallocracy, the femme castratrice.\textsuperscript{156} It could be argued that this femme castratrice is revolutionary and liberating for women because she breaks out of the shackles of
conventional femininity and Freud’s notion of the passive, castrated woman, instead representing the castrating woman. As a female spectator, I undeniably find the bitch more rewarding than the screen muse, yet, I propose that, like the muse, her power is still relatively marginal for women. The pleasure that she offers is temporarily rewarding but not power-enhancing in the long run. This is due to a number of factors, which I would now like to elaborate on in this context.

Whether she is a dangerous killing machine, or a corporate bitch with “a Filofax where her heart should be”, such as Meryl Streep in The Devil Wears Prada (2006), the screen bitch’s expression of authority and dissidence cancels out her more favourable, compassionate traits. This reinforces the idea that a woman who defines herself by her own direction and needs is unloving and unlovable. In her thought-provoking essay, Is the Gaze Male? (1983) Kaplan affirms that when a woman controls the action and the gaze of the narrative:

[s]he nearly always loses her traditionally feminine characteristics in so doing – not those of attractiveness, but rather of kindness, humaneness, motherliness. She is now often cold, driving, ambitious, manipulating, just like the men whose position she has usurped. In denying women the fullness of an emotionally engaged existence, through her isolating and masculinised demeanour, the bitch deters many female spectators (and filmmakers) from emulating her in their real lives, resulting in her presence on screen doing very little politically.

Moreover, even though the violent vixen regularly overthrows forms of male power, she is only able to do so through patriarchal means, or through being ‘enhanced’ by a mutant beast or cyborg gene, that awards her extraordinary fighting prowess. It is not an emotional, intellectual, or spiritual strength that mainstream filmmakers generally grant to their bitches, but an inaccessible physical ‘renovation’ that Creed notes is only
ever ‘borrowed’, and uses violence to settle the score.\footnote{160} This once again reinstates the fallible dominant ideology that women must ‘improve’ themselves to warrant authority, and celebrates brute force as an imperative trait for power, an ideology that continues to advantage men.

Violent bitches therefore provide women with little potential for empowerment outside of the immediate experience of the movie theatre, as we struggle to see anything that resembles ourselves in these fantasy women. While their elite characteristics, athletic figures, and ‘kick ass’ fighting abilities see these heroines form our ideal egos, allowing us temporary meconnaissance, they ultimately emphasise our alienation and feelings of lack, since once we walk out of the movie theatre we become more aware of our limitations, and of the realisation that our actual status in the world remains unchanged. This is enhanced by the fact that these heroines only ever exist in the highly stylised genres of science fiction, fantasy or comic book remakes, which fail to mirror ordinary life and the female social condition. Therefore, these bitches become reductive to the politics of women, as female spectators are not compelled to take any direct action in their everyday lives.

Even with her capacity to reap revenge on patriarchy, the violent bitch adheres to a prescribed female subjectivity and sexuality: she is generally white, middle class, attractive, and fails to escape fetishisation as her toned body, squeezed into tight, revealing costumes, becomes a highly eroticised spectacle.\footnote{161} She therefore, sadly, becomes another objectified reel woman, providing ‘eye-candy’ for the male audience’s titillation. Cultural theorist Sharon Ross (2004) further highlights that screen bitches are also commonly mothers, driven by a maternal instinct to protect their offspring, or the good of humanity, thereby once again adhering to a traditional model of altruistic femininity.\footnote{162}
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A final problem that the screen bitch presents for women relates to her reinforcement of the repressive concept of female abjectivity. In her analysis of women’s representation in horror films, Creed explains that, unlike the male body, which “signifies form and integrity, and is clearly differentiated from the world”, the mutable and fertilisable nature of the female body disrupts the coherence of the symbolic order, and often results in it being considered suspect, and negatively associated with terror, deception and entrapment on screen. She terms this contemptuous representation of woman’s sexual difference, in which the female body is portrayed as grotesque and alien-like, the Monstrous-Feminine. Creed points out that the womb in particular has historically been depicted as something monstrous, given its dissolving of the border between self/other and inside/outside. In similarity to Klein, Creed’s writing suggests that the devaluation of motherhood and the fear of female genitalia, most explicitly demonstrated through the castrating vagina dentata, or toothed vagina, in horror films, is the manifestation of womb envy.

The screen bitch often embodies the monstrous-feminine, especially if she is a mother, and/or does not meet the feminine body ideal (Hamilton in Terminator 2: Judgment Day, Sigourney Weaver in Alien Resurrection (1997), Davis in The Long Kiss Goodnight). The stronger and more threatening the bitch’s abject state becomes to patriarchal rule, the sooner she is written off as an inadequate muse in society: a sex-starved, spiteful and unattractive female; a stigma that her male and female detractors use as a discursive strategy to “wallpaper over the gap” that she has created in the celluloid ceiling, and to stifle her voice.

Like the fate of the screen muse, we generally witness the killing off of the bitch in the culmination of mainstream films, which often involves her forced to commit suicide to save her children and/or the world. This trend, along with the litigious censorship of a
lot of feminist cinema today, as I examine in the next chapter, again reveals the high level of cultural anxiety towards women (especially mothers) who act out against their assigned social demeanour. This absurdly suggests that powerful women are simply too dangerous to society and must be destroyed, and serves to return the bitch to the traditional role of the self-sacrificing mother.\textsuperscript{171} This ultimately sees the screen bitch fail to mobilise female agency beyond a restricted parameter of subversion.

This ubiquitous idealisation and denigration of reel woman in the dichotomy of mainstream 21\textsuperscript{st} century cinema appears to go unquestioned by the majority of audiences. It seems that in our mass-media-driven world, we have become so immersed in recurring images, symbols and stories, that those more familiar to us feel ‘right’ and ‘natural’.\textsuperscript{172} The consumption of mainstream imagery establishes a distorted self-consciousness in female spectators that encourages their conformity, since “[w]oman’s image of herself is so entwined in the tangle of myths and inventions made by man that it is hard to look at it straight”.\textsuperscript{173} Doane confirms that for the female spectator there are still very few “images either for her or of her”.\textsuperscript{174} This presents a particularly complex scenario for female filmmakers attempting to self-mediate within this mediaisation.

**Reel Women Watching Woman**

As females, we have almost no voice on the big screen…we find our lives, feelings, and experiences grossly underrepresented.\textsuperscript{175}

Filmmaker Allison Anders

Female filmmakers, like myself, embedded in the inferior conditioning of mainstream spectatorship, internalise the limited muse/bitch dichotomy depicted in our mediaisation as “the fierce light of ideology or theoretical dogma convinces us [that our subjectivity] can be homogenised”.\textsuperscript{176} This influences our visions of self, and inevitably that of the female characters we create, as was evidenced in *Float’s* first draft. Looking back, I
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think that I was always conscious of my identification with the screen muse, and my wish to be like her. I never saw this as a problem because in my day-to-day life I felt I did not subscribe to the model of femininity and agency that she proposed. However, after receiving my supervisor’s feedback regarding the lifeless presentation of Float’s female characters, I became cognisant of the fact that, on an unconscious level, I was subscribing to this imagery, without even realising it. Dyer affirms that cultural representations instituted through forms of learned spectatorship determine our hierarchical understanding of society, and directly impact the ways in which we define and represent ourselves within this hierarchy:

How a group is represented, presented over again in cultural forms, how an image of a member of a group is taken as a representative of that group, how that group is represented in the sense of spoken for and on behalf of (whether they represent, speak for themselves or not), these all have to do with how members of groups see themselves and others like themselves, how they see their place in society, their right to the rights a society claims to ensure its citizens.177

During my initial process of narrative reframing, outlined so far in this and the previous chapter, I came to critically consider Dyer’s assertion in relation to my life-long viewing experiences. I questioned what this imposed identification with the male gaze told me regarding my place in the world. How did my consumption of the hypnotic, erotic muse imagery position my desires as a heterosexual woman? What did the bitch teach me regarding the limits of female power? In what ways did these recurring images (in)form my own representations of screen woman?

Italian filmmaker Francesca Comencini believes that, “it is terrible violence to force female movie-goers to conform to convention, which belongs to men and to which women must, in a certain sense, also adhere”.178 Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema has been criticised for its lack of discussion regarding this complicated issue of female spectatorship. By principally employing a Freudian framework in its feminist analysis,
Mulvey’s essay ironically overlooks the female members in the audience, and the alienating affect that the male gaze can have on their identities. In her later article, *Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure* (1980), Mulvey addresses this neglect by speculating whether, through the male gaze of the cinematic apparatus, the female spectator “is carried along, as it were by the scruff of the text, or whether her pleasure can be more deep-rooted and complex”.

She rejoins by claiming that women are forced to oscillate between both masculine and feminine viewing identifications: we have the option to either derive masochistic pleasure by identifying with the objectified woman on screen, or sadistic pleasure from identifying with the male spectator watching her. This sees us occupy a double identification, as we are both the viewer and the viewed; yet, as Rich points out in her criticism of Mulvey’s psychoanalytical framework, it appears that in this model we are essentially invisible in both:

> As a woman going into the movie theatre, you are faced with a context that is coded wholly for your invisibility, and yet, obviously you are sitting there and bringing along a certain coding from life outside the theatre…cinematic codes have structured our absence to such an extent that the only choice allowed to us is to identify either with Marilyn Monroe or the man behind me hitting the back of my seat with his knees.

So where does this situation leave a female filmmaker trying to formulate her vision of the world, and write herself and woman out of this predicament? Through my personal experience, as well as my observations of many of the female film students I teach, it appears that woman’s marginalised performance on mainstream screen has imprinted itself so deeply into female filmmakers’ psyches, that it serves to pollute our imaginations and creative expressions. A major issue for contemporary reel women, therefore, is that we have become so saturated with false representations of ourselves as the objects of desire, become accustomed to being told what to desire through male-serving ideologies and institutions, that many of us no longer know what we desire, or even how to engage with this vital concept. This was most obvious in my inability to
respond to my supervisor’s questioning regarding my own agency as the writer of *Float*. From this experience I was led to ask, as Kaplan does, whether it is possible for a woman to be the controlling agent in the act of voyeurism: whether there can be “such a thing as the female subject of desire?”182 The answer to this critical question is what I endeavoured to discover in my ongoing contextual research, this time into contemporary feminist cinema, and the experimental rewriting process of *Float*. 
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Notes

3 The average time for a feature film shoot is usually between two to three months.
4 McCreadie. Women Screenwriters Today: Their Lives and Words, 92.
5 Ibid, 92-93.
8 McCreadie. Women Screenwriters Today: Their Lives and Words, 96.
9 Ibid.
11 Chapman. Some Significant Women in Australian Film: A Celebration and a Cautionary Tale.
12 See Blonski,Creed and Freiberg, Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia;
14 While Jane Campion was born in New Zealand, she is often referred to as an Australian filmmaker because she trained at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School, and has received a large majority of her funding from the Australian government and film industry.
17 Lauzen. Thumbs Down - Representation of Women Film Critics in the Top 100 U.S. Daily Newspapers - A Study by Dr. Martha Lauzen.
18 For example, in 2008 in Australia, women made up 50% of students enrolled in the Victorian College of the Arts’s Bachelor of Film and Television (Tracey Claire, Personal Communication, February 18, 2009), 55% of Curtin University’s Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Film and Television (Amy Leung, Personal Communication, February 20, 2009) and 57% of Murdoch University’s Bachelor of Media, majoring in Screen and Sound,(Office of Policy and Planning. Enrolments by Programme, Attendance Type & Gender. Murdoch University 2008 [cited 1st November, 2008]. Available from http://wwwplan.murdoch.edu.au/stats/student/table1-2/default.asp?YEAR=2008&SEM=1&CAMPUS=0&FEE=0&SEX=0&NEW=0&ATTEND=0&EQUITY=0&DIVISION=16&AOU=0).
21 Supporting this idea, French reveals that, “[i]n the 1992 AFC survey, [Australian] women nominated three reasons almost equally when asked what barriers they saw to their progress: conditions in the industry, lack of opportunities in the company or work area, and sexism. These responses suggest that it is not primarily social and family responsibilities which inhibit women’s progress in the industry”. (French. On Their Own Merits: Women and the Moving Image in Australia, 26).
23 Lauzen. Thumbs Down - Representation of Women Film Critics in the Top 100 U.S. Daily Newspapers - A Study by Dr. Martha Lauzen, 6.
25 Campion won the Palme D’or prize for her film The Piano in 1993.
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29 I will elaborate on this point later in the chapter, with regard to reel woman’s representation on screen today, and, again in chapter three, in relation to the incongruence of film censorship.

30 This famous statement was made by feminist artist Barbara Kruger in her 1987 artwork containing a photographic image of a large hand holding a credit card with the slogan “I shop therefore I am” written on it. See Barbara Kruger and Kate Linker. 1990. *Love for Sale: The Words and Pictures of Barbara Kruger*. New York: H.N. Abrams.


35 Mansfield. *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway*, 44.


39 Ibid, 104.


44 Deleuze and Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 42.


48 Ibid, 10.

49 Ibid, 66.

50 Ibid, 13.

51 Ibid, 17.

52 See Mansfield. *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway*, 55.


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58 Silverstein. WMC Exclusive: In Hollywood, Perception of Equality Doesn't Make it Real.

59 Wright. Leading Ladies Need Not Apply.

60 Ibid.

61 Martha M. Lauzen. Women @ the Box Office: A Study of the Top 100 Worldwide Grossing Films [Report]. Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film San Diego State University 2008 [cited 2nd January 2009]. Available from womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/files/Women%20@%20Box%20Office.pdf -


63 Ibid, 230.

64 Ibid, 232.

65 Ibid.

66 This includes Screenwest, ACT Arts, NSW Film and Television Office (FTO), Northern Territory Film Office (NTFO), Pacific Film and Television Commission (PFTC), South Australian Film Corporation (SAFC), Arts Tasmania, Screen Tasmania, and Film Victoria.

67 Blonski, Creed and Freiberg. Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia, 12. Although Stott made this remark over 20 years ago, it is still very relevant to today’s funding culture.


75 American screenwriter/director Sarah Kernochan reveals this similar trend in the United States: “It’s tacitly understood in the business that most projects we’re developing are for men…There’s no question the amount of product for women has diminished. Every year it’s a little less. The major studios only want to do the sure thing”. (Wright. Leading Ladies Need Not Apply.

76 These short films include Summer Angst (2004), The Cherry Orchard (2003), Her Outback (2002) and Samantha Stewart, Aged 14 (2000).


80 The largest international distributor for women’s cinema today is Women Make Movies.

81 Blonski, Creed and Freiberg. Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia, Preface. The struggle that I have faced to find sufficient resources for this research project, has most obviously demonstrated to me the little support for today’s female filmmakers and their films.

82 Chantal Bourgault du Coudray, Personal Communication, Perth, November 2, 2008.

83 Lum. Distribution and Exhibition.

84 Ibid.

This was pointed out by Barbara Creed. 1987. Feminist Film Theory: Reading the Text in *Don't Shoot Darling: Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*, edited by Annette Blonski, Barbara Creed and Freda Freiberg. Richmond Australia: Greenhouse Publications, 283 over twenty years ago but is still applicable to today's film industry.


Moreover, Freud drew most of his clinical evidence from repressed, middle-aged, middle-class Viennese gentry, which did not provide a diverse range of the female population upon which to propound a universal view of womanhood.

Kaplan, ed. *Feminism and Film*, 125 [my emphasis].


Kaplan, ed. *Feminism and Film*, 125.


Kaplan, ed. *Feminism and Film*, 125.

In contrast to Mitchell’s viewpoint, I therefore emphasise that psychoanalysis does more than merely provide a lens through which to examine patriarchy, adopting its phallocentric framework for the analysis of women in film without challenge, also ideologically corroborates patriarchy and women’s secondary signification.


Klein. *A Study of Envy and Gratitude*, 244.


Homer notes that critics have also identified this oversight as a weakness in Lacan’s theory by pointing out that self-identification actually occurs prior to the mirror stage, since, “[i]n order for the subject to identify with an image in the mirror and then mis-recognize themselves, they must first have a sense of themselves as a self”. (Homer. *Jacques Lacan*, 26).

Arguably, a few exceptions can be found in mainstream actresses who generally take on more commanding roles, such as Jodie Foster, Catherine Keener, Frances McDormand, and Charlize Theron.


Australian film critic Lynden Barber (2007) confirms that in mainstream film “nothing much seems to have changed”, since Haskell’s and Rosen’s observations. She writes that Hollywood “seems largely to have closed down its possibilities for telling powerful women's stories, corralling actresses into the occasional romantic comedy or, in a shallow nod towards sexuality equality, making them one of the boys as action heroines. Women wanting fulfilling roles usually have to turn to the independent sector or

116 Young-Eisendrath and Wiedemann. Female Authority: Empowering Women through Psychotherapy, 45.
118 Young-Eisendrath. Women and Desire: Beyond Wanting to be Wanted.
120 As part of her research Levy interviewed American College students and young women who participated in the Girls Gone Wild video series, see Ibid, 7-45.
122 Ibid, 28.
123 As opposed to also trying to establish themselves through intellectual, spiritual, and/or political endeavours.
126 These ‘Sex Wars’, sometimes referred to as the ‘Porn Wars’, related to the acrimonious debates within the feminist movement and lesbian community in the late 1970s through the 1980s around the issues of feminist strategies regarding sexuality, sexual representation, pornography and other sexual issues. For further reading on this debate, see Drucilla Cornell. 2000. Feminism and Pornography. New York: Oxford University Press.
127 Wolf. The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women, 279.
128 Ibid, 155.
129 Young-Eisendrath. Women and Desire: Beyond Wanting to be Wanted, 18.
132 Men are now also being targeted by this capitalist ideology, as made evident in the recent metro-sexual movement.
135 Wolf. The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women, 158.
136 Levy. Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture, 30. Levy points out that this is most evident in Hilton’s infamous sex tape in which she looks extremely bored during intercourse, even answering her mobile phone during the sexual act.
137 Kaplan, ed. Feminism and Film, 135.
139 See Wolf. The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women, 158.
141 Wolf. The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women, 158.
143 See Young-Eisendrath. Women and Desire: Beyond Wanting to be Wanted, 18.
144 Wolf. The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women, 17.
145 Be it through acts of romance, (s)exploitation, violence, marriage, or motherhood.
148 Ibid.
149 Ibid, 1.
Chapter Three

X Marks the Spot: Censoring Reel Woman

Whatever is unnamed, undepicted in images, whatever is omitted from biography, censored in collections of letters, whatever is mis-named as something else, made difficult-to-come-by, whatever is buried in the memory by the collapse of meaning under an inadequate or lying language - this will become, not merely unspoken, but unspeakable.

Adrienne Rich

If you can change women’s representation in the media, you will change women’s place in the world.

Martha M. Lauzen

As a consumer of mass-imagery, I have been conditioned to derive visual pleasure in looking at depictions of the female body and sexuality from a male point of view. However, as a heterosexual woman, I derive little sexual pleasure or sense of active desire from these representations. This manifested itself in the writing of Float’s first draft, during which I found that when I tried to write sexual material from a female perspective, I either resorted to the prevalent androcentric model I was accustomed to, or created puritanical scenes lacking an erotic nature, particularly in relation to the lead character of Hannah.

In the hope to re-engage with my desires, and translate this into the rewriting of the screenplay, I set out to research how independent feminist filmmakers today deal with female sexuality on screen. I wanted to investigate the techniques they employ to construct women as empowered desiring agents and voyeurs, both in the diegesis and in the process of spectatorship. To complement this analysis, I felt it was necessary to also continue my investigation into the sites of resistance preventing reel woman’s actualisation today. This saw me explore the incongruence of film censorship, which prevents this important feminist cinema from being seen by the majority of contemporary society. Since I suspected that this policing of female agency was also
present in current film scholarship and pedagogy, albeit on a more restrained level, I extended this investigation to also include the deconstruction of my educative and pedagogical experiences as a female filmmaker.

**The Abject (M)other: Contemporary Feminist Cinema**

[P]art of my job as a woman film-maker is to break out of the ghetto. However, I then find that the big screen space is occupied in such a way that my position, my vision and my desire, which is necessarily a revolutionary desire, is not quite going to fit in.³

Sally Potter

Patriarchal ideology works to curb the power of the mother, and by extension all women, by controlling woman’s desire through a series of repressive practices which deny her autonomy over her body.⁴

Barbara Creed

As I outlined in the last chapter, female filmmakers today face enormous hardship in getting their films made and seen. A once surging feminist culture has dispersed and left in its wake an immobile female agency in mainstream cinema, which New York Times critic Manohla Dargis aptly notes is no longer just postfeminist, but ‘post-female’, as the industry blatantly marginalises and silences female voices that challenge the patriarchal paradigm.⁵ Nevertheless, there is a succession of reel women who have persevered, refusing to compromise their creative visions, or to surrender to the capitalist demand of mainstream cinema, by offering more arresting representations of woman in their films. Among this list is Catherine Breillat’s *Romance* (1999), *A Ma Soeur* (2001) and *Anatomie de L’enfer* (2004); Carine Adler’s *Under the Skin* (1997); Jane Campion’s *Holy Smoke!* (1999) and *In the Cut* (2003); Cate Shortland’s *Somersault* (2004); Ana Kokkinos’s *Book of Revelation* (2006); Jeanne Labrune’s *Si Je T’aime, Prends Garde a Toi* (1998); Lynne Stopkewich’s *Kissed* (1996) and *Suspicious River* (2000); Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trihn Thi’s *Baise Moi* (2000), and Claire Denis’s *Trouble Every Day* (2001).
The mass media has an uneasy relationship with these subversive films. This is not only because they push the boundaries of acceptable femininity by experimenting with various female ‘transgressions’, and speak confrontational truths about the contemporary human condition, but, moreover, because these truths are spoken from the lips of women. A recurring genre in this female-oriented cinema continues to be that of the anti-romance narrative, which contends that romance breeds narcissism and self-denial in women. Mellencamp clarifies the significant difference between romance and love as that, “[o]ne is addicting and self-defeating, the other liberating”. It is the fine line between these two notions that generally provides the conflict for female characters in today’s anti-romance cinema, as they search for sexual pleasure, identity, love, and personal truth.

Campion’s *In the Cut*, for instance, is centred around the character of Frannie, a single woman, who, following the serial murder of a number of young women in her neighbourhood, tests the limits of her own desire and fear, by becoming involved in a sexual relationship with Malloy, the homicide detective investigating the case, whom she suspects is possibly involved in the killings. In an interview regarding *In the Cut* Campion discusses the film’s anti-romance sentiment:

> Women today are dealing with both their independence and also the fact that their lives are built around finding and satisfying the romantic models we grew up with...[we’re] still searching for our prince, in a way. As much as we don’t discuss that, because it’s too embarrassing and too sad, I think it really does exist.

Representing this complex nature of contemporary female desire described by Campion, *In the Cut* examines how myths of romance create the death of female desire. The serial killer seduces women with grandiose illusions of romance, his trademark being an engagement ring left on the finger of his female victims. This is juxtaposed with Malloy and Frannie’s growing attraction and love for one another, which is devoid
of romance: frank and honest, they are equal subjects in their sexual and emotional exchanges. This is most transparent in their first date in a bar, where the straight-talking Malloy does not beat around the bush, so to speak, forthrightly presenting Frannie with her options:

Hey, listen. I can be whatever you want me to be. You want me to romance you, take you to a classy restaurant, no problem. You want me to be your best friend and fuck you...treat you good, lick your pussy, no problem.9

Like Sally Potter’s casting of Julie Christie in The Gold Diggers, it was no doubt a conscious intertextual decision by Campion to cast Meg Ryan, the Hollywood sweetheart of contemporary romantic comedies (Sleepless in Seattle, French Kiss (1995), Addicted to Love (1997), You’ve Got Mail (1998)) in the role of Frannie in her film, so as to radically rework the romance narrative, and woman’s passive place within it, by involving a woman who is negotiating her own sexual desire rather than being governed by men’s (or Hollywood’s).

French writer/director Catherine Breillat’s films also deal with contemporary women investigating their paradoxical desires through an unrelenting journey of sexual experimentation. In Romance, Marie, a woman rejected by her narcissistic and frigid boyfriend, attempts to overcome the idea of romance, which she refers to as “sentimental bullshit”, and satisfy her own “raw desire” and sexual needs, by pursuing random sex with men.10 Marie explains to us: “I don’t want to see the men who screw me. Or look at them. I want to be a hole, a pit…the more gaping, the more obscene it is, the more it’s me, my intimacy”.11 Creed writes that Romance “deliberately eschews romantic love in order to transverse sexual boundaries and to explore themes of female desire, fantasy and sexual perversity”.12 Depending on a quote by Breillat herself, film scholar Anne Gillain describes the post-Freudian philosophy in Breillat’s films, which:
highlight what constitutes in her mind the greatest danger for the woman: her alienation through the desire of the man. “When a woman gives in to this imperious desire in which she becomes nothing, there is a sully,” she affirms categorically...The specter of this “nothing” is what motivates Breillat’s characters. In film after film, they refuse in various ways to yield to this male desire.13

The irony of this statement, which has an uncanny resemblance to my supervisor’s comment regarding Hannah and Float’s first draft, is that, as I will shortly discuss, Breillat has experienced censorship issues for almost every film that she has made, and has even had a number of her films banned around the world.14 Through this legislative barrier, the male authority in the industry attempts, time and again, to make Breillat’s films ‘nothing’ in mainstream society, and to sully the imperfect feminine.

Feminist filmmakers today continue to embody a French poststructuralist aesthetic in their works, especially Kristeva’s notion of the abject (m)other, yet they have upped the ante from early feminist cinema. In most cases, the anti-romance theme is now explored through a more extreme sexualised and enraged narrative. This cinema exudes a potent female agency that presents an unflinching examination of female desire, by way of reel women’s risqué and/or aggressive experimentation with their bodies through excessive states. Its female characters enjoy sexual pleasure without fear of punishment or the need for conformity to marriage, monogamy, or motherhood.

Iconic French filmmaker Agnes Varda acknowledges this anarchistic sexual trend in contemporary feminist cinema:

women are now making films that affirm their sexuality, and sometimes in a radical way. It is as if there is another step to reach, a step that consists of different approaches to sexuality, different from those proposed and accepted in films made by men.15

Gillain suggests that this presence of overt sexuality is because, despite some advancements, sexuality “remains what it has always been through the ages: the space
of the greatest restriction for women”, and is therefore a critical site for renegotiating the vicissitudes of female subjectivity and agency on screen. Baillargeon similarly asserts that reel women, like herself, are trying to understand and experiment with their own psyches and sexuality through their female characters: “[w]hat is it they desire?…How does the body behave when you are free, and how do you film women in their singularity”.

This filmic inquiry echoes the theory of resistance, elaborated by Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, which is deeply embedded in the female body. These French feminists claim that creative discourses are transformative for women, as they displace the rigid Law of the Father by enabling us to reconnect with our bodies and the limitlessness of the pre-Oedipal imaginary, and thereby transcend the strict boundaries of the symbolic order.

Given film’s evocation of meconnaissance, the medium serves as an ideal art form for female filmmakers to attempt to overcome the notion of woman’s ‘lack’, by celebrating the excess of her (maternal) body as a primary site for identity creation and resistance. A momentary return to Kristeva’s theory on abjection will make it easier to clarify and discuss its application by these filmmakers.

Kristeva identifies three broad categories of abjection in the forms of waste, food, and sexual difference, and asserts that the abject (m)other breaks down meaning and ‘disturbs identity, system, order’, by reminding us of our precarious bodily and psychic borders, as well as our inevitable death. Shrouded in ambiguity, the abject acts like a mediator, which “simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject”. It ‘[v]iolently and painfully’ endows excitement through a temporary reliving of the pleasures of the imaginary. Yet it also just as easily causes repulsion, by threatening to pollute the integrity of the subject’s body through evocation of its time of vulnerability and dependence on the maternal container, in which it failed to distinguish itself from the
mother.\textsuperscript{21} Kristeva proposes that our horrified reaction to abject forms in organised culture (vomit, the skin on warm milk, blood, an open wound, a corpse) is a necessary protection against self-annihilation: a defending of our borders against the abject (m)other as we futilely attempt to gain wholeness.

Informed by Kristeva’s theory, a large majority of feminist anti-romance films today challenge patriarchy’s notion of the female body as unruly, grotesque, and resistant to categorisation, by involving reel women renegotiating their bodies’ materiality and boundaries, as they attempt to understand their own sexuality, “no matter how disturbing or degrading their experiences”.\textsuperscript{22} For example, in Adler’s \textit{Under the Skin}, Iris, grieving the death of her mother, breaks up with her long term boyfriend and embarks on a sexual odyssey with random strangers she picks up in bars and in a cinema, one of whom urinates on her while she is blindfolded. In Campion’s \textit{In the Cut}, Frannie enjoys cunnilingus, engages in phone sex, and masturbates. In Shortland’s \textit{Somersault}, young Heidi seduces her mother’s boyfriend, and later agrees to a ménage a trois with two men she has just met. In Stopkewich’s \textit{Kissed}, Sandra, a necrophiliac, prefers dead bodies over live men, and, in her film \textit{Suspicious River}, Leila, a bored motel receptionist, prostitutes herself to hotel guests, engaging in violent sexual encounters and flirting with death as she vicariously lives out the fate of her adulterous mother, who was killed by a jealous lover when Leila was a child. Finally, in Breillat’s \textit{Romance}, Marie engages in sadomasochistic liaisons, even allowing a passer-by to pay her to let him ‘eat her’ in a public stairwell.

Breillat’s films most explicitly explore the effects of the abject and the monstrous-feminine on women, dealing with female characters who express great shame and self-hatred towards their bodies. Breillat links women’s historical oppression to the disgust and apprehension that many men feel towards the maternal body, most specifically the
vagina. Her films attempt to demystify the obscenity of the female body, which Breillat seems to suggest arises solely from the way in which men look at women. She unequivocally depicts reel woman, with all of her abjection, and explores the female body’s potential to be invaded and polluted.

The most extreme example of this can be found in *Anatomie de l’enfer* (*Anatomy of Hell*), in which a nameless, suicidal woman pays a misogynistic gay man to spend four nights with her, so as to entertain the masochistic desire she feels towards her body. She asks the man to confront his revulsion with women, by watching her ‘where she is unwatchable’, given that the vagina is a metaphorical void, and to tell her all the things that disgust him about her body. Among many unsavoury acts over these four nights, in which the woman’s body is poked, prodded, and hypothesised like a science experiment, we see the woman remove a soiled tampon and place it into a glass of water like a bloodied tea bag, which she and the man drink; and watch as the man peculiarly decides to insert a garden rake into her vagina, and leave it there.

This abject feminist cinema today explores the traversing of social boundaries by demonstrating that, like men, women can use sex as pleasure, cheat on their spouses, choose independence over marriage, and have no desire to bear children. It sometimes depicts the painful effects of violence against women from a woman’s point of view, such as when Frannie discovers the decapitated body of her beloved sister, Pauline, who has become the serial killer’s latest victim in *In the Cut*, or when young twelve-year-old Anais in *A Ma Soeur* (*For my Sister*) witnesses the brutal random killing of her mother and sister, from the backseat of the car in which they are sleeping, before being raped by the assailant. On other occasions, however, it also radically rearranges gender signifiers through the uncharted territory of female violence, examining how women can also resort to brutality and/or rape. For instance, in Kokkinos’s *Book of Revelation*, 

three masked women abduct, drug and rape a male dancer in his physical and professional prime for twelve days, before setting him free, a broken and traumatised man. In Despentes and Trihn Thi’s *Baise Moi (Rape Me)*, Nadine and Manu, two marginalised and sexually-exploited women, embark on a murderous revenge spree against the white, male bourgeoisie, in which they rape and kill countless men. In Denis’s *Trouble Every Day*, Core, a woman suffering from libidinal excess, and imprisoned in her bedroom by her husband due to this sickness, regularly manages to break out of her confinement to satisfy her lust by seducing and sleeping with a number of men, before devouring them in a bloodthirsty act of sexual cannibalism. Similarly, when Esther, a middle class research analyst in Marina De Van’s *In My Skin* (2002), accidentally scrapes her leg open on a piece of scrap metal, she becomes infatuated with her gaping wound, which she does not allow to heal, instead cutting and probing this metaphorical ‘vagina’, encouraging it to fester and engorge as she derives orgiastic pleasure from extreme bouts of self-mutilation and self-cannibalism.

**Filming the Unfilmable**

While contemporary feminist cinema contains explicit sexual content, its female gaze presents this material minus the titillation and glamour of Hollywood. Breillat suggests that this refuting of eroticism by feminist filmmakers is in response to the myths and conventions of Hollywood, that, like those of pornography, continue to be deceiving and oppressive to female desire and sexual pleasure. This rejection of the illusory and fetishising male gaze can be found in *In the Cut*, in which we see Frannie get a cramp in her leg during intercourse, and watch Malloy take his time to put on a condom, as well as in *Under the Skin*, in which we encounter the thrill and the depravity of Iris’s sexual perversions and promiscuity.
Breillat’s cerebral works tend to take these de-eroticised depictions one step further. She adamantly states that she takes “sexuality as a subject, not as an object” in her films, which expose the sexual act for what it is. Her sex scenes are always shown from a female character’s perspective, and examine the most intimate and mundane details of gender politics in sexual interaction. Reminiscent of Akerman’s *Jeanne Dielman*, these scenes make for a confronting viewing experience, given that they use Brechtian distanciation: usually playing out in real time (sometimes up to 25 minutes in length) with long takes and minimal editing, and depicting the clumsy, ugly, embarrassing, messy, and laboured elements of sex that are all but absent on mainstream screen, other than for comedic value. Breillat also often uses wide shots in these sex scenes, which keep the audience at a distance to the characters, and thereby deny the viewer the opportunity for sexual arousal. In *A Ma Soeur*, for example, we observe the deflowering of Anais’s sister from young Anais’s point of view, who lies in bed across the room she shares with her sister. Breillat’s distancing camera work in this scene has a double effect on the audience. It not only makes us aware that we are spying on a very private event, but moreover, as we identify with Anais’s gaze, and see her distress and tears, it forces us to realise that she is too young to be witnessing this sexual act. This again displaces the opportunity for fetishisation by focussing the spectator’s attention away from the naked female body, and onto woman’s subjectivity and emotional state. Breillat’s austere approach to sex scenes prevents the viewer’s visual entrancement, and makes her films’ sexual material an ordeal, rather than a spectacle, to sit through.

The female gaze in feminist cinema today continues to represent woman differently from the representations of most male filmmakers. Refusing to undermine the integrity of the female body by cutting it into objectified parts through a variety of close-ups, feminist filmmakers work towards humanising the woman attached to the body by
generally portraying her in her entirety, within the context of the cruel world around her.\textsuperscript{28} Furthermore, as an apparent gesture to the female spectator, the heroines in these films deviate from the restrictive, homogeneous image of female beauty that solicits the look of the male gaze. These heroines are real women: ordinary, saggy-breasted, overweight, wrinkly and/or unkempt, yet full of vigour. A demonstration of this can be found in Campion’s films, where glamorous Hollywood stars such as Nicole Kidman, Kate Winslet, Meg Ryan, and Holly Hunter, are shown as they have never been presented in mainstream cinema: unfetishised. These women have disheveled make-up, a runny nose, and limp hair; and are seen smelling their own menstrual blood, urinating and farting.\textsuperscript{29} For the character of Frannie, Campion had Ryan’s famous looks dramatically altered: her blonde hair was dyed a mousy brown; her striking blue eyes, hidden behind dull brown contact lenses; her previously eroticised body covered by baggy clothes, or shown naturally as now the body of a 42-year-old woman and mother.

Film theorist Sue Gillett (2004) notes that, in Campion’s films there is:

an aesthetic at work which aims at re-visioning and refashioning images of the feminine, refusing to censure the actions of her women in the interests of upholding the ideal of the classical body with its limited repertoire of gestures, poses and expressions.\textsuperscript{30}

I concur with Gillett when she states that, watching the woman in Campion’s films “is a huge relief. The pressure is off. Watching them I can watch what they are doing without the constant, yet unacknowledged, distraction of how they appear”.\textsuperscript{31} In Campion’s works we look with screen woman, not at her.\textsuperscript{32}

This is evidenced in a scene from Holy Smoke!, in which we see Kate Winslet, in the role of free-willed Ruth, who is having an emotional breakdown, in an arresting full-frontal nude shot that belies the body beautiful: Winslet is full-figured, has an abundance of pubic hair, and involuntarily urinates due to Ruth’s distressed state. In this scene Winslet’s body is not fetishised for the spectator; it is humanised. Through
Winslet’s vulnerable performance and Campion’s naturalised mise-en-scene, the spectator becomes “acutely aware of the scene s/he is watching.” We feel compassion and empathy for Ruth as we identify with her pain. As a result, Ruth’s/Winslet’s body is also not degraded in its abject state; instead it “is celebrated as natural and earthy”.

Nicole Holofcener’s film *Lovely and Amazing* (2001), which examines the narcissism and obsession with body image imposed on women through the beauty myth, contains a similar full-body nude shot. The moment takes place after a young want-to-be actress, Elizabeth, has sex with Kevin, an egotistical Hollywood actor whom she has just met at an audition, in which she was told she was unsuccessful in getting the lead role opposite him due to her lack of ‘sexiness’. In the self-reflexive scene, Elizabeth and Kevin lie in bed postcoital, discussing the audition and the pressures of the film industry for women. Spontaneously, Elizabeth gets off the bed, stands in front of Kevin (and us) in a raw, full frontal shot, and asks him (and us) to study her body and point out what is wrong with it. Although a little caught off guard, Kevin agrees to her request, slowly highlighting Elizabeth’s flaws: untrimmed pubic hair; droopy, uneven breasts; bowlegs, and flabby underarms.

Rather than feeling humiliation for Elizabeth as she exposes her body to the male gaze, Holofcener creates a powerful and moving moment for the female spectator, by constructing Elizabeth’s gaze as she, vulnerably and bravely, looks back at Kevin (and us), in a way, daring him (and us) to scrutinise her natural body. This full-length image does not function as a signifier for the phallus but rather reinforces the female body as an entity in its own right. It not only destroys classical narrative pleasure because we are encouraged to identify with Elizabeth, who is looking back, but also because it draws attention to the beauty and entitlement of the imperfect female body, that even superficial Kevin eventually cannot help but see as ‘lovely and amazing’.
Eroticising Man

My films feature the homme fatal, counterpart of the femme fatale, object of desire. Catherine Breillat

I don’t know why I talked to this man. Maybe it was his eyes, or his mouth, or the sound of his voice, or the way he moved. I wanted to talk to him. I wanted to kiss him. So I did. Iris in Under the Skin.

A further characteristic of the female gaze in contemporary feminist cinema is its eroticisation of the male body (Beau Travail (1999), White Room (1990), Earth (1998), Si Je T’aime, Prends Garde a Toi, Romance, Book of Revelation, Japanese Story), which subverts the “cultural prohibition against seeing men’s bodies as instruments of pleasure”. In Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema Mulvey denied the possible functioning of man as an erotic figure, yet this phenomenon has become a growing trend in feminist film, which is driven by a female desire that often involves women using men’s bodies solely for their own gratification. These frequent displays of male bodies on screen break with the notion of the passive female character/spectator; instead constructing woman as the desiring subject/voyeur of the gaze.

It is not just men’s bodies that are eroticised in this cinema, but also male characters who show an interest and appreciation for the female body and orgasm, which induces desire in the female character/spectator. In the Cut’s Malloy, for instance, is a man who has learnt his way around a woman’s body, but not simply for his own satisfaction or sadistic desire. This is revealed when, in his proposal to Frannie in the bar, he explains: “There ain’t much I haven’t done. The only thing I won’t do is beat you up”. After pleasuring Frannie with his cunnilingus skills, she enquires where Malloy gained this ability, to which he responds by telling her the story of the ‘chicken lady’; a housewife he met during a chicken delivery job as a teenager, who taught him how to pleasure a woman:
She takes me into her bedroom and takes her clothes off and she's a real woman. She’s got pubic hair from here to here, black and curly like those Spanish girls. And I want to get the fuck out of there, so she grabs me and says, ‘you ever kissed a girl down there?’ I says ‘no’. So she wets her fingers, she touches herself real soft, touches her clit, tells me to lick there, tells me to put my tongue there, take my time, lick in a slow circle, and after a while she came.40

This story arouses Frannie and constructs Malloy as an eroticised character for the female spectator given that, as Gillett notes, he is able to confidently:

speak the words of her body and pleasure, [which] distinguishes him from the classic cast of male heroes…who see nothing in a woman except their own castrated reflections.41

As a woman, I find contemporary feminist cinema thought provoking and strangely liberating. While it is not always to my liking, or what I would necessarily classify as an enjoyable viewing experience in the traditional sense, it is refreshing to watch these films deal with the power dynamics and intersections of sex and violence from a female point of view; using woman’s body as a site through which gender expectations are performed and resisted. Referring back to Comencini’s comment regarding the ‘violence’ of mainstream spectatorship for women, Gillain affirms that feminist cinema “provides women an image stripped clean of the male varnish accumulated through the ages, [it] shields us from this type of violence”.42 This cinema is critical to the politics of women as well as the understanding of female identity and desire in society, given that feminist filmmakers collapse the limiting boundaries set around reel woman’s subjectivity and agency in commercial film, and advocate our right to experiment with salacious material on screen, just as male filmmakers have done for decades. Adler explains her feelings on entering into this morally challenging territory with her film

*Under the Skin*:

I think one of the things I could do as a woman, is to try not to do a politically correct film. I know I can be criticised…but I don’t really care what they think, or I try not to care…As a woman I think that I can try and find my own voice.43
Ironically however, this female voice is, more often than not, silenced before it is even heard.

**Beholding Medusa**

I make movies about all the ambiguities of life. Like a mirror, audiences see what they are...They are not prepared for such a portrait, so I get very, very aggressive reactions. That is normal for a society based on lying to yourself.44

Catherine Breillat

Women are supposed to be the view and when the view talks back, it is uncomfortable.45

Jane Campion

Contemporary society, and its patriarchal censorship boards, remains exceptionally averse to female filmmakers who violate taboos about femininity. To diminish the political impact of their films, the media initiates their silencing by way of controversy and censorship, and simultaneously continues to circulate an unappealing and selective iconography of feminism. So, even when women go against the odds and make films that represent their vision of the world and woman’s place within it, mass society is hardly ever exposed to these critical images of woman.

In spite of Breillat’s uneroticised treatise on sexuality, she almost always sees her films come up against censorship legislation. In response to the attempt to ban her contentious film *Romance*, Breillat became renowned for her declaration at the Edinburgh film festival in 1999, where she contended that censorship is a male preoccupation that derives from male anxiety, and that the X-rating in film is linked to the denigration of the female X chromosome in society.46 Her promotional poster for *Romance* fittingly displays an image of a naked woman with her hands between her legs, with a large red cross printed across the poster, revealing the scandal: “a woman in touch with her own sense of sexual pleasure”.47
Censors deemed *Romance* ‘pornographic’ for its ‘explicit sexual scenes’ and took particular issue with its display of an erect penis.\(^48\) Creed rebuts this accusation, arguing that the film:

> is not pornographic – rather, it restores explicit images of sexuality (now almost entirely the preserve of pornography) to mainstream cinema, but not in a pornographic form.\(^49\)

She highlights that *Romance* lacks gratuitous close-ups of genitalia, and does not set out to titillate, or undercut character or narrative development for a preoccupation with sexual activity.\(^50\) Responding to a film reviewer’s claim that the sex scenes in the film are a “humiliating affair” for Marie, film critic Adrian Martin notes that the sex “is fully consensual, seems to satisfy the heroine’s emotional and physical needs at the time, and ends at exactly the point when she decides to end it!”\(^51\) Martin further disputes a censorship board member’s claim that the stairwell sex scene in the film is ‘sexually violent’, pointing out that, “[o]ne of the most remarkable aspects of *Romance* is the way in which it inscribes in its own material ambiguous designations of obscenity”.\(^52\) It is with such moralising, personal judgements as those abovementioned that (male) censors condition film legislation and ban female filmmaker’s films.\(^53\) Breillat voices her uncompromising thoughts on this issue:

> The problem is that censors create the concept of obscenity. By supposedly trying to protect us, they form an absurd concept of what is obscene…if men can’t desire liberated women, then tough. Does it mean they can only desire a slave? Men need to question the roots of their own desire.\(^54\)

Another banned feminist film, which does not depict anything close to the abhorrence and depravity of many uncensored male directed films (*Irreversible* (2002), *8mm* (1999), *The War Zone* (1999), *Saw* (2004)), is *Baise-moi*. In defence of the movie, critic Noel Burch writes that it was banned because its “sexual violence is perpetrated by women against men and it stirs up unspeakable fantasies and fears”.\(^55\) Despentes and Trihn Thi’s decision to use two well-known French porn stars for the lead roles of
Manu and Nadine, symbolically represents “the female body speaking, saying it is no longer willing to submit”. Yet, in the end censors made it submit, by banning the film in most countries.57

The incongruence of film censorship is reinforced when male-directed films depict equally sexually explicit images of woman, and yet, because she is represented as the muse, they receive an “R” rating, whereas female-directed works, aimed at satisfying a female desire, are banned. It seems the issue that censorship boards have with feminist cinema, therefore, lies not in its explicit depiction of sexuality, but in the female-driven nature of this sexuality, as well as this cinema’s display of real women’s imperfect bodies, and its fetishisation of the male body/penis, which fails to eliminate (men’s) castration anxiety. Creed shares this view, asserting that what critics and censors found so scandalous in Romance was that:

it not only features a woman who speaks openly about her own sexual desires and who is prepared to take responsibility for what happens to her, regardless of how demeaning; it also makes very clear that a woman’s sexual pleasure is not dependent on the phallus.58

Censorship reinforces the idea that female desire and sexuality, like the monstrous-feminine, is abject and dangerous, “a sort of insatiable hunger, a voracity that will swallow you whole”, and that therefore needs to be restrained. This patriarchal fear is commonly explored in feminist cinema, nowhere more literally than in the cannibalistic Trouble Every Day. The ongoing cultural anxiety that “female power is unhealthy and overwhelming - a kind of soul-sucking danger that needs to be warded off by women and men alike”, derives from the myth of the Medusa.

Medusa was a monstrous woman with hair of a thousand snakes whose glance could turn anything she looked at into stone. Representing the incarnation of male castration
fears, and the enigma of femininity in patriarchy, Medusa’s luring of man to look at her monstrous figure was a threat to phallic masculinity and reason. Medusa was eventually beheaded by the hero Perseus; catching her own reflection in his sword just before being slain. This final sequence of the myth befits the dilemma of feminist cinema today, which reflexively shows woman an image of herself, but due to the ‘obscenity’ of her body/desire, this fleeting moment of identification comes just before she is slain (censored).

Censorship is a complex issue, as it is not only directed on a physical and political level at female filmmakers and their films, but also routinely curbs reel woman’s sexual expression and exploration in social forums through the tacit insinuation that female characters (and the actresses playing them) who push the boundaries of their passive sexual positioning and pursue their own pleasure are in some way dysfunctional, dirty and/or morally corrupt.

**Speaking the Unspeakable**

A prime example of juxtaposing the feminist expression of sexuality and establishment reaction is demonstrated in the now infamous interview between long-running British talk show host, Michael Parkinson, and actress Meg Ryan, who was doing publicity for her lead role as Frannie in Campion’s *In the Cut*. The interview made global headlines, which vilified Ryan for being ‘cold’, ‘arrogant’ and ‘rude’ to the decorated TV veteran, who himself has since labelled this meeting as the “most difficult TV moment” of his 25 year career. In a 2006 survey of British TV viewers conducted by the BBC, Ryan’s behaviour in the interview was voted the third “most shocking” TV chat show moment in history.
When I watched this interview I found these allegations against Ryan totally unjustified: 
outrageous even. To me, it was in fact Parkinson who was deeply offensive and 
condescending towards Ryan, a woman in whom he met his match, and who deflected 
the brunt of his scorn regarding her involvement with the film. This interview was 
reminiscent of Parkinson’s abrasive 1975 encounter with outspoken actress Helen 
Mirren, who often played sexually experimental characters as a younger woman. Over 
30 years later, and the high-rating Parkinson continued to adopt a censorious approach 
towards characters and actresses who paid little regard to social decorum and were 
driven by their own self-determined desire.

It was evident from the onset of the interview with Ryan that Parkinson expected her to 
be as charming and appeasing as the characters she had played in past romantic 
comedies. He was clearly caught off guard when her demeanour was in fact more 
closely aligned to Frannie. It appears that viewers also found Ryan’s somewhat 
guarded, but at the same time frank, behaviour so ‘shocking’ because here was a 
woman who did not play the game: a woman who answered questions resolutely; 
showed no interest in engaging with Parkinson’s famous flirtatious interview style; 
and openly vocalised her disagreement with many of his moralising statements 
regarding In the Cut’s depiction of female desire and sexuality.

In response to Ryan’s resolve, Parkinson made no attempt to hide his objection to her 
acting outside of her assigned role as ‘America’s sweetheart’, as well as his dislike of 
the film, and took on an increasingly hostile and berating line of questioning that Ryan 
has since described as that of a “disapproving father”. Parkinson appeared to set out to 
try to humiliate the actress and weaken her agency and creative merit. I provide parts of 
the transcript from this interview, which began with Parkinson asking Ryan to explain 
Campion’s anti-romance ideology:
Ryan: In Jane’s universe romance is sort of a destructive force and it’s a lie, whereas love is a universal truth.

Parkinson: Do you share that view?

Ryan: Yes. I think that she’s made a movie about a sort of debunking of the current Western romantic mythology that’s in place, which is that there is such a thing as happily ever after, or your Prince Charming will come…She’s saying that most people have a frustrated relationship with that myth and that indeed it is a myth and if you are present and looking for truth, you’ll be more satisfied.

Parkinson: That’s a bleak view of life isn’t it?

Ryan: I think it’s beautiful.

Parkinson (scoffing): What’s beautiful about that?

Ryan: The search for truth is a beautiful thing.

Parkinson: No, it’s not a search for truth; it’s a search for cynicism and disenchantment.

Ryan: Do you think romance has more validity and honesty in it than love?

Parkinson: Romance has inspired great movies, great poetry, great music. Great sex never did! 69

This comment by Parkinson regarding sex was not only jarring because it was delivered with vehemence, but also, due to its untimeliness: he and Ryan had not yet discussed the sexual element in the film. It very quickly established Parkinson’s condemnation for Campion’s (and Ryan’s) representation of female sexuality and agency, because of which he appeared to be too threatened to remain neutral towards other aspects of the film, or towards Ryan. She confirmed this in a later interview, in which she stated: “I felt he confused my In The Cut character with who I was”. 70

Parkinson’s patent preference for Ryan’s more cutesy roles, him referring to her notorious fake orgasm scene in When Harry Met Sally (1989) as one of modern cinema’s “most celebrated moments”, 71 demonstrated that he felt more comfortable
(and comforted) by her playing a woman who fakes sexual pleasure in order to exalt man’s ego, than her embodying a character who is actualising her own sexual agency and orgasm. In the second half of the interview, Parkinson continued to try to defame Ryan’s character of Frannie, even after Ryan diplomatically asserted: “[t]his movie is a container for a lot of ideas, that no-one has to be right or wrong about. It’s a rumination and a poem.”

Parkinson began the second half by criticising Frannie’s choice, as a “sensitive writer, poet and teacher”, to become involved with detective Malloy, a “foul mouthed New York cop”, to which Ryan contended:

**Ryan:** That’s so not how I think of it and I don’t think you’re right.

**Parkinson:** We saw two different movies then.

The audience laughs on cue.

**Ryan:** Well, no. He’s a truth teller, he’s honest…She’s located all of her passion into academia, into words…She’s very marginalised, she’s somebody who lives on the fringes of things and isn’t engaged in things until he comes along, luckily for her.

Referring to the bar scene I mentioned early in the chapter, in which Malloy presents Frannie with her two options, Parkinson denounces Frannie’s decision to sleep with Malloy rather than being romanced by him, and then continues with this judgmental line of questioning:

**Parkinson:** The love scenes are graphic and very sexy…now I want to ask you…and this is a serious question…how long do you have to be with a fellow actor to play scenes that you played there…before he kisses your backside?

**Ryan:** (after attempting to evade this derisive question) Jane treats eroticism in an incredibly artful way…and I disagree with you that it’s graphic.

Parkinson pulls a dumbfounded face at this remark to which the audience again laughs on cue.

**Ryan:** I think it’s poetic.
To reinforce his point, Parkinson then brings up a fellatio scene in the film, in which Frannie, searching for a toilet in the basement of a bar, stumbles across a man receiving oral sex from a woman, and chooses to continue watching. During the sexual act a part of the man’s penis is briefly seen, yet ironically this moment was shot with a dildo resembling a penis. Ryan strongly defends the scene:

**Ryan**: You don’t see anything!

**Parkinson**: You don’t see anything, you see the lot! You can’t deny that that is a very, very graphic scene.

**Ryan**: It’s only suggestive. Jane is a remarkable filmmaker because she suggests more than you actually see.

Parkinson’s obvious offense at this display of a (fake) penis on screen again reinforces the illogical nature of censorship, given that, like the classification board that awarded *In the Cut* its ‘R’ rating, Parkinson took no issue with horrific scenes in the film that show a forensic team pulling female body parts, cut into pieces by the serial killer, out of numerous washing machines in a Laundromat, and Pauline’s decapitated head cradled in Frannie’s arms. It seems that the exhibition of the erect penis was their only real concern.

In the behind-the-scenes featurette for *In the Cut*, Ryan states:

In the book [of *In the Cut*] it says how ‘one of the requirements of being a human being is to surrender to the evolution of your soul no matter how terrifying it might be’, that’s Frannie’s journey…and that was so fun to inhabit. She’s just going to go about her life living as authentically as possible.

This quote reflects Ryan’s own journey as a reel woman who had been professionally limited to roles determined by the problematic romance genre (which, as Mellencamp has pointed out, while targeted at women, ultimately serves the desires and gaze of male protagonists and audiences), and who was attempting to evolve beyond this muse-like
persona by taking on a more personal role that required her to step into the unknown of her own desire as a woman. Sadly, she was publicly pilloried for doing so.

This was demonstrated in the final moments of the interview with Parkinson, in which he became increasingly patronising towards Ryan. Adopting a pathologising manner, he implied that her decision to take on the role of Frannie was due to her personal unhappiness related to her high-profile affair with actor Russell Crowe and divorce from Dennis Quaid. As though trying to restore order and the Law of the Father, Parkinson then went on to infer that Ryan should return to her more appealing previous persona:

  Parkinson: There’s a difference between you when you were doing those romantic comedies and now, you seem to be a much more wary person…and a slightly bruised person, and that would be due to your divorce and that sort of thing…Do you imagine that you might in the future, when you fully recover from all you’ve been through that you might actually…revert back to that person you were?

  Ryan: Hopefully I’ll never revert. I’m sure I’ll become different again in some way…hopefully I’ll evolve.\textsuperscript{77}

It would be fair to assume that, had Ryan been a man talking about his role as a male character living out his sexual desire, Parkinson would not have asked many of the loaded and personalised questions that he did, and the audience would have been far less critical of his/her aloof demeanour. It is these types of everyday acts of censorship of female desire that expel reel women’s voices and bodies from mainstream society, and prevent the positive exposure of contemporary feminist cinema and women in the mass media. As Breillat proclaims: “You can fight against [legislative] censorship but if a society itself self-censors something, that’s far more terrible”.\textsuperscript{78}

This latent censorship also resides in the fact that women have never had significant control of screen pedagogy and scholarship in the critical areas of their own domain, namely, female subjectivity and agency. The male prerogative in dominant film
epistemology fails to recognise woman’s difference: the language of the mother, women’s multiple ways of knowing, and our presence in general. This has detrimental effects on the development of female identity in film pedagogy and scholarship.

**A Personal Lens**

Thus divided in two, one outside, the other inside, you no longer embrace yourself, or me. Outside, you try to conform to an alien order. Exiled from yourself, you fuse with everything you meet. You imitate whatever comes close...You/we are sundered; as you allow yourself to be abused, you become an impassive travesty. You no longer return indifferent; you return closed, impenetrable. 

79  
Luce Irigaray

It is a terrible thing to see that no one has ever taught us how to develop our vision as women neither in the history of arts nor in film schools. 

80  
Marie Mandy

The destabilisation of identity and consequent crisis of representation in western society during the postmodern flux of the mid-1990s promised a move away from discourses founded on the Law of the Father and a unified Cartesian subject. As a result, many young women flocked to the creative arts looking for inspiration and a means for self-expression. I was one of them. However, rather than discovering how to articulate my lived experiences as a woman, in this film university, I found my ‘nothing’.

The problematic representation of woman in, and on, screen that transpired in the postfeminist decade, was reflected in the culture of my tertiary education. Indicative of the industry at the time, the film department at my university was comprised of just two women to eleven male lecturers, tutors, and technicians. More disconcerting than this, during my four-year screen honours degree I was never once required to watch or analyse the works of any female filmmaker, nor was I introduced to any feminist film theory. 

81  
Week after week, I would sit among other impressionable young women in the darkness of our lecture screenings. Week after week we would watch the films of Alfred Hitchcock, Orson Welles, Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Copolla, Quentin
Tarantino and Ridley Scott. I cared little for their gun swinging male protagonists; plot-driven narratives; extraordinary action sequences; technical prowess or explosions. I was more interested in emotional explosions.

One could assume that this absence of reel woman in my film curriculum was a matter of supply and demand, given the small number of women in the industry. In response to this common argument presented to me by some of my colleagues, who maintain that there still simply are not as many notable female filmmakers to include in our screen syllabus, I again draw attention to Nochlin’s essay, in which she points out that it is these types of public assertions that have a significant political effect on the construction of our reality:

> It is when one really starts thinking about the implications of – ‘Why have there been no great women artists?’ that one begins to realize to what extent our consciousness of how things are in the world has been conditioned – and often falsified – by the way the most important questions are posed. \(^82\)

In their construction, mainstream screen curricula condition our value systems to favour androcentricism, and perpetuate the deleterious notion that women still bear little significance in the intellectual and cultural arenas.\(^83\) Considering that there were almost twice as many female students as male in my undergraduate film course, it is a sad indictment that we were not offered forms of female identification upon which to model ourselves, and that neither students nor lecturers raised female filmmakers’ issues, or showed an interest in exploring the works of female auteurs.

It was not only the absence of female content that was troubling in this curriculum, but also its overall epistemological framework, which presented an equally dismal culture of female invisibility. Feminist Adrienne Rich (1979) confirms that in universities women:
have been made participants in a system that prepares men to take up roles of power in a man-centered society, that asks questions and teaches “facts” generated by a male intellectual tradition, and that both subtly and openly confirms men as the leaders and shapers of human destiny both within and outside academia.

As is still the case in many Australian universities, the film curriculum at my institution involved a rationalist epistemology, which employed a scientific, outcome-oriented pedagogical model that almost totally denied experiential investigation, and the issue of affectivity. We were taught to use the marginalising restorative three-act structure, which favours a film’s action and product, over its evocation and process, and supports omniscient narratives over personalised ones.

From my teaching experience I am aware that, for the most part, this objective, cognitive epistemology still prevails in film pedagogy today. Students are taught the ins and outs of film equipment and techniques; the paperwork logistics of film management such as budgets, scheduling, copyright and insurance; and are required to write countless essays analysing the works of celebrated (male) filmmakers. This is all very relevant, but I suggest that an additional educative orientation on how to negotiate the more intangible, self-reflexive elements of filmmaking praxis: how to analyse one’s own filmic intention and artistic process; how to work with the non-rational particularities of the creative unconscious; how to subvert the homogenising constructions of commercial cinema and write with a distinctive voice; or how to deal with the psychoanalytical, ethical and political issues of representation in one’s films, would help to provide a more rewarding and comprehensive approach to film pedagogy. This significant absence in dominant screen curricula indicates that such fundamental theoretical insights are extraneous to a field that is becoming more mass-market focussed.
A major contributing factor to this rigid curriculum in university culture, to a large extent, is the increasing pressure departments are under to achieve greater economic efficiencies and student numbers. It seems that this commercial push has resulted in a fear of risk in tertiary screen education, which is now primarily focussed on standardising students for the mainstream film industry, “reproducing the values, meanings and logic of [its] capitalist system”,85 rather than on encouraging students’ experimentation with accepted norms. This scholarly environment presents numerous sites of resistance for the identities of aspirant female filmmakers in particular, as it upholds entrenched norms of male entitlement and female pathologisation. The Cartesian mind/body and reason/emotion split in film pedagogy’s epistemological model imposes an either/or, right/wrong logic and hierarchy, which renders anything other than the ‘white male’ paradigm as deficient, and prevents women from engaging with their sensory knowledge. Feminist Jane Tompkins confirms that “an epistemology which excludes emotions from the process of attaining knowledge radically undercuts women’s epistemic authority”.86

The current pedagogical organisation of dominant screen scholarship is crippling to the development of female subjectivity and agency, and fails to adequately serve the needs of emerging reel women. As an undergraduate student, I learnt to adapt to this circumstance by taking on the persona of an honorary man as a filmmaker. This forced me to deny my senses and to work solely on a rationalist level, which greatly contradicted my lived body and numerous non-rational understandings. It inhibited the exertion of my agency as a woman by preventing me from engaging with my sensory nature, and thereby stripped me of the emotional attachments that could make it possible to write the personal cinema that I had always desired to write.
Moreover, this rationalist curriculum is also highly incompatible with the actual creative process of filmmaking. Drawing on Nietzschean theory I surmise that, like subjectivity, filmmaking is an incredibly fragmented and multi-layered experience that is far too fluid for a monolithic Apollonian methodology, which “curls about itself and bites its own tail”, as it requires a filmmaker to remain open to numerous forms of self and other, and to call on the Dionysian realm as the essential driving force for his/her creativity. By denying the inescapable influence of unconscious impulses on film reception and creation, and keeping reel women from investigating their own subjectivity and social conditioning in this process of filmmaking, the current model of screen pedagogy thwarts aspirant female (and male) filmmakers from portraying anything other than a shallow understanding of humanity in their films, and fails to hold them accountable for their filmic representations.

As an undergraduate student I was ignorant of these numerous obstacles facing female filmmakers as a collective, as well as the subtle censoring of female experience and women’s voices in screen pedagogy. I assumed that I was the only person in tension with the curriculum’s epistemology and desperately tried not to draw attention to myself in order to disguise my anomaly. I learnt I could (and should) hide myself in my praxis by strictly following the course’s cognitive model of analysis. As I was naïve about both the independent film and film feminist revolutions, I was unaware that it was possible to do something about the discordance I felt towards mainstream cinema and discourse. I never thought to question the relevance of my undergraduate curriculum to my lived experience, or to challenge its repressive mechanisms in my filmmaking. Instead, like most of my peers, I eventually conformed to the male order, which saw my sensory epistemology schooled out of my praxis altogether.
My experience represents the outcomes of an emerging female filmmaker unexposed to feminist cinema, or the realities of female subjectivity and agency in the medium, attempting to step into a male mould that did not fit. Rich acknowledges the alienating impact that this type of “intellectual and spiritual blockading” and disavowal in the phallocentric structure of scholarship can have on a female student:

When someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into the mirror and saw nothing. Yet you know you exist and others like you, that this is a game of mirrors. It takes some strength of soul – and not just as individual strength, but collective understanding – to resist this void, this nonbeing, into which you are thrust, and to stand up, demanding to be seen and heard.

Like Rich, cultural theorist Nick Mansfield cautions that the omniscient certainty of the Law of the Father assumed in institutions such as academia, and the “[e]ver mutating and ever dangerous, power and the so-called truth it uses to justify and extend itself…[should always] be met with scepticism and resistance”. While I am in agreement with Mansfield, I find that actualising this type of resistance is not an easy feat for reel women. This is because, when female scholars attempt to overcome the Law of the Father, by writing the self, they are generally condemned for their personal accounts, since in the academy the subjective (female) voice remains inferior to the assumed objective truth and genius of third person (male) declarations. Ruby Rich recognises this dilemma:

Speaking in one’s own name versus speaking in the name of history is a familiar problem to anyone who has ever pursued a course of study [and]…is a schizophrenia especially familiar to feminists.

Tompkins terms this hostility “against feeling, against women, against what is personal”, the ‘trashing of emotion’.

Given this hostile contemporary climate of film and its scholarship, many female filmmakers do not attempt to make personal cinema, or openly discuss their desires, or
their incongruence with the dominant film system, out of a fear of reprisal.\textsuperscript{94} The ongoing pejorative campaigning against feminism further paralyses female filmmakers from speaking out since, as Ruby Rich illuminates, we lack an appropriate language with which to do so:

\begin{quote}
It is a problem common to an oppressed people at the point of formulating a new language with which to name that oppression, for the history of oppression has prevented the development of any unified language among its subjects.\textsuperscript{95}
\end{quote}

Moreover, the obfuscation of the process of filmmaking in screen education disavows the phallocentric power constructions that exist within this process, and therefore makes it impossible for women to publicly contest their situation, since it is an unspoken, and therefore unspeakable, “problem that has no name”.\textsuperscript{96}

\textbf{Comfortably Numb}

This absence of emotional epistemologies and an active language of resistance in contemporary institutions “can cause dysfunction in individuals, relationships and entire organizations”.\textsuperscript{97} Not surprisingly, in my teaching experience I have found that most of my female students similarly display symptoms of alienation, self-abnegation and male imitation in their praxis. Like myself during my undergraduate years, these emerging female filmmakers lack an understanding of women’s historical indoctrination in film, as well as of the existing structural inequalities and censorship of woman in the film industry and scholarship. Out of their consequent disenchantment, they unwittingly conform to the prevailing asymmetrical power bias in film.

This situation is not helped by the frequent misuse of the feminist label in mass culture and the media today, which presents feminism “as a contemporary folk devil”\textsuperscript{98} and has made the term almost ideologically redundant. This causes unnecessary confusion regarding its true values and aims, and results in many of my female students (and
colleagues) strongly rejecting the ideology because of its image; rebelling against the very ideology that attempts to fight for their status and autonomy. These women perceive feminism as a rarefied subculture. Their definitions generally relate to its ‘unappealing’ dogmatic representation. They view it as a humourless, outdated, fundamentalist ideology, as opposed to a multifaceted and life-affirming value system that can be adapted to many levels of their contemporary lives. Wolf confirms that:

> the definition of feminism has become ideologically overloaded. Instead of offering a mighty Yes to all women’s individual wishes to forge their own definition, it has been disastrously redefined in the popular imagination as a massive No to everything outside a narrow set of endorsements. ⁹⁹

This confounding of feminism in capitalist culture disrupts the possibility of a necessary intergenerational dialogue between the mothers and daughters of the feminist film movement. It seems that young female filmmakers, who no longer face as overt gender discrimination and social immobilisation as did earlier generations, fail to recognise that the struggles faced by their foremothers are not too dissimilar to the more latent injustices and structural misogyny they continue to experience on a day to day level.

Journalist Melissa Kent (2005) claims that today’s iGeneration is too busy acquiring the latest products and striving for economic success “to follow radical dreams or attempt a social revolution”. ¹⁰⁰ Cultural theorist Mark Gibson equally affirms that young people are spiritually and politically ‘adrift’ and embody “a cult of ambiguity in that they don’t want to be located or pinned down on opinions”. ¹⁰¹ This is displayed by many of my female students who seem to try to be ‘one of the boys’; to be equal to men rather than honouring their own uniqueness as women. They appear apprehensive about genuinely implementing an overt female agency in their films, instead trying to gain power by “becoming like men or by becoming liked by men”. ¹⁰²
When I have attempted to point out to these students that the sex of a filmmaker matters politically, they respond with bitterness towards feminism (and towards me) for highlighting the issue of sexual difference. This issue is further enhanced by the apolitical mindset of mainstream Australian culture and its superficial and silencing ‘no worries’ ethos and apathetic ‘whatever’ philosophy, where anyone who ‘pipes up’ or ‘makes a fuss’ about something is a ‘whinger’, or ‘troublemaker’. In such a culture, downplaying personal problems and political concerns is a key quality for social merit. As a result, a large number of Australian women, like myself in the early stages of this research project, seem to attempt to deflect attention away from our difference and to remain silent regarding our discordance with phallocentricism, instead striving for equality to men by working within male points of reference.

Echoing my undergraduate postfeminist mindset, several of the more outspoken female students I have taught rebuke feminist principles due to feminism’s litigious reputation, and argue that, because they now grant themselves the moral and intellectual ‘right’ to social power, they do not need to engage with a collective feminist polemic in their praxis. This individualist stance does not, however, appear to make these female students feel more empowered intuitively. This is reflected in their problematic films, in which these female filmmakers (and their female characters) generally strive for acceptance over free will and personal conviction. Their representations of reel woman typically follow the muse/bitch stereotypes of femininity, and their narratives routinely include presentations of male dominance and patriarchal excess, all of which put woman ‘back in her place’. A powerful demonstration of this is illustrated in my experience as a panellist marking students’ films, which serves as a précis in action of most of what I have covered in this chapter. It speaks volumes concerning the
continuing passivity, invisibility and censorship of active reel woman in screen culture today.

**A Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing**

A few years ago, I was a panel judge for the graduating films of the university’s third year students, a forum also attended by other academics and film students. I was looking forward to one particular film, *Wolf*, made by an intelligent group of young women whom I had taught in their first year. However, when the lights dimmed and I was invited into their film, I was horrified to see the world they had created.

*Fade up from black*

*The film opens with a young woman who goes to a bar to meet some friends. A male stranger sits at the bar and watches her. She notices this and bows her head timidly. He approaches her and buys her a drink without asking, although she states that she can buy her own. He ignores her and hands her a whisky. She holds the glass for a moment, then tips it over onto the bar. He takes no notice of this act of subversion and buys another. This time she accepts the drink.*

*He asks her questions, she answers them. Her friend follows her into the toilets and nastily informs her that this stranger has a girlfriend. She doesn’t care and returns to him at the bar. He offers her a lift home, she accepts.*

*In the car he reveals an obvious misogyny, stating that he once had a dog like her who also would never look him in the eyes. She becomes concerned and politely asks him to stop the vehicle. He continues driving. She pleads again and again for him to stop. Finally he lets her out.*

*She runs home through a dark park, reaches her apartment block, and to her horror, sees the man waiting for her at the bottom of the dark staircase. She screams and runs up the stairs, he chases her.*

*He catches up to her halfway up the stairs and asks her why she’s running; he’s not going to hurt her. She apologises, blaming her resistance on a troubled past*
as she finally looks at him with deep shame. He smirks and tells her that he knows what she wants; he can now see it in her eyes. He instructs her to take her top off. She is offended and again breaks away, as she rushes up to her apartment.

This time he catches her at the front door, and violently pushes her inside. She screams for him to stop. He throws her onto all fours on the ground and viciously rapes her in her own home. We focus close up on her face. We watch her suffer.

After this horrific act, the man does up his pants, snickers menacingly and leaves. The woman slowly and painfully makes her way over to her bed, where she begins to sob profusely.

Fade to black.

The lights come on and I am asked to speak first. I am short of breath. I need to understand what has motivated this all female crew to tell this story. What statement are they trying to make? Is this woman perhaps living out a rape fantasy? Given the film’s title it seems more likely to be a cautionary tale warning women not to explore their sexuality, not to wander off the path of acceptable femininity or else suffer the consequences that Little Red Riding Hood did. Is this patriarchal puritanism at its worst, as young women are now reinforcing it? The female character is blamed for being passive, punished for not listening to her friend, and for flirting with a stranger. The man, on the other hand, is not reprimanded or held accountable for his actions. It appears these filmmakers accept the primitive notion that men cannot ‘help themselves’ for their sexual desires and misdemeanours. This woman asked for it, didn’t she? He told us there was a look in her eye. This reeks of the troublesome postfeminist claim that there is no such thing as date rape, just bad choices and bad sex resulting in women crying ‘wolf’.

I struggle to speak, afraid of what I might say. I do not want to humiliate these young women or play on my authoritative position. This is all too familiar for me. I have been on the receiving end of this asymmetrical power relationship and look where it brought me: to a place of alienation, imitation and silence. I want to use this position of authority to help these emerging female filmmakers become aware of the damaging implications of their film’s representation of woman. In an
attempt to create a more democratic space for the feedback session, I encourage these young women to speak first by asking them to explain their intentions with the film.

Rather than offering a strong explanation for their filmic agency, these filmmakers deny the political elements of the narrative, stating that they simply wanted to examine a woman who becomes a victim of rape; for which a few of their peers congratulate them for their “courage” in broaching this type of material. I question this response, asking whether the women in the audience are not tired of being overexposed to female victimisation on a daily level: on the news, in most t.v. shows, and in dominant cinema. There is no response. Most of the women look down to the ground, seemingly hoping not to be singled out.

I draw attention to the fact that this film’s story had been told over and over again, to the point where it appears women have even become desensitised towards the abuse of woman on screen, since female filmmakers are now telling the same story. Would it perhaps not have been more courageous to break the reoccurring rape narrative, rather than reinforce it, and witness this woman fight back or somehow overcome this situation?

Again no response. I highlight the authority and political impact of filmic imagery, and the responsibility I feel that female filmmakers, especially university trained filmmakers who choose to explore such salient issues, have to resist and change society: to bring new images, perspectives and meanings of woman to the screen.

From the extremely hostile response I now receive, I realise that we still exist in a time of staunch postfeminism within film. For a moment, I regret saying anything, as disapproving murmurs and resentful looks are shot my way. Oh no, they think I’m a bitch. Why didn’t I just keep my big mouth shut and focus on the film’s technical and visual strengths? Why didn’t I say something pleasant that did not ruffle anyone’s feathers and just let these stressed out graduating students coast to the end of their degree?

Panellist X states that this is no place for “a polemic”. I challenge this remark: if this critical issue of representation is dismissed as too polemical for a film
university forum, where will it ever be addressed? Panellist Y goes so far as to reduce my argument down to personal politics, informing the audience that I am doing a PhD in the area of film feminism, to which a few scoffs return. I cringe as I watch a number of students roll their eyes at me, whispering something to the person next to them. I feel ‘over-political’. Like I am making a big deal out of nothing. Wait a minute, when did the rape of a woman stop being a big deal?

As harrowing as it feels to be the least popular person in the room, I tell myself firmly that I will not be a good girl who ‘holds her tongue’ like the woman in this story. I will not feel guilty for my opposition to this problematic film. I will not be bullied into submission simply because I am significantly younger than the other panellists, and the only woman. I try to reassure myself that if my comments only reach one student, this will be worth it.

Inspired by the other panellists’ evasiveness, the female director states that she wanted to “focus more on characterisation than gender politics”. The last panellist, Z, who has remained silent until now, challenges this weak argument, claiming that, for him, the moment the film entered the area of sexual violence it became political and to deny that reading is “irresponsible”. At last, a voice of support. I remark that a major issue for me with the film was its significant lack of characterisation. At no time in the film did we learn anything about this woman. She is simply presented as the quintessential female stereotype of the violence or horror genre: the subservient and silent prey, hunted down by the male aggressor. These terrible things are ‘done to her’. The man controls what happens to this woman physically and emotionally. The only time she resists him is when she pours out the first drink he buys her. Why did they not continue with this subversion?

Again no response. It appears as if these female filmmakers did not even consider this an option. Panellist Z continues along this line, claiming that due to the female character’s objectified representation he felt “nothing” for her while she was being raped (I do not fail to pick up on the appearance of this word again). He states that although it upsets him, he has to be honest and admit that due to the way this woman was portrayed in the film, he almost felt like “she deserved it”.
People seem to sit up and take notice. A few nod in agreement. The other panelists do not challenge him. Why is this? Is his statement stronger, given more merit, less political because it came from a man? I encourage the filmmakers and other students to challenge our opinions, present another interpretation, or ask questions. Anything but sit there indifferently. However, to my frustration panelists X and Y choose to wrap up the session.

I drive home after the screening wondering if I got through to anyone? Will there be negative consequences to my comments? I know I was not cruel to these students; confronting, but not cruel. Still, maybe I should have toned it down a bit? No, I know I’ve done nothing wrong. So why do I feel so guilty?

This experience resonates with Joan Riviere’s infamous 1929 paper Womanliness as Masquerade, in which she discusses her clinical observations of women who find themselves in traditionally male positions of authority through success in professional and/or intellectual contexts that allow them the experience of possessing the phallus. Riviere notes that due to the repressed desire for the pre-Oedipal mother within organised culture, and the consequent restriction on female authority, these women often experience great anxiety related to the masculinised privilege of their professional positions. Fearing reprisal, she describes how these women therefore use flirtation and a masquerade of femininity to mask their assumption of the phallus. The masquerade requires them to look for the approval and desire of a male figure through flirtation, thereby transforming them back into the reassuring role of being, rather than owning, the phallus.

Riviere’s observations have some personal resonance. In my early years as a lecturer, I was self-conscious about my overall demeanour at work, given the lack of entitlement that I felt I had to hold authority over a large group of students, some significantly older than myself. I believed that I had to compensate for my gender, my age, and my ‘improper’ positioning, by being attractive and liked by my students. At work, I
continue to wear more feminine, conservative clothes than I normally would in my private life, and, rather than using flirtation to ameliorate my power, my masquerade involves adopting a type of self-undermining humour to ‘win over’ the class.  

Even with the knowledge I have gained through this research project regarding the issues of female authority, I could not help wishing I had worn my customary masquerade at the screening. From the chastising experience of this event, I came to directly understand Riviere’s theory that women in positions of authority often feel great remorse after speaking their mind in public; we wait anxiously for some retribution to arrive. My retribution came in the form of my demonisation by a number of students; many who, for years, would stop and chat with me in the corridors, now walked past without even an acknowledgment. My newfound unpopularity was more directly confirmed when my younger sister ran into an old school acquaintance who was studying film at the university where I was teaching. When my sister enquired whether this young woman knew me, she stated, “Oh, is that your sister? She’s hot, but man she’s psycho”. My sister asked what she meant by this strange description, to which the woman replied that I was apparently well-known among students for my physical appearance, but that many called me ‘psycho’ after the infamous debate I had engendered at the third year screening. I was hurt and angered by this nullifying claim and my relegation to the muse/bitch dichotomy.

This screening event, and my subsequent vilification, made the censoring of women’s independent voice in the individualist culture of today painfully clear to me. Over half a century after Riviere’s essay, Young-Eisendrath affirms that contemporary women who challenge the status quo continue to be defamed for their dissidence:
in spite of feminism, female power – decisiveness, status, command, influence – cannot be expressed directly at home or in the workplace without arousing suspicion, confusion, fear, or dread.\(^{111}\)

The actions of the female students at the screening, and the way in which I was treated in this forum, also brings to mind Nietzsche’s theory on the herd mentality and slave morality of mass culture, which serve to inhibit an individual’s will-to-power.\(^ {112}\) Nietzsche was convinced that Christianity and its image of an omnipotent God before whom all are guilty - which, as Deleuze and Guattari have pointed out has now been replaced by capitalism - represses Dionysian desires, creating a non-individualistic herd mentality in society that breeds an inactivity of will-to-power.\(^ {113}\) He claimed that we either possess a weak will-to-power, which makes us *slaves* of morality and convention, whereby we share a herd mentality that favours mediocrity and the concerns of the vast majority; or we possess a strong will-to-power, which renders us *masters* of our own making, as we accept the vulnerability of independent thought.\(^ {114}\)

Nietzsche maintained that slaves feel threatened by an individual’s self-determined values, which highlight the absence of their own, and therefore attempt to control him/her through the moral doctrines of guilt and redemption.\(^ {115}\) He called this *ressentiment*, which, akin to bad conscience, involves slaves insulating themselves from their own culpability by directing their frustrations onto blaming others.\(^ {116}\) Slave morality (like censorship) is therefore essentially negative as “life in the main is reduced to a mode of self-preservation rather than increase”\(^ {117}\) and constructs a “No” attitude towards anything that is different from itself.\(^ {118}\)

In a way, I became the scapegoat, the sacrificial lamb, at this graduation screening, where the female students opted to allow me to be crucified, to shield themselves from having to answer my questions, and admit to their weakness of agency.\(^ {119}\) Adrienne
Rich confirms that, “[e]ach woman in the university is defined by her relationship to the men in power instead of her relationship to other women up and down the scale”. She argues that this “fragmentation and the invisible demoralization it generates” sees most women, “in competition with each other and blinded to our common struggles...[and] works constantly against the intellectual and emotional energies of the woman student”.120

This argument was reinforced a few days after the screening, when I received four emails from women that were at the event: three from female students, and the other from a female colleague. These women expressed their appreciation of my comments regarding the disturbing film, stating, however, that they did not feel ‘comfortable’ voicing their support of me in public, as they did not want to ‘offend’ their peers who had made the film, or be ‘attacked’ like they felt I was by the majority of the people at the screening. One student also wrote, “I knew something was wrong with the film, but no one else seemed to care”.121

These revealing emails, along with the controversy that my comments caused, reinforced for me the repressive culture that remains in many contemporary educational institutions, and the complacency of a large number of female film students. The screening event demonstrated that even though female filmmakers today may have more access to equipment, technology, and training, many still make films that highlight the internalised problem of female agency and woman’s lack of specificity in patriarchal society.

The current epistemological model of screen scholarship and its androcentric culture results in many film graduates becoming recycled thinkers who take male-driven concepts as a given, and do not challenge, or even question, the status quo. Considering
the tremendous authority and effect of film on the psyche of society, is it not highly unethical to foster this type of homogeneity and docility in our universities? If even these institutions do not actively encourage the subversion of commercial cinema’s marginalising representations of women, where are the cultural spaces to support this necessary screen dialectic?

As a result of the supportive emails I received after the screening, my guilt relating to my comments eventually subsided into hope, because I felt that I had perhaps planted a seed in the minds of a few other students who would approach their future filmmaking with a new appreciation for the politics of female representation. This inspired me to write an email to the group of female filmmakers who made the controversial film, in order to clarify my points in a less threatening arena, and to ensure that they understood that I admired their filmmaking capabilities, and that this was why I felt so passionate to point out my concerns with their film’s content. I explained that as a filmmaker also interested in exploring difficult subject matter, such as sexual violence, I expect this same scrutiny. I welcomed their response to my email but, sadly, never received a reply.
Notes

4 Creed. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, 162.
6 Mellen camp. *A Fine Romance: Five Ages of Film Feminism*, 76.
7 Ibid, 6.
11 Ibid.
14 This includes her controversial films *Une Vraie Jeune Fille* (1976), *A Ma Soeur*, *Romance*, and *Anatomy of Hell*.
16 Gillain. Profile of a Filmmaker: Catherine Breillat, 204.
20 Ibid, 5.
21 Ibid, 9-10.
24 See Gillain. Profile of a Filmmaker: Catherine Breillat, 204.
26 This is made most explicit in films such as *A Ma Soeur*, *Romance*, and *Anatomy of Hell*.
27 The first sex scene in *A Ma Soeur* takes up 25 minutes of screen time.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid, 6.
32 Ibid, 11.
33 Smelik. *And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory*, 137.
37 Kaplan notes the onset of this trend in the films of the 1970s and 80s. See, Kaplan, ed. *Feminism and Film*, 128-129.
39 *In the Cut*. Campion.
40 Ibid.
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48 Romance was the first mainstream film to feature an erect penis. Brooks.


52 Ibid, 5.

53 Price. Catherine Breillat, 3.

54 Brooks. The Joy of Sex, 3.


56 Gillain. Profile of a Filmmaker: Catherine Breillat, 203.


59 Irigaray. This Sex Which Is Not One, 29.

60 Young-Eisendrath. Women and Desire: Beyond Wanting to be Wanted, 19.


64 BBC. Helen Mirren - The Sexist Parkinson Interview [Television Program]. 2007 [cited 21st September 2007]. Available from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmlP_cFOoAM. In this interview, Parkinson belittlingly referred to recent Oscar winner, Mirren - a young, free-willed feminist at the time who had chosen to appear nude in a number of films - as a “serious actress in quotes”, going so far as to maintain that her physical attributes, or “equipment” as he childishly put it, detracted from her performance ability and status as a true actress. In the interview, Parkinson appeared to want to shame Mirren for playing female characters with strong sexual appetites, attempting to manoeuvre her into agreeing that she was in fact the ‘sex queen’ that she had been labeled by critics, and that she enjoyed “projecting slutish eroticism”, as one critic had noted. This scrutiny by Parkinson, and by the public, however, was water off a duck’s back to Mirren: “They can think what they like”, she remarked, before calling Parkinson’s persistent chauvinistic queries “boring questions”, a comment that clearly angered the host and saw his manner towards her become more abrasive.

65 Ryan admits in the interview that she is not comfortable being in the media spotlight.


67 In the same interview with Denton, Parkinson revealed that he did not like In the Cut.


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70 Marcus. Marie Claire: Meg Ryan Interview. 108.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.

Ironically, the young woman was not present at the screening, but took up this labelling of me without question.

Young-Eisendrath. *Women and Desire: Beyond Wanting to be Wanted*, 3.

Nietzsche. *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, 472-473.


A number of weeks after the screening, I asked panellist X why he was so opposed to the debate. He revealed that he and panellist Y had been script editors for the problematic film and that they were therefore perhaps a “little to blame” because they had never thought of the “sexual politics involved”. It appears that rather than ‘losing face’ in front of the students and admitting this, my colleagues instead chose to use me as the scapegoat.


Personal communication, Perth January 2005.
Part Two
Towards the Final Draft: Translating and Rewriting *Float*

The first draft of *Float* demonstrated an incongruity and lack of maturation in my authorial voice, and my understanding of female identity and agency: the very concepts that I wished to explore in this research project. Let us briefly return to the meeting I had with my supervisor to discuss the first draft, presented at the beginning of this exegesis:

**Flashback 2003**

*It feels like I’ve been sitting here for ages like an obedient student. I have. My pen is ready. I’m listening, waiting, wondering, hanging on every movement you make... You finally look up. “What I feel about your script is...nothing. What I feel for your characters is...nothing. Your writing is constipated, childish, and idealistic...Where are you in these words? They’ve all been written at a distance. You’re pulling the punches. You’re not writing authentically...Who is this woman in your script? What are her desires? What are her limitations, her strengths, her sexual fantasies, her dreams, her fears, and her contradictions? What are yours?”*

As outlined in part one, this encounter began a soul-searching journey of exploration of the theoretical, philosophical and personal themes underpinning my early scriptwriting. In dealing with this difficult but necessary journey of growth, both privately and professionally, I needed to ask myself how I would translate and integrate my lived experience and the developing findings of this research into the rewrites of the screenplay. This required me to assess what ethical, moral, theoretical and political perspectives I would bring to bear on the narrative and the characters’ development, and how the major themes of my research could be best explored and experimented with, with authenticity and courage.
In this part two of the thesis, which comprises chapters four, five and six, I relate the journey of this rewriting process in greater detail. I trace *Float’s* methodological evolution, from its early stages to the thesis copy: its aims, its methods, its challenges, and its outcomes. This is a difficult and contradictory task, as I endeavour to capture a largely intangible, disjointed, and intuitive creative process within the confines of a coherent and cogent academic text. Nevertheless, I set out to reveal my experimentation with a number of forms of subjectivity and writing resistance which I have previously discussed, including existentialism, autoethnography, alternative scriptwriting theory, French poststructuralism, and most especially, the French poststructuralist practice of *l’écriture féminine*. At the same time I set out to contextualise *Float’s* successive drafts by detailing the influencing circumstances and contingent moments of my life during this rewriting period.

Chapter four begins by charting my attempt to use the theoretical and philosophical findings of part one to move beyond the phallocentric film construction and methodology with which I was trained in my undergraduate education, and creatively conditioned towards as a female spectator. It describes how, through the abovementioned deconstructive discourses of resistance that help challenge the negative encoding of woman by deterritorialising our social identity, I set out to resist the limiting three-act structure I had used in my earlier scriptwriting, break through the celluloid ceiling in my mind, and actualise reel woman more effectively in *Float’s* final draft. The chapter concludes by describing how this research project’s stakes were dramatically raised during this scriptwriting process when I became involved in a traumatic event that presented overwhelming challenges for my agency.

Chapter five outlines how, in the hope of regaining a sense of empowerment, healing and spiritual overcoming after this event, I used the screenplay to write a story of
female devictimisation. I discuss my intensive engagement with *l'écriture féminine* during this period, which helped me to externalise the interior fragmentation and alienation I was experiencing as a symptom of my trauma. I further examine how this process of writing the body enabled me to more intimately investigate some of the motivations for the screenplay, most significantly the influence of female identity in my familial history. The chapter then describes how, through my traumatised state, I came to recognise some of the psychological risks and agenic limitations of *l'écriture féminine*. I reveal my decision to draw on the reconstructive discourses of autoethnography, alternative scriptwriting, existentialism, and affirmative feminist cinema to try to regain a sense of personal coherence in my scriptwriting and to write *Float*’s characters as active desiring agents.

Chapter six most specifically discusses and outlines the themes, characters and intentions of the final draft of *Float*, which is equally a dramatic experiment, and an evocation of the findings of this research. Since any attempt to encapsulate an art form in a theoretical discourse can lead us away from the direct experience of that art, I focus on my methodology and conscious intentions for the screenplay, rather than exhaustively analysing the finished work. In this way, I intend to allow you, the reader, to bring your own perspectives, experiences and interpretations to *Float*. Chapter six reveals my aim to have the screenplay articulate a counternarrative in which I negotiate the challenges of developing female agency today. It describes how I use Hannah and the individuals in her life to play out various agencies, so as to investigate the possible states available to me as a woman, and to define the qualities that I suggest represent woman as active on screen. I frame this discussion with reference to a selection of the film feminist techniques I outlined in part one, including the anti-romance narrative, open-endedness, laughter, and female focalisation, which I employ in the final draft
in the hope of constructing a more realistic and empowered representation of contemporary woman.
Chapter Four

Against the Current: Forms of Subjectivity and Writing Resistance

If we keep on speaking sameness, if we speak to each other as men have been doing for centuries, as we have been taught to speak, we’ll miss each other, fail ourselves. Again…Words will pass through our bodies, above our heads. They’ll vanish and we’ll be lost. Far off, up high. Absent from ourselves: we’ll be spoken machines, speaking machines. Enveloped in proper skins but not our own.¹

Luce Irigaray

We have everything to gain by seeking our own way of being in our films…We must tell our stories to our daughters, and to our sons and everyone else. It is a point of view, another important point of view of the world.²

Paule Baillargeon

As this exegesis has examined so far, for most of life I have acted unauthentically in a role that did not fit, and have spoken with a voice which was not my own, putting up with feeling uncomfortable in my skin for the sake of social acceptance. As a young girl, I experienced some marginalisation due to my cultural and language difference; my teenage years spent absorbing popular culture taught me the muse-bitch dichotomy; and I spent most of my early adulthood as a young filmmaker moving between these two limiting positions of femininity, reinforced by mainstream film and the framework of my undergraduate film curriculum. On a public and professional level, prior to commencing this research project, I was often painfully obedient and compliant when it came to authority and social mores, generally to the detriment of my own welfare. In my personal life, however, I had always strongly resisted imposed formula or blindly following the crowd, which was most likely due to my primary reliance on my body and its responses to given situations as a personal gauge for my necessary action.

In my early filmmaking praxis I tried to resist the schismatising effect of this binary nature of my subjectivity, but the struggle of trying to meet the ideals of external forces, and of honouring my numerous sensory understandings that commanded me to know
better, saw a line running down the middle of me, splitting me in two. Campion hints at a similar dilemma in her filmmaking:

Personally, I feel within me, among other things, two main forces guiding me: the excitement of discovering the truth about things and people, whatever that might be, and the desire to be loved. Two such companions are difficult to accommodate.³

In the first few years of my candidature, I continued to wear the Iron Maiden mask while, inside, my desire and sense of self eroded. I was intrinsically aware of this slow death of agency, but my increasing incongruence and consequent feelings of inferiority saw me, more than ever, attempt to feign a wholeness of character. Ironically, by trying to deny this discordance, I experienced the extremity of the split subject, which Freud confirmed derives from the tension between our conscious (paternal) and unconscious (maternal) forces: between physiological processes and social constraints.⁴ My denial of this internal/external conflict saw the divide between my private and professional selves widen: they grew increasingly estranged from one another, yet were still connected by the same body.

Freud proposed that the experience of a split subjectivity is more enhanced in women than in men, given that, unlike the young boy who can live out his fantasies for the unconscious (m)other through sexual relationships with women in adulthood, the girl is unable to satisfy her unconscious maternal longings.⁵ Along with the prevalence of heterosexuality preventing women from fulfilling their desire for the mother, the social taboo surrounding the expression of female desire in general, as examined in the previous chapter, creates an impossibly schizophrenic condition for many women. Reflecting on her and other female writers’ experience of this affliction, Mellencamp confirms that, in their praxis, many women especially suffer from a ‘divided self’:

I couldn’t speak my discontent and I couldn’t endure the suffocation. Insanity seemed to be the only solution...as apparently it was for the famous suicides, the dead heroes for my generation – Sylvia Plath, Ann Sexton, and even Virginia
Woolf. In the end, the contradictions and double standards must have crushed them.6

Informed by this project’s investigation into the better known theories of female subjectivity and agency in psychoanalysis, and the impact they have had on the common view of reel woman today, I began to ask myself a number of critical questions regarding the challenges I faced, both as a female filmmaker, and in writing the character of Hannah. Was I ashamed of my femaleness, my apparent lack? Was I writing the script and thesis to try to obtain a (pen)is of my own? Was I really no-thing more than an image? Was my (and Hannah’s) inevitable fate to be seen but not heard?

Given the self-reflexive nature of this research project, it soon became clear to me that my lack of a female role model in teaching and making films meant that I had to, in many ways, carve out my own agency in these fields. I wondered if I could do so without reverting back to the female masquerade, particularly as this reinforced my, and other women’s, apparent lack of entitlement in these discourses. Could I come to acknowledge and accept myself as an authority in my film praxis and teaching, and resist feeling guilty for doing so? I quote Doane at length as she succinctly highlights the challenges of my predicament:

> the greatest masquerade of all is that of the woman speaking (or writing, or filming), appropriating discourse. To take up a discourse for the woman (if not, indeed, by her), that is, the discourse of feminism itself, would thus seem to entail an absolute contradiction. How can she speak? Yet, we know that women speak, even though it may not be clear exactly how this takes place. And unless we want to accept a formulation by means of which woman can only mimic man’s relation to language, that is, assume a position defined by the penis-phallus as the supreme arbiter of lack, we must try to reconsider the relation between the female body and language...Does woman have a stake in representation or, more appropriately, can we assign one to her?7

My departure from psychoanalysis during this project’s process of narrative reframing was influenced by Doane’s thought-provoking writing, along with French
poststructuralism, which helped me come to recognise how the prevalent phallocentricism and Cartesian body/mind split in my educative learning significantly impeded my early scriptwriting. Echoing Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva in their attempts to define a female-generated discourse of resistance, Doane’s line of questioning made me contemplate whether I could find a way in which to use my familiarity with contradiction to recognise the flows and points of connection between my disparate selves, so as to speak (and write) as a more integrated, yet multifaceted, woman. In my close involvement with this feminist theory, and the simultaneous research I had conducted into the depiction and censorship of the female body and agency in feminist cinema, which attempts to assign women a stake in representation, I came to identify why I had inhibited, and moralised about, the expression of female subjectivity and desire in Float’s first draft. During the screenplay’s rewrites, it dawned on me that the main reason I had repressed my agency was not solely out of fear of social disapproval, or as a result of my educative conditioning, but most significantly, because of an innate awareness of the actual strength of the female life force inside of me that I shamefully felt I had to restrain.

In retrospect, I think I reached a limit in my scriptwriting as a protection against my ‘otherness’. I was intimidated by my corporeal energies, which felt as if they were simmering just below the surface, threatening to boil over if I did not keep them under constant surveillance. Education scholars Barbara Grant and Sally Knowles (2000) propose that this personal censorship is symptomatic of the beauty myth, and the inherent connections between women’s (abject) bodies, and their writing:

\[
\text{[t]he strong reluctance to show the imperfect body of the text bespeaks feelings of shame towards our texts, reminiscent of dominant Western cultural attitudes towards viewing the physical body of a woman – if it’s not perfect, then it’s not good enough to show.}^{8}
\]
Similarly, and in keeping with Kristeva’s theory of the abject, Mansfield affirms that “[w]e are unsettled by things that cross lines, especially those that seem to belong to both sides, that blur and question the whole process of demarcation”. This anxiety saw me stringently employ the restorative three-act structure in my early scriptwriting to keep this powerful energy in check, as this prescriptive methodology disabled me from engaging with my experiential body. In my employment of this structure and its continuity of subjectivity, it appears that I was trying to repress, to ‘write away’, the fluctuating nature of my body and my experience of self as a woman. Prior to beginning the actual writing of Float’s first draft I developed a clear plan for its narrative and the philosophical statement I wanted the screenplay to make. Once I began the scriptwriting process, I then simply brought this premeditated idea into existence by following the three-act formula.

In my early years of teaching, I made the mistake of also instructing my students to do the same. I was, however, continuously disappointed when I read their uninspired scripts - filled with generic characters and normative ideals - hopelessly wondering where they (and I) had gone wrong. Smith provides some clarification on this issue, explaining that “the way the narrative is structured is not simply formal, but ideological and political”. She elaborates that writers who rely solely on a plot-based formula usually produce dull and marginalising results, since:

a plot can be a straightjacket, an artificial construction into which everything in the narrative has to be pushed...Used too tightly, it can stifle digression, open-endedness, philosophical rumination, symbolic significance and generic variety.

Enlightened by Smith’s writing on narrative experimentation, and my new awareness of the independent and feminist film movements’ contention that the three-act structure reinforces a specific morality and model of subjectivity, mostly to the detriment of
women, I recognised that my employment of this mainstream storytelling convention was highly restrictive to the actualisation of female agency.

In my engagement with French poststructuralism, I further identified that the three-act’s rigid construction allows little scope to explore the plurality of life, and is therefore particularly incongruent to the representation of the female condition. Cixous and Irigaray affirm that traditional discourses of writing subordinate the multiplicity of the female body in favour of the oneness of the male sex organ. They claim that this is because symbolic language is derived from male sexuality, which is focussed on mastery and control.\(^\text{12}\) Looking more specifically at the roots of male sexuality in mainstream film’s three-act construction, Dyer proclaims that:

> Male sexuality is said to be goal oriented; seduction and foreplay are merely the means by which one gets to the ‘real thing’, an orgasm, the great single climax. Equally, it has been suggested that if one compares the underlying structure of most narratives in Western fiction, it is about the pursuit of a goal and its attainment, usually through possession. Thus male sexuality is like a story, or stories are like male sexuality. Both keep women in their place.\(^\text{13}\)

Considering this, I came to understand that by incorporating this masculinised storytelling structure in my early scriptwriting I had written a traditional Oedipalised narrative, in which the father and male desire were idealised, and the mother and female desire, inhibited and demonised. In doing so, I was writing Hannah and myself-as-woman into the silent void that had been assigned to us by this mainstream construction.

Citing Mulvey, Kaplan claims that it is possible for women to use their marginalisation to overcome this Oedipalised ego:

> even if one accepts the psychoanalytical positioning of women, all is not lost, since the Oedipus complex is not completed in women...[Mulvey] notes that ‘there is some way in which women aren’t colonized,’ having been ‘so specifically excluded from culture and language’.\(^\text{14}\)
Irigaray proposes that to overcome this negative positioning, women must honour our difference to traditional forms of writing, since our many erogenous zones signify that female desire and discourse:

involves a different economy more than anything else, one that upsets the linearity of a project, undermines the goal-object of a desire, diffuses the polarization toward a single pleasure, disconcerts fidelity to a single discourse.\textsuperscript{15}

Her writing suggested to me that I needed to completely abandon the phallocentric three-act structure in my praxis and write from the body.

Interestingly in my supervisor’s feedback to \textit{Float}'s first draft he used a bodily metaphor to communicate the repressive nature in my writing, claiming my body, as text, was ‘constipated’. This is reminiscent of Nietzsche’s dyspeptic individual who inhibits his or her unconscious drives.\textsuperscript{16} In contrast to the prevailing western model of thinking based on Freud’s Oedipalised ego, and his claim that the necessary “price we pay for our advance in civilization”\textsuperscript{17} is to endure the guilt induced by the internal watchdog of the superego, which makes us sublimate our unconscious and its maternal desire, Nietzsche contended that the repression of this Dionysian energy is the ‘illness’ of bad conscience as it creates an Apollonian state that “suffers from the fatal weakness of failing to come to terms with basic aspects of human life in the world that do not disappear when veiled”.\textsuperscript{18}

This culture of ‘self-preservation rather than increase’ described by Nietzsche continues to destroy contemporary reel women’s agency. Film feminist Fiona Carson (2001) confirms that while women today no longer wear the ‘Victorian corset’, we now carry “an internalised, invisible, psychological and physiological”\textsuperscript{19} one that restricts us from spiritual freedom and self-actualisation. In accordance with this, I suggest that even though contemporary women like myself now enjoy markedly more social freedom
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than the women of my mother’s generation, the psychological and physiological ‘corset’ we still wear prevents us from knowing how to exploit this liberty and so, in many ways, it is rendered ineffective. This predicament was exemplified in the first meeting with my supervisor, in which he brought to light that my volition for telling stories was still primarily driven by my desire to be accepted, validated and defined by external (male) sources. Nothing much had changed since I was that lonely German girl with a funny accent who just wanted to be ‘normal’ like everybody else. My scriptwriting confirmed I had become just that, a normal and acceptable young woman, yet now with nothing unique or affective to say.

As a filmmaker himself, my supervisor recognises the body and the unconscious as inescapable elements in scriptwriting, and as critical sites to help resist our social positioning. His feedback made apparent that by strictly following the conventional three-act structure that generally denies these experiential elements and woman-as-agent, I had produced a self-abnegating, plot-driven screenplay, with lifeless, one-dimensional female characters. It was, perhaps, the furthest from personal, female character-centred cinema that I could have found myself. Dancyger and Rush confirm that:

If we find ourselves suspicious of [the three-act’s] world view, if we feel our history has shown us the limitations and corruptions that underlie our illusion of free will, then we must be leery of the restorative three-act structure. If we are not, we may find ourselves reinforcing, through the structure of our screenplays, the very conservative notions we wish to challenge in our stories.  20

Although I did not feel quite so optimistic at the time, my supervisor’s unfavourable comments regarding the first draft of Float turned out to be strangely liberating. By challenging me to imagine my expressions of self-and-other more profoundly, he encouraged me to ‘let go’ of the tiring charade of uniformity, morality and femininity in my writing, and to instead focus my energies on embracing the vicissitudes of my
subjectivity and desire as a woman. I came to see that I needed to revisit the agency I once had for telling stories, before I had learnt all the ‘rules’. This time, however, I wanted to ensure that my primary motivation for rewriting the screenplay was not simply to now ‘please’ my supervisor, or to seek the approval of others who may watch the eventual film: the script intention had to be predominantly self-determined. Belenky calls this move towards a personal discourse of authority, subjectivism:

> Subjectivism is for women a position from which they redefine the nature of authority. It is the position at which their views of experts and expertise undergo radical change. The orientation to authority shifts form external to internal. Along with this discovery of personal authority arises a sense of voice...to which woman begins to attend rather than the long-familiar external voices that have directed her life.\(^\text{21}\)

In film, a turning point is generally a moment of decision or commitment by the main character whose agency moves the story into the next act. This difficult meeting with my supervisor became a critical turning point in my praxis and my personal life, as it began the journey of rediscovering my identity and desire as a woman and a filmmaker. As an intellectual and political stance, after this meeting I decided to take off my corset, remove the mask, deviate from my usual frames of reference, and attempt to move to a more intuited mode of writing. Given the first draft’s problematic misrepresentation of Hannah and myself as disembodied beings, I felt it was necessary to begin this scriptwriting process of subjectivism by turning my research focus onto the revaluation of the bodily roots of subjectivity. This saw me start to experiment with the possibilities afforded by the previously mentioned existentialist, postmodernist and poststructuralist theories of identity and writing resistance. Unlike the deterministic nature of enlightenment and psychoanalytical theory, which leave little room for female empowerment and transformation, I found these discourses helpful in my development of *Float*’s successive drafts. By offering more fluid notions of subjectivity that challenge the presumption of homogeneity and recognise the influence of the body and
the unconscious (m)other within, these discourses suggested to me possible ways in which I could strengthen my agency, and resist dominant power structures, by assimilating my corporeal processes and understandings into my praxis.

**Past the Breakers: Beyond the Three-Act Structure**

The hardest part [of scriptwriting]…is to contain your fear enough so that you can bring it to the next level and make it sing. You don’t know anything about what’s going to happen, but it’s like a child inside you waiting to be born. That’s a moment in which panic can easily settle in. The temptation is to totally pre-imagine the film in order to quell the anxiety. But that’s what you have to resist…my subconscious is far smarter than my active consciousness, so I have to find ways to let it do its will.

Catherine Breillat

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.

Marianne Williamson

A significant difference in my scriptwriting methodology for the rewriting of *Float’s* first draft was epistemological. I set out to unlearn the contrived, androcentric writing style and language I had been influenced into using through my social and educational experiences. Existentialism’s assertion that we have no fixed essence and can therefore alter the future of our existence, presented optimistic and emancipatory possibilities for my predicament. While the philosophy acknowledges that our personal and social circumstances curtail our freedom, it argues that we must act on our individual agency and control the extent to which we allow these outer influences to determine our inner perceptions of self. Drawing on Nietzsche’s theory of self-mastery, Sartre asserted that achieving personal authenticity has less to do with experience than with will, less with truth than with decisiveness, since we are only the sum of what we have chosen to make of ourselves as free willed agents. He insisted that spiritual transcendence is only possible if a subject acknowledges this ability to choose to move from a passive agency to an active one. He did not propose that actualising this self-made reality is an
easy feat, but that it is a necessary one, as this choice is sometimes the only source of freedom available to us.

In my adoption of existentialist theory in my scriptwriting, I took on board De Beauvoir’s claim that, although the philosophy is more of a challenge for women, its notion of drawing on an internal versus external measure of value offers us a greater chance for personal sustainability than seeking validation in the patriarchal system. De Beauvoir was adamant that women need to take responsibility for their ultimate experience of selfhood and freedom by rejecting the role of being the other, and willing themselves into becoming active agents. This encouraged me to concentrate on controlling those elements of my experience of self that were in my power, so as to work towards transforming the troubled female agency in Float’s first draft.

Existentialist theory changed the way I started to think about Float’s characters and narrative. Emulating Sartre’s theory of subjectivity, in which he stated, “[m]an [sic] exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself …at first he is nothing [o]nly afterwards…he himself will have made what he will be”; I identified two significant changes that I needed to make in this rewriting process. Firstly, I came to recognise the free will I possessed in my praxis: that I could use the first draft’s ‘nothing’ as a liberating starting point to write myself into the filmmaker and woman that I wished to become. Secondly, when applied to screenwriting, Sartre’s statement suggested to me that by defying the notion of becoming through foreseeing the psychological and internal workings (essence) of Float’s characters before their actions and experiences in the narrative plotline (existence), I was writing in bad faith. From this, I decided that in the screenplay’s future development, creative experimentation needed to precede intention, or, put another way, that “subjectivity must be the starting point”.28
In contrast to the premeditated scriptwriting approach that I used for *Float*’s first draft, in the script’s rewrites I felt it was critical not to directly apply the theory discussed in part one that I was immersing myself in. I felt this would pollute the screenplay’s dramatic experiment and produce a contrived and didactic text. Instead, I began to work very organically: I started to think with *Float*’s story “instead of about it”. The scriptwriting mobilised a theoretical and epistemological framework and vice-versa. It became a dynamic and reciprocal process, in place of a rigid and monological one. Instead of reducing Hannah to a pawn that I moved along the plot line to communicate my overall statement, I gave precedence to her subjectivity, her dynamic process of becoming, as the primary site of meaning. I approached Hannah as a “question rather than a statement”, allowing her (and myself) to develop through the story rather than before it. With this experimental process-oriented methodology I wanted to afford both Hannah and myself the possibility of imaging a different future for ourselves; one that involved an awakening as desiring agents.

Deleuze and Guattari’s postmodernist theory further assisted me in my quest to embrace my paradoxical experience of self and use it to write a more liberated anti-Oedipal narrative. Their writing on the schizophrenic contemporary subject suggested that I could employ my experience of fragmentation as a transformative agency. Acknowledging that the ‘complete’ image Western culture has presented of the world is merely an aesthetic choice, Deleuze and Guattari argued that we can begin to explore parts of culture that do not fit in with its dominant narratives and make a choice to “cut ourselves adrift from this paranoid, introverted, self-policing and reconceive of our being-in-the-world as an endless becoming new and otherwise”. Although, in their lifetimes, neither philosopher encountered the extent of globalisation that exists today, they were the first to predict its oppressive effects on humanity, contending that global
capitalism had brought about political apathy and the vulnerability of the contemporary subject-in-crisis, which is at constant risk of complete deterritorialisation. Confirming Deleuze and Guattari’s premonition, Mansfield describes today’s confused climate of selfhood as a mixture of “ambivalence and ambiguity – the intensification of the self as the key site of human experience and its increasing sense of internal fragmentation and chaos”.32

Correctly predicting that western society would adopt this schizophrenic, non-linear notion of the self described by Mansfield, which “keep[s] the intensity of our selfhood perpetually on the boil, nagging and unsettling, but also inspiring and thrilling us with mystery, fear and pleasure”,33 Deleuze and Guattari foresaw that the contemporary subject would consist of a multiplicity of desiring processes, and rhizomatic ‘lines of flight’ of experience, which are creative and liberatory escapes and inversions from the forces of repression, centralisation and social stratification.34 Their writing helped me to recognise how I could use my plurality as a productive contradiction to deterritorialise my socialised condition as a woman. Their notion of ‘becoming woman’35 also confirmed that I needed to work with a more evolutionary structure in Float’s rewrites, since “be-coming woman produces an identity which is not an outcome of a process but is that process itself”.36

Further, Deleuze and Guattari’s view of the body as a site of identity resistance, given its discontinuous and endless lines of flight, was of great value to my initial redevelopment of the screenplay, and helped me to begin to reconceive of myself beyond the mind/body duality. In my praxis, I took up a more mobile model of subject formation that saw me cease thinking of my own subjectivity as permanent or split, but instead as a multifaceted and continuous experience of becoming. I began to embrace the ambiguity of working on several lines of flight, and shifting temporal and spatial
locations. I attempted to do away with mental and physical obstacles blocking my scriptwriting, and find the philosophically meaningful.

This engagement with postmodernism highlighted to me the possibility of changing my circumstances and the representation of woman in my screenplay by pushing the limits of the female body and agency through the character of Hannah. Deleuze affirmed that this tendency in feminist cinema is part of female filmmakers’ process of subjectivism and becoming, in which they try “to conquer the source of their own attitudes and the temporality which corresponds to them as individual or common gest”. In an attempt to overcome my social conditioning and nurture Hannah’s agency through each new draft of Float, I abandoned the three-act construction and ‘rules’ of scriptwriting that I had been taught in my undergraduate education; instead allowing a polyphony of words, images and sensations to flow out of me. This unsystematic approach to scriptwriting appears to be favoured by a number of female writer/directors. Talking about the organic scriptwriting methodology she used for her Oscar winning screenplay Lost in Translation (2003), Sofia Coppola asserts:

My script has lots of spaces and holes. It was based on taking notes of different little impressions and off shoots. Little stories I’d thought about over the years, and randomly collected in notebooks.

Anders’s preference for working in the independent arena over that of Hollywood also seems to be related to her fluid scriptwriting approach. She explains:

[Hollywood studios] are interested if they could take what they like about my work and put it into a formula but they don’t understand that it’s not a formula and it can work on its own kind of process.

While my experimentation with Deleuze and Guattari’s postmodernist philosophy was beneficial theoretically, I found that its concepts regarding subjectivity and agency lacked practical applicability in my scriptwriting, as they were difficult to live out.
Postmodernism has been accused by some feminists of presenting a theory of agency that is both too deterministic, \(^{40}\) and too voluntaristic.\(^{41}\) On the one hand, its notion of the discursive subject constructs us as nothing more than docile bodies within institutions of power, which leaves little in the way of agency and our capacity for self-determination. On the other hand, its call for individualised acts of resistance to overcome social oppression contradictorily seems to downplay the complex effects of power on subjugated individuals, such as women, who, as De Beauvoir highlighted, often struggle with this concept of a free agency that is there for the taking. Although postmodernist theory provided me with only a somewhat limited experience of resistance beyond the theoretical, it nevertheless brought me to French poststructuralism, which became particularly influential in the development of the screenplay.

**Into her Depths**

They have taught you to be afraid of the abyss, of the infinite, which is nonetheless more familiar to you than it is to man…If she should discover its (her) force! If she should, suddenly, take pleasure in, profit from its immensity! If she should take the leap! And fall not like a stone, but like a bird. If she should discover herself to be a swimmer of the unlimited! Let yourself go! Let go of everything! Lose everything! Take to the air. Take to the open sea…Nothing is lost. Everything remains to be sought…love the unknown, love the uncertain…leave yourself, shrug off the old lies, dare what you don’t dare…you owe nothing to the past, you owe nothing to the law…seek out the shattered, the multiple I, that you will be still further on and emerge from oneself, shed the old body, shake off the Law. Let it fall with all its weight, and you, take off, don’t turn back: it’s not worth it, there’s nothing behind you, everything is yet to come.\(^{42}\)

Helene Cixous

Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write your self. Your body must be heard.\(^{43}\)

Helene Cixous

In *Float’s* rewrites I found that French poststructuralism most substantially theorises the potential for female agency by proposing that subjectivity is *regulated*, not determined, by discourse and is therefore open to change. As examined in the previous chapter, many contemporary female filmmakers today experiment with a French poststructuralist aesthetic in their films due to its deconstruction of phallocentric
assumptions and iconography. Smelik notes that this cinema has, in turn, seen some film theorists who once “conceive[d] of female subjectivity within cinematic discourse and representation in purely negative terms or even as an impossibility”,44 view reel woman as “a subject-in-process, allowing room for ambiguities, contradictions and fragmentation”.45

While Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva contest the phallocentric construction of the symbolic order of language, which “relentlessly position[s] femininity outside symbolisation, as somehow exceeding or defying representation”,46 and all call for new forms of representation that recognise maternal language and honour women’s difference to traditional discourse, their work differs in methodological framework. Cixous and Irigaray, for example, have no interest in working within the confines of the symbolic order, claiming it is impossible to speak of female desire and to augment women’s agency within this space as it keeps woman from her innate plurality.47 Cixous insists that traditional language imposes a hierarchical construction of sex difference, which establishes binaries of ‘activity/passivity’, ‘father/mother’, ‘head/heart’, ‘white/black’, and ‘man/woman’,48 where the former in each dichotomy is privileged in society’s power relations and the latter debased. Moreover, she asserts that such a binary presents a rigid, homogeneous state of being that does not allow for difference or transformation, leaving woman in a state of immobility.

Irigaray likewise highlights that traditional language is centred on male sexuality and the penis: linear, monological, and outcome oriented.49 Informed by Lacan’s notion of other jouissance, she suggests that woman’s sexuality is plural, non-linear and process-oriented, “[a] sort of expanding universe to which no limits [can] be fixed”.50 In her book This Sex Which Is Not One (1985), Irigaray draws particular attention to woman’s multiple erogenous zones, highlighting that woman is eternally touching herself as “her
genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within herself, she is already two – but not divisible into one(s)”.

For this reason, Irigaray claims that women’s language requires a more pluralistic construction to articulate woman’s autoeroticism. Cixous likewise affirms that woman must write the inexhaustible erogeneity of her body in order to gain access to her agency.

These two theorists explore the ways in which women’s sexuality and unconscious shape their language, and their writing. They conceive of a radical writing practice they call *l’écriture féminine* (feminine writing) which seeks to evoke the libidinal pre-Oedipal imaginary and explode the phallocentric systems of representation by encouraging writers to write their body. *L’écriture féminine* also, therefore, sometimes referred to as ‘writing the body’, challenges woman’s subordinate positioning in the symbolic order and its renunciation of female desire, by tearing woman “away from the superegoized structure in which she has always occupied the place reserved for the guilty” and instead offering her ineffable self-*jouissance* through her spontaneous relationship with her body. This deconstructive writing practice combats the western dualism of mind and body by encouraging writers to defy the conventional discourse and embrace the imaginary through such feats as poetic expression, syntax disruption, multiplicity, contradiction and grammatical interruptions. For Cixous, *l’écriture féminine* serves to break apart oppressive forms of identity, clearing the path for women’s psychic emancipation by bringing “women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies”. She asserts that “[w]oman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement”, and claims that in turn, by giving woman “access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal”.


Chapter Four - Against the Current

Literary critic Sandra Gilbert describes the textual pleasure of writing the body as a “metaphysical fulfilment of desire...a fusion of the erotic, the mystical and the political”. In her monumental book Sexual/Textual Politics (2002), feminist Toril Moi explains that *l’écriture feminine* “may be read positively, as a utopian vision of female creativity in a truly non-oppressive and non-sexist society”, since it “takes off from a negative analysis of its own society in order to create images and ideas that have the power to inspire to revolt against oppression and exploitation”. As with the contemporary feminist films I described in chapter three, which present a visual treatise of French poststructuralism, I felt a strong affiliation with this poststructuralist writing practice and found myself drawn towards experimenting with its principles in my scriptwriting.

I also found engagement with Kristeva’s writing insightful. Her theory of the foreigner who “experiences a loss of his or her mother, motherland, mother-tongue...[c]aught between two languages” and is subsequently “reduced to silence...becom[ing] an outward manifestation of the estranged psychic relation between conscious and unconscious”, helped me to understand the difficulty I had in expressing (my) female subjectivity in the initial draft of *Float*. As outlined in chapter three, I did not feel at ‘home’ in the androcentric culture and language of my undergraduate film course, or the industry, and therefore found refuge in the foreigner’s realm of silence. Kristeva suggests that women (and men) can resist this sense of ‘homelessness’ through explorative writing practices that take us back to our maternal language. Privileging the pleasurable drive-related pre-Oedipal stage of development in the mother’s womb, which she calls the chora, Kristeva contends that it is during symbiosis with the mother that the child first establishes a perceptual awareness of language, rather than, as psychoanalysis suggests, through paternal interaction.
As opposed to phallocentric discourse, which she identifies as the *symbolic*, Kristeva’s work emphasises the influence of pre-linguistic *semiotic* language, which is fluid, formless and rhythmical and derives from a chaotic mix of bodily drives, and the sounds of the mother’s voice in the womb. Kristeva proposes that due to our earliest nondifferentiated state with the mother, her semiotic language remains deep within the core of our unconscious, and can be used to transgress limiting identity discourses. She claims that artists and writers should embrace more inclusive styles of language that also bring the semiotic into play; attesting that a semiotic/symbolic dialectic, like the abject, puts the ‘subject-in-process/on trial’ and allows women to discover more liberating forms of subjectivity intrinsic to their experience. Kristeva suggests that there are three discourses that allow us to evoke semiotic forces through their acknowledgment of the divided subject. The first discourse is psychoanalysis; the second is poetry; and the third, which is the primary focus of her work, is a discourse of maternity.

In likeness with Cixous’s concept of the Newly Born Woman, who becomes anew through engaging with the other both inside and outside of herself, Kristeva uses the pregnant maternal body as a symbol for the other-in-process within all of us, as the mother is literally carrying (an)other inside of herself. A pregnant woman is not a whole, fixed entity but a spilt subject, and not one but a double. Kristeva believes that this “dramatic ordeal: a splitting of the body, the division and coexistence of self and other, of nature and awareness, of physiology and speech” is eradicated in the masculine order of signification, to the detriment of female desire, and suggests that to strengthen our agency in society, women need to develop counternarratives of maternity that emphasise the semiotic chora, in particular with regard to the alienated relationship between mothers and daughters. This point reverberated strongly with the
mother/daughter theme in *Float’s* first draft, and further helped to highlight my obvious wish to reconnect with my body and the maternal chora: something I set out to explore further in the development of the screenplay.

Along with my discovery of autoethnography shortly after the first draft meeting with my supervisor, which began my journey of subjectivism, my engagement with French poststructuralism, especially *l’écriture feminine*, became a major milestone in my scriptwriting development. This writing practice directly engendered the socially developed attributes of my female condition, resonating with my interiority and sensory nature. Like autoethnography, *l’écriture feminine* requires a writer to use “all their senses, their bodies, movement, feeling, and their whole being”\(^69\) to discover the truth of their subject matter and to write with the *jouissance* that comes from this semiotic interaction.\(^70\) By legitimising the importance of personal voices in cultural analysis, and allowing woman to write her unanalysable body, autoethnography and *l’écriture feminine* revealed to me ways in which I could overcome my poverty of desire and agency, and experience empowerment and a reawakening through the process of subjective writing. Cixous affirms that:

> By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display – the ailing or dead figure.\(^71\)

In *Float’s* rewrites I set out to write the excessiveness and inconsistencies of my lived body without the red editing pen in hand. To do so, I adopted a plural and sensory methodology, so as to give a voice to what had been absent from my work but not my experience. This required me to adopt a mobile and bodily consciousness in my writing; to remain open to the vulnerabilities and possibilities of that which organised language and culture has repressed, namely the female body as subject. A major challenge at first was to try to overcome the anxiety I felt towards my body as a woman, given its social
connections to the monstrous feminine. Cixous affirms that this association, inherited from Freud via Greek mythology, is difficult for women to break through as it has riveted us “between two horrifying myths: between the Medusa and the abyss…anchored in the dogma of castration”.72

I sought advice in Cixous’s writing, which encourages women to speak up against these falsehoods that have historically been used to scare them from actualising their own power. In defence of the apparent unrepresentability of women’s genitalia, which Freud referred to as the ‘dark continent’, Cixous insists that this myth is only because the female sex has been directly determined by the male gaze, and is in fact, “neither dark nor unexplorable”,73 highlighting the irony that it is “still unexplored only because we’ve been made to believe that it is too dark to be explorable”.74 I was inspired by Cixous’s suggestion that if women (and men) would simply look deeper into the unknown of woman, they would discover that there is nothing to fear, that there is no validity to these myths; an insight that is expressed so poignantly in her reworking of the disparaging myth of Medusa: “You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she’s not deadly. She’s beautiful and she’s laughing”.75

In response to this statement, I challenged myself to write the uncomfortable, the unfamiliar, the unexplored; and allowed myself to go to places in my mind and body that I had never before let speak. Quoting Breillat, Gillain notes that the filmmaker uses a similar methodology to mine in her scriptwriting:

Breillat describes herself as a “kamikaze scriptwriter”: kamikaze because she plunges into the unknown to explode the dominant codes…Her method of working is ascetic: “There are deeply obscure forces within me that I don’t even explain to myself. The explanation is the film. Suddenly the film is very frontal. I can’t escape this frontalism. I cannot be indirect because I don’t know beforehand what I am about to unearth”.76
This confronting and non-formulaic process of inquiry, inspired by my involvement with l’écriture féminine, enabled me to investigate my subjectivity from a much more layered and critical perspective. Dancyger and Rush confirm that, “one of the things that happens when we break out of the restorative three-act form is that the effaced narrator becomes increasingly visible and overt”. They argue that one cannot write personal cinema without this necessary exposition and “honest self-awareness”.

This methodological shift not only enabled me to write more vulnerably, it was, in turn, beneficial to the reworking of Float’s characters. For example, when I first attempted to write the character of Tamdar, a displaced African refugee with whom Hannah becomes involved, I found that he became the ideal native: a ‘Noble Savage’ type character reminiscent of early literature. This scenario, being a white woman writing the character of a black man, made me aware of my own oppressive ability. My supervisor further highlighted this issue of my colonialised representation of Tamdar, pointing out that I was patronising him by making him embody an untainted innocence. Tamdar personified the ‘dark continent’ of my psyche as a woman, and, like Hannah, was a demanding character to write because he forced me to acknowledge my difference, and the ‘displaced’ state of my sexuality. This realisation was prompted by Cixous’s claim that woman is taught that:

hers is the dark region: because you are Africa, you are black. Your continent is dark. Dark is dangerous. You can’t see anything in the dark, you are afraid...And we have internalized this fear of the dark. Women haven’t had eyes for themselves. They haven’t gone exploring in their house. Their sex still frightens them. Their bodies, which they haven’t dared enjoy, have been colonized. Woman is disgusted by woman and fears her.

Kristeva observes that, “encounters with foreigners can help reacquaint us with the otherness within our own psyches”. Through my experimentation with l’écriture féminine, I came to recognise that, against a background of research into Tamdar’s cultural history, I could use my own experience of marginalisation, along with
engagement with the semiotic realm, to liberate and humanise this character (and my sexuality); developing him into a more realistic and complex individual with various traits and failings.

By rigorously disintegrating my Oedipalised ego and decensoring the female body through *l’écriture féminine*, my scriptwriting started to extend beyond the confines I had inadvertently laid down around me. The social boundaries that presented like brick walls in my mind began to crumble. As exhilarating as this new methodological approach to my scriptwriting was, it also recalled my acute fear of the unknown, and death. Through collapsing my defences to allow new sensations to flow out from inside, I simultaneously experienced these old fears returning to inhabit me. I found some reassurance in Campion, who, talking about her similar scriptwriting process for *In the Cut*, reveals: “I felt intimidated by the material and excited as well. It’s good to feel fear and go out and find your way to meet it”.82 It was during this radical experimental writing process that I experienced the second turning point in my journey of agency: a cruel twist of fate, an extraordinary case of life imitating art, as I came face to face with my fear.

**Sinking: Trauma and Dissociation**

The foundations on which we have built our lives are far more fragile than we think, and so we are severely shaken when life turns out to have a will of its own. The modern aspect is our naive belief that everything is controllable. As a result we are amazingly ill-equipped when the unexpected occurs.83

Filmmaker Susanne Bier

In the early morning hours of January 16, 2005, myself, my siblings, and our respective life partners, were involved in a serious car accident. We were returning from the airport after collecting my younger brother, who had just become a professional golfer overseas, and were on our way home to celebrate with our parents, who were in a
separate vehicle. In another part of town, two police officers had stopped to attend to a drunken brawl in an inner city park. In their haste, the policemen left their keys in the ignition of their vehicle. We were travelling across a major intersection when the police car, which had subsequently been stolen by a man involved in the brawl – a man who was wanted on parole, had a blood alcohol level three times over the legal limit, and was driving at speeds exceeding 120kms per hour - ran a late red light and crossed our path, causing us to crash into his vehicle. From the impact, the small four-wheel drive we were travelling in was catapulted metres into the air over the top of the police car, rolling numerous times, before smashing into oncoming traffic. My heavily pregnant sister was driving our vehicle.

Miraculously, no one was killed or critically injured in the accident, and after a terrifying few weeks my sister gave birth to a healthy baby girl. Nevertheless, the accident’s traumatic effects continue to reverberate through our lives on complex and multiple levels: physical, emotional, familial, relational, spiritual, political, and legal. Psychiatrist Judith Lewis Herman (1994) confirms that the powerful force of a violent event “inspire[s] helplessness and terror” in the victim, fragmenting and overwhelming his or her integrated self-protecting system of both body and mind, and “produc[ing] profound and lasting changes in physiological arousal, emotion, cognition, and memory”.

The accident attracted national media attention and, for many of our friends and acquaintances, the reports on the news were the first they had heard of the incident. This was particularly problematic because our story became a sensationalist spectacle. Each news station reported conflicting information; one even going so far as to claim my sister had lost the baby, and another stating that one of us had died in the crash. In the news footage, there are a number of medium close-ups of myself as I receive medical
attention from ambulance officers, and as I am lifted onto a stretcher. When I first saw this footage I did not recognise myself. I looked so small inside the frame. A face of terror looked back at me; teeth clenched tightly, large dilated pupils, and blood soaked clothing. I vaguely remember the bright lights from the media cameras that chaotic night. I remember wishing that they would leave us alone. As a female filmmaker researching how to break this assaulting male gaze, I did not fail to see the bitter irony of this event as the camera was now turned on me at my most vulnerable. I was the objectified woman of its fixation.

To add insult to injury, through a connection with someone working for a major news station, we discovered that at least one of Perth’s leading news broadcasters had bought a tape shot by a group of men who call themselves the ‘Paparazzi of Perth’. These men were also there that night but, unlike the media who arrived approximately ten minutes after the crash, and, for the most part, stayed at a ‘respectable’ distance from us, these men were some of the first on the scene and began filming us from only a few metres away while we were still trapped upside down and unconscious in our vehicle. For all they knew, they were shooting a ‘snuff’ film.\(^5\) I have been told that in the footage these men are heard laughing and celebrating over our tragedy as they realise the lucrative possibilities of the shocking imagery they are capturing as witnesses pull us out of the back of the car in our unconscious states, and my pregnant sister incredibly frees herself from the wreckage. As far as we are aware, no official news stations used any of the salacious tape, as it was evidently too graphic for commercial television, but we will never really know whether it exists elsewhere in the mass ether of cyberspace. I have not watched the tape, a copy of which is now in my family’s possession, and I never will. Not out of fear, but as an act of agency. I will not give power to these men’s
actions. I will not see the experience through their eyes. This was my family’s story; this was my story.

For a long period of time after this event, the threat of annihilation associated with my near death experience immobilised my spirit. Herman confirms that, “traumatized people feel that they belong more to the dead than to the living”.\(^8^6\) A part of me was lost early that January morning: my trust, my confidence, and my \textit{jouissance}. One of the consequences of being a filmmaker who needs to pay great attention to detail, was that I was haunted by vivid flashbacks after the accident. In both conscious and subconscious states, abject images, sounds and sensations played over and over in my mind and body like a horror movie on loop.\(^8^7\) Due to my capacity for visualisation, these visceral flashbacks were further enhanced by my imagination and macabre “what if” contemplations.

In this existential agony I became acutely aware of the horrors and tragedies of humanity. I began to live life in slow motion, beneath a dark cloud of contemplation; everything was foggy \textit{and} under the microscope, a dangerous combination. Existing purely within a Dionysian realm, and living through my bodily manifestations, I began to truly understand the temporality and plurality of my subjectivity. I learnt to surrender control to these non-rational drives and my somatic responses without any reassurance of some end to my physical and psychological turmoil.

The intensive medical journey towards my recovery also proved to be an extremely silencing and dehumanising affair. But for a few exceptions to the mostly male specialists and lawyers I dealt with on a weekly basis, I was just a number, a form, a pay cheque, a commodity, a pathologised woman: a victim. In the ‘deficit model’ of conventional medicine used to diagnose and treat me, which “emphasizes weakness or
problematic elements and de-emphasizes – or even ignores - strengths”, 88 I was awarded no identity, no agency as an autonomous being. Supporting Kristeva’s theory concerning the abject’s threatening breakdown in meaning, where self-other boundaries are disturbed, 89 Herman writes that:

[trauma forces the survivor to relive all her earlier struggles over autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy…[it] violate[s] the autonomy of the person at the level of basic bodily integrity. The body is invaded, injured, defile...]

This medical objectification added to my trauma, to my disempowerment and feelings of alienation. I came to feel totally helpless. I believed nothing was within my control: not my fragile mind, not my injured body, and certainly not the frightening world around me.

This harrowing event had a direct impact on my scriptwriting and research. After almost six months leave due to my injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder, I decided to revisit my writing, and made the decision to incorporate this event into my thesis due to the significant connections it made with my title of study. There was simply no way I could continue my research without discovering a voice with which to integrate this experience into my writing, as it shook up the foundations of my world, confronted the fundamental core of my being, and changed me forever. As the next chapter will examine, putting the lived experience of the accident into scriptwriting practice proved more challenging and exhausting than I had thought possible. It was during this return to my work that my agency was tested like never before.
Notes

1 Irigaray. *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 227.
4 For an interesting contemporary discussion of Freud’s split subject see Mansfield. *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway*, 25-37.
7 Doane. *Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body*, 94.
11 Ibid, 136.
14 Kaplan, ed. *Feminism and Film*, 132.
18 Schacht. *Nietzsche*, 496.
29 Bochner and Ellis. *Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject*, 735.
32 Ibid, 2.
33 Ibid.
Cixous and Jenson. "Coming to Writing" and Other Essays, 40.
Cixous. The Laugh of the Medusa. 880.
Smelik. And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory, 29.
Ibid.
Gamble. The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism, 134.
Irigaray. This Sex Which Is Not One, 31.
Cixous and Clement. The Newly Born Woman, 63.
Irigaray. This Sex Which Is Not One, 30.
Cixous. The Laugh of the Medusa. 880.
Ibid. Cixous associates this guilt to “everything, guilty at every turn: for having desires, for not having any; for being frigid, for being “too hot”; for not being both at once; for being too motherly and not enough; for having children and for not having any; for nursing and for not nursing”.
Ibid, 875.
Ibid.
Ibid, 880.
Cixous and Clement. The Newly Born Woman, xvii.
Ibid, 120.
Kristeva writes that, the chora is a pleasurable drive-related stage of development in the mother’s womb in which the child experiences itself solely as part of the maternal body with no concept of self-other boundaries. Ibid, 35.
Ibid.
Kristeva. Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia.
Bochner and Ellis. Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject, 741.
Cixous. The Laugh of the Medusa.
Ibid, 880.
Ibid, 885.
Ibid, 884.
Ibid, 884-885.
Ibid, 885.
Gillain. Profile of Filmmaker: Catherine Breillat, 205.
Ibid, 354.
The notion of the Noble savage derived from eighteenth-century sentimentalism and was used by early settlers and novelists to describe natives as innocent and uncorrupted by the influences of civilization. For more reading on this see Terry Jay Ellingson. 2001. The Myth of the Noble Savage. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.
Cixous and Clement. The Newly Born Woman, 68.
Kristeva and Oliver. The Portable Kristeva, 227.
In the Cut: Behind the Scenes Featurette. Screen.
Michael Kjaer. 2002. When Life has a Will of its Own. Film: The Danish Film Institute. (22), 13-14.
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Herman. Trauma and Recovery, 52-53.
Chapter Five

From the Undertow: Female Survival and Agency

Writing: a way of leaving no space for death, of pushing back forgetfulness, of never letting oneself be surprised by the abyss. Of never becoming resigned, consoled; never turning over in bed to face the wall and drift asleep again as if nothing had happened; as if nothing could happen.¹

Helen Cixous

Writing hurts.²

Ruth Behar

Toril Moi notes that for a woman, writing becomes an intimate extension of her speaking body because, as Cixous asserts, “writing and voice…are woven together”³ and “spring from the deepest layers of her psyche”.⁴ The major physical injuries I sustained in the car accident ironically involve areas of the body most closely associated to writing and voice (speech): neck and spinal sprain, and most notably, after four years I still have a displaced jaw. It hurts to work at a computer, and to speak.

For many months after returning to this research project, I resisted writing. I was in a constant physical and psychological battle with myself to commit to even just sitting down in front of my laptop. Once I did so, it was extremely difficult to write, not only because of the physical pain it caused but also because my memories “lack[ed] verbal narrative and context”⁵ as they were deeply rooted in my body. Another major issue that I had to face was the fact that, after the accident, I could no longer relate to fundamental elements of the script or feel passionate about its rewrites. Its content seemed flippant and contrived. I badly wanted to write my way out of my traumatised state and release some of the anguish that my body was now carrying around, as I was buckling under the weight of it all. I was, however, unable to access the intuitive space that I needed to write the body, as everything felt too raw. I was not alone in this experience: Cixous reveals that she does not attempt to write if she is not ‘in good shape’: “[i]f I do not
have all my strength at my disposal, I would write, of course, but a bit less, a bit below*. 6

During this return to work the pejorative voices of my undergraduate education, and its omniscient epistemology, were making themselves heard once again. I felt it would be self-indulgent to directly write about the subjective experience of my trauma. Through this negative internal dialogue with myself, I initially reverted back to repressing my lived experience. By doing so, I returned to inhibiting every part of me that enabled me to write and tell stories. On many occasions during my recovery I wished I was writing a prescriptive and impersonal thesis that did not demand me to intimately connect with my body. I wanted to completely block out this violent ordeal.

I soon learnt, however, that my body could not be silenced and was slow to forget. As I tried to write around this experience, fool myself and others that I was no longer fragmented by the event, that I was healed and ‘whole’ again, the trauma worked itself deeper inside of me, and my physical symptoms worsened, as did the quality of my writing. When I did eventually find the courage to return to incorporating elements of l’écriture féminine in my praxis, it enabled me to flush out some of the erratic waves of anxiety that were flooding me internally. As part of this process, I employed emotional recall: a performance technique I often use when working with actors, which required me to recall my physical, emotional and spiritual responses to the accident in order to return to the moment as it happened, and evoke an immediate and candid account of the event. I experienced extreme moments of jouissance and empowerment through this release.

In this experimentation I found myself returning to writing about trauma, death and identity, primarily through the turbulent relationship between Hannah and her mother.
This time, however, it became clear to me that these persistent themes were not, as I first suspected, me ‘rehearsing to die’, or wanting to kill off the woman inside me. I realised that I was in fact “not driven towards death but by death”; my near death experience, acting as a limit to my corporeal self, was calling for personal authenticity in life. Bettelheim affirms that the figures and events of our narratives “suggest the need for gaining a higher state of selfhood – an inner renewal which is achieved as personal and racial unconscious forces become available to the person”. The recurring presence of the mother-daughter relationship alongside the theme of death symbolised to me my yearning to, in a way, be ‘reborn’, to return to the imaginary (m)other inside me, who exists beyond all the rules and laws of organised society that had first brought me to my place of nothing, and now to my state of disassociation. Mansfield acknowledges that abjection and death “offer us a freedom outside of the repression and logic that dominate our daily practices of keeping ourselves in order, within the lines”. Moi likewise writes that death represents “the ultimate object of desire - as Nirvana or the recapturing of the lost unity, the final healing of the split subject”.

It was enlightening for me to recognise these psychological motivations behind my scriptwriting and fictional archetypes. Jung’s suggestion that the organising principles of our creative unconscious and its spiritual demands are inherited from our psychic ancestry in particular illuminated a path of inquiry that I felt compelled to continue down further. Autoethnographer Kim Etherington (2004) supports this impulse, stating that “[i]n order to reclaim our ‘selves’ (that might have been lost through illness or trauma) we need to make our selves available as an audience to our self-story”.

Although I have always had a positive and close bond with my mother, during this introspective post-accident research into writing the body, I came to recognise that the weak and, at times, negative connection I had with my female identity; the script’s
primary examination of a troubled maternal bond; and my own need to reconnect with
the figurative mother, were all no doubt in part influenced by my mother’s complicated
relationship with her own mother, which in some intrinsic ways has stemmed down
through our family tree. From this realisation I began to follow still deeper the roots of
my maternal connections.

**Still Waters: Writing (M)other**

> If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the
glass grow and the squirrel’s heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the
other side of silence.

George Eliot

> To write vulnerably is to open a Pandora’s box. Who can say what will come flying
out?

Ruth Behar

My mother was brought up in a loving but strict German household and was an only
child for the first 17 years of her life, until her sister was born. My late grandfather, who
we called Papa, was a well-known doctor, and a warm and affectionate man, yet he
could also be controlling. My grandmother, Mutti, has lived with bipolarity for most of
her life. Mum spent many of her childhood years during the 1950s playing in the
corridors of the various hospitals my grandmother frequented. It upsets me to have
discovered that during this time Mutti was given electric shock treatment. Papa would
sometimes administer her medication, which I always found a little disconcerting. As a
child, I remember her compartmentalised pill container filled with many multicoloured
tablets. I would watch her take a couple every few hours, throwing her head back
slightly to help them go down, complaining to me that they gave her a dry mouth. I
have been told that I would often sit with my grandmother as she lay in her bed during
one of her periods of depression. In some ways, I understood her.
As my mother was growing up Mutti used to tell her how much she was disgusted by sex, claiming she only complied for procreation. She aroused shame in mum for having large breasts as a teenager, telling her not to draw attention to them with her clothing or posture. Mum has subsequently developed a slouch as she spent her younger years trying to hide away her womanliness. She has told me stories of finding her mother in her nightie standing barefoot in the snow, calling out in the darkness to God. Mutti would often speak of the imaginary ‘cellar people’ who whispered to her through the water pipes; insist someone was tampering with her stove because they were trying to gas her; and sometimes even call my mother the antichrist.

On a return trip to Germany with my family when I was 15, I discovered that my grandfather had been unfaithful to Mutti for much of their married life, a circumstance of which she was aware but never spoke about. When my mother was a teenager, Papa entangled her in one particularly lengthy affair with his medical secretary, who had become a family friend, by insisting that mum regularly make contact with this woman to relay his arrangements for them to meet. To this day, this memory still upsets my mother, given that she feels that she too deceived my grandmother.

Papa claimed that his affairs only began once Mutti’s depression had worsened, blaming her ‘frigidity’. While I am not privy to the intimate details of my grandparents’ lives, I have forever wondered whether this timeline is correct or whether, given the silencing of the women of her generation, my grandmother’s mental illness was greatly exacerbated, and perhaps even misdiagnosed, as a result of her internalised heartache and rage regarding this infidelity: or as George Eliot, a woman who knew all about concealment called it, from this ‘roar which lies on the other side of silence’.16
During this family holiday, Papa had organised for us all to have lunch with his ex-lover, who was now married to someone else. Still confused and angered after recently learning of his affairs, I refused to go out of respect for Mutti, and my mother. I was sickened by the thought of having to do small talk with this woman over lunch while my medicated grandmother sat there with her dry mouth full of unspoken words. But my mother pleaded for me to ‘keep the peace’, saying it would anger Papa if I did not go, and pointing out that Mutti was ‘fine’ with the situation, which appeared to be true as she seemed in good spirits that day. Though infuriated by my mother’s and grandmother’s compliance, I went along nonetheless. As expected, this turned out to be an uncomfortable event, yet what frustrated me the most was that, on the way home in the car, my grandmother would not stop commenting on how attractive this woman was - how much she admired her dress, her home, her cooking - all delivered in a self-defeatist manner that made me want to scream for her to shut up and return to her customary mute state.

But this is how things were. Like most dutiful wives of her time, my grandmother lived to serve her husband and his needs. She had no overt hobbies, passions, or dreams of her own. A strong memory that I will always have of her, is of how, immediately after clearing their breakfast dishes, she would habitually lay the table for lunch, and then sit in the dining room and wait for hours for Papa to return from his nearby surgery. On a few occasions when I stayed with my grandparents on my solo visits to Germany in my late teens, I came home to find Mutti sitting at the table in the dark, having done the same for dinner.

On the last day of our family trip, my grandfather wanted to show us some silent home movies from the 1950s and 60s, which he had shot on 8mm film. We all sat down in my grandparents’ lounge room and watched hours of fascinating footage of their family
holidays around Europe. I marvelled at seeing my mother as a thumb-sucking toddler, a cheeky young girl dancing in the grass, and a sunbathing teenager on the beaches of Italy. I watched how she moved, how she ate her food, how she dressed, how she laughed. After becoming lost in this nostalgic imagery, however, I started to notice a recurring pattern within these many films, which, at first, was somewhat humorous in its lack of subtlety, but soon became disturbing to me.

Whenever Papa was filming my mother or Mutti walking down a street, eating at a restaurant, or swimming at the beach, the camera would linger on them for a moment and then start to pan away, apparently filming the surrounding scenery. It soon became obvious, however, that Papa’s lens was in search of something else. He would not take long to find what he was looking for, an attractive woman walking, sitting or sunbathing nearby. Unbeknown to this anonymous woman, my grandfather would film her for a substantial length of time, sometimes even zooming in for a closer inspection. His gaze was often broken by my mother jumping in front of the camera, insisting he film her building a sand castle, or something of that nature. I was not the only one to notice this trend in Papa’s films. The rest of my family also sat there silently in the uncomfortable construction of his gaze that, in many ways, erased my mother’s and my grandmother’s presence.

It was only through writing the body of (m)other that I came to recognise how these personal experiences of female repression in my family, and my mother’s problematic relationship with her own mother (and father), influenced my subjectivity and agency, and Float’s fictional narrative. Through revisiting this familial history I began to see my mother as more than simply my mother, but as a woman on her own terms, with her own experience of the loss of a positive female identity and sovereignty through patriarchal indoctrination and control. As is a common pattern in many families, my
grandmother’s inability to place her own pleasures and desires before those of her husband, filtered through to my mother and, subsequently, on to my two sisters and myself on a subconscious level. We came to understand that the message was that women should sacrifice these fundamental elements for their husbands and/or children.

As discussed in the previous chapters, it seems that this self-abnegating legacy, passed down through generations of women, is still written on the skin of contemporary female desire. Ruby Rich concludes that this muse-like masochistic behaviour displayed in the actions of many contemporary women is born out of a deep anger at the ongoing repression of female agency. Given that women are still censured for openly expressing anger, she contends that this leaves us “no choice but to direct the anger inward, as women have done for centuries, against the self”, which she deems “a neat solution for the status quo, and a terrible choice for women”. Nietzsche also acknowledged that when the will-to-power, this ‘powerful instinct for freedom’ is “forced to become latent, driven underground” and finally able to discharge, it takes on a masochistic nature, only able to “vent its energy upon itself”.

My personal experience and that of many close women in my life, including my sisters and friends, reflects this distressing tendency. All of us, educated, independent and successful young women, enjoying fulfilling female friendships and our ‘autonomy’, underwent a similar phase in our late teens and early twenties, in which we chose, time and again, to become involved in unhealthy relationships with men, to whom we surrendered our power. It was not a matter of believing that these men were ‘better’ than we were. It was more to do with an automatic response to the Alpha element of social indoctrination: our reflex to take a back seat when it came to the development of desire and agency.
By denying our selves in these relationships, we irrationally began to believe that we deserved our mistreatment by these men. We internalised the numerous problems in our relationships, feeling that these stemmed back to our inadequacy because we were (now) too emotional, too insecure, too demanding, or (most paradoxically) too dependent, which, for a long time brought each of us to the common place of female passivity, before eventually ending these relationships. This phenomenon, not uncommon to many contemporary women, seems to be a sort of painful rite of passage towards (re)claiming our agency. It is a cruel initiation that we seem to believe we must endure before we can allow ourselves to be powerful in personal relationships.

Given my confusion and frustration at this situation, which I had witnessed in my family and so regularly in other women but could not recognise when I myself was falling into it, I fought hard to find a voice and wield some agency in my early relationships, especially as I was determined not to end up in a situation like my grandmother or my mother. However, I struggled with the idea that this assertion of my power was somehow ‘wrong’ given that, as previously discussed, female power is still generally associated with stridency. I was therefore uneasy about asserting myself, which manifested itself, at times, in my adoption of a rather aggressive demeanour to mask my insecurity and to defend my ‘impudent’ act of claiming power. This often saw me labelled an angry bitch, which, more damaging than the resulting rejection by others, imprisoned me in my rage. In an attempt to compensate for my ‘unlovable’ nature, I would eventually resort to taking on more of a muse-like masochistic role where I became all too willing to please, which, in turn, disarmed my voice and agency, and saw me follow the same rage-isolation-inactivity cycle as had my grandmother.

As I grew older, and in close connection to the insights gained from this research project, I became more comfortable with acting on my agency as a woman without
needing to revert to forceful measures. This, along with my recall of Kristeva’s claim that the mother-daughter bond can have subversive possibilities, and Kaplan’s similar assertion that when the mother’s desire is the focus for the girl there is a “possibility for new psychic patterns to emerge”, inspired me to try to position woman and the mother as commanding and important figures in *Float’s* narrative, particularly through the relationship between Hannah and Mrs Brannigan.

To successfully integrate my personal experience into the feature script, I closely studied a number of contemporary feminist films that explore female issues related to the mother, including Armstrong’s *High Tide* (1987), Gorris’s *Antonia’s Line* (1995), Holofcener’s *Lovely and Amazing*, Stopkewich’s *Suspicious River*, Campion’s *In the Cut* and *The Piano*, Breillat’s *A Ma Soeur*, Shortland’s *Somersault*, Potter’s *Orlando* (1992) and Adler’s *Under the Skin.* I simultaneously drew even more rigorously on *l’écriture feminine*, working towards making Hannah’s troubled maternal relationship and its challenging repercussions on her subjectivity and agency the primary focus of the script. This required me to push even further into deterritorialising my rational mind so as to become lost in the non-rational semiotic realm in my writing.

In this boundless, metaphysical space I found myself writing material radically different from that which I had previously produced; with a rawness that at times cut painfully deep for me, and for those close to me. This was both incredibly terrifying and liberating. Campion describes her choice to push the boundaries and take creative risks in her films in a similar manner:

_I found so much freedom in the work that it was irresistible. It was the best way of living I knew – better than ‘normal’ life, because in normal life I was more hidden. I felt that I could express my strangest, my weirdest, my most extreme sides…I think I would have suffered from not doing it, and I don’t think I’m the only woman to feel that._
Unlike Campion, however, the pleasure that this extreme scriptwriting experimentation evoked soon escaped me. Ironically, I came to suffer from the boundlessness of my creative exploration.

With the liberty to let myself go where I had never gone before in my writing and psyche, the complex ramifications of the accident on my body, identity and social agency loomed. It was not long after re-engaging with l’écriture feminine that I found myself in a state of traumatic entrapment and hyper-vigilance: my body on “permanent alert, as if the danger might return at any moment”.24 I became overwhelmed by the smallest of sensations or situations. Sometimes this terror became too great and my body switched into a mode of self-preservation, moving me to a state of complete numbness. I found some solace in this lack of feeling, yet it saw me become detached from my body, my loved ones, and my community. At times it was as if I had stepped out of my skin; like a third person, the old me watched on as this new me became increasingly more alienated from the world.

This experience made apparent to me the problems of writing the body for female agency which, I believe, had the accident not occurred, I would perhaps not have become aware of for some time. The main problems that I experienced with the practice lies in its foundations in Lacan’s notion of other jouissance, and in its over-reliance on the semiotic. Feminist poststructuralists argue that Lacan is favourable to women’s resistance as his work links language to our pre-linguistic subjectivity, offering a deeper understanding of how sexual difference and desire manifests itself in the organisation of language as the unconscious ‘speaks’.25 His notion of other jouissance appears to grant women an advantaged access to desire since, unlike the limit of phallic jouissance, other jouissance is “beyond the symbolic and the subject” and can offer women ineffable and infinite pleasure.26
However, fundamental problems exist with this supposed benefit of other *jouissance* for women given that, as I touched on in chapter two, in this theoretical concept, female desire still remains passive and secondary to male desire, and woman’s definition and access to pleasure comes at a much higher cost than man’s. Not only is other *jouissance* only possible through woman’s masquerade of femininity in which she becomes the (passive) phallus, but also, it is solely through the desire of a man that woman can save herself from non-existence. Man’s existence, on the other hand, is never jeopardised or dependent on an other. He obtains phallic *jouissance* through the (active) possession of the phallus and his self-determined desire *for* a woman. Homer recognises the inactivity of other *jouissance* in organised culture, which he admits is difficult to define since it falls outside of language and is therefore “something that one can experience but say nothing about”.

I appreciate that other *jouissance* is more of a philosophical concept that, like existentialism, does not necessarily deny women’s social limitations and physical reality but rather offers a spiritual transcendence and infinite pleasure that we can strive towards experiencing internally despite these unideal circumstances. On this level, I find other *jouissance* potentially liberating and optimistic for women. Nevertheless, as I experienced most patently during my post-accident existence, on a day-to-day level it is very difficult to access this enlightened psychic state in a society that, on the whole, is structured to deny women’s experience, pleasure, and spiritual contemplation. For this reason, I agree with poststructuralist Catherine Clement’s claim that other *jouissance* and its creative formulation in *l’écriture féminine* is “devoid of reality…except in a poetic sense”.

Other feminists (Moi (2002), Brown (1979), Faure (1981), Jones (1981)) also support this view, arguing that *l’écriture féminine*’s esoteric nature and metaphysical idealism
precludes women’s political change by doing little to alter the daily circumstances of our lives. The practice has attracted criticism for overlooking women’s material circumstances, which prevent many women from writing; for collapsing critical differences among women into a singular experience of the female body and sexuality in its claim for “the autonomy of a female voice and the potentiality of a feminine language”,\(^\text{30}\) for repeating the very binary of man/woman that it claims to undermine;\(^\text{31}\) and for containing essentialist inferences which seem to suggest that there is a pure biological ‘feminine’ essence that exists beyond psychosocial contexts.\(^\text{32}\)

As I stated in this thesis’s introduction, I do not necessarily find the type of essentialism employed by \textit{l’ecriture feminine} to be a problem for women. I am in agreement with Fuss who suggests that while writing the body may have limitations as a communal feminist discourse, when consciously employed, this essentialist practice can have political benefits, especially when used on an individual level of resistance:

There is an important distinction to be made...between “deploying” or “activating” essentialism and “falling into” or “lapsing into” essentialism. “Falling into” or “lapsing into” implies that essentialism is inherently reactionary – inevitably and inescapably a problem or mistake. “Deploying” or “activating,” on the other hand, implies that essentialism may have some strategic or interventionary value...the radicality or conservatism of essentialism depends, to a significant degree, on \textit{who} is utilizing it, \textit{how} it is deployed, and \textit{where} its effects are concentrated.\(^\text{33}\)

Fuss continues by demonstrating how the essentialism activated by Irigaray and Cixous’s writing practice can be used as a powerful tactic for reworking ideas on female subjectivity and agency in dominant discourse:

to give “woman” an essence is to undo Western phallosomorphism and to offer women entry into subjecthood. Moreover, because in this Western ontology existence is predicated on essence, it has been possible for someone like Lacan to conclude, \textit{remaining fully within traditional metaphysics}, that without essence, “women does not exist”...A woman who lays claim to an essence of her own undoes the conventional binarisms of essence/accident, form/matter, and actuality/potentiality. In this specific historical context, to essentialize “woman” can be a politically strategic gesture of displacement.\(^\text{34}\)
My concerns with *l’écriture feminine* relate instead to its extreme favouring of the non-rational realm. Its Lacanian-inspired claim that women are only definable in the semiotic and should therefore embrace its excessiveness and otherness, keeps us passive in society by stripping us of agency in the symbolic through our consignment to psychic displacement. In my experimentation with *l’écriture feminine*, in which I allowed myself to become consumed by my bodily pulsations and the chaos of the imaginary, the writing practice’s lack of boundaries, along with the injured state of my body and mind, resulted in me struggling to find the necessary clarity and counterbalance of life’s restorative energy to successfully engage with this type of deconstruction and still maintain a healthy existence. I found that the trauma of the car accident had crept into every moment of my creative imagination, my visceral responses, my dreams, and my daily conversations. In this gruelling scriptwriting period, I experienced the return of a deep-seated anger, and found myself drawn to the narratives and mechanisms of militant feminist films, including *Romance, Trouble Every Day, Baise-Moi, In my Skin*, and *Anatomy of Hell*. In likeness to *l’écriture feminine*, this acrimonious cinema transgresses normative boundaries and phallocentric forces and, for a while, entertained the anger and isolation I was experiencing as a woman in my vulnerable and victimised post-accident condition; offering me a sense of empowerment through its violent, revenge-driven narratives.

However, the exclusionary and extremist effects of my experimentation with *l’écriture feminine* eventually also proved to be a problematic tendency in my interaction with militant cinema. I soon began creating (and existing in) a highly dystopian world of rage and deception; exploring explicit themes of violence, sexuality and death in the screenplay, that I realised left me with a bitter taste in my mouth, and was getting me nowhere in my daily life. This brought me to question the effectiveness of militant
feminist film for contemporary women, which, like the limitations of the screen bitch in mainstream cinema, reinforces an extremely restrictive scope for female subjectivity and agency.

Although I admire the bravery and innovation made by militant feminist filmmakers, and do not wish to discount the importance of their films, as a policing film feminist identity would exclude diversity among women, I have mixed feelings about this corrosive cinema. On the one hand, I am grateful for the alternative lens that it provides, and recognise that it would be naïve to assume that this cinema’s content necessarily reflects its filmmakers’ values, since the function of a film can be highly complex. For example, the extreme violence in most militant feminist films often seems to be motivated by the filmmakers’ intention to reinforce the need for human compassion, as opposed to them advocating violence. While not always effective as a form of entertainment, this cinema can therefore be very effective politically. Nevertheless, on the other hand, I have some concerns about its pessimistic presentation of female agency, which I feel undermines its political gains.

As with the screen bitch, a common trend in militant feminist cinema is the anti-emotive depiction of female characters who are starved of feeling and whose agency is reduced to vengeance as they turn the tables on men and use extreme acts of violence and cruelty to satisfy their needs. These female vigilante narratives commonly involve women attempting to combat male dominance through murder; sexual violence; committing suicide; lesbianism, or exploiting men by sleeping with them simply to conceive a child. In her essay, *Is the Gaze Male?*, Kaplan sheds some further light on this issue of role reversal on screen by deducing that the gaze has more to do with patriarchy’s dominance-submission power pattern than with gender. She argues that the gaze is therefore “not necessarily male (literally), but to own and activate the gaze,
given our language and the structure of the unconscious, is to be in the masculine position".\textsuperscript{35} She explains that:

women have been permitted in representation to assume (step into) the position defined as masculine, as long as the man then steps into her position) [sic], so as to keep the whole structure intact.\textsuperscript{36}

When a woman controls the gaze and takes on the power position, such as is the case in militant feminist film, she is thereby ultimately aligned with masculinity and aggression.

By merely reversing traditional roles and presenting women as those now doing the oppressing, militant feminist cinema offers female viewers little \textit{jouissance} as women. It focuses more “on denying men their cathexis with women as erotic objects”\textsuperscript{37} than on providing women with positive or pleasurable images of themselves as individual agents. Moreover, rather than beginning its narratives with a woman’s anger and witnessing her move past this reactive state, this cinema mostly ends with the birth and actualisation of her wrath. It therefore fails to move woman \textit{beyond} rage to offer her an active position and agency, offering merely a \textit{reactive} one, which continues to define her solely in relation to man, and leaves female viewers trapped in a world of anger and despair: “in the position of negativity – subverting rather than positing”\textsuperscript{38} For these reasons, I fail to see the long-term benefits of militant cinema for female agency, given that, as one film reviewer aptly questions in relation to Breillat’s films, is this type of militancy really subversive if “women’s horizons are always bounded by joyless sex, rape and death?”\textsuperscript{39}

In my close engagement with both militant cinema and \textit{l’ecriture feminine} during \textit{Float}’s developing drafts, I was brought back to the futile cycle of rage that I had experienced as a younger woman, this time exacerbated by the distress of the accident.
All the radical deconstruction and inward living that I was doing in my scriptwriting saw something toxic rising inside of me. My body was speaking and I did not like what it was telling me. Not only did I find living and writing primarily through my traumatised body exhausting, but also, I grew increasingly nauseated by myself, for I felt I was nothing but this trauma and anger. This demonstrated to me that the kind of subversion advocated by these deconstructive forms of resistance “happens much more easily in the realm of “texts” than in the world of human interaction”.

Along with my strong wish to break the cycle of female passivity in my family’s story, in this bleak period I reminded myself of my desire to make films that could create change. I realised that the sort of screenplay I was writing was becoming increasingly inaccessible and abhorrent. I did not want to alienate an audience (or myself) by writing an overly esoteric or oppositional screenplay, which never left the academic or underground arena; but I found that through my exclusive interaction with l’écriture feminine and radical feminist cinema, I was doing just that.

Kaplan recognises the problems of deconstruction for reel women, arguing that we need to move theoretically beyond deconstruction to reconstruction:

> While it is essential for feminist film critics to examine signifying processes carefully in order to understand the way in which women have been constructed in language and in film, it is equally important not to lose sight of the material world in which we live, and in which our oppression takes concrete, often painful forms. We need films that will show us…the existing discourses that oppress us, how we stand in a different position in relation to those discourses…[and] how to manipulate the recognized, dominating discourses so as to begin to free ourselves through rather than beyond them (for what is there “beyond”?).

Doane also addresses the dangerous preoccupation with deconstructing the female body in feminist cinema, inquiring, “what is left after the stripping, the uncoding, the deconstruction? For an uncoded body is clearly an impossibility”.
Kristeva likewise warns writers not to totally abandon the symbolic realm, which already precedes us.\textsuperscript{43} She rejects \textit{l’ecriture feminine} for attempting to create a feminine language outside of the symbolic through its preoccupation with the semiotic, and its failure to recognise that women’s bodies are always mediated by patriarchy and the symbolic order of language and can thereby never completely escape phallic influence.\textsuperscript{44} Acknowledging the problems for women of either end of the continuum of language, Kristeva asserts that, while the paternal-symbolic supports women’s oppression and invisibility in patriarchy, the maternal-semiotic can be equally damaging, as it banishes women from dominant society and the order of meaning, and commonly leads to delirium.\textsuperscript{45} Nietzsche similarly acknowledged that without mediation, the semiotic (Dionysian) realm results in the subject’s primordial emptiness and psychic devastation.\textsuperscript{46}

In agreement with Kristeva, I propose that Cixous and Irigaray do not deal adequately with the psychic risk related to the abstract experimentation of \textit{l’ecriture feminine}: that is, the fine line between its emancipating and potentially destructive affects. Through the tormenting aftermath of the car accident, I no longer felt that I had the balance required to walk its precarious metaphysical tightrope in my scriptwriting as my sense of fragmentation was intensifying.\textsuperscript{47} I felt I had returned to writing in bad faith, yet this time I had switched positions. Instead of acting as though I was solely determined by rational elements as I did in the creation of \textit{Float}’s first draft, I was now writing as though completely governed by my non-rational responses. Feminist Raia Prokhovnik (2002) affirms that:

\begin{quote}
the accentuated role accorded to language and texts and symbols, signs and chains of significance [by \textit{l’ecriture feminine}] again undervalues the relation between form and content, and so perpetuates the mind/body split.\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}
Learning to Float

In an attempt to finally move past this mind/body dilemma to which I had once again returned, and in symbiosis with my physical rehabilitation, I regularly interspersed my scriptwriting with going swimming at a local pool, something I had not done since I swam at an elite level as a teenager. Performing this physical act with my injuries paralleled the psychic struggle I was experiencing in my experimentation with l’écriture féminine. While it was at first frustrating not to be able to swim with my previous fluency, I persisted and after a few weeks found myself regaining a sense of my body and its inherent strength. This in turn helped my psychological condition.

For a long period during my recovery, the only time that I felt in control of my life was when I was swimming. It helped me to regain confidence in my abilities and to soothe my trauma by integrating my body and mind. The water provided me with a feeling of calmness and healing as I glided through it, becoming increasingly more aware of my power. Interestingly, Moi notes that, for Cixous, water has deep connections with the maternal chora, l’écriture féminine, and the notion of becoming:

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water is the feminine element par excellence: the closure of the mythical world contains and reflects the comforting security of the mother’s womb. It is within this space that Cixous’s speaking subject is free to move from one subject position to another, or to merge oceanically with the world. Her vision of female writing is in this sense firmly located within the closure of the Lacanian Imaginary: a space in which all difference has been abolished.49
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Although I am a strong swimmer, I have always had a fear (and awe) of the ocean, rarely entering its water beyond shoulder height. This is a fear that I have wanted to conquer ever since moving to Australia as a child, especially when I first observed Australian children playing freely in the ocean’s depths with not a care in the world. A few months into my swimming rehabilitation, I was at the beach with my partner and a group of friends and, as a symbolic gesture to myself of my journey of agency and
Chapter Five – From the Undertow 26

healing, I made the decision to try to finally face this fear by following my friends further into the small swell. To my dismay, a few moments after I had moved beyond my usual wading spot, a large set of waves came through, one of which took me (and others) with it, dumping me and sending me tumbling back towards the shore.

To this day, I am not certain whether it was due to the fact that I hit my head on the ocean floor, or because the sensation of being tossed around under water in the powerful breaking wave recalled the experience of the accident, but I blacked out momentarily and had to be helped to shore by my partner, who was also trying to cover my naked upper half as the wave had removed my bikini top. While this occurrence was understandably upsetting, I was nevertheless surprised at how deeply humiliated and terrorised I felt, and at how my condition regressed after this event. The ocean’s unpredictability almost undid all the good that my swimming expeditions had done to help empower me, by once more reminding me of my vulnerability in the real world, outside the controlled environment of the pool.

After this beach incident, the ocean became a metaphor for my risky engagement with l’écriture féminine. I felt too fragile to continue to attempt to navigate the practice’s limitless waters, which now threatened to completely drown me into non-existence by perpetuating the cycle of trauma. When I eventually returned to swimming along the safety of lane ropes, I made the decision to incorporate the leitmotif of water and the ocean as a theme of agency and survival in Float’s narrative, and to symbolise unresolved issues related to the maternal realm in society.

It was during this time that I came to appreciate the necessity to, occasionally, consciously separate the body and mind, particularly if it is injured or diseased: to use rational thought to try to transcend and overcome the body. The challenge for me in
doing this, however, was that my mind and judgement were also clouded by my trauma and so it was particularly difficult to establish the ‘distance’ needed from my visceral responses to reach a lucid place of mind. Just as I did not want to become yet another tortured writer by indulging in my suffering, in this negotiation of my mind/body boundaries I was also adamant that I would not relapse into the sole pursuit of rationalist processes in my praxis. I wondered whether it was possible to walk the fine line of drawing on the ominous, semiotic experiences I had undergone so as to inform *Float’s* fictional narrative, without endangering my life in the symbolic.

Nietzschean and Kristevean theory suggested to me that this was achievable. Unlike the exclusionary systems of conventional language, Kristeva aims to “conceive of a notion of difference that does not operate according to a dualistic logic of opposition” and separatism between the symbolic and semiotic. For women to maintain a healthy psyche and create successful counternarratives, Kristeva recommends a synthesis of the two imperfect modalities of language. She proposes that this approach requires women to gain access to the semiotic “call of the mother”, while also working in the paternal symbolic to derive coherence and equanimity. Echoing Mellencamp’s earlier mentioned point, Kristeva warns that finding this correct balance is still a perilous affair, citing Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath and Marina Tsvetaeva as examples of female writers who attempted to unravel this ‘impossible dialectic’ and suffered extreme consequences (all three committed suicide), but sees this as women’s only possibility for psychic emancipation.

While an advocate of semiotic (Dionysian) engagement for creative exploration, Nietzsche, a man who suffered illness throughout his life, also recognised that we must call on the symbolic’s (Apollo’s) order and structure to ensure that we are not swallowed up in the frenzy of semiotic intoxication, and to gain a “fair semblance
which at any moment make[s] life worth living and whet[s] our appetite for the next 

moment”.\textsuperscript{53} The aim, Nietzsche claimed, is to “become master of the chaos one is; to 

compel one’s chaos to become form”.\textsuperscript{54} Placing this into a scriptwriting context, 
 
Dancyger and Rush similarly warn that in deviating from the traditional three-act 

structure, an experimental scriptwriter must be careful not to fall into psychological 

unrest:

If you attempt to merely copy the disorder of direct experience…all you’ll create 

is disorder…The trick to writing about reality is to find a way to bring to the 

foreground the conflict between focus and confusion…this approach requires as 

much control as the restorative three-act structure.\textsuperscript{55}

In the darkness of my post-traumatic turmoil, I developed a strong appreciation for this 

human need for clarity and overcoming. I yearned for a tonic to move past the 

unproductive, pessimistic nature of my scriptwriting and to redefine Hannah and myself 

as more than the split, angry women I was writing us into. In the midst of this psychic 

fragmentation, a ferocious desire to survive and to regain a sense of connectedness, 

control and hope pushed itself out from deep inside me. I became determined to write a 

narrative that, while dealing with some of the immobilising horrors of humanity I had 

become exposed to through the accident, involved an existentialist movement towards 

catharsis and activity.

**Breathing Under Water**

The stories we tell about our lives often become the frameworks of meaning out of which we act, think, interpret, and relate.\textsuperscript{56}

Christine Kiesinger

I’m not into self-sacrifice. I’m a survivor type, and I need my girl to survive.\textsuperscript{57}

Jane Campion

Existentialism is often projected as a deeply pessimistic philosophy. In the traumatic 

reverberations of the car crash, however, I came to view existentialism and its notion of
self-mastery in a much more favourable light. While this trauma forced me to face my ultimate aloneness in the world, along with many of the cruel and senseless realities about our existence addressed by existentialism, it was these uncomfortable truths I found confronting and threatening, not the philosophy that attempts to deal with them. Once again faced with the fragility and brevity of life, this time through nearly losing all of the people dearest to me, as well as my own life, I realised that I could no longer outrun my own shadow or deny this new awareness of the world, and I no longer wanted to. Instead I wanted to learn how to affirm and embrace life despite the attainment of such an awareness; to exercise power over the consequent creative-destructive forces evoked by this event; and, as suggested by existentialism, use my near death experience to live like I had never lived before. Boldly.

It was during this close involvement with existentialist theory that I once again revisited the autoethnographic practice of narrative reframing. Just as successful personal cinema must resonate with an audience, the discourse of narrative reframing encourages a writer to find a way in which to gain a sufficient perspective on their subjective experience in order to make it significant and informative to the lives of others. This practice’s primary intention is “the textual enfranchisement of the previously disenfranchised” by enabling a writer to “speak of events that may have silenced them when they were happening” and to “gain agency through [this] testimony”. It is underlined by the existentialist belief that our spiritual freedom is an artistic process of self-creation, dependent on our free will to organise the elements of our lives, many of which are determined out of our control, into the subjective frame that is to be our experience of our selves and the world around us.

As a filmmaker, I recognise the power of selective editing. Narrative reframing’s demand for a rational assessment of “the degree to which we live our stories versus the
degree to which our stories live us”, helped me to understand how I could use this knowledge of editing to regain my agency and take back authorship of my life story and that of the fictional screenplay. This involved me undergoing a process of externalisation in which I took a step back from my story so as to look at it objectively “as a text for study”. I was encouraged by Kiesinger to try to integrate the overwhelming event of the accident and its consequences into my personal history so that I could begin to experience and express it “as coherent, intelligible, and meaningful”. I made a choice to use the future drafts of *Float* to try to reframe my experience: to stop performing the angry, victimised role I had taken on, and step out of the way of my self and my writing. This creative process of individuation required me to come to a place of self-acceptance that saw me let my old fragmented self die, in the metaphorical sense, in the hope of giving birth to a new inclusive self that was in an ongoing process of evolution. Richardson confirms that narrative forms allow us to explain our selves and our experiences “as temporality, because narrative attends to and grows out of temporality. It is the universal way in which humans accommodate to finitude”.

In *Float*’s development I began to pursue my desire to write a narrative that did not avoid life’s hardships and injustices, or require them to be “attenuated, veiled, sweetened, blunted, and falsified”, yet still involved a life-affirming sentiment. Nietzsche argued that as a ‘transfiguring mirror’, tragic art best serves to integrate this balance. He believed that the coexistence of the diametrically opposed forces of Apollo and Dionysus in this Aristotelian art form generates a creative-destructive dynamic that produces the will-to-power, and the consequent potential for human growth. While, as I have previously described, I object to the lack of agency awarded to women in the restorative three-act structure of Aristotelian storytelling commonly
employed by popular film, after the accident I came to recognise that some of its emotive and cathartic qualities can be highly beneficial for women and should not be too easily dismissed.

Through its affectivity and therapeutic denouement, the restorative structure enables a filmmaker to deal with painful and disturbing topics and experience a sense of agenic catharsis through this process, or as Nietzsche put it, where the danger to will is the greatest, “art, that sorceress expert at healing…can turn his [sic] nauseous thoughts into imaginations with which it is possible to live”.\footnote{Philosopher Richard Schacht (1983) clarifies that what we see reflected in the transfiguring mirror of tragic art is not a “stark and brutally ‘realistic’ portrayal” of the human condition yet it is also not a “radical transmutation into a merely imaginary, idealized condition”.\footnote{The focus is to capture the Dionysian spirit in an Apollonian form that “does not take the kind of life-endangering toll Dionysian intoxication does”.}\footnote{This restorative structure is not just beneficial for female filmmakers, and the reception of feminist ideals in general, but is also critical to the empowerment of the female subject and her desire. While I appreciate the reasons why many feminist filmmakers and theorists are suspicious of this mainstream structure and its connections to male sexuality, as I also was earlier on in my research journey, I suggest that the three-act construction can equally be used to reflect female desire and sexuality. Through this research project and my scriptwriting practice, I have come to view the implicit postmodern and poststructuralist characterisation of female sexuality as ‘non-goal oriented’ as rather limiting. Ultimately, while I appreciate French poststructuralism’s view of sexuality, it is not entirely congruent with my own lived experience, and I feel a little betrayed by the suggestion that pleasure in the goal of orgasm is somehow suspect. This is not to say that I do not value the advocacy of a female sexuality that is more...}
diffused and multi-directional, as I can see how important the exercise is as a counterbalance to phallocentricity - but I want to be able to access both kinds of pleasure. Following Kristeva’s suggestion of a synthesis of the two imperfect modalities of language, then, I propose a synthesis of the two imperfect modalities of desire as more in keeping with my experience of an active female sexuality.

My scriptwriting experimentation has brought me to disagree with Mulvey’s claim that women “cannot view the decline of the traditional film form with anything much more than sentimental regret”.74 The familiarity and affectivity of mainstream cinema’s three-act structure enables female filmmakers to (re)humanise woman and the female condition on screen, making it possible for a larger audience to understand and empathise with woman by seeing the world from her perspective.75 In this sense, this restorative approach is “a way of expressing the unrepresented and the unrepresentable”76 within male-dominated culture and is important for encouraging an acceptance of difference, and for keeping feminist ideology circulating in the public domain.

Rich seems to agree with the need for pathos in feminist cinema. She writes, “[f]or women, whose emotions and instincts have so long been denied as fraudulent or unrepresentative, the revival of emotion as a proper subject of artistic concern is a crucial issue”.77 Smelik is careful to clarify, however, that affectivity is:

[n]ot to be confused with sentimentality, or the cult of emotions for their own sake...[but rather it is] an ethical framework which combines...the seriousness of analysis or of understanding with the hopeful quest for change or transformation.78

With its common anti-restorative and anti-affective approach, militant feminist cinema fails to offer women this experience of catharsis and transformation. By breaking boundaries through jettisoning the three-act structure and focussing primarily on a
political agenda, radical feminist films inadvertently create new boundaries, since these digressive works are not only often difficult for a mainstream audience to follow, but tend to “offer intellectual pleasure but rarely emotional pleasure”.\textsuperscript{79} Their theoretical nature renders these films too didactic for a mainstream audience, who also want to be entertained whilst being exposed to this new information and vision of woman. This results in these films alienating the very audience that they need to inform. Moreover, as this cinema is also often (unjustly) censored and given limited distribution, it is left preaching to the converted, since cinema-goers who seek out subversive feminist films are usually not those in as much need of gender enlightenment.

Even Johnston, a major advocate for women’s counter-cinema, supports the need for the adoption of elements of the popular film form in feminist cinema, insisting:

\begin{quote}
...a strategy should be developed which embraces both the notion of film as a political tool and film as entertainment...In order to counter our objectification in the cinema...women’s cinema must embody the working through of desire: such an objective demands the use of entertainment film. Ideas derived from the entertainment film, then, should inform the political film, and political ideas should inform the entertainment cinema: a two way process.\textsuperscript{80}
\end{quote}

In accordance with Johnston, I suggest that to strengthen female authority in mainstream culture, some compromise over creative control and overt political expression is, in the long run, perhaps more rewarding for women and the overall film feminist agenda, as it gives female filmmakers the opportunity to move from the isolated margins of subcultural film to a cinema of greater accessibility, positivity and social power.

A filmmaker who seems to have come to the same conclusion is Dutch filmmaker Marleen Gorris. As previously outlined, Gorris’s 1980s films (\textit{A Question of Silence}, \textit{Broken Mirrors}) were once seen as the apotheosis of feminist guerrilla warfare but have become increasingly more accessible over the years, without abandoning feminist
principles. Her most commercially successful film to date has been *Antonia’s Line* (1995), a life-enriching story often referred to as a feminist fairytale, which, at its centre, involves a strong-minded matriarch, Antonia, reflecting on her life and female lineage in a small village community where her matriarchal law and feminist ideals prospered through several generations. The film won the 1996 Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film, evidently presenting a more digestible feminist ideology that, as opposed to Gorris’s earlier films, reached mass international audiences.

Reflecting on her intentions for *Antonia’s Line*, Gorris remarks: “I had never talked about women’s lives as happy occasions…I decided, wouldn’t it be nice if they were raised in a kind of harmony with life and death”. In the opening sequence of the film, Gorris seems to use the vile ravings of Antonia’s dying mother, who has apparently gone mad in her rage as she lies on her death bed still cursing her long-dead adulterous husband, to illustrate the futility of female anger and the need for women’s generational change and movement beyond second wave militancy. Antonia comes to recognise that her mother’s rage “was powerless” and that because of it she could have “no peace, even in death”. She therefore takes up a different type of feminist power through nurturing a community in which women’s difference and complete independence from men is celebrated. Gorris explains that, in deviation from her previous female protagonists, Antonia “forces people round to her view without steamrolling them, and without violence”. Supporting this interpretation, Gillett points out that, as with Gorris’s other works, *Antonia’s Line* still deals with the feminist themes of female justice and retribution against male violence, and does not shy away from the “ugly side of conventional heterosexual and familial relationships”, however, this is no longer countered with aggression but with “a truly human community based on the values of love, acceptance, diversity and equality”.


As a result of the film’s less overtly political style, Gorris received some criticism from feminists for ‘selling out’ on her feminist roots, to which the film’s producer Judy Counihan, responded: “Women are allowed to change. This is a mellower side to Marleen…It is in no way a compromise of her politics. It’s feminism for the nineties”. 87

This comment resonates with my third wave ideals. I propose that inflammatory feminist cinema had its place in the 1970s and 1980s, but must now work harder to avoid suffering from the extremity and pessimism of its adopted position, since “[t]here is something deadly about such reductive work: it tells one little and thus does rather little politically”. 88 Mellencamp shares this opinion regarding what she terms ‘irascible’ feminist cinema, asserting that:

While anger initially served as a motivation, we learned little about women except that we hadn’t been invited to the party and were furious. But rage has its limits…It aims at reclaiming “lost ground” rather than staking out “new territory”. 89

This situation brings Kaplan to proclaim that reel women have arrived at a point where we must destabilise the dominance-submission structure:

[We need to] move beyond long-held cultural and linguistic patterns of oppositions: male/female (as these terms currently signify); dominant/submissive; active/passive; nature/civilization; order/chaos; matriarchal/patriarchal. If rigidly defined sex differences have been constructed around fear of the other, we need to think about ways of transcending a polarity that has only brought us all pain. 90

In keeping with this, I do not endorse the notion that female filmmakers should simply take up narrative cinema’s conventions without reworking its oppressive mechanisms, but suggest we must also work within this popular medium to critique and subvert it, and not deny women the pleasures and political advantages of this mainstream art form and its three-act structure.

My supervisor seems to agree with this view. After reading the rather nihilistic drafts of *Float* that were written during my post-accident anguish and close involvement with
militant feminist cinema and _l'écriture feminine_, he encouraged me to be more ‘generous’ to myself and the characters in the screenplay. Although I understood what he meant by this in theory, and no longer wanted to restrict myself to the peripheral position held by militant feminist cinema, I was still at a loss about how to do this in my practice while also dealing with the challenging material that I wanted to explore in _Float_. The final significant turning point in my rewriting process that helped me come to understand how to possibly find this reconciliation, occurred late one night during this difficult post-accident time when I stumbled across a remarkable documentary by a French female filmmaker, Marie Mandy, that examined a variety of international female filmmakers who, “take a bite out of taboos and forbidden subjects” for women in film. Like _Antonia’s Line_, these reel women’s works successfully combine politics and narrative pleasure, allowing for the expression of feminist ethics “without reducing them to the level of dogma, description or propaganda”.

**A Newly Born Woman**

My laptop seems to call out to me in protest as I pull shut the study door behind me. It’s late. I don’t bother turning on the lights as I walk through the dark, silent house, down the hallway towards the lounge room. The neighbours’ lights filter in through a gap in the curtains. I hear laughter. I wonder what they’re up to. I collapse face down on the couch, breathing in the familiar smell of the fabric.

My eyes adjust to the darkness. I start to notice tiny grains of sand and lint moving as I breath. I don’t want to leave this small space. It’s nice being able to see around the corners. Maybe if I stay here long enough I will find my place, become part of this couch, whole and defined. People could come and visit me, take a seat and marvel at my consistency. They wouldn’t have to deal with my fluctuating moods and confusion any longer. They could just lay a blanket over me at night. I would understand.

I turn my head to the side and reach for the remote control to switch on the television for company. The image of a woman’s naked body captures my
attention. She is intriguing. Her breasts sag, her stomach is untoned, her pubic hair prolific. She is ordinary, unkempt, unfetishised and she is looking straight at me. I now feel claustrophobic in the limited confines of the couch. I peel myself off its fabric and sit up.

What am I watching? I don’t recognise the actress. Her body looks like my own. I reach for the television programme, afraid to check the channel with the remote in case I miss something. This can’t be a commercial station. My eyes quickly scan the page. I discover it is a documentary called, Filming Desire: A Journey Through Women’s Cinema. I’ve missed the first twenty minutes, hiding in the couch. I switch on the light and sit back down. Captivated.

The documentary interviews a selection of contemporary independent female filmmakers from across the globe, a few of whom I am researching in my thesis, yet have struggled to find information and resources in relation to. And here they are, honest, vibrant and accessible, revealing their ways of working; visiting and inspiring me in my home, on a night when I could not have needed them more.

These fascinating women discuss their works and how they deal with the politics of female representation, including issues of point of view; censorship; filming the body; sexuality, and the male gaze. Their voices are powerfully interwoven with clips from their respective films, all involving female protagonists as central to the narrative. In this discussion I hear (and see) a recurring suggestion of women’s cinematic language of desire, and the concept of the female gaze.

All too soon, it is over. I sit in the silence once again, listening to the neighbours, reflecting on what I have just observed. I hurry back to my laptop.

Discovering Filming Desire and the feminist filmmakers it featured, many of whose works I discussed in chapter three, established a female conscience, identity and community for me within contemporary cinema that felt like someone had opened a window and let in fresh air. I felt a deep connection to these contemporary filmmakers and their films as they reflected the lived experiences of my generation and were less
blatantly political in nature. It was as if I had come home after years of displacement in a foreign and hostile land.

The reel women featured in Filming Desire refuse to restrict themselves to any set guidelines, be they commercial or radically political. Rather, they tell their often confronting personalised stories in a contemporary style that Smelik recognises:

\[
\text{combin[es] visual pleasure, narrative tension and political integrity...[to] construct a feminist position through an alternative but recognizable use of traditional cinematic codes and conventions.}^{93}
\]

Borrowing Mandy’s likeminded words from her experience of interviewing the reel women in her documentary talking about their creative praxis, Filming Desire “changed my opinion of filmmaking in an irreversible way”.\(^{94}\) It not only grounded and positioned a lot of the feminist theory and metaphysical rhetoric I had been engaging with into a contemporary filmic context, but its critical resources and insights into other reel women’s ways of working informed me of more active and emancipatory film techniques I could adopt in my scriptwriting to try to define a female consciousness in Float that is equally political, erotic, affective and entertaining, and which neither adheres to the culture of female passivity or of ressentiment.

The documentary inspired me to persistently seek out the multiple works of these female filmmakers, which, given that modern feminist cinema still faces the challenge of winning mainstream acceptance, was a taxing act of agency in itself due to the limited distribution of some of these films and the lack of related discourse and resources regarding these critical works. My eventual immersion in this contemporary feminist cinema during the screenplay’s developing drafts helped me start to regain a sense of personal authority, which filtered into my scriptwriting. Through this cinema, I discovered the language with which to put a voice and structure to my lived experience.
It provided me with the knowledge of how other contemporary female filmmakers deal with the politics of female subjectivity and agency, and offered some techniques to position my personal trauma within a broader context of reel woman today. Chapman reflects on the importance of this type of female camaraderie in her filmmaking career:

> without the influence and political lobbying of these [Australian screen] women, I don’t believe I would have had the subconscious conviction that I could make films, and that what I wanted to say, even if intimate, domestic and personal in scale, was just as interesting as the mythic male legends.95

With their less separatist approach to feminist filmmaking, the reel women in *Filming Desire* awarded me with the practical skills to more cohesively unite my project’s theory with my scriptwriting practice and lifestyle demands. I came to identify the psychological level at which I could work: how I could benefit from the wisdom I gained through the experience of the accident and writing the body, but also accept my limitations. Further indebted to Kaplan’s writing on the cinematic gaze, in my development of *Float* characters and narrative I attempted to take up what she identifies as a ‘mutual gaze’, which is a loving subject-subject gaze rather than the “subject-object kind that reduces one of the parties to the place of submission”.96 This concept is reminiscent of Kristeva’s call in *Tales of Love* (1983) for a new type of heretical ethics, which she terms ‘herethics’, which recognises alterity, and is founded on the loving bond and mutual gaze between mother and child. Oliver clarifies that Kristeva’s herethics:

> challenges rather than presupposes an autonomous ethical agent…it sets up one’s obligations to the other as obligations to the self and obligations to the species. This ethics binds the subject to the other through love and not Law.97

It was this ethical model and gaze that I also began to experiment with through the characters of *Float*, testing the limits and possibilities of the two common dominance-submission subject positions and their sadism-masochism patterns in the hope of creating a more munificent and mobile model of human engagement: one that happens
in the space between these extreme behaviours and allows women (and men) to experience more fulfilling interactions. In doing so, I set out to encourage an acceptance of difference rather than reinforcing exclusionary ideals such as those advocated by militant cinema.

Gillett notes that Campion’s films are driven by this will “to invent the conditions of mutual seeing which might enable the different sexes to rest in a compassionate embrace”,98 and clarifies that in contrast to the more obvious polemics of fundamentalist feminist cinema, they “do not simply set out to empower victimized women or to castigate the powerful victimizers”99 but to examine the particularities of human agency and the overlapping of ethical boundaries. French similarly recognises that Campion’s films, “embody a slippage between things: something that works to emphasize that meanings (and humans) are complex constructions, and one is not necessarily one thing or the other”.100 She further highlights that Campion is “able to offer a representation of ‘woman’ as different, not lesser to her masculine counterpart, existing alongside him rather than in opposition”.101

Another female filmmaker, Danish writer/director Susanne Bier, also seems driven by this need for mutual gazing and the view that “life is neither right nor wrong, good or bad”,102 as one of her characters states. To date, I have probably connected most with Bier’s films (Open Hearts (2002), Brothers (2004), After the Wedding (2006), Things we Lost in the Fire (2007)) more than with those of any other filmmaker, particularly since the experience of the car accident. Her films have an enormous capacity to move me and inspire me to live and to love. While not primarily feminist, these films repeatedly deal with ordinary people undergoing unfathomable sadness and grief from unexpected human tragedies, and always involve courageous female characters who demand attention by openly and vulnerably speaking their minds. Despite the serious
subject matter of her films, Bier consciously aims not to alienate an audience, but rather to provide a new understanding of life and human nature. Discussing this sentiment in her work, Bier asserts: “I do believe that movies need to have an ability to communicate...For me moviemaking is not pure art. It is a mass medium, even if it should be artistically coherent”. Explaining her interest in exploring trauma and the ‘randomness’ of human existence, she reveals:

I guess I’m frightened by this randomness, so I want to deal with it, make some sense of it by telling a story. But it’s not without hope. I don’t believe in telling stories without some hope.

Antonia’s existentialist assertion in the closing moments of *Antonia’s Line* that “life’s got to be lived”, and the film’s correlating voice-over that, “life wants to live”, encapsulate my desire, similar to that of Gorris, Campion and Bier, to create affirmative cinema, that demonstrates that even in the ongoing shadows of (female) oppression and death, new forms of life and hope are born, sprouting up from the darkness, pushing through the cracks of life, looking for light. This epiphany in relation to the type of films that I want to make, gained through my experience of trauma, and through studying the aforementioned female filmmakers’ films, helped me to find my bearings, and to bring some order to my psychic and social exile. I decided that to move the script past the point of disorder and negativity that it had fallen into following my exhaustive *l’écriture féminine* and militant cinema based experimentation, I needed to introduce some structure back into my scriptwriting methodology. This, in turn, helped to bring me out of the abject state that I had come to occupy through my writing, and eventually enabled me to rejoin the living.
Surfacing: Becoming Reel Desiring Agents

From the organic sequence of this research project, and its reworking of my considerations through the developing screenplay, I came to view my scriptwriting as a necessary interplay between a constructionist methodology and an instinctive one, based on creative experimentation and difference. This methodological development followed a significant shift in my ideology, which arose from the cross fertilisation of psycho-philosophical theory, my insight into more affirmative feminist filmmaking, and a personal growth in congruence with the pursuit of agency. Dancyger and Rush support this approach to scriptwriting, affirming that it is with a “mixture of intellectual context and inchoate intuition”\(^{106}\) that the successful screenwriter works.

In *Float’s* future drafts I set out to use this multi-layered methodology to overcome the unnecessary disparity between narrative film and fundamental feminist cinema. Rather than limiting myself to a rigid traditional form or a highly transgressive one, I employed an eclectic mix of film feminist techniques of resistance that I felt best served an active representation of women on screen, at the same time as reintroducing elements of the restorative structure. My intention was to use the resilience and familiarity of the three-act structure to help construct woman as the active desiring agent in the narrative, without repeating normative thinking. Smith’s writing assured me that this could be possible if I remained vigilant not to lapse into didacticism given that, as she asserts, writing strategies and techniques “are different from rules in that they set writing in motion rather than delineating correct methods”\(^{107}\).

I began to apply some strategies in my scriptwriting in order to breathe life into Hannah and the characters in the screenplay. To do so, I drew on aspects of Russian theatre actor/director Constantin Stanislavski’s performance technique, the method system,\(^{108}\)
given its direct links to existentialist theory. This system presented me with a coherent structure on which to base my characters’ growth. Like existentialism, it argues that a character’s essence is not a cause but an effect of existence, and that to create a complex and humanised character (essence) first requires the development of their history or ‘backstory’: their physical, social and emotional experiences (existence). Stanislavski’s method deconstructs intangible human behaviours to simple nameable elements in order to offer a more comprehensive psychological foundation for understanding character, and, while it is generally employed by actors and directors to build and authenticate characters, I also found this technique very useful in the workshopping of Float’s protagonists.

I commenced this developmental process with the character of Hannah, working intensively on her backstory and given circumstances by imagining what her life had entailed up to the point at which we meet her. In the hope of preventing Hannah from simply speaking ‘in theory’ by introducing influences from my research findings, I also used personal references as a starting point, with the aim of creating a tangible three-dimensional character on which to allow my imagination to build. I employed this same methodology towards the other protagonists in the narrative, who each came to embody the themes and concepts that I explored over the course of this research project; and serve to make Hannah play out her existential dilemma.

Once I had completed this detailed history for each character, although not in any logical preordained form, I began to construct improvisational scenarios in my writing for them to meet, in which I placed characters in opposition or agreement with one another to negotiate and define the nature of their relationship. It was at this stage that I temporarily suspended my constructionist approach and allowed characters to engage and interact, with no agenda in mind. I simply observed interesting (and at times not so
interesting) things start to take shape, both in between characters and within themselves, with little imposed plotting. Horton refers to this semiotic writing process of be(com)ing, in which film characters are “recognized as being made up of many “voices” within us, each with its own history, needs, flavor, limitations, joys, and rhythms”,\textsuperscript{110} as the carnivalesque.

_\textit{Float’s} carnivalesque workshopping process enabled me to enhance individual characterisations, which, in turn, developed and altered relationships, and vice versa. Through this experimental journey, Hannah became a composite character of contemporary woman, based on significant individuals in my life, heightened with fictional license. In workshopping I established that Hannah suffers from her conservative family’s troubled past, especially from the abuse that she endured at the hands of her mother, and consequently exists in an emotionally imprisoned state. Hannah’s and her mother’s relationship was the first that I set out to experiment with. Through doing so, I determined that Hannah was, for the most part, raised by her mother as her father was often working away. This enabled me to privilege the maternal realm in Hannah’s psyche, emphasising her mother’s vital role as the primary identification for Hannah’s self-other relations, and allowing her desire to “set things in motion”.\textsuperscript{111}

By introducing new characters into my workshopping of Hannah and her quest for self-integration and love, she began to embark on a journey of sexual experimentation in an attempt to erase the painful memories of her childhood and overcome her subsequent feelings of abandonment and shame. During this process, characters moved between similar geographical spaces, coming in and out of focus, sometimes more prominently than their eventual weighting in the final draft, sometimes less. This involved certain superfluous characters being cut out of the screenplay, and occasionally two characters
were condensed and refined into one. Take for example the character of Hannah’s mother. To recall, in the first draft of the screenplay, Hannah had befriended an elderly German woman ‘Martha’, as a mother substitute for her neglectful mother, ‘Mrs Brannigan’. As a consequence of my theoretical engagement with feminist ideology and \textit{l’ecriture feminine}, through which I strengthened my ability to write the mother as a complex being with multiple and conflicting traits, I found that there was no longer a need for the elderly woman. ‘Mrs Brannigan’ and ‘Martha’ therefore became one character – Hannah’s mother, Marthe.

While my carnivalesque experimentation with \textit{Float}’s characters was an, at times, exciting and enriching endeavour, particularly with the character of Hannah, through whom I could safely live out and experiment with some of my more extreme fears, fantasies and aversions, it also proved to be an uncomfortable, and frightening experience. This was especially the case when characters took me to places that I did not necessarily want to go, or behaved in a way that I found offensive or cruel. Just as with a family member, however I tried to think of these individuals unconditionally: to accept their (my) difference and flaws, which, as in real life relationships, was not an easy feat. To attempt to remain open-minded and not moralise or pre-think these characters, as I did in \textit{Float}’s first draft, I set out to embrace my self as a subject-in-process; momentarily letting go of my rational mind, and allowing the fictional characters to surprise and enlighten me with “twists, gestures, actions, words…[that I]…did not completely expect”.\footnote{Horton underpins this approach, affirming that to encourage the element of revelation and heterogeneity in the writing process of a character-centred screenplay, the writer must ‘know’ her characters, “but not completely”\footnote{This carnivalesque methodology involved me exploring my changing...}
feelings and experiences of female subjectivity and agency through the scriptwriting and research journey, and discovering what I was creating by the process of creating it.

To ensure that I did not once again put myself at risk during this semiotic engagement, in this process I also introduced a number of scriptwriting mechanisms and film feminist techniques, which I will outline in more detail in the next chapter. I was, however, careful not to pollute the multiple forces at play by bringing in these structures too early, and therefore only did so when I witnessed something with potential occurring, after which I moved and coaxed it in the direction of coherent dramatic material, and then released it again. It became a rigorous, multi-layered exercise: a careful balancing act of fluidity and structure, ambiguity and transparency. The finetuning of this experimental character and narrative formation neither constituted a complete chaos, nor resolved itself into an order of fixed status. Instead, in this process I set out to act like the conductor of a choir, consciously directing and synchronising the divergent voices, in an attempt to help unite the overall polyphony of the narrative.

In the latter stages of this workshopping process I felt that I was beginning to inhabit *Float*s characters with a greater degree of authenticity; that I was writing them with a psychological credibility, as they started to ‘visit’ me in quiet moments of my day. I would often find myself having conversations with them in my mind. I became confident that I knew how they would react in various situations that were occurring in my life, and I genuinely started to care for them as though they were ‘real’ people. This character-based workshopping resulted in a comprehensive overhaul of the final draft of the screenplay, which I discuss in the following, and final chapter. As an act of self-creation, albeit one limited by the constraints imposed by the medium and my personal and social circumstances, in this final scriptwriting phase I set out to write my self and Hannah as active survivors.
Notes

1 Cixous and Jenson. "Coming to Writing" and Other Essays, 3.
4 Moi. Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory, 112.
5 Herman. Trauma and Recovery, 38.
7 See Pamela Thurschwell. 2000. Sigmund Freud. London; New York: Routledge, 88. Referring to Freud’s notion of the repetition compulsion and its connections to the death instinct, Pamela Thurschwell writes that, “[r]e-enacting unpleasurable experiences comes to seem like a rehearsal for one’s death”.
9 Bettelheim. The Uses of Enchantment: the Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales, 36.
10 Mansfield. Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway, 87.
12 See Jung. Civilization in Transition.
15 Behar. The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks your Heart, 19.
17 This opinion is supported by Young-Eisendrath’s writing on female desire. See Young-Eisendrath. Women and Desire: Beyond Wanting to be Wanted.
18 Rich. Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement, 324.
19 Ibid.
20 Nietzsche. The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals, 220.
21 Kaplan, ed. Feminism and Film, 134.
22 In order to help me to do so more acutely, I also enlisted the literature of a number of psychologists and theorists (Kristeva (1980), Chodorow (1978), Welldon (1988), Friday (1977), Rich (1979), Kaplan (1992), Studlar (1984)) who have written extensively on the mother/daughter bond, and the critical impact that this relationship has on a daughter’s subjectivity and agency.
24 Herman. Trauma and Recovery, 35. Herman writes that the “main symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder fall into three main categories. These are called “hyperarousal,” “intrusion,” and “constriction”. Hyperarousal reflects the persistent expectation of danger; intrusion reflects the indelible imprint of the traumatic moment; constriction reflects the numbing response of surrender”.
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34 Ibid, 71.
35 Kaplan, ed. Feminism and Film, 130.
36 Ibid, 129.
38 Kaplan, ed. Feminism and Film, 130.
41 Kaplan. Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera, 141.
42 Doane. Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body, 88.
43 Kristeva. New Maladies of the Soul, 213-215.
44 Ibid, 213.
46 Nietzsche. The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals, 51.
47 Herman writes that “in the aftermath of an experience of overwhelming danger, the two contradictory responses of intrusion and constriction establish an oscillating rhythm”. (Herman. Trauma and Recovery, 47).
50 Oliver. Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-bind, 7.
53 Nietzsche. The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals, 145.
54 Nietzsche. The Will to Power (1883-1888), 842.
55 Dancyger and Rush. Alternative Scriptwriting: Successfully Breaking the Rules, 32. They further assert that “[e]xternal characters may in fact never escape this trap of self-delusion, but we as writers cannot let ourselves fall in”. (354).
58 Sartre asserted that we ultimately come into this world alone and die in the same way, since no other human being can ever experience our internal world of desires, emotions and idiosyncratic perspectives. He wrote: “I carry the weight of the world by myself alone without anything or any person being able to lighten it…I am abandoned in the world…I find myself suddenly alone and without help, engaged in a world for which I bear the whole responsibility without being able, whatever I do, to tear myself away from this responsibility for an instant”.(Sartre. Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology, 555-556).
59 Sartre argued that we must not flee from suffering, but rather, “[t]he one who realizes in anguish his [sic] condition as being thrown into a responsibility which extends to his very abandonment has no longer either remorse or regret or excuse; he is no longer anything but a freedom which perfectly reveals itself and whose being resides in this very revelation”. Ibid, 556.
60 Etherington. Becoming a Reflective Researcher: Using our Selves in Research, 146.
61 Bochner and Ellis. Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject, 749.
68 Nietzsche. The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals, 30.
69 Ibid, 145-146.
70 Ibid, 52.
71 Ibid, 52.
72 Schacht. Nietzsche, 500.
73 Ibid, 499.
Mulvey. Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, 47.

75 See Smelik. And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory, 82.

76 Ibid.

77 Rich. Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement, 139.

78 Smelik. And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory, 186.

79 Citron. Women’s Film Production: Going Mainstream, 51.

80 Johnston. Women’s Cinema as Counter-Cinema, 32-33.


83 Ibid.


86 Ibid.


89 Mellencamp. A Fine Romance: Five Ages of Film Feminism, 121.

90 Kaplan, ed. Feminism and Film, 135.


92 Smith. The Writing Experiment: Strategies for Innovative Creative Writing, x.

93 Smelik. And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory, 2.


95 Chapman. Some Significant Women in Australian Film: A Celebration and a Cautionary Tale.

96 Kaplan, ed. Feminism and Film, 135.

97 Oliver. Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-bind, 183.

98 Gillett. The Films of Jane Campion: Views from Beyond the Mirror, 12.

99 Ibid, 79.

100 French. Centring the Female: The Articulation of Female Experience in the Films of Jane Campion, 219.


107 Smith. The Writing Experiment: Strategies for Innovative Creative Writing, ix.


109 Ibid, 139-176.

110 Horton. Writing the Character-Centered Screenplay, 5.

111 Kaplan, ed. Feminism and Film, 134. Kaplan writes that single mothers “are forced to make themselves subject in relation to their children; they are forced to invent new symbolic roles, which combine positions previously assigned to fathers with traditional female ones. The child cannot position the mother as object to the father’s law, since in single-parent households her desire sets things in motion”. Ibid.

112 Horton. Writing the Character-Centered Screenplay, 125.

113 Ibid.
Chapter Six

The Dramatic Experiment: Writing the Female-Centred Screenplay

I’m attracted to subjects that I feel I have to grow into.¹

Jane Campion.

I think erotic longing is one of the most salient factors in our lives. We can suppress it and do all kinds of things with it, but I think it's decisive for who and what we are.²

Susanne Bier.

My psychological maturation and acceptance of my own fragmentation during the course of this scriptwriting project compelled me to use Float’s final draft to conduct a dramatic inquiry into the inconsistencies and complexities of the contemporary female condition. Through the developing character of Hannah, I came to enter the narrative of Float in an increasingly personal way. Negotiating Hannah’s narrative journey, therefore, also directly involved me in contemplating my own personal journey, and my thoughts on subjectivity, family, romance, motherhood, death, and erotic love. In the screenplay, I set out to present a female-centred, anti-romance narrative that contemplates the possible social, ethical and theoretical issues surrounding contemporary desire, particularly in relation to women and mothers. In response to Kristeva’s call for discourses of maternity, in which she writes, “real female innovation (in whatever social field) will only come about when maternity, female creation and the link between them are better understood”,³ I use the theme of motherhood as central to my dramatic inquiry. I aim to examine the underlying frustration of maternal desire and power in the contemporary era, and to experiment with the consequent limits on, and potential for, woman’s subjectivity and agency, especially her ability to overcome personal hardship. Through the character of Hannah, I question whether, by using a fluid notion of subjectivity that acknowledges and accepts the paradox of our agency in
today’s society, and equally resists repressive modern forms of identity, woman can be(come) an active desiring subject.

As discussed in the previous chapter, existentialism offers me enlightening methods for conducting this philosophical and dramatic investigation. Following the common trend of narrative inquiry and feminist filmmaking, in which a (female) character’s goal is to attain the power to overcome a relational, social or political situation, in the final draft of *Float*, I attempt to reproduce the fragility and hardship of contemporary life, positioning characters in ambivalent and extreme situations requiring choice, in order to test the limits of their agency.

The ensemble of characters that I have created in *Float’s* final draft are all in the midst of postmodern angst, be it due to their marginalisation in terms of gender, race, sexuality or class. It is my aim that these characters’ struggle for emotional, physical and spiritual survival propels the dramatic drive and plot line of the story. I attempt to mirror today’s individualist culture by demonstrating that these characters all seem to be in search of a sense of connectedness, to feel part of something bigger than themselves. In the vein of becoming woman, I have tried to represent them as embodying a kind of liminality, in which they exist in the less defined, in-between spaces of organised culture and human engagement: between man-woman, home-away, childhood-adulthood, innocence-guilt, denial-truth, dream-reality, life-death.

Presumably deriving from my lived experience of trauma and its ramifications on my identity during the workshopping of the screenplay, its characters in the final draft all suffer from personal, familial and/or social trauma, which relates back to the maternal relationship. I aim to suggest that each pursues the objet petit a in an attempt to compensate for their feelings of lack (through drugs, sex, religion, self-mutilation,
death, and/or violence), and to repress their maternal desire by sublimating it into their occupations as teacher, doctor, carer, beauty department manager, and priest. Similar to my own maternal repression, through these characters I posit that the influence of the pre-Oedipal mother cannot be denied without risking “effects signalling ‘the return of the repressed’”. I use the contradiction between their professional (rational) and private (non-rational) worlds to illustrate that the mother’s potent power is, “usually more far-reaching and more pervasive than, the [paternal] power of money or law or social position”. I further explore this conviction by examining the intrusive nature of maternal trauma, and its deep remnants in the subconscious, which manifests itself in these characters’ extreme sadomasochistic engagements, as they explore the abject self-(m)other boundary.

Deleuze explains that both sadism and masochism are fixations with the mother, but that where the sadist tortures and negates the mother and exalts the father, the masochist privileges the mother, yearning to relive the jouissance of her body. I endeavour to examine this notion through the differing sexual agencies of the script’s main characters. In each, I consider the archaic bodily traces of the semiotic chora, and how maternal trauma is gendered and manifested in the human body; particularly, how it is performed against the body of woman. I set out to reveal men’s more common externalisation of trauma through forms of drug and alcohol abuse and/or sadistic acts of (sexual) violence. In contrast, I present parallels of how women, given the rejection of female excess in society, generally internalise their responses, waging a masochistic war against their own bodies and identities. Through Float’s characters, I trace the possible connections between the (m)other’s absence in dominant culture and the hostile condition of capitalist society, which encourages a brutal form of masculinity that annihilates difference. I deliberate on how this adverse global landscape is
detrimental to the emotional and spiritual evolution of humanity, and is particularly fatal to women and children, using the screenplay to search for an existentialist alternative.

In order to ensure that I do not assume certainties in the final draft, as I did in the first, but rather experiment with the “pregnant ambiguities” of humanity, I set out to embrace a postmodern approach to character. With this approach, I aim to present characters with multiple, idiosyncratic, and often contradictory traits, at the same time as examining how we are all interconnected and share similar experiences of suffering.

In my quest to offer the viewer/reader a more demanding psychological and moral interpretation of character, in this character-driven inquiry I have tried not to assume a dichotomous either/or model of representation, but have instead aimed for a both/and model, that allows for contingency, compassion, and the multiplicity of human nature. I have endeavoured to not reduce protagonists to one-dimensional heroes/heroines or villains/villainesses or to propose any clear-cut solutions regarding humanity. Rather, I have attempted to capture the schizophrenic condition of the contemporary subject, who defies simple explanation, and cannot be encapsulated within a monolithic code of ethics.

I have tried to resist my desire to categorise *Float’s* characters as either ‘good or bad’, or ‘right or wrong’ beings, by presenting flawed, life-like characters who possess characteristics that both attract and repel us. I aim to deconstruct the polarity between the traditionally masculine position (active, dominant, emotionless) on screen, and the feminine position (passive, submissive, emotional), as well as the tensions and dissonances of agency in paternal (rational, Apollonian) identification and maternal (non-rational, Dionysian) identification by representing characters that, within themselves, embody opposing characteristics. In doing so, I hope to provide a more
realistic and enlightened representation of woman (and man) than usually found in mainstream cinema, by allowing characters to exist somewhere in the middle of these polarities, and to function on a plane of morality that, “transcends conventional morality, but does not simply revert to a pre-moral level”. \(^{10}\) I employ these ‘slippages’ of character, with the objective of reformulating normative conventions of desire, especially female desire, in the screenplay. I attempt to unravel the dichotomous muse and bitch dilemma on screen, and to negotiate an alternative position for reel woman that does not limit her to this historical paradigm.

While the characters themselves may not treat each other unconditionally, and mostly engage in dominant-submissive interactions which exacerbate each other’s traumas, I set out to take up a mutual gaze towards *Float*’s protagonists, that does not judge or reprimand them for their desires and actions, but attempts to understand the motivations for these. Saying that, however, as freethinking agents, I hold Hannah and all of the script’s other protagonists accountable for their behaviour. I challenge them to become other than what they have been socially conditioned to be, providing that the circumstances are supportive for them to be able to do so. Dancyger and Rush advocate this approach, claiming that “[w]e must push our characters to the point where they either must see or be lost”. \(^{11}\) In the final draft, I intend to reveal that, by accepting the anxiety that is an essential by-product of free will, some of *Float*’s characters manage to overcome themselves and live courageously, while others do not, performing varied states of victimhood, and thereby remaining passive agents trapped in docile bodies. I centre this dramatic experiment on the character of Hannah.
By positioning Hannah as the main character in the narrative, I attempt to subvert the traditional androcentric screenplay. Mulvey affirms that “introducing a woman as central to a story shifts its meaning, producing another kind of narrative discourse”\(^{12}\) that is constructed around female desire, and the question ‘what does she want?’ In Hannah, I not only investigate this question, ‘what does she want?’ but more significantly ask ‘what does she want?’ I set out to create an anti-heroine who represents the paradox of contemporary female agency. On the one hand, Hannah does not conform to the conventional female role, possessing dominant traits usually aligned with masculinity: she is intelligent; she is a writer; she is economically independent; she does not seem to care what people think of her; and she is not compelled to please anyone other than herself, freely living out her sexual desires, and making no apologies for who she is. On a more latent level, however, Hannah still retains traditionally feminine characteristics: she can equally be passive towards her own body and wellbeing, existing in a kind of emotional remission, and repeatedly choosing to be annulled through masochistic behaviour.

I dramatise my experience of the limits of both masculine/paternal and feminine/maternal identification through the course of the final draft’s narrative, by using Hannah to test the potential agency contained within each of these polarised positions, and to experiment with the advantages and restrictions of each. This is inspired by Kaplan’s query, whether it is possible to:

envisage a female dominant position that would differ qualitatively from the male form of dominance? Or is there merely the possibility for both sex genders to occupy the positions we now know as masculine and feminine?\(^{13}\)

Through Hannah’s exchanges with *Float’s* other characters, I investigate some of the gendered assumptions and oppressive forces described in this exegesis that directly
impact on female agency, and set out to explore the precarious and blurred line between woman performing as an object and a subject of desire.

By way of Hannah’s story, I set out to represent woman as a potently sexual being, and to explore the darker terrain of female sexuality and desire. My hope is that Hannah’s sexual experimentation, as well as her fetishisation of death (symbolised through her acquisition of a coffin in the opening sequence of the screenplay), reinforces la petite morte, and illustrates Hannah’s yearning to be reunited with the maternal container. In her article *Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures* (1984) Studlar notes that:

> if the mother/infant relationship is disturbed when the child’s body boundaries are not well established, fetishism based on the disavowal of loss may develop as a defensive maneuver to restore the mother’s body, permit passive infant satisfaction, and protect primary identification.14

Through Hannah’s masochistic journey, in which she flirts with the idea of her own death, I set out to illustrate how her agency becomes temporarily revitalised, but inevitably deadened, since “Eros is desexualized and humiliated for the sake of a ressexualized Thanatos”.15 What starts out as an emancipatory voyage of desire for Hannah increasingly turns into a victimising cycle of entrapment, filled with humiliating sexual liaisons and empty hedonistic excess, as Hannah fails to acknowledge her own culpability in her ongoing personal torment. I aim to suggest that what Hannah essentially longs for is a loving connection with a man, but she struggles to trust another human being. Her emotional and physical mistreatment by her mother seem to have folded her words and repressed feelings so deeply in on themselves that she has become an emotional refugee. As a survival mechanism, Hannah has learnt to spin an impervious cocoon around herself. By denying the release of her emotions, she has become disconnected from her own body and can only speak her desires and anguish through this estranged site.
In *Float’s* final draft, I attempt to offer a tough-love examination of female victimisation by using Hannah to investigate the possible ramifications of female passivity, and to experiment with the potential for woman to pursue her own self-determined desire. Hannah’s opportunity to move past her maternal complex and experience spiritual freedom is presented as conditional upon her making a choice to change her circumstances: not to deny her hardship, but rather to become active in her recovery, and cease playing the role of the victim. In my hopes of avoiding the ressentiment present in most militant feminist cinema, I experiment with whether, in her pursuit of desire, Hannah can experience a transcendence that does not depend on a physical act of revenge, punishment or violence, but rather involves an internal shift of agency from passive to active, and an inner reconciliation regarding her troubled relationship with her mother. I further use Hannah’s introspective journey to experiment with whether she can transform her relationship with her own body: to use it as a vehicle for her own pleasure, not just one for the pleasure of others.

I use the screenplay’s other f(r)ictional characters to evoke various types of desire in Hannah on her search for self-actualisation. I position each individual in Hannah’s life as an archetype of her unconscious and conscious mind and its agenic demands: their varying states of agency represent her internal problematic in a filmic form, where issues of rationality/non-rationality and latency/actuality are acted out and explored in masculine/feminine extremes.

**Martha**

In Martha, I present an overtly Sadian character with Apollonian principles and a masculine agency. Martha holds a corporate position in the beauty industry; she has a severe and autocratic manner; she is a narcissist who plays to the capitalist agenda; she
has a high libido; and she is beautiful. I aim to add complexity to this maternal character by revealing that internally things are not so well-ordered. Martha is a victim of abuse, and subsequently suffers from a deep insecurity and rage connected to her own body. Martha has transferred a lot of her anger and shame onto Hannah, who was an unplanned pregnancy when she was just a teenager, resenting her daughter for having hindered her independence, and for causing her to be ostracised by her father. I use this mother-daughter duo to examine the cruel sacrificial agency many women perform against one another in a misguided attempt to gain status and pleasure in a male-dominated world. As an ageing muse dependent on beauty and male desire for her definition, Martha sees Hannah, the younger version of herself, as a threat. Her relationship with her daughter is therefore fraught with sexual competition and neglect.

To rework the first draft’s relegation of Hannah and Martha to the margins of the narrative, I set out to represent these female characters as commanding and complex desiring beings. Through them, I attempt to demonstrate that, just like man, contemporary woman can be many things. Alongside her ability to be loving and nurturing, she can equally be promiscuous, use sex as power, choose independence over marriage, and have no desire to bear children. I use these reel women to test the consequences for women who embody what is traditionally considered a masculine agency, giving them a sex drive bordering on insatiable, which sees them boldly take what they desire without emotional involvement or fear of judgement, and sometimes resorting to confrontational onslaughts when their source of pleasure is threatened.

In the final draft of the screenplay, I employ Hannah’s pathological bond with her mother as an oppressive force on her subjectivity and agency. In retaliation and defence against her mother, Hannah has evolved into Martha’s antipodal other. She possesses Masoch’s Dionysian characteristics: she is an artist and a writer; she exists in disorderly
spaces in both her avant-garde apartment and her old mini; her voluptuous and deviant body transgresses conventional femininity; and her attire is blatant in its promiscuity. I use Martha as both an archetype for Hannah’s femininity, and as her shadow figure: she represents the woman Hannah could turn out to be if she continues to neglect her personal wellbeing. I aim to demonstrate that Hannah’s biggest fear is to turn into her mother, yet, by spending all of her energies blaming Martha for her ongoing torment, she lacks personal accountability and is therefore unwittingly be(com)ing just like her.

To indicate Hannah’s painful longing for the love of her mother, I reveal her attempt to gain a vicarious sense of power by mimicking Martha’s excessive behaviour through wanton acts: she commits her sexual transgressions as a “manic defence against formidable fears related to the threat of losing both mother and a sense of identity”. Through the final draft’s narrative I set out to examine how, in a desperate effort to gain an awareness of her own existence, and to create the illusion of her mother’s love, Hannah regularly negates her bodily integrity by self-mutilation. I intend to demonstrate that the painful release from this self-harm serves as a type of orgasm for Hannah, and sustains her mother’s control over her. Psychiatrist Estela Welldon (1988) affirms that daughters engage in a masochistic pain-pleasure dialectic as an attempt to free themselves from the equally dangerous and comforting oral mother:

In doing such harm to their bodies they are expressing tremendous dissatisfaction, not only with themselves but with their mothers, who provided them with the bodies against which they are now fighting.

In *Float*’s final draft I explore Studlar’s suggestion that there is an opportunity to use masochism to empower female agency, because masochism is a subversive desire that “affirms the compelling power of the pre-Oedipal mother as a stronger attraction than the ‘normalizing’ force of the father”. Deleuze likewise conceded that the masochist transfers the paternal function onto the mother, seeing her as ‘lacking nothing’ since she
is privileged with possessing the nurturing maternal body that generates ‘parthenogenetic rebirth’. He proposed that this can therefore result in “the most radical transformation of the law”. 19 Through Hannah, I explore these interconnections between masochism and rebirth.

In attempting to present an insubordinate depiction of female desire, in the final draft I have tried to avoid mainstream film’s criticism of female characters - and particularly of mothers - who explore their sexuality. I use Hannah’s demonisation of Martha to exemplify the social disavowal and scrutiny of mothers who possess sexual or negative characteristics. This cultural conditioning disables Hannah from recognising Martha’s own oppression: that her mother is as much a victim of patriarchy as she is. I include Martha and Hannah’s shared ability to sing, to represent the pervasiveness of the maternal voice, and further use this semiotic form of communication to illustrate that these subversive women are not ultimately in conflict with one another, but are in equal conflict with the symbolic order.

To raise the dramatic stakes in Hannah’s conflict of female identity, and force her out of her self-denial, I have Hannah fall pregnant: the ultimate experience of womanliness. 20 The script draws on the chaotic and unpredictable period of maternity and birth, which involves a woman’s body in an undertaking that is completely foreign to man, to attempt to contest the centrality of the mind/body split, and as a signifier for the existential challenges and opportunities specific to female agency. I use the transformative experience of pregnancy, during which Hannah’s reproductive organs begin to swell with the force of life, to reconnect Hannah with her estranged, female body and to make things happen inside her that are beyond her conscious control. Reflecting my own metaphysical journey during the writing of the script, I use Hannah’s pregnant body and its passage of the other in herself, and herself in the other,
to plunge her into the semiotic realm in search of identity and agency. Kristevean theory affirms that the maternal body is the very embodiment of the subject in process/on trial, as it is the embodiment of alterity within.\textsuperscript{21}

The final draft’s dramatic inquiry into female subjectivity and agency is foregrounded with the tripartite relationship between Hannah, her mother, and her unborn daughter. Through Martha and Hannah, I attempt to illustrate how their masochistic natures turn into sadism towards the extensions of themselves, their daughters, expressing itself as “wrath and severity”.\textsuperscript{22} With the intention of breaking the stereotype of the blissful expectant mother, I reveal that Hannah feels resentment and dread towards the child growing inside her. She comes to understand Martha’s hostility, as she now experiences the same violent thoughts about her own unborn child who is a reminder of her otherness, and the lack of control that she feels over her life. I set out to demonstrate that, by failing to distinguish herself as an autonomous entity separate from her mother, Hannah associates her own womb with Martha’s threatening body, and therefore experiences a tremendous fear of engulfment by her foetus as she sees it as the abject (m)other within that is taking her over. Welldon confirms that impending motherhood for women who have suffered maternal abuse “intensifies their previous problems to the point that they are unable to cope any more”,\textsuperscript{23} given that, in pregnancy, a woman’s regenerative power is most manifest.

Since Hannah holds little value for her own life, she holds even less for her foetus. As an act of vengeance against Martha, and equally as a “form of self-inflicted wound”,\textsuperscript{24} Hannah toys with the idea of truncating her pregnancy. Through Float’s narrative I question whether, like Martha, who has repeated the cycle of abuse in her mistreatment of Hannah, creating two generations of women who have endured the effects of
patriarchal violence through their familial roots, Hannah will also sacrifice her daughter and continue the pattern of female victimisation.

Mr Brannigan

In the final draft of the screenplay I use Hannah’s relationship with her stepfather, Mr Brannigan, to reflect the Oedipal scenario that still exists in many contemporary families, in which, as a result of the mother’s ongoing repression in society, the father is idealised. This scenario is further complicated in Hannah because of her abuse by Martha. In Hannah’s mind, her stepfather is an Apollonian character who ‘can do no wrong’; symbolised through his virtuous occupation as a priest. The screenplay aims to reveal that, since Martha and Mr Brannigan have separated, Hannah has taken up the traditional role of the wife: she is her stepfather’s caretaker, dutifully collecting his medication and food every week, with little acknowledgment or gratitude in return.

Although my dramatic experiment begins with this conventional Oedipal premise, I attempt to offer an anti-Oedipal narrative that witnesses the demise of the archetypal father, which, in turn, allows for the expression of female desire. De Lauretis supports this methodology:

> The most exciting work in cinema and in feminism today is not anti-narrative or anti-Oedipal; quite the opposite. It is narrative and Oedipal with a vengeance, for it seeks to stress the duplicity of that scenario and the specific contradiction of the female subject in it, the contradiction by which historical women must work with and against Oedipus. 

In *Float*, I set out to destabilise the Law of the Father by awarding Mr Brannigan a traditionally feminine agency: he is a depressive and anxiety-ridden character who is confined to the domestic space; he appears infrequently, in despondent medicated states; and he possesses an immature sexual desire.
To play out Hannah’s Oedipal conflict I incorporate two male characters, Jonathon and Tamdar, with whom Hannah becomes intimately involved. I set up a semiotic triangle with these diametrically opposed lovers, who become foils for Hannah’s internal frustration of desire, to confront her with her existential dilemma. I use these characters to examine that, while romance is primarily a patriarchal construction, it is also ideologically compelling and pleasurable for women. I attempt to demonstrate that Hannah is well aware of the fallacies of romantic love, yet she still flirts with the comforting idea of it as she attempts to search for meaning and validation in men. Through Hannah’s interactions with these lovers, I experiment with the possibility of her movement from being the object of men’s desire, to be(com)ing the subject of her own.26

**Jonathon**

In the character of Jonathan I attempt to encapsulate the qualities of the patriarchal, uber-masculine, white, middle-class man. Jonathan embodies Sadian and Apollonian characteristics: he is a heart surgeon with a god-complex; he lives in a meticulous apartment; he is well groomed and muscular; he is fertile, and he is wealthy. Even Jonathon’s choice of drug, cocaine, pertains to his narcissistic lifestyle, and supports his heightened sexuality and feelings of superiority. To counterbalance these traits and provide Jonathon with more substance, I set out to explore the possible reasons for his sadistic agency. In the final draft, I aim to reveal that Jonathon harbours extreme feelings of loss and anger towards his mother who abandoned the family when he was a teenager, and to whom he attributes the death of his younger brother later in life. I suggest that Jonathon became a doctor to sublimate his consequent feelings of inadequacy, but that when his son, Charlie, was born with severe disabilities, Jonathon suffered a significant blow to his ego and masculinity. This tragedy, compounded with
the loss of both his mother and brother, has rendered him spiritually castrated by the
time we meet him in the screenplay.

In my representation of Hannah and Jonathon’s relationship I hope to convey her
attraction to his innate misogyny, and to his close proximity to death in his occupation.
Jonathon entertains Hannah’s subconscious wish for deliverance from her emotional
numbness through sex and/or death. His sadistic treatment of her is familiar and
strangely comforting, as it evokes memories of her mother’s abuse, as well as her
father’s emotional disregard for her. Like ravenous animals, Hannah and Jonathon hunt
one another down in an attempt to satisfy their sadomasochistic desires. They engage in
an “erotic form of hatred” 27 through increasingly volatile object-object liaisons that
deny each other’s subjectivities.

**Tamdar**

With Tamdar, a troubled immigrant doctor who has faced a life of hardship in his war-
torn motherland, I have set out to create a polar opposite character to Jonathon. I
represent Tamdar as a defeatist character who embodies an alternative ‘femininised’
masculinity that resembles Masoch’s Dionysian characteristics: he is a black man; he
has a disfigured body; he has lost his medical status, working in a dull and demeaning
job as a nurse’s aid; he lives in a rundown housing estate with hostile neighbours; he is
poor; he is impotent, he is musical, and his choice of drug, marijuana, provides him
with hallucinogenic and anaesthetizing effects. Tamdar, like Hannah, hides a traumatic
history of maternal abuse, but of a different kind. He consequently lives with extreme
guilt and a lack of self-worth that sees him remain trapped in a state of repressed rage
and fear. I suggest that Tamdar has sublimated his loss of the mother into the transferred
compulsion to rescue women, and in parallel to Jonathon, has sought salvation through
becoming a doctor. At the point at which we meet Tamdar in the final draft of the screenplay, he has recently sought exile in Australia, where his medical qualifications are not recognised. This results in him existing in a moribund state.

While I initially introduce Tamdar as a student in Hannah’s class who is her object of desire, it is my intention to use these characters’ growing relationship to experiment whether it is possible for them to eventually share a subject-subject engagement. I aim to suggest that Hannah is drawn to Tamdar’s obvious need to help women, secretly hoping that he will save her from her personal torment. Tamdar senses this need inside Hannah: in her he sees a woman he wants to rescue. I further use the character of Tamdar to bring the tension and sexual competitiveness between Hannah and her mother to boiling point. When Martha also starts to pursue her desire for Tamdar, and the two become sexually involved, Hannah’s (and Tamdar’s) maternal angst is exacerbated, which sees her move deeper into a masochistic realm in which she starts to lose control over her sexual encounters.

As Hannah and Tamdar become more intimately connected, they begin to disrupt one another’s deadened existence by confronting each other’s lack of a self-determined agency. In doing so, they each become the catalyst for the other’s reawakening. Through this relationship, I test whether Hannah can survive the loss of the father, and the maternal ideal, so as to overcome her romantic notions and begin to heal herself. I question whether she can move from self-eradication to self-acceptance, by discovering a mode of behaviour that allows her to be vulnerable with Tamdar, and enables her to surmount her childlike, victimised state, and move to one of adult culpability and reparation.
In *Float’s* final draft I set out to create a symbiotic relationship between these abovementioned characters and the script’s dramatic acts: the developing plotline is mostly affected by the characters’ agencies, yet at times I use it to represent the unpredictability of life, putting characters into overwhelming circumstances out of their immediate control in order to see how they respond.

**The Dramatic Acts**

I laugh; therefore, I am implicated. I laugh; therefore, I am responsible and accountable.²⁸

Donna Haraway

At the end of act one, I introduce the script’s first turning point: a fatal car accident, as a dramatic impetus to put the screenplay’s protagonists under pressure, and to make their lives intersect more intensively. I use this violent event to activate the characters’ repressed semiotic desires, moving them out of the rational life of act one, into act two’s more confronting and intuitive world of chaos. I reveal how each character tries to escape their trauma, but it inevitably catches up with each of them, bringing them out of their ambivalence. Through the reverberations of instability and mortality caused by the car crash, I present each character with an existential problem: to become active and choose life, or to remain passive agents in forms of figurative or literal death.

Just before the collision, I reveal that Hannah comes dangerously close to fulfilling her Oedipal desire to kill her mother, but she inevitably fails to do so. As a result, Hannah believes she will never be liberated from her mother’s tyranny, which sees her start to push the limits of her body as she enters the second act. Through a series of memory flashbacks and dreams, in act two I set out to present a more rigorous exposition of Hannah and the other characters’ maternal issues. We observe Hannah playing out the split nature of her identity through her exchanges with Jonathon and Tamdar, whose
worlds have also been thrown into chaos as a result of the car accident. I aim to illustrate the fact that Hannah is caught between these two disparate men in her life, deriving pleasure (albeit different types of pleasure) from both of them. In order to push Hannah to finally make a decision regarding her future, and that of her child, towards the end of act two I introduce the script’s second turning point: the loss of the patriarchal father. In her grieving state, Hannah tries to avoid facing her reality and making this decision about her future but when, as a gesture of love, Tamdar comes to see her, he eventually confronts her with this choice, thereby introducing her to the possibility of be(com)ing other than a victim of another’s desire.

The climax and final turning point in the narrative sees Hannah arriving at her moment of personal truth during a particularly rough sexual engagement with Jonathon. In this scene, I set out to demonstrate that Hannah can no longer deny her trauma and Tamdar’s honest words, which have worked their way into her body. When, in his acute drug stupor, Jonathon refuses to stop their sexual intercourse at her request, Hannah becomes utterly aware that she wants to survive this threatening attack. She eventually manages to free herself from the situation through the transgressive power of laughter, which, as highlighted in chapter one, is a triumphant feminist technique of accountability and resistance that I employ with the intention of empowering Hannah during this violation.

Hannah’s laughter emasculates Jonathon, and eventually confronts him with the brutality of his actions. Reinforcing Cixous’s assertion that embracing our abjection through the laugh of the Medusa is an act of reclaiming our difference to phallocentrism, I use this laughter to represent the “subterranean rage and the intense humor, strength, and sheer power available” to women through acknowledging its existence, and using it to move past their subjugation. In contrast with the trend in
most militant anti-romance films, that commonly conclude with a female character’s
discovery and expression of rage, I have no desire to end the screenplay at this point.
Instead, I intend to use this climactic moment of laughter to reveal Hannah’s ultimate
acknowledgment of this innate anger, which she has allowed to consume her life, and to
experiment with whether she can finally mobilise her agency from a reactive to an
active mode; using her rage as empowerment rather than retaliation.

As discussed in chapter one, act three in a screenplay traditionally involves “a return to
innocence”, in which transgressive women are forced into a ‘cleansed’ state of
abstinence and conformity. While I use Float’s third act to explore whether Hannah is
able to leave behind the extreme behaviour of the first two acts, and come to a place of
self-awareness and healing, I have set out to avoid this restoration of normative
femininity by still representing Hannah as possessing transgressive characteristics in the
closing moments of the screenplay. In an attempt to capture the disparate and contingent
condition of human existence, I also draw on the common feminist trend of
incorporating an element of ambiguity and open-endedness in Float’s conclusion, in
which Hannah is not reprimanded for her desires, but instead freely moves into the
unknown of her future with courage and resolve.

**The Female Gaze: Focalisation and Ocularisation**

A woman must not be defined by the man who looks at her, by the gaze of men, by those
men who have oppressed her: her father, her husband, her lover, her brother all looking at
her, and she herself, who has become accustomed to existing by this gaze. The first
feminist gesture is to say, well, okay, they may be looking at me, but I’m looking too.
The act of deciding to look and deciding that the world is not defined by how they look at
me but how I look at them.

Agnes Varda

If women exist for themselves, not through someone else’s eyes: men’s, other women’s
or their mother’s, the whole vision of sexuality changes.

Marie Mandy
To encourage an active female consciousness in the final draft of *Float*, and enhance its presentation of female desire and agency, I set out to subvert the traditional cinematic apparatus by constructing a female gaze that, for the most part, privileges Hannah’s subjectivity, and tells the story from her point of view. With this gaze, I display Hannah and Martha in their natural state in the screenplay so as to represent reel woman as an unfetishised subject of the narrative. Hannah has a fuller figure, is unremarkable in appearance, and, by way of her unruly physical behaviour, and eventual bodily transformation through her pregnancy, defies the feminine ideal. I use Martha’s ageing naked body and sexuality to attempt to transgress the tendency of mainstream film to hide away the maternal and elderly female body and desire. Moreover, as opposed to the normative depiction of the mother on screen, who is nearly always presented “from the position of child or husband”,\(^{34}\) in *Float* I allow Hannah and Martha to control the gaze, so as to “raise the possibility of [the mother] having needs and desires of her own”.\(^{35}\)

*Float’s* female gaze functions on various levels of narration, through both internal and external focalisation techniques: including voice over, direct address, point of view shots, metaphor, dream states, and spatial and temporal manipulation, to enable the spectator/reader to inhabit Hannah’s subjective world. At times I take this narrativity one step further through the technique of ocularisation. Smelik explains that, in contrast to internal focalisation which deals with the “psychological level of what a character knows”,\(^{36}\) ocularisation refers to “the visual regime of the camera showing us what the character sees”\(^{37}\) through the point of view shot. This is the most extreme expression of a character’s subjectivity, as it allows an audience to literally view the world through their eyes, establishing the highest level of identification between the spectator and the subject on screen. I use these focalisation and ocularisation techniques to attempt to
humanise Hannah and Martha, and prevent these female characters, who equally possess positive and negative qualities, from being too easily dismissed as bitches and/or bad mothers. In doing so, I hope to provide a more inclusive model of contemporary female subjectivity and agency, that goes beyond the ordinary limits of female representation and audience identification with woman on screen.

I begin the screenplay with Hannah’s voice-over narration to immediately establish that the film is to be her story. With this internal monologue I hope to develop a strong connection between Hannah and the spectator/reader, allowing them to be privy to her personal situation. I use the despondent tone in Hannah’s opening few lines to try to communicate her emotional estrangement, and her resentment towards her mother, and to construct Hannah’s subjectivity and this maternal relationship, as the central driving forces for the script’s drama. This voice-over traces Hannah’s development throughout the screenplay, and her closing commentary suggests the beginnings of her transformation.

Another focalisation technique I adopt in the final draft is presented in the screenplay’s overall aesthetic, through which I aim to emblematise Hannah’s anxieties and desires: her maternal trauma; her loss of identity; and her consequent fascination with extreme sexual acts, and death. Drawing on elements of l’écriture féminine, I set out to use the body of the script’s text to evoke the abject maternal container, and the visceral affects of trauma and death. Through a variety of leitmotifs and metaphors, I attempt to recreate the semiotic through excreta (water, blood, shit, piss, drool, vomit, semen, sweat, tears), images of decadence (rubbish, maggots, rotting food, dead bodies, car wreckage, decrepit buildings, cocaine, fire, coffin, mirrors, graveyard), and Dionysian forms of human behaviour (physical violence, suicide, sex, drug addiction, vanity, pregnancy, social alienation, disability, music, and crime). With the aim of representing
Hannah’s symbolic journey of be(com)ing woman, I use the composite texture of *Float*’s world to also symbolise the multiplicities of the imaginary body: the screenplay is made up of a kaleidoscope of capitalism and postmodernism through such sub-themes as multiculturalism, diaspora, globalisation, commutative locations, developing technologies, and the relinquishing of religion. It sets out to juxtapose binaries of past and present, poverty and wealth, birth and death, father and mother, lust and love, freedom and war, black and white, and isolation and kinship, which all occupy the same narrative space rather than existing as separate entities.

A prominent leitmotif I incorporate in *Float* is that of water. The screenplay is enveloped by the element of water, which I use in an attempt to signify the maternal chora and its evocation of immersion, growth, and renewal. In similitude to my post-accident rehabilitation through the act of swimming, the screenplay’s notion of survival, of staying afloat, is literally played out through Hannah and Tamdar’s relationship as they discover that they share a fear of water, and an inability to swim, and begin to try to conquer their fear through regular late night swimming expeditions in a local outdoor swimming pool. Through this symbolic act of learning to swim, I question whether Hannah and Tamdar can begin to regain some trust in humanity: whether they can help each other to reconcile their traumatic pasts, and to fulfil their shared yearning for loving human contact. Water is used to symbolise Hannah and Tamdar’s longing for the pre-Oedipal semiotic, as well as their increasing sexual desire for one another.

The coffin also serves to represent the maternal chora to which Hannah subconsciously wishes to return. I use this symbol of death to demonstrate how Hannah’s feelings of abandonment by her mother (and father) render her incapable of moving on from childhood angst and be(com)ing an independent woman. 39 Welldon acknowledges that a woman who has suffered from maternal abuse often feels that:
she has not been allowed to enjoy a sense of her own development as a separate individual, with her own identity; in other words she has not experienced the freedom to be herself. This creates in her a deep belief that she is not a whole being, but her mother’s part-object, just as she experienced her mother when she was a young infant.  

The coffin lies like a corpse in Hannah’s apartment, preventing her from living actively and connecting to those with whom she comes into contact. I use its changing function in the screenplay to signify Hannah negotiating the futility of life, the death of the maternal ideal, and the necessary dissolution of the patriarchal father, which is essential to her restoring her fractured bond with her mother.

In the screenplay, I further use the Brannigan home, which has been in the family for two generations, as a symbol of familial discord, and of the resonating effects of the patriarchal father on female identity. The house is a metaphor for both Hannah’s and Martha’s unresolved domestic issues. It acts as a mid-point between the past and present that haunts Hannah with the memory of the abuse she suffered from her mother, and reminds Martha of her own abuse. The house represents the stranglehold that this troubled past still has on these women’s subjectivity and agency, most evident in Hannah’s recurring flashback sequences in the house throughout the screenplay.


and that female characters often engage with the homes of their youth as though they are ‘sensate beings’ through which they experience “both a physical and psychological Return Home”.  She observes that this generally involves a destabilisation of the familial space, which enables the female protagonist’s physical and/or emotional survival. In the final draft of *Float*, I follow this trend by choosing to have the decrepit family home now in the
possession of Martha and Hannah, two women who have survived the effects of paternal unrest, and who now attempt to overcome the ongoing strain the house places on their lives.

In the screenplay I also explore the volatile and gendered nature of the car, which, as an alternative domestic space to the home, often involves the reworking of familial power dynamics on screen. The womb-like interior of the car’s capsule is used as a vulnerable, claustrophobic space that “function[s] as a method for creating those extremes of character-character interaction [where] emotions become magnified or intensified”. I further set out to capture the male eroticisation of the car as a substitute for the phallus: a fetishised stand-in for the (maternal) female body. I aim to demonstrate that, like the penis, a car also has the ability to penetrate and injure the body. Quoting Meahgan Morris, Simpson affirms that what enhances the precariousness of the car space on screen is that it can be used as ‘an agent of action’ for the filmmaker and character. I explore this in Float’s accident scene, as well as when Tamdar is hit by Jonathon’s car, which wounds his body, just as Jonathon violates Hannah’s body a few scenes later.

A final recurring motif that I employ in Float is the mirror, which I primarily use as a metaphor for identity, alienation and family heritage. On several occasions in the final draft I describe Hannah looking at herself in the mirror. I intend for these self-reflexive moments to highlight the tension of her split subjectivity: the illusion of self versus the real self. Gillett affirms that:

The mirror reflects a social mask, or the desire for one: it signals, ironically, the wide gap between the authenticity and originality sought after and the socially motivated self-construction.
By having Hannah look into the mirror I also aim to reveal her struggle to define her identity as separate from her mother’s. In the mirror she sees both herself, and the dominating presence of Martha, in “her own unwelcome likeness to her”. These mirror moments are further incorporated as acts of self-reassurance for Hannah, in which she seems to be checking that she still exists, given her emotional numbness, and the “instability of identity (and gender)”.

I construct two contrasting mirror scenes in the screenplay to attempt to demonstrate Hannah’s gradual change of identity. In the first scene, which takes place in act two, Hannah hangs a towel over the bathroom mirror to obstruct her reflection, highlighting her lack of personal acceptance. After the violent sex scene with Jonathon at the climax of this second act, Hannah cuts her hair in front of this same mirror, looks at her pregnant body in all of its fullness, and then back at her reflection. With this scene I hope to indicate the beginnings of Hannah’s transformation as she attempts to find a “balance between commemorating the past and moving on from it”.

At certain moments of the narrative I employ ocularisation to try to ensure that Hannah’s desire and subjectivity, quite literally, determine the screenplay’s viewpoint. A demonstration of this is in the two recurring childhood flashback scenes - the bike riding scene and the bathroom drowning scene - which we experience, for the most part, through young Hannah’s eyes. With this technique of ocularisation I aim to deconstruct reel woman’s traditional role as the object of the gaze by instituting her as the desiring viewing subject in the screenplay. I set out to eroticise the male body through Hannah’s gaze. Examples of this include Float’s opening classroom scene, in which, through Hannah’s eyes, we admire Tamdar’s hands, arms, chest, and lips as he reads; Hannah’s secret filming of her and Jonathon’s sexual liaisons which, from the many tapes she has shot, appears to be a voyeuristic act that she has been indulging in for some time;
Hannah’s view of both Tamdar and Jonathon during intercourse, and finally, when we observe, from Hannah’s point of view while grocery shopping, Jonathon’s argument, and make up sex, with another lover in a nearby public building.

One particularly significant moment in the screenplay in which I adopt the techniques of both internal focalisation and ocularisation is in Hannah’s violent sex scene with Jonathon. Smelik highlights that “violence and sexuality are erased from male texts representing rape, turning sexual violence into metaphors or symbols” for male supremacy. In view of Smelik’s writing, I use the rape scene in Float as a pivotal turning point in the script to attempt to move Hannah out of the common fate of death, destruction, or revenge for reel woman in the rape scenario. I set out to personalise this brutal scene through using ocularisation to ensure that the spectator/reader experiences the event primarily from Hannah’s vulnerable missionary position, as Jonathon beats and penetrates her from above. The most obvious example of this is when the screen occasionally goes black as Hannah closes her eyes attempting to disengage from her violated body. I further employ internal focalisation and moments of ellipsis, in the form of Hannah’s flashbacks, to try to explore the psychic effects of her momentary surrender during this attack, and to capture her precarious psychological condition as she moves through various states of consciousness trying to block out the traumatic ordeal. By using internal focalisation and ocularisation to privilege Hannah’s subjectivity during her sexual attack, I hope to provide an antidote to the classic rape-murder scene, which generally prevents the expression of female identity, and thereby also deprives female spectators of agency. In doing so, I also hope to return the depiction of rape to being that which I suggest it is: a cruel and cowardly act of annihilation, often fuelled by a desire for, and fear of, the mother.
The most explicit construction of the female gaze that I employ in *Float*’s final draft is through Martha’s and Hannah’s moments of direct address. There are three instances in which Martha directs the gaze at us (as Hannah) and we experience her intimidating power from her daughter’s perspective. These include a flashback scene where she catches young Hannah (and us) in the reflection of the bathroom mirror, watching her at the sink, and accuses her (us) of ‘spying’ on her; a further flashback scene where Martha, making love to a man in her bedroom, turns and glares at young Hannah (us) for watching her; and finally in Martha’s shower scene with Tamdar, where she challenges Hannah (us) to interrupt the intimate moment.

Two noteworthy instances that involve Hannah returning the gaze take place during the car accident scene, and in the final moment of the screenplay. In an attempt to rework the victimising experience of my family’s car crash, during which we were filmed against our will, I use direct address in *Float*’s accident scene to turn the gaze back around onto the men who are filming the spectacle with their home video camera. When Hannah notices these men’s camera, she stares straight at them (us) with disbelief, reproaching them (us) for daring to film her, and the injured pregnant woman who is also involved in the crash, in this traumatic moment. With this technique of direct address, I set out to shift the power dynamic between Hannah and these men, transferring them from performing the role of the viewer to becoming the viewed, as Hannah advances on them, and attacks their metaphorical body: their prized car.

In the closing of the film, Hannah surfaces from the water and looks down the lens at us. I use this final moment of direct address, in which Hannah is letting us know that she is aware that we have been watching her, to highlight the fact that she is reclaiming her story: she is now looking back. This is her moment of self-actualisation.
Chapter Six – The Dramatic Experiment

Notes

1 Verhoeven. Jane Campion, 56.
3 Kristeva and Moi. The Kristeva Reader, 298.
4 See Bochner and Ellis. Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject, 744.
5 Kaplan, ed. Feminism and Film, 133.
7 See Deleuze and Sacher-Masoch. Masochism, 123-134.
8 Horton. Writing the Character-Centered Screenplay, 5.
9 Smith. The Writing Experiment: Strategies for Innovative Creative Writing, 140.
10 Schacht. Nietzsche, 389. This relates to Nietzsche’s assertion that, to attain spiritual superiority, we must move beyond the limiting morality of ‘good and evil’.
12 Mulvey. Visual and Other Pleasures, 35.
13 Kaplan, ed. Feminism and Film, 128.
15 Deleuze and Sacher-Masoch. Masochism, 120.
17 Ibid, 40.
18 Studlar. Masochism and the Peverse Pleasures of the Cinema, 211.
19 Deleuze and Sacher-Masoch. Masochism, 102.
20 By this, I do not mean to insinuate that women are ‘naturally’ mothers and must experience childbirth to become actualised; I am, after all, not a mother myself. However, I am in agreement with Cixous who argues that feminists should not deny the possible “unsurpassed pleasures of pregnancy” and motherhood simply because motherhood has been used to repress us in patriarchy. (Cixous. The Laugh of the Medusa. 891). Like Kaplan I argue that, for this very reason, motherhood is a place to “reformulate the position as given, rather than discovering a specificity outside the system we are in”. (Kaplan, ed. Feminism and Film, 133). I therefore use Hannah’s pregnancy metaphorically to rework the image of the ideal expecting mother.
22 Deleuze and Sacher-Masoch. Masochism, 52.
24 Ibid, first page.
26 Young-Eisendrath. Women and Desire: Beyond Wanting to be Wanted, 19. This follows Young-Eisendrath’s call for women to move beyond the muse and hag-bitch dichotomy.
29 Cixous. The Laugh of the Medusa. 885.
33 Ibid.
34 Kaplan, ed. Feminism and Film, 468.
35 Ibid.
38 Voice over narration is also employed in a number of previously mentioned feminist films including, Kissed, Suspicious River, Under the Skin, Romance, Antonia’s Line, Orlando, Gas Food Lodging, Personal Velocity, The Piano, An Angle at my Table.

39 This is similar to Stopkewich’s film Suspicious River in which Leila attempts to connect with her dead mother by mimicking her sexual deviancy, and in Kissed, where Sandra can only engage in sexual pleasure and intimacy with a man if he is dead: a denial of life altogether.

40 Welldon. Mother, Madonna, Whore: The Idealization and Denigration of Motherhood, 8-9.

41 Catherine Simpson. 2000. Imagined Geographies: Women's Negotiation of Space in Contemporary Australian Cinema, 1988-98, Division of Social Sciences Humanities and Education, Murdoch University, Perth, 80. Considering this point, I use this domestic setting to feminise both Mr Brannigan - who suffers from agrophobia - and Tamdar during his victimised post-accident state.

42 Ibid, 78.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid, 145.

45 Ibid, 149. This is made most obvious in Hannah and Martha’s argument just prior to the car accident.

46 Ibid, 177.


48 Gillett. The Films of Jane Campion: Views from Beyond the Mirror, 3.

49 Smith. The Writing Experiment: Strategies for Innovative Creative Writing, 21. For a more indepth discussion on the metaphoric qualities of the mirror, see Smith. The Writing Experiment: Strategies for Innovative Creative Writing, 19-25

50 Smith. The Writing Experiment: Strategies for Innovative Creative Writing, 24.

51 Ibid, 22.

52 Smelik. And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory, 78.

53 Ibid, 72.
Conclusion: Reflexions of Self

This thesis has traced my intellectual and spiritual journey as an emerging academic and filmmaker writing the screenplay *Float*. Through this process I have come to understand some of the possible reasons why the screenplay’s first draft produced the feedback it did from my supervisor, and why I was unable to answer his critical questions regarding my desire and intentions for *Float*’s central character, Hannah. At the beginning of this exegesis, I asked: What is this strong desire that compels me to make films? The discoveries I have made throughout this creative research project suggest that this desire derives from an immense impulse to generate life into an inner self, which I have been conditioned to neglect and repress as a woman.

This exegesis has described how, in the early years of my research, I primarily defined myself against external discourses, which saw me vulnerable to the need for outside approval. My subjectivity felt determined beyond my own experience and felt fixed, yet strangely fragile, at the same time. The consequent lack of acceptance I felt towards my oscillating nature, as well as society’s inhibition and denigration of female desire, sexuality, and power, saw me experience the psychic schism of contemporary woman, which I have come to identify in this thesis as a founding cause for the inactivity of female agency in society.

The life-threatening experience of the car accident during my candidature, and its multiple repercussions on my scriptwriting and my life in general, shattered the illusion of totality by which I had attempted to live, and plunged me into a crisis of identity. This violent, serendipitous event ultimately stripped away the Law of the Father, and society’s superficial elements, which emphasised the feelings of fragmentation that I had allowed to govern my life. By reconnecting me with the maternal realm, it became
a significant catalyst in the reconciliation of my split self, and eventually awarded me with a clarity of perspective and purpose previously missing in my life. As a result of the accident, I came to realise that what truly matters to me, has little to do with social status or approval, but is driven most profoundly by a desire for personal integrity and sovereignty, and for connection with those I hold dear. It has been a wonderfully freeing process, through this scriptwriting journey and the characters of Hannah and Martha, to give up attempting to meet society’s unrealistic notions of femininity.

The personal truth that I came to experience during my Dionysian post-accident existence, and the experimental writing process of *Float*, also helped to reinforce my desire to make cinema that is ultimately positive and useful: cinema that acknowledges that we cannot avoid the shadows of life, but neither do we only find darkness there. These experiences offered me the opportunity to find my deepest and most powerful voice. Through writing the character of Hannah, I discovered an innate agency and resilience that ultimately derived from admitting my (her) vulnerability and feelings of fragmentation, and from looking death in the face so as to reawaken my (her) life force.

This thesis has attempted to demonstrate that, while the capitalist era of individualism and its revolution of digital technology seem to serve as a gender equalizer in film, the reality is that reel women still struggle to access power in the medium. I have presented some of the principal sites of resistance preventing women from performing actively in, and on, film, which, especially when considered together, limit the social aspirations and self-perceptions of many (reel) women and, if not addressed, have the potential to devastate the future of female agency in the filmmaking industry and in society at large. These sites of resistance include: women’s historical (mis)representation on screen as lacking a self-determining nature; the prevalent Freudian view of woman’s ‘lack’ still upheld in the industry and societal structures; the normalisation of Hollywood’s
penchant for sexualising and killing women; capitalism’s perpetuation of the universal subject; the mass media’s demonisation of feminism, which results in many female filmmakers fervently rejecting the very ideology that attempts to fight for their status and autonomy; the phallocentric constructions of mainstream screen culture and the epistemology of film education; the incongruence of film censorship and its connections with unresolved issues related to the maternal realm in society; and, the familial heritage of the mother’s repression in the domestic setting.

I propose that these forms of female programming from a young age are also destructive to the possibility for change in the industry because, as women, female filmmakers’ “failures to rebel, our incomplete revolutions, are rooted in the repression of desire that, essential to sexual oppression, truncates hope”.

This internalisation and consequent repression of desire in many women has lead to the common assumption of female passivity in the industry and the organisation of our leading social discourses. As has been my own experience, female filmmakers also often perpetuate this theory, given that many of us have become convinced of the impossibility of overcoming our predicament, and thereby fail to try to change our sexual expressions and representations of woman on screen. For this reason, I suggest that future scholarship needs to address the deeper psychological causes for the inactivity of contemporary female desire in film.

Postfeminist notions current in popular culture regarding women’s individual rights focus purely on the need for women’s equality to men, which again reinstates masculinity as the norm, and fails to encourage women to explore their own specificity. I recommend that future research would therefore benefit from analysing reel woman and her ways of knowing, from a non-deficit perspective. I further argue the consequent need for more inclusive modes of practice within film discourse and pedagogy, and
across the film industry, that acknowledge that the phallocentric ‘one size fits all’ model of operation must be abandoned in favour of one that is cognisant and respectful of reel women’s difference, and supportive of their approach to knowledge and to filmmaking.²

For female filmmakers themselves, I propose that the first critical step is to find a way of rethinking their self-perceptions and gauge of authority. Through documenting my process of writing *Float*, I have revealed the advantages for reel women of taking up more fluid models of subjectivity in their praxis, and of employing subversive writing processes, that cater for difference and the notion of becoming, thereby allowing us greater opportunities for self-definition and *jouissance* than working solely in traditional forms. I argue that, by allowing women to re-engage with maternal language, and to incorporate their lived bodies and experiences of self in their writing, autoethnography, poststructuralism, feminism, independent scriptwriting practice, and, most especially, *l’écriture féminine*, are critical discourses for the retrieval of reel women’s agency, and the reconceptualisation of a more liberating model of female subjectivity in cinema.

This thesis has also explored some of the risks to women of excessive engagement with semiotic discourses. My analysis of *l’écriture féminine*, in particular, argues that, before female filmmakers can learn to benefit from the ambiguity and detachment of the imaginary, to which we have become more accustomed, we need to simultaneously participate in the material world, and work towards influencing mainstream culture. I suggest that reel women have been exiled from dominant discourse for too long, and equally live in the symbolic, so it is critical that we establish some sort of personal coherence and authority in this cultural order, so as to strengthen our status in society.

Saying that, however, I do not wish to overlook *l’écriture féminine*’s emancipatory possibilities for reel woman. As this thesis has shown, the contemporary residue of
feminism’s backlash, along with today’s individualist culture, has resulted in a loss of an agenic evolution in the consciousness of many emerging female filmmakers, and the female characters they write. Regularly viewing ourselves through the distorted mainstream lens, we struggle to put our postfeminist notions of individualism into emotional and filmic practice. I therefore recommend the need to nurture a confidence in female filmmakers because, as Germaine Greer proclaims:

you cannot make great artists out of egos that have been damaged, with wills that are defective, with libidos that have driven out of reach and energy diverted into neurotic channels.³

I propose that it takes many generations to overcome an oppressive discourse that has existed for centuries, and that is so intrinsically ingrained in our female imaginations and bodies because, for most of us, our self-image has been inherited from our mothers and grandmothers. L’écriture feminine encourages women to celebrate their otherness, and to reconnect with their sensory understandings, rather than simply complying with the external powers-that-be. Together with ongoing lobbying to improve women’s status in society, writing the body therefore has the potential to generate new and subversive epistemologies and female identities.

As I arrive at the end of this long journey of introspection, I am beginning to accept my inconsistencies, and am learning to honour my healthy tension with the many social ‘rules’ I did not agree to. Smelik notes that:

women can only become subjects when they live through and represent the contradiction of being both ‘Woman’ and ‘women’; of being an image of the feminine and a socio-historical subject.⁴

I have come to view my subjectivity as overdetermined; deriving from multiple and fluctuating drives, desires, identifications and experiences, as well as from my personal responsibility to organise these elements into the experience of self that I wish to live. While it would be comforting to have an answer for the primary factor that constitutes
my subjectivity, experience has taught me that there are endless determinants that seem to influence how I define my self; which is a self that is forever evolving and shifting. Mansfield warns that, when dealing with the slippery topic of subjectivity, “we should beware of the destructiveness of big answers, even if we have to pay the price of uncertainty and open-endedness in our debates”. I subscribe to his notion that, “not only do I not believe that an ultimate theory of the subject is possible, I also do not want one”. In this thesis I have therefore resisted the urge to draw conclusions. I have discussed a number of imperfect theories of subjectivity which I find offer some valuable insights into the possible reasons for reel woman’s troubling agency, and propose that these are most informative when considered together.

Through this scriptwriting project, I have come to trust and value my experiential approach to knowledge, and have found that my writing has acquired greater agency as I have begun to integrate my contradictory traits as part of my entire being, rather than thinking of them as disparate. This acceptance of my fluctuating self, along with my attempt to keep my own counsel in my praxis, is nevertheless an ongoing challenge that I believe I will continue to wrestle with, perhaps for the rest of my career. As a social subject I know I will never be able to completely abandon my desire for a certain degree of validation from others, but I have come to listen to this external opinion as just one voice that influences my filmmaking and my subjectivity, as opposed to it being the overriding voice.

It would be satisfying to pull together some of the loose ends that this project has unraveled concerning contemporary reel woman, but I believe that we are still a long way from understanding, and being able to write the final word on, female subjectivity and agency in film. This thesis hopefully serves to inspire other female filmmakers to tell their personal stories to strengthen the presence of woman’s voice in contemporary
cinema. It is critical that reel women no longer accept the roles of passive recipients in cinema but strive to be(come) active shapers of its future. Postfeminism insinuates that we are in a time of post-patriarchy, which is clearly not the case. I therefore recommend that female filmmakers collectively persist with constructing their point of view in cinema, and re-ignite the feminist film fire, to burn out new terrain for contemporary woman on screen. I suggest that we can use our films to keep feminist ideals circulating in the public domain, however, in a way that does not alienate an audience through militancy, but, instead, values woman’s difference, and moves with contemporary ideology and politics, to illustrate to young women how feminism can enrich the quality of their lives, and improve their relationships with men. The challenge that remains for film feminism is to motivate a collective voice for reel woman, while simultaneously acknowledging her diversity and individuality, in order to re-energise a feminist film culture pertinent to the 21st century.

As for me; my trauma no longer defines who I am. Rather, like this research project, it has refined who I am be(com)ing. I aim to use the insights gained through this PhD to live a more informed life as a woman, filmmaker, and academic, and to support my film students to do the same. I plan to make Float into a film in the next few years. So, while this research journey has come to an end, for me, this is only the beginning. Here is where I leave you. Summer has arrived, and I am off for a swim at the beach.
Notes

4 Smelik. *And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory*, 113. Smelik makes this statement in reference to De Lauretis’s writing on female representation, see De Lauretis. *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*.
6 Ibid, 7.
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**Filmography**


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Riddles of the Sphinx. 1977. Director: Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen. BFI Distribution: Great Britain. Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen.


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Part Three

Feature Film Script:
Float
FLOAT

A screenplay by Larissa Sexton-Finck
1. **INT. CLASSROOM. DAY**

We are very tight on a woman’s face. This is HANNAH, a rather ordinary looking English language teacher in her early thirties, with long, dark hair and large green eyes. At first glance Hannah appears bold, but behind this layer of toughness we detect something fragile about her.

We remain close on Hannah, who is absorbed by one of her students reading a poem out aloud. The man off-screen has a strong African accent.

> TAMDAR (O.S.)
> The tide rises, the tide falls, the twilight darkens, the curlew calls.

As the reader continues we now see Hannah is standing at the front of a classroom leaning back on a desk as she listens. She has a real woman’s body, with curves and imperfections, and is dressed rather provocatively in a low cut top, showing off her substantial cleavage, a fitted pencil skirt, and high heels that do great things for her stocky legs. Hannah exudes a sexual confidence that suggests she couldn’t care less what anyone thinks of her.

> TAMDAR (O.S.) (CONTD.)
> Along the sea-sands damp and brown...

Opening Title Sequence Starts.
First Title.

2. **INT. CLASSROOM. FBACK. NIGHT**

We are in the same classroom but at nighttime. We watch fragmented shots of an intense sexual act. Two bodies in contact.

We see a man’s strong back; a woman’s untoned stomach jiggling with each pulsation; her mouth opening and closing; her hands clenching the man’s well-defined buttocks.

We continue to hear the man reciting the poem.

> TAMDAR (O.S.) (CONTD.)
> ...the traveller hastens towards the town.

We now see that the woman is Hannah. The man is JONATHON. He has sex appeal and he knows it. He is raw and brutish like a rugby player, yet with a clean-cut edge that indicates a white-collar job. Jonathon is slightly older than Hannah, with broad shoulders and a large nose that looks like it’s taken a few blows on the field.
Their lovemaking is not tender but aggressive, desperate, cold. They are on Hannah’s classroom desk, items are being knocked around.

From Hannah’s slightly blurred POV we see the desk bouncing against a nearby bookshelf holding an aquarium full of fish that dart around anxiously in the swirling water.

Hannah closes her eyes and moans with guttural pleasure.

TAMDAR (O.S.) (CONTD.)
And the tide rises, the tide falls.

Second title.

3. INT. CLASSROOM. DAY

We cut back to the lesson and observe fifteen or so students of mixed ethnicity and age following the poem’s text as they listen to the man who we still do not see.

TAMDAR (O.S.) (CONTD.)
Darkness settles on the roofs and walls...

4. INT. CLASSROOM. FBACK. NIGHT

Jonathon turns Hannah onto her stomach and starts thrusting into her from behind, holding her head down onto the desk.

TAMDAR (O.S.) (CONTD.)
...but the sea, the sea in darkness calls.

From Hannah’s POV we see the table moving frantically underneath us.

Hannah looks like she is experiencing both pleasure and pain as she whimpers loudly.

TAMDAR (O.S.) (CONTD.)
The little waves, with their soft, white hands, eff...eff...

Third title.

5. INT. CLASSROOM. DAY

Hannah helps the man reading along.

HANNAH
Efface.
We now see the reader, TAMDAR, as he looks up catching the correction. He is a tall black African man whose face and strong features tell a tale of adversity far beyond his thirty something years.

TAMDAR
...efface the footprints in the sands. And the tide rises, the tide falls.

Hannah is drawn to Tamdar as he reads. Her eyes linger on his large hands holding the book, and continue along his muscular arms and chest.

6. INT. CLASSROOM. FBACK. NIGHT

VIDEO FOOTAGE: This time we watch the sexual scene from a fixed position through what appears to be an amateur video camera. The footage is grainy and slightly obscured as though the camera has been hidden.

TAMDAR (O.S.) (CONTD.)
The morning breaks, the steeds in their stalls stamp and ne...

As Jonathon continues to thrust into Hannah she glances up at us like she knows we are watching her.

Her face emerges into:

7. INT. THE BRANNIGAN'S CORRIDOR. FBACK. DAY

We see young Hannah’s face aged six, dressed up in a duck costume, watching something off screen.

We now see what she is watching.

Through her parents’ bedroom door, which has been left ajar, Hannah watches her mother, whose face is obscured, having rough sex with a BEARDED MAN.

8. INT. CLASSROOM. FBACK. NIGHT

VIDEO FOOTAGE: Hannah is still staring at us as she starts to climax.

Jonathon also starts to orgasm.

END OF VIDEO FOOTAGE.

9. INT. CLASSROOM. NIGHT

We continue to watch Tamdar read as he struggles with another word.
Although still gazing desirably at Tamdar, Hannah does not miss a beat.

HANNAH
...neigh.

Tamdar continues without looking up.

TAMDAR
...neigh as the hostler calls.

Hannah marvels at Tamdar’s intensely dark skin, his broad, thick nose, his large marvellous lips and pure white teeth.

TAMDAR (CONTD.)
The day returns but nevermore, returns the traveller to the shore...

10. INT. CLASSROOM. FBACK. NIGHT
Jonathon climaxes and collapses on top of Hannah.
It is over. They are both out of breath.
We hear Tamdar’s voice drifting off.

TAMDAR (O.S.) (CONTD.)
...And the tide rises, the tide falls.

Jonathon slowly peels himself off Hannah and steps away from her. He pulls up his zipper and walks out of the classroom.
Hannah stays on her stomach on the desk and closes her eyes.

HANNAH (V.O.)
My mother and I were never very close.

11. EXT. OLD COAST HIGHWAY. LATE AFTERNOON
We are close up on breaking waves, the ocean.

Last title: Float

The shot pulls out and up to a bird's-eye view of a beaten up red mini driving along an old coast highway next to the ocean in the late afternoon sun. It is the only car on the highway.
The mini has a plain plywood coffin tied to its roof rack.

We follow the mini for some time.

12.  INT.  INSIDE MINI.  LATE AFTERNOON

SFX: Music blaring from the car radio is drowned out by the mini's engine.

Hannah is driving with all the windows down. A few contents on the backseat - folders of paper, takeaway coffee cups and burger wrappers - float around in the wind, scattered among various magazines, books on philosophy and poetry.

HANNAH (V.O.) (CONTD.)
She used to call me the thorn in her side.

13.  INT.  CLASSROOM.  FBACK.  NIGHT

Hannah is now dressed and is tidying up her disrupted desk in the dark classroom.

She has restored order. She heads towards the door. Something stops her and she turns back around.

14.  INT.  CLASSROOM.  FBACK.  NIGHT

VIDEO FOOTAGE: Through the grainy video lens we see Hannah approaching us. She picks us up in her hands as she turns off the camera.

END OF VIDEO FOOTAGE.

15.  INT.  CLASSROOM.  FBACK.  NIGHT

Hannah has a small digital camera in her hand, which she has removed from a classroom shelf. She takes it with her as she exits the classroom.

16.  EXT.  INNER CITY.  LATE AFTERNOON

Hannah's mini now drives through the Central Business District. She stops abruptly at a set of lights.

17.  INT.  INSIDE MINI.  LATE AFTERNOON

SFX: We hear a deep groan.

Through the windscreen, we see the coffin slide forward and come off the roof rack. It falls across the bonnet of the
mini and lands on the road in front of it with a loud WHACK.

Suits waiting to cross at the busy intersection on their way home are shocked and uncomfortable by the visual reminder of their inevitable fate.

From Hannah’s POV we see them look towards us through the windscreen.

18.  EXT. INNER CITY. LATE AFTERNOON

Leaving the engine running, Hannah gets out of the mini, taking no notice of the commotion she is causing.

She awkwardly attempts to lift the lightweight coffin back onto the roof rack. None of the bystanders offer to help her.

HANNAH (V.O.) (CONTD.)
I always saw myself as my father’s daughter.

Pedestrians keep a safe distance from the coffin as they cross the lights. A few laugh to one another in bewilderment.

19.  INT. CHURCH. FBACK. DAY

We are inside a church with magnificent stained glass windows and large imposing arches.

SFX: A choir is practising on a stage.

Hannah’s father, MR BRANNIGAN, a man of about thirty, wearing a priest's collar, walks past the choir in quiet conversation with another man also dressed in religious attire.

HANNAH (V.O.) (CONTD.)
He used to say...

As Mr Brannigan passes the choir something off-screen catches his eye.

HANNAH (V.O.) (CONTD.)
...mum had the voice of an angel.

Through the hundreds of lit candles which surround the choir we see whom he is watching, Hannah’s mother, MARTHA, a very attractive but rather grave looking sixteen-year-old girl who has the same dark hair as Hannah and wears a conservative 1970s dress. The candles create a magical glow around Martha, who is singing with her eyes closed. Her voice stands out over the others.
Mr Brannigan is mesmerised. He does not seem to be listening to the man who is still speaking to him, as he smiles admiringly at Martha.

Martha opens her eyes and catches his gaze.

The young man standing in front of Martha sways slightly as he sings. Along with Mr Brannigan, we now see that Martha is heavily pregnant.

A statue of the Virgin Mary looks on behind her as she now appears out of place in the surroundings. Martha drops her eyes as she watches Mr Brannigan’s surprise at her distended stomach.

Mr Brannigan takes a moment to adjust to this image but gives her another warm smile as he continues walking.

Martha watches him leave.

20.  EXT. INNER CITY. LATE AFTERNOON

Hannah has finished tying down the coffin.

She jumps back into the mini and drives off.

21.  INT. THE BRANNIGAN’S BATHROOM. DBACK. NIGHT

We are under water in a bathtub. We see ten-year-old Hannah’s head being pushed into the water towards us.

    HANNAH (V.O.) (CONTD.)
    ...but I never heard her sing.

Her mother’s menacing naked figure is blurred above Hannah holding her down.

Hannah’s frightened face and opened mouth create a haunting image as she thrashes about above us, her screams silenced.

22.  EXT. HANNAH’S APARTMENT. LATE AFTERNOON

From high above we see Hannah’s mini pull up at an art deco apartment building with large windows. Adjacent to the building lies an old, abandoned graveyard.

23.  INT. APARTMENT FOYER. LATE AFTERNOON

Hannah struggles to get the coffin into the lift in the building’s foyer.
24. INT. THE BRANNIGAN'S LOUNGEROOM. FBACK. DAY

8MM HOME MOVIE: Through an old 8mm camera we see a tight image of Martha now in her early twenties forcing a smile as she carries out Hannah’s sixth birthday party cake with candles.

Hannah dressed up in a full-length duck costume stands in the corner of the decorated room with her costumed friends and some of their parents, a big smile spread across her face.

Among the group we notice the bearded man from the earlier sex scene, who wears a small, brass crucifix pin on his lapel, watching Martha with desire.

END OF 8MM FOOTAGE.

25. INT. THE BRANNIGAN'S CORRIDOR. FBACK. DAY

Young Hannah, still in her duck outfit, runs excitedly into a dark corridor looking for her mother to show her a present she has just received. It is a brown teddy bear.

HANNAH (V.O.) (CONTD.)
...mum had no maternal bone in her body.

Through the bedroom door and from young Hannah’s POV we see Martha during her lovemaking with the bearded man, turn and glare at us with a look that could turn us to stone.

Hannah’s smile fades. She looks confused.

26. INT. THE BRANNIGAN'S LOUNGEROOM. FBACK. DAY

8MM HOME MOVIE: Hannah blows out the candles on her birthday cake.

HANNAH (V.O.) (CONTD.)
She gave me nothing but life.

END OF 8MM FOOTAGE.

27. INT. THE BRANNIGAN'S BATHROOM. FBACK. NIGHT

Martha pulls Hannah back out of the bath water.

She gasps loudly for air.
HANNAH
Huuuggh.

28. INT. HANNAH'S APARTMENT. LATE AFTERNOON

Hannah throws the coffin onto her lounge room floor. It hits it with a thud.

29. INT. THE BRANNIGAN'S KITCHEN. FBACK. NIGHT

It is the end of Hannah’s party. She has unzipped the upper body of her duck costume. It hangs behind her like a tail between her legs.

HANNAH (V.O.) (CONTD.)
And took something from me...

We are tight on Hannah’s small hands as she unlocks the back kitchen door.

SFX: We hear sounds of the ocean nearby.

From the dark garden the bearded man enters the house. He thanks Hannah as he passes her by placing his hand on top of her head.

Hannah glumly watches the man make his way into the house.

HANNAH (V.O.) (CONTD.)
...I never even knew I had.

Fade to black.

30. INT. HANNAH’S APARTMENT. NIGHT

Fade up from black

Hannah’s open-plan apartment is rather messy and is filled with antiques and eclectic collector items. The walls are lined with old movie posters and dark abstract paintings of the ocean.

The coffin lies in the middle of the lounge room near a bay window and some French doors that look like they have never been opened.

Hannah sits in her lounge room eating a bowl of cereal for dinner as she types away at her laptop.

31. INT. HANNAH’S APARTMENT. NIGHT

Hannah is now sitting on her couch having a glass of wine.
She appears to be watching late night television. As the shot moves behind her we now realise that she is watching the video of her and Jonathon having sex in the classroom.

We see this arouses Hannah. She picks up the remote control and rewinds a section to view it again.

We are tight on Hannah’s eyes as she watches herself on the screen.

Hannah places her hands between her legs and begins to masturbate.

32. INT. HANNAH’S APARTMENT. NIGHT

Hannah removes the digital tape of her and Jonathon and places it on a nearby shelf with a collection of similar looking tapes.

As she removes the tape we see an old black and white film is playing on television. The female character falls helplessly into the arms of the male hero who kisses her with exaggerated passion.

Hannah pours herself another glass of wine, sits back down on the couch, and settles in to watch the remainder of the movie.

33. INT. HANNAH’S OFFICE. DAY

Hannah sits in an office.

FELIX, a podgy, forty-year-old man with stylish spectacles, and JANE, a twenty-year-old woman with partially blackened eyes, and a cast over her nose, appear in the doorway.

FELIX
Heard about the nomination for the column. You must be stoked.

Jane’s voice is nasally as a result of the cast.

JANE
Yes congrats.

Hannah brushes off their praise.

HANNAH
Thanks. It’s just some daggy thing.

Hannah motions to Jane’s cast.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
Did you?
Jane smiles gleefully.

    JANE
    Yeah, finally had it done in the break.

    FELIX
    It’s the Angelina Jolie model.

    JANE
    Fuck off Felix.

Hannah is fascinated.

    HANNAH
    Did it hurt?

    JANE
    Like a bastard.

Jane grins and walks back to her desk.

Hannah and Felix share a bemused look.

    FELIX
    What have they got you writing about this time?

Hannah looks unimpressed.

    HANNAH
    The mother-daughter bond.

Felix raises his eyebrows.

    FELIX
    (sarcastic)
    That should be a breeze.

Hannah lets out a laugh.

    HANNAH
    Yeah.

34. INT. CLINIC. DAY

We are in an elderly patient’s room in a small loveless rehabilitation clinic.

Tamdar, dressed in a white uniform with a name badge pinned to it, is changing a man’s catheter and colostomy bag. It is a messy job.

Next to him stands JASON, a skinny aid in his early twenties, dressed the same as Tamdar.
JASON
You into cars?

Tamdar shrugs with indifference.

Jason speaks with total adoration in his voice.

JASON (CONTD.)
My friend’s got this new Subaru WRX. Mate she’s an absolute beauty.

Tamdar places the colostomy bag into a bucket. Some of the faeces splash onto his gloves.

JASON (CONTD.)
She’s got a sports exhaust, lowered suspension, lightweight wheels...

Tamdar attaches the new colostomy bag.

JASON (CONTD.)
...spoilers. And she can hit a hundred km’s in six seconds.

Jason is pumped. Tamdar is not as impressed. He turns his attention to the catheter.

JASON (CONTD.)
I get a hard on just thinking about her.

Jason briefly glances at the elderly man having the catheter inserted who looks in pain.

JASON (CONTD.)
Sorry mate.

Jason turns back to Tamdar.

JASON (CONTD.)
Anyway, you’ll have to come for a ride sometime.

Tamdar concentrates on finishing the job.

35. INT. DEPARTMENT STORE. NIGHT

In a beautician’s mirror we are tight on Hannah’s magnified lips as she tests a rich red lipstick.

MARTHA (O.S.)
It’s not your colour.

Hannah turns and faces her mother who has just arrived at the upmarket beauty counter.
Martha wears a sharply cut dress suit and has a leather folder in hand. She is still an attractive, well-groomed woman now in her late forties, yet her tight expression hints at a little too much plastic surgery.

Martha calls out to a sales assistant who is attending to a customer. She speaks with a slight German accent.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
Charmaine, please bring me the Allure No 4.

Charmaine excuses herself from the customer and brings over the lipstick, smiling politely at Martha who offers the lipstick to Hannah.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
You need apricot tones.

Hannah ignores her mother. She addresses Charmaine as she opens her purse.

HANNAH
I’ll take the red thanks.

Charmaine is a little unsure of what to do. Martha is frustrated.

MARTHA
Fine. If you want to look like a cheap hooker that’s your choice but you’re not paying for the damn thing.

She passes Hannah the red lipstick. Hannah doesn’t accept it at first.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
Oh for God’s sake. Take it.

Hannah takes the lipstick and walks off.

Martha hands the other lipstick back to Charmaine and follows after Hannah.

Charmaine looks relieved that they have left. She returns to the waiting customer.

36.  INT. BAR CAFÉ. NIGHT

Hannah and Martha sit on high stools at a bar. Hannah drinks a coffee, her mother a white wine. Martha takes a cigarette from an elegant silver case.

HANNAH
You can’t smoke in here.
Martha ignores her, lighting the cigarette.

MARTHA
When is your award thing?

HANNAH
You don’t have to come.

MARTHA
I want to.

HANNAH
I’ve got nothing to wear.

MARTHA
You can borrow something from the store.

A young barman behind the bar addresses Martha.

BARMAN
Madam, you can’t smoke in here.

Martha flirts with him.

MARTHA
Madam? Do I really look that old to you?

The barman does not care for Martha’s games. He continues watching her, waiting for her to put out the cigarette.

Martha is irritated.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
Okay.

She takes another drag and then puts out the cigarette.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
I’ll have another wine...if I’m allowed.

The barman pours Martha another glass. Martha reaches into her handbag for her purse to pay.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
You can’t do anything anymore these days. Everyone’s a bloody fascist.

Martha finds a ticket in her purse.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
Oh shit. Please pick up my drycleaning, I have meetings all week.
She hands Hannah the ticket.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
It’s a dress I need for a date.

Hannah reluctantly takes the ticket.

HANNAH
You’re not still seeing that Michael guy, are you?

Martha laughs.

MARTHA
God no. He was terrible in bed, like some pubescent boy. I feel sorry for his poor wife.

Hannah doesn’t want to hear the details.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
Men only want you to be their lover or their mother. Just remember that.

HANNAH
(sarcastic)
I’m taking notes.

The barman smiles in amusement as he listens on.

MARTHA
I’m seeing Richard now. I call him my little dick.

Hannah finds this humorous.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
He’s in real estate. He’s going to help me sell the house.

HANNAH
Is he married too?

Martha ignores the question. She looks down at her cleavage and lifts her breasts.

MARTHA
I might need to get my boobs done soon. He’s a little younger than me.

Hannah does not let her change the subject.

HANNAH
Is he?
Martha lets go of her breasts, shrugs, and lights up another cigarette.

37. INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. NIGHT.

Jonathon, conservatively dressed, stands next to a hospital bed, in which lies KATIE, a teenage girl with a heavily bandaged chest.

Katie is surrounded by a ridiculous number of flower bouquets and pot plants.

Her father, JOSHUA, a large athletic looking man wearing an L.A. Dodgers baseball cap, sits by his daughter’s bed holding her hand.

Jonathon picks up Katie’s file, motioning towards the plants.

JONATHON
Hope you garden as well as you pitch.

Joshua laughs. Jonathon reviews Katie’s file.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
Well, all of your results are really positive Katie. The heart’s responding well, so I think you should be able to go home on Monday.

Katie and Joshua are pleased.

JOSHUA
Mate, you can’t imagine how good that sounds.

Jonathon smiles as Joshua gives his daughter a high five.

38. EXT. CARPARK. NIGHT

Hannah and Martha have left the bar and are walking through a large car park that adjoins a nearby hospital entrance. Martha is a little unsteady on her feet. She points off-screen.

MARTHA
I’m just over here.

HANNAH
I’m taking you home.

MARTHA
No I’m fine.
Hannah starts walking towards her mini.

**HANNAH**

Good luck with that.

Martha checks her handbag and discovers Hannah has taken her keys.

Hannah holds them up for her to see.

**MARTHA**

Shit. How do you always manage to do that?

Martha follows her daughter. They reach Hannah’s mini.

As Hannah unlocks the passenger’s door for her mother, she looks up to see Jonathon walking out of the hospital entrance with two colleagues. The colleagues say their goodbyes. Jonathon lights a cigarette and turns his head in Hannah’s direction.

Hannah quickly ducks down behind her mini. Martha lets out an intoxicated laugh.

**MARTHA (CONTD.)**

What on earth are you doing?

Hannah waits a few moments and then stands but gives a short yelp as she notices Jonathon hovering in the darkness close to the car.

**JONATHON**

Taking a leak?

Hannah heads towards the driver's door. Martha glances towards Jonathon who follows Hannah.

**HANNAH**

Get in the car mum.

Martha does not move. She addresses Jonathon.

**MARTHA**

Who are you?

Jonathon ignores the question. He encroaches on Hannah as she unlocks the driver’s side, grabbing the door and stopping her opening it all the way. He speaks in a low tone.

**JONATHON**

Aren’t you going to introduce me?

Hannah tries to push past him.
HANNAH
Can you move?

Jonathon does not like being rejected. He catches her by the hair as she passes him.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
Let go, that hurts.

Jonathon smiles cockily and brings her face close to his as he tightens his grip on her hair. He speaks quietly.

JONATHON
What, this?

Martha yells at Jonathon across the car.

MARTHA
Let go of her you brute.

Jonathon takes Hannah’s hand and places it on his crotch.

JONATHON
You’ve got me all barred up.

Hannah also appears to become a little aroused.

Jonathon leans in to her and inhales deeply.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
You smell like shit, you know that.

Jonathon jerks his hand away, gives Hannah a crooked smile and turns and walks off.

Hannah is humiliated. She calls after him.

HANNAH
Fuck you.

Jonathon blows her a kiss without turning back around.

Hannah opens her door. Martha is perplexed.

MARTHA
Who was that arsehole?

Hannah is more forceful.

HANNAH
I said get in the car mum.

This time Martha obeys.

Hannah glances to where Jonathon has walked into the darkness. She hesitates for a moment and then gets into the driver's seat.
39. INT. BATHROOM. DAY
Hannah stands wrapped in a towel, brushing her teeth at the sink. She looks unwell.

Hannah suddenly vomits into the sink.

She throws her soiled toothbrush into the bin and washes out her mouth. She glances at herself in the mirror.

40. INT. DRYCLEANERS. DAY
Hannah picks up Martha’s drycleaning. It is a fitted black dress. Hannah lifts the plastic that covers the dress. She admires the expensive fabric.

41. INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR. DAY
Hannah is standing at a counter in a hospital corridor talking to a secretary. A young attractive nurse is going through some paperwork in the background.

SECRETARY
Okay. I just need to see some identific...

Hannah has already pulled her driver’s license from her purse. She has obviously done this before.

The secretary walks to a nearby filing cabinet.

Hannah glances down the corridor, as if looking for someone.

The secretary returns with a small basket full of medication.

SECRETARY
Sign here thank you.

She hands Hannah a form, which she begins to sign.

HANNAH
Is Dr Kingsley working today?

The nurse standing behind the secretary hears the question. She throws Hannah a judgmental haircut to shoes glance.

Hannah stares back at her, hard.

SECRETARY
I’m not sure. Would you like me to page him?
HANNAH
(abrupt)
No,

Hannah takes the packets of medication and walks off.
The secretary and nurse exchange a knowing look.

42. INT. HANNAH’S APARTMENT. DAY

We are tight on Hannah’s hands separating a variety of
different coloured tablets into a pill container segregated
into days of the week.

Hannah’s expression is blank as she works. She finishes
sorting the tablets and closes the container.

43. INT. MR BRANNIGAN’S LOUNGEROOM. DAY

We are inside Mr Brannigan’s humble house.

There is a key in the door. Hannah enters carrying a box of
groceries.

HANNAH
Hello.

There is no answer. Hannah glances into a nearby room.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
Dad?

Still no sign of any life.

44. INT. MR BRANNIGAN’S KITCHEN. DAY

Hannah walks into a small depressing looking kitchen. She
places the pill container onto the kitchen counter.

Hannah opens the fridge. From her expression we read that
there is a pungent smell.

We see the few contents in her father’s fridge have gone
foul. Maggots and mould have infested the vegetables and
meat.

Hannah removes all of the contents of the fridge, wipes out
the shelves with a nearby kitchen cloth and fills the
fridge with fresh fruit and vegetables from her grocery
box.
45. INT. MR BRANNIGAN’S LOUNGEROOM. DAY

Hannah now wanders around the stillness of the lounge room, touching some of her father’s items, which evidently stir memories - a leather notebook, a bowl full of exotic looking feathers, a crucifix, and an old pipe with a tin of tobacco.

Hannah flicks through the notebook, skimming over the handwritten pages.

She opens the tin and inhales the tobacco. She enjoys the familiar smell.

Hannah sits down in an armchair.

SFX: We hear a door close.

Mr Brannigan appears from a side room. He is now a man in his sixties, with intelligent eyes that hint at years of intense study. Heavy lines on his hollow face suggest a long dependence on medication. He notices Hannah sitting in the lounge room.

MR BRANNIGAN
You been here long?

Hannah shakes her head.

They remain silent for a long moment. Hannah watches her father as he shifts his weight from one foot to the other.

HANNAH
Everything okay?

MR BRANNIGAN
Yes.

Mr Brannigan sits down on an old sofa opposite Hannah.

MR BRANNIGAN (CONTD.)
How’s your mother?

Hannah shrugs with indifference. She glances out of the window, then back at him.

HANNAH
That article I wrote...do you remember the one I read to you on obituaries?

Her father does not answer her. He points at his pipe next to her on the shelf.

Hannah hands him the pipe and tobacco. She reaches into her handbag and pulls out a letter.
HANNAH (CONTD.)
Well anyway it’s been nominated for this award...

She goes to pass her father the letter. He glances towards it but does not take it from her as he fills his pipe with tobacco.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
...I thought maybe you could come to the ceremony?

MR BRANNIGAN
You know I can’t.

Hannah is disappointed.

HANNAH
I just thought you could try.

Her father lights the pipe and sucks on it.

MR BRANNIGAN
Well you shouldn’t have.

Hannah drops her eyes. She returns the letter to her handbag and reluctantly plays her trump card.

HANNAH
Mum’s coming.

Mr Brannigan seems to reconsider.

MR BRANNIGAN
When is it?

HANNAH
Friday.

They sit in silence.

46. INT. CLASSROOM. DAY

Hannah sits at her desk wearing her mother’s fitted, drycleaned dress. Students perform a written exercise.

Advanced English grammatical expressions are written on the whiteboard behind Hannah who is again secretly gazing at Tamdar in the front row.

Tamdar lifts his eyes and catches her looking at him. Hannah does not shift her gaze.

A male student asks for assistance. Hannah walks over to him. Tamdar watches her as she leans over the man’s table.
We are in a sterile white bedroom with minimal stylish furniture. The room is in pristine condition.

Hannah and Jonathon are lying naked in bed, post sex.

Jonathon reaches to the bedside table, on which we see a mirror with a small mound of cocaine and a credit card. He lifts the card and begins to cut the powder.

Hannah is lying on her back staring at the ceiling.

Jonathon glances at her.

JONATHON
I love your tits like that.

Hannah looks down at her breasts. She pulls at her nipples.

HANNAH
They only look good when they’re erect.

Jonathon rolls a small piece of paper and brings the mirror onto his lap.

JONATHON
Nah, they’re good all soft...reminds me of being a kid.

Hannah pulls a face at him.

Jonathon shakes his head.

JONATHON
You fucking intellectuals. So I liked breastfeeding. Doesn’t mean I wanted to sleep with my mother.

Hannah throws him a doubtful look.

Jonathon has a line. His face turns more serious.

JONATHON (CONT'D.)
She doesn’t want a bar of me anyway.

Hannah realises they share a similar maternal burden.

HANNAH
I wasn’t breastfed.

Jonathon pinches his nose.
JONATHON
You missed out there.

He passes Hannah the mirror. She rolls onto her stomach and has a line.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
I lost my ninth patient today.

Hannah looks up at him empathetically.

Jonathon places the mirror back onto the bedside table and puts his credit card into his wallet.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
If I reach double figures by the end of the year I have to pay up on a bet I made with this wanker in Neurology.

Hannah returns to lying on her back.

HANNAH
That would be tragic.

Jonathon stands and heads out of the room he motions to Hannah’s clothes strewn across his otherwise immaculate bedroom.

JONATHON
Clean your shit up, will you?

Jonathon exits the room.

Hannah looks down at her small potbelly. She sucks it in for a moment then lets it go.

Hannah stands up and walks over to a nearby chest of drawers. She picks up Jonathon’s stethoscope, and listens to her own heartbeat.

SFX: We hear Hannah’s heartbeat for a few moments.

Hannah sits back down on the bed and starts to look through Jonathon’s wallet with curiosity. She smiles at a younger photo of Jonathon holding a baby boy.

Jonathon returns with a beer in his hand and catches her in the act.

JONATHON
What, I have to pay you now?

Hannah notices he has not brought her a drink. She holds up the photo.
HANNAH
What’s his name again?

JONATHON
Charles.

Hannah stifles a laugh.

Jonathon snatches the photo out of her hand defensively.

HANNAH
Sorry, it’s just, well kids can be pretty cruel.

JONATHON
It was my dad’s name. We call him Charlie.

Jonathon takes his wallet from Hannah and puts the photo back into it.

Hannah realises this is a sensitive subject.

Jonathon lets out a sad laugh as he looks at her.

JONATHON
The silly bastard died in his favourite chair with a whisky in one hand and a fag in the other. Not a bad way to go I guess.

Jonathon uses his finger to brush up the last of the cocaine residue off the mirror and rubs it onto his teeth.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
Anyway, shouldn’t you be pissing off?

48. INT. HANNAH'S OLD BEDROOM. DAY

We are in Hannah's childhood bedroom. It does not seem to have changed over the years. Haunted by teenage decorations, photos and posters.

Hannah is emptying the contents of her cupboard into some moving boxes.

Martha appears in the doorway with an empty box in hand. She is covered in dust and appears a little flustered.

MARTHA
I’ve just been up in the attic. The bloody roof is falling to pieces...

She pulls a face.
MARTHA (CONTD.)
...and there’s an awful stench from all the rain we’ve had. I better tell Richard not to let anyone up there.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
Your thesis and notebooks will get ruined if you don’t bring them down soon.

HANNAH
I’ve got no room left. I’ll have to get them with the rest of my stuff next week.

Martha reaches into the box and pulls out a worn looking teddy-bear, so loved the threads are struggling to hold onto one another. It is the birthday present we saw Hannah receive on her sixth birthday.

She passes it to Hannah.

MARTHA
I found this. Is it yours?

Hannah takes her beloved toy. It brings back a flood of emotions.

HANNAH
Dad sent it from India.

Martha seems a little envious of the toy.

MARTHA
I’m late. I’ll see you tonight.

Martha heads out of the room.

49. INT. CLINIC KITCHEN. NIGHT
Tamdar is cleaning dinner trays.

Through the kitchen window we see it is raining hard outside.

Jason brings in the last of the trays.

JASON
Hey, you knocking off?

The lingo confuses Tamdar.

JASON (CONTD.)
You finished?

Tamdar glances at the clock on the kitchen wall and nods.
Jason motions towards the rain.

JASON (CONTD.)
It’s pissing down. Come for a ride and we’ll drop you home.

50. INT. JONATHON’S APARTMENT. NIGHT

Jonathon is walking his ex, SARAH, a withdrawn looking blonde-haired woman with sad, sunken eyes, out of his apartment.

Sarah hovers in the doorway.

SARAH
I thought maybe you could start having him more often. My therapist says I should reduce my stress levels.

JONATHON
I can’t. You know with work and...

Sarah looks disappointed.

Jonathon pretends to be sympathetic.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
Anyway I thought you were doing better.

Sarah is too tired to argue.

SARAH
Make sure he’s settled before you put him to bed okay. And no tv or sugar.

JONATHON
I know.

Sarah is reluctant to leave their son. Jonathon tries to reassure her.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
He’ll be fine Sarah.

Sarah nods. She leaves.

51. INT. INSIDE SUBARU. NIGHT

SFX: Some bass heavy RnB music beats out from a ridiculously beefed up sound system.
Tamdar, looking out of place, is in the backseat of a hotted up Subaru WRX with Jason and two gym junkie twenty-somethings - the driver, BRENT, slicked back hair, wearing a muscle top and TAY, ginger hair and a goatee.

Jason sits next to Tamdar in the back of the car holding a small video camera.

Jason points the camera towards Tamdar.

52. INT. INSIDE SUBARU. NIGHT

VIDEO FOOTAGE: Through Jason’s camera we see Tamdar realise he is being filmed. He grins and puts his hand over the lens.

END OF VIDEO FOOTAGE.

53. INT. INSIDE SUBARU. NIGHT

Jason stops filming.

He reaches down to his feet and hands Tamdar a beer.

Tay turns around to speak to Tamdar.

TAY
So, are you into RnB - Fiddy Cent, Ludicrous?

Tamdar has never heard of these artists.

JASON
He’s from Africa not L.A. fuckwit.

Brent laughs.

Tay does not like being the butt of the joke.

TAY
How was I supposed to know man?

Tamdar leaves the two to squabble and takes a swig of his beer as he glances out of the window.

54. INT. BUILDING FOYER. NIGHT

Hannah, wearing a low cut cocktail dress, stands awkwardly alone in the foyer of a modern looking building with a glass of champagne in her hand.

Around her are groups of other well-dressed people chatting away, and a number of wait staff carrying drinks and canapés around on platters.
Hannah glances towards the entrance.

55. INT. JONATHON’S KITCHEN. NIGHT

The kitchen has stainless steel bench tops and all the latest mod cons.

Jonathon is sitting on a stool at the bench eating out of a number of take-away containers.

Next to him in a wheelchair sits his son CHARLIE, a severely disabled, teenage boy who is almost the same size as his father. Charlie is drooling excessively.

Jonathon looks up and sees this. It spoils his appetite. He stops eating and waves his hand in front of Charlie’s face. His son does not blink.

Jonathon wheels him towards the corner of the room, facing the wall, and returns to his meal.

56. INT. BUILDING FOYER. NIGHT

There is a loud commotion near the entrance. Hannah and a few other guests look up to see Martha and RICHARD, a conceited looking man of no more than twenty five, in a suit and cravat, stumbling through the foyer doors trying to escape the rain. They have obviously had a few drinks.

Hannah downs her glass of champagne.

Martha and Richard attempt to instantly sober up as they realise the attention they have gained. Martha points in Hannah’s direction and they make their way over towards her.

MARTHA
Richard this is Hannah.

RICHARD
See what you mean, you really could be sisters.

Martha is pleased.

Hannah is used to her mother’s favourite claim. She is icy as Richard cheesily kisses her hand.

RICHARD (CONTD.)
It’s a pleasure to meet you

HANNAH
Where’s dad?

Martha is perplexed by this question.
MARTHA
Where he always is I suspect.

Hannah is clearly disappointed.

A woman makes an announcement.

WOMAN
Ladies and Gentleman, if you would like to finish your drinks and make your way into the auditorium. We will begin the proceedings shortly. Thank you.

People begin to leave the foyer.

57. INT. INSIDE SUBARU. NIGHT

SFX: The music is still blaring from the sound system.

We are back inside the Subaru as it moves at a snail’s pace through bustling neon nightlife.

The rain now falls gently against Tamdar’s window.

Jason passes Tamdar the camera.

JASON
Have a go.

Tamdar awkwardly holds the camera.

JASON (CONTD.)
Just look through the eyepiece and press the big red button on the right.

Tamdar follows his instructions.

JASON (CONTD.)
Use your thumb on that lever on top if you want to zoom in closer on anything.

Tamdar begins filming the crowds as he takes in the spectacle.

58. INT. MONTAGE. NIGHT

VIDEO FOOTAGE: Through Tamdar’s passenger window we see a large Italian family eating at a restaurant; we see club revellers waiting in long lines; a group of young women on a hen’s night in costume. They laugh as they walk to their next destination arms around each other; we see an African group busking as they beat away at bongo drums, singing
their hearts out; we see semi-clad women standing at the door of a strip club; we see street vendors selling tacky roses and fluorescent glow in the dark jewellery; we see bouncers throwing a drunken man out of a pub.

END OF VIDEO FOOTAGE.

59. INT. INSIDE SUBARU. NIGHT

Tamdar stops filming. He looks in wonder at the camera.

JASON
Pretty cool huh.

Tamdar nods.
Tay lights a cigarette and winds down his electric window.
Through the windscreen we see a couple of drag queens, dressed up to the nines, pass in front of the car.
One of the men stumbles slightly in his high heels and steadies himself by placing his hand lightly on the Subaru‘s bonnet. He mouths ‘sorry’ to them as he does so.
Tay sticks his hand out of the window and pretends to shoot the two drag queens.
They walk off laughing at him.
Tamdar watches Tay with indifference before glancing back out of the window.

60. INT. BUILDING FOYER. NIGHT

It is after the ceremony. Hannah stands with Martha and Richard having a drink.
A woman in her early fifties approaches them, offering Hannah commiserations.

WOMAN
For what it’s worth, I thought you should have won.

Hannah forces a smile.

HANNAH
Thanks.

The woman lingers. Hannah realises she is waiting for an introduction.

HANNAH(CONTD.)
Oh, this is my mother, Mar...
Hannah realises the woman has an agenda. She doesn’t bother continuing, instead reaching for some food from a passing waiter. Richard tries to give her a reassuring grin.

WOMAN (CONTD.)
I’m actually a bit of a fan of yours since your Vogue cover. When was that, ten years ago?

Martha corrects her.

MARTHA
Eight.

WOMAN
Right. Well you’ve done wonderful things for the store, especially your range for mature women like us.

Martha does not appreciate this comment.

MARTHA
I’m only 48!

The woman realises she has offended Martha. Hannah finds this amusing.

WOMAN
Oh I didn’t mean to...

Hannah gestures towards Richard making the most of the moment.

HANNAH
Have you met my mother’s little dick?

The woman is thrown by this nickname. Richard laughs uncomfortably, looking at Martha, who is unfazed as she takes another drink off a waiter’s tray.

The woman tries to regain her footing.

WOMAN
So did your daughter inherit the writing gift from you?

Hannah interrupts before Martha has a chance to respond.

HANNAH
From my dad actually.
Martha laughs spitefully, explaining to the woman.

MARTHA
He’s not even her real father.

Hannah is hurt by Martha’s insensitivity.

The woman regrets approaching them. She feels it’s best she leave. She turns back to Hannah.

WOMAN
It was a great article.

Hannah offers the woman a smile as she walks away.

61. INT. INSIDE MINI. NIGHT

Hannah and Martha are dropping Richard off in an affluent leafy suburb.

He gets out of the car and leans down to call through the passenger’s window.

RICHARD
(to Hannah)
Thanks again.

Hannah gives him a slight smile.

RICHARD (CONTD.)
(to Martha)
See you soon gorgeous.

Martha smiles flirtatiously.

MARTHA
Absolutely.

Hannah drives off a little too abruptly, splashing a puddle onto Richard. Martha looks at her.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
I said we could take a taxi.

Hannah ignores her.

Martha pulls a lipstick from the handbag and begins to touch up her lips.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
What a stuffy affair that was. Everyone was so stuck up their own backsides...and the nerve of that woman.

She finishes applying the lipstick and turns to Hannah.
MARTHA (CONTD.)
What made you think your father
would come?

Hannah does not answer her.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
I assumed the ticket was for
Richard.

HANNAH
I would have saved the money and
gotten you a child’s pass if it
was.

Martha scoffs at her comment.

MARTHA
Oh you’re just jealous.

Martha looks out of the window.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
Anyway, Doctor Millen wants your
father to go back into the
treatment centre.

Hannah glances at her with disdain.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
Don’t look at me like that. You
even said he was getting worse.

Hannah is irritated. She grips the steering wheel a little
tighter.

HANNAH
No I didn’t. I said I found some
medication under his bed. It
could have been from years ago.

Hannah is obviously trying to convince herself. Martha is
suspicious.

MARTHA
Under his bed?

HANNAH
Jesus. I was tidying up okay.

Hannah puts her foot down on the accelerator in
frustration. Martha notices this.

MARTHA
Slow down, it’s been raining.

Martha looks back out of the window.
MARTHA (CONTD.)
They’ll be able to monitor him better there. No one expects you to look after him, after what he did. You’ve got no obligation to him.

Hannah does not want to hear this.

HANNAH
It was all hearsay and you know it.

Hannah accelerates further in anger as they cross through an intersection.

MARTHA
For God’s sake Hannah, slow down.

Hannah likes pushing her mother’s buttons. Martha looks at her anxiously, catching a wild glimmer in her eyes.

A sudden flash of a car in front of the mini’s windscreen catches Martha’s and Hannah’s attention. Martha screams out.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
Hannah!

WHAM. The mini slams into another vehicle and starts to flip and roll. It all happens so fast. Glass and the books from Hannah’s back seat fly through the air.

SFX: We hear sounds of a violent collision, brakes locking, glass breaking and metal crunching. Then, an eerie silence.

62. INT. INSIDE SUBARU. NIGHT

We are back in the Subaru.

SFX: The music is interrupted by what sounds like a call to an emergency department.

EMERGENCY LINE (O.S.) (FILT.)
Police and Ambulance. What is your emergency?

SFX: Through a CB radio we hear a distressed woman’s voice.

WOMAN (O.S.) (FILT.)
There’s been a car accident at the intersection of Ranford Parade and Bourke St.
Brent reaches forward and turns up the radio.

**EMERGENCY LINE (O.S.) (FILT.)**
Is anyone hurt?

**WOMAN (O.S.) (FILT.)**
Yes. Please hurry...

Tamdar attempts to understand what’s occurring.

We hear communications to various personnel.

**EMERGENCY LINE (O.S.) (FILT.)**
All units north of the river, we have an MVA at the intersection of Ranford Parade and Bourke St requiring urgent assistance. Please respond...

Jason is excited.

**JASON**
That’s close man.

Brent accelerates.

**BRENT**
Sure is. Same place as the other week.

The three men are raring to go. Tamdar looks at Jason to gauge the situation.

**JASON**
You’ll see mate.

Jason is excited. He takes the camera from Tamdar’s lap and starts frantically adjusting the settings.

Tay turns back to Tamdar.

**TAY**
Brent’s got the whole system hooked up.

Brent speeds up a main street. Through the windscreen we can see a commotion in the distance.

**BRENT**
Fuck it’s a big one. You ready Jas?

**JASON**
Yep.

Jason lifts the camera to his eye and presses record.
63. INT. INSIDE SUBARU. NIGHT

VIDEO FOOTAGE: Through the windscreen Jason’s camera captures images of carnage as we approach a horrific car crash in the middle of a major intersection. It is chaotic.

Close to Brent’s car lies Hannah’s flattened mini on its roof, its wheels still spinning. Next to it is a small upturned four-wheel drive, which is severely crushed in.

Nearby a police car has smashed into a railing, and two other badly damaged vehicles can be seen in the background. Glass and debris lie everywhere.

SFX: There is no sound coming from inside the upturned vehicles other than the hiss of engines. Off screen we hear Brent, Tay and Jason are wired as they marvel at the spectacle.

BRENT (O.S.)
They’re gone. They’re fucking gone.

SFX: We now hear screaming and groaning from inside the four-wheel drive.

TAY (O.S.)
Shit. Should we do something?

Through Jason’s camera we see passers by rush towards the two upturned vehicles and attempt to free the passengers. One by one the injured are pulled from the wreckage.

We see Martha and Hannah are both unconscious.

We see a man with a face covered in blood freed from the front passenger’s side of the four-wheel drive.

TAY (O.S.)
Man, that’s gotta hurt.

A number of ambulances, police, and media arrive at the scene and begin to tend to the injured.

Jason’s camera captures a young Aboriginal man lying on the road near the police car, receiving medical attention. A number of policemen stand authoritatively over him.

BRENT (O.S.)
That abo must’ve stolen the cop car and cleaned them all up.

JASON (O.S.)
(laughing)
He’ll get a fucking pig beating.
As witnesses continue to focus on checking the back of the four-wheel drive, the front windscreen is punched out from the inside and a heavily PREGNANT WOMAN crawls out of the debris.

The woman is in obvious shock. She stands alone looking down at her bloodstained trousers.

BRENT (O.S.)
Shit. You getting this Jas?

JASON (O.S.)
Yeah...I’ve got her.

Witnesses are taken aback by this tragic image.

END OF VIDEO FOOTAGE.

64.  EXT. STREET INTERSECTION. NIGHT

From Hannah’s POV we see she slowly begins to regain consciousness.

She lies on the street, receiving medical attention from a female ambulance officer.

AMBULANCE OFFICER
Can you hear me?

From Hannah’s POV the ambulance officer’s face drifts in and out.

AMBULANCE OFFICER (CONTD.)
I need you to try and stay awake for me, okay.

65.  INT. INSIDE SUBARU. NIGHT

The lights of the emergency vehicles flash across Tamdar’s face.

His expression is dark as he watches the mayhem.

This evokes a memory in him:

66.  EXT. VILLAGE. FBACK. DAY

SFX: We hear gunfire, villagers screaming and chickens squawking.

We find ourselves in an African jungle setting, in the middle of gunfire.

We see Tamdar as a young adolescent with dead eyes, wearing civilian clothing and a red scarf around his neck, running
wildly through a village with a group of youths and older rebels each wearing a scarf.

The group has makeshift guns slung around their necks, which they fire erratically. Some older rebels swing machetes.

We see graphic images of dead bodies and civilians - men, women and children - being shot as they run from the group. Tamdar and another youth stop to set a hut on fire. In the doorway of the hut Tamdar notices a dead man lying on his back who has had his limbs and genitals macheted off and piled onto his chest.

Tamdar seems desensitised to this as he kicks the body into the hut and sets it alight.

67. INT. INSIDE SUBARU. NIGHT

Tamdar springs into action. He tries to get out of the car but the doors are centrally locked. He is trapped.

TAMDAR
Open the door.

Tay turns to him.

TAY
You’re not going to puke are you?

Tamdar raises his voice as he starts beating at the door.

TAMDAR
Open the door.

68. EXT. STREET INTERSECTION. NIGHT

We see the ambulance officer who was assisting Hannah is now tending to Martha who is still unconscious. Hannah lies next to her mother wearing a neck brace. She is watching the pregnant woman.

From Hannah’s slightly blurred POV we see the pregnant woman start to cry quietly, holding her stomach.

Hannah is empathetic.

69. INT. INSIDE SUBARU. NIGHT

VIDEO FOOTAGE: Jason’s camera zooms close up on the pregnant woman in her traumatised state. She is yet to receive medical attention due to all the madness. Her husband, the man with the bloody face, embraces her,
placing his hand protectively on her stomach as he attempts to calm her down. His other hand holds his injured head as he struggles to stand himself.

Jason zooms back out.

In the background of Jason’s frame, we see Hannah still watching the pregnant woman. After a moment she shifts her gaze and seems to notice Jason’s camera. She looks directly at us with disbelief.

END OF VIDEO FOOTAGE.

70. INT. INSIDE SUBARU. NIGHT

Jason slowly pulls the camera from his eye.

JASON
Oh shit.

Tay finds Jason’s line of sight.

Through the windscreen we see Hannah slowly stand and head towards them. She is unstable and looks disoriented but the burning rage in her eyes fuels her to keep going.

JASON (CONTD.)
Back up Brent, we’ve been spotted.

Tamdar has managed to find the central door lock switch in the console. He throws his door open and exits the vehicle.

Tay sees him leave.

TAY
Where the fuck are you going?

He turns back to Brent.

TAY (CONTD.)
Brent, let’s move man.

Brent, still fascinated by the chaos, takes a moment to catch on. He notices Hannah approaching, and fumbles to put the car into reverse.

71. EXT. STREET INTERSECTION. NIGHT

The pregnant woman suddenly collapses.

Tamdar rushes to her, making her frantic husband sit down on the pavement. He checks the now unconscious woman’s pulse and breathing passage. He begins giving her CPR.
A witness places a blanket over the pregnant woman, addressing Tamdar.

**WITNESS**
Do you know what you're doing?

Tamdar ignores the question. His attention is on the task at hand.

Nearby Hannah is only meters from the Subaru. She picks up a piece of scrap metal off the road and comes at the car.

Before Brent has the chance to reverse, she swings the metal and brings it down hard onto the Subaru’s windscreen.

72. **INT. INSIDE SUBARU. NIGHT**

Tay and Brent raise their arms in protection.

**BRENT, JASON, TAY**

Fuck!

The windscreen cracks.

**JASON**

Brent, fucking go, go.

Brent finally finds the gear.

73. **EXT. STREET INTERSECTION. NIGHT**

The car screeches backwards, spins on its axis and speeds off.

The adrenaline instantly seems to leave Hannah. Her legs buckle. She drops down on the street curb in exhaustion. The ambulance officer rushes to her with a stretcher.

The pregnant woman starts to cough but is still unconscious.

Tamdar waits a few seconds to see if she comes to. She does not. He continues with the CPR.

Hannah’s stretcher is wheeled past Tamdar.

**FX:** In slow motion Hannah and Tamdar exchange a momentary glance as she passes him giving CPR to the pregnant woman.

The footage returns to normal. A small crowd has gathered around Tamdar.

A police officer, **CONSTABLE MACPHERSON**, hurries over to the commotion and pushes his way through the crowd.

He calls out to an ambulance officer.
CONSTABLE MACPHERSON
We need someone over here.

He addresses Tamdar as he motions for him to stop.

CONSTABLE MACPHERSON (CONTD.)
I need you to move mate.

Tamdar stops giving the woman CPR and looks up. He is uneasy by the sight of the gun in the constable’s belt.

TAMDAR
I’m a doctor.

The constable has some doubt due to Tamdar’s generic uniform.

CONSTABLE MACPHERSON
What’s your name?

TAMDAR
Muvandi. Dr Muvandi.

CONSTABLE MACPHERSON
And where do you practice?

TAMDAR
I...

Tamdar attempts to explain but is struggling to articulate himself given his heightened state. He doesn’t have time for the officer’s questions. He turns back to the woman and again starts CPR.

An ambulance officer arrives. Constable Macpherson pulls Tamdar off the unconscious woman.

CONSTABLE MACPHERSON
I told you to move.

The ambulance officer repeats Tamdar’s earlier assessment of the pregnant woman.

Tamdar stands slowly, looking down at her. He is troubled. He could not save her.

Constable Macpherson kneels down to assist the ambulance officer. One of the witnesses is seen informing him that Tamdar was in the Subaru. The constable looks at Tamdar who is starting to back away.

CONSTABLE MACPHERSON
You stay right there, mate.

Tamdar starts to become worried, unsure of how he got himself into this mess. Will he be arrested? Deported?
The witnesses look at him accusingly.

SFX: The soundtrack goes silent as Tamdar glances around at the turmoil surrounding him.

He makes a split second decision; turning and running off.

SFX: The soundtrack returns to normal as the constable tries to run after Tamdar.

CONSTABLE MACPHERSON
Hey...

Tamdar continues running. He is fast.

CONSTABLE MACPHERSON (CONTD.)
Hey!

The constable slows down and stops, realising Tamdar is already far gone into the night.

The ambulance officer has finished his assessment and is about to start CPR when the pregnant woman comes to. He looks to where Tamdar has fled - an unaware hero.

74. INT. HANNAH’S APARTMENT. DAY

Hannah, with severe seatbelt bruising around her neck, pours some cereal into a bowl.

She opens the fridge and sniffs the milk. It is sour. She puts it back into the fridge.

SFX: On the television in the background we hear a news broadcast.

NEWSREADER (O.S.)
One woman is dead and eight others injured from a horror car crash involving a stolen police car in the early hours of this morning...

Hannah briefly glances towards the television.

We see Jason’s video footage of the pregnant woman and her husband with Hannah in the background.

Hannah sombrely watches the news story as she starts to eat her dry cereal.

75. INT. JONATHON’S KITCHEN. DAY

Jonathon is pouring himself a cup of coffee from a percolator. Through the doorway we see Charlie has been placed too close to the television.
SFX: From the television we continue to hear the news broadcast.

NEWSREADER (O.S.)
Witnesses claim the stolen vehicle, which had keys left in the ignition, was being pursued by police at the time of the accident, an allegation that has been strongly denied by senior Constable Macpherson.

76. INT. RUNDOWN FLAT. DAY

We find ourselves in Tamdar’s decrepit flat, small enough to arouse claustrophobia. Although he keeps it neat, it cannot escape the seediness of the housing commission block of flats that it is a part of.

Tamdar dressed in his clinic uniform, also watches the news story, his face grim.

NEWSREADER (O.S)
The name of the deceased woman is yet to be released.

77. EXT. MR BRANNIGAN’S FRONT DOOR. DAY

ISABELLE, a precocious twelve-year-old girl and her ten-year-old brother, GUS, knock on Mr Brannigan’s front door.

After a few moments he answers with hesitance. He is surprised to see the two.

GUS
We lost our frisbee over your fence and mum said we had to ask first whether we can go get it.

Mr Brannigan looks confused. He hovers behind the door, warily checking the surroundings.

MR BRANNIGAN
Do you live on the street?

Isabelle smiles and nods, pointing to a nearby house.

ISABELLE
We just moved into the blue house.

Mr Brannigan seems uncomfortable around Isabelle but is enticed by her serene nature.

Gus grows impatient.
GUS
So can I get my frisbee?

Mr Brannigan is still watching Isabelle.

78. INT. MR BRANNIGAN’S BATHROOM. FFORWARD. NIGHT

We see a flash of Mr Brannigan sitting naked in an empty bathtub, whipping himself across the back.

79. EXT. MR BRANNIGAN’S FRONT DOOR. DAY

Isabelle pulls a silly face at Mr Brannigan to break his gaze.

Mr Brannigan takes a moment to come out of his mesmerized state. He considers letting Isabelle and Gus through the house but then changes his mind.

MR BRANNIGAN
No.

He abruptly shuts the door on the two.

80. INT. MR BRANNIGAN’S ENTRANCE. DAY

Through the door we can hear Gus’s disappointment.

GUS (O.S.) (FILT.)
Oh man...

Mr Brannigan walks over to a window. From his POV we see Gus kick the front door.

GUS (CONTD.)
Wanker.

Gus runs back across the street. Isabelle laughs at her younger brother, picking a flower from Mr Brannigan’s garden.

Mr Brannigan watches her with wonder, admiring her carefree nature, as she smells the flower before sticking it into her hair and dreamily strolling off across the road.

81. INT. MARTHA’S ROOM. DAY

Martha is in the rehabilitation clinic. She wears a neck and back brace, and lies in the bed of a small private room.

Hannah sits near her bed watching a game show on the mounted television.
MARTHA
This whole place needs a renovation, it’s just miserable. And there’s some crazy man down the corridor who won’t stop screaming.

Hannah doesn’t seem to be listening.

Martha tries to sit up with difficulty. She grimaces in pain.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
Anyway it’s not all bad. You should see the handsome thing they have looking after me here.

At that exact moment Tamdar enters the room with a dinner tray. Martha likes what she sees.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
Speak of the devil.

Tamdar sees Hannah whose eyes are still on the tv screen. He hesitates, wondering whether she will remember seeing him at the accident.

Jason, who remains with the food trolley in the corridor, also recognises Hannah. He throws Tamdar a cautionary look to not give anything away.

Tamdar pulls a portable trolley table across Martha’s bed and places the food tray onto it.

Hannah glances over, a little taken aback to see Tamdar.

TAMDAR
Hello.

HANNAH
Hi.

Martha notices their familiarity.

MARTHA
Do you two know each other?

HANNAH
It’s Tamdar right?

Tamdar nods.

He lifts the cover off the plate. We see an unappetising looking piece of meat and vegetables drowned in sauce.

MARTHA
I’m not eating this shit.
HANNAH
Mum.

Hannah looks at Tamdar apologetically.

TAMDAR
Unfortunately it tastes as bad as it looks.

Martha addresses Hannah.

MARTHA
Get me some sushi or something, will you? There’s that little restaurant on the corner.

Hannah can’t be bothered.

Tamdar starts to adjust Martha’s bed for her to sit up slightly.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
It’s really not too much to ask considering you tried to kill me, is it?

Tamdar catches this facetious remark.

Hannah reluctantly stands and complies. Martha calls out to her as she leaves the room.

MARTHA (CONTD.) (O.S.)
And some cigarettes.

82. INT. HANNAH’S BEDROOM. NIGHT

SFX: Over a black screen we hear sounds of the car accident.

Hannah switches on her bedside light. She can’t sleep.

83. EXT. JUNGLE. FBACK. DAY

SFX: We hear distorted sounds of war zone and shouting.

We are again in the African jungle.

We are tight on young Tamdar who is slightly younger than the earlier flashback. He is kneeling on sandy ground watching something off screen, his face deeply disturbed.

The shot pulls back to show a young African soldier, no more than ten years old, holding an AK-47, almost bigger than he is, to Tamdar’s head. The boy’s eyes are glazed
over from a recent hit of ‘brown-brown’ - cocaine and gun powder. A cigarette hangs from his mouth.

We now see what Tamdar is being made to watch. In a shallow pool of water, a few meters from him, a group of older rebels are raping his MOTHER. She holds back her screams in an attempt to protect her son but she is obviously in extreme pain.

Tamdar closes his eyes to block out the troubling sight but the young rebel above him shouts at him to open his eyes, threatening to shoot him if he does not watch.

Tamdar opens his eyes.

84. INT. RUNDOWN FLAT. NIGHT

Tamdar awakes in a sweat. His bed is soaked. He breathes deeply, attempting to calm himself.

SFX: We now realise that the violent sounds of Tamdar’s neighbours having a noisy dispute next door also crept into his nightmare.

Tamdar stares hopelessly at the wall he shares with his neighbours.

85. INT. HANNAH'S APARTMENT. NIGHT

SFX: The tv is on quietly in the background. We hear a B-grade film.

Hannah sits in her lounge room near the coffin, which lies on the daily obituaries section of the newspaper.

She begins to paint the outside of the coffin a strong red colour. The rich paint strokes across the wood.

86. INT. HANNAH'S APARTMENT. DAWN

SFX: The tv is still on. We hear an early morning talk show.

The morning light arrives slowly outside. Hannah, still in her pyjamas, has not slept. She checks the paint on the coffin. It is dry.

She steps into the coffin and lies down, taking a look around. She reaches for the coffin’s lid and starts to pull it over herself until she is completely covered.

The lid is immediately removed and Hannah steps back into her lounge room. She looks back at the coffin, a little wary of it now.
87. INT. MARTHA’S ROOM. DAY

Martha, with her hospital gown pulled down around her shoulders, sits in her bed being looked over by a rehab specialist.

The specialist, a man in his mid forties, is feeling Martha’s spine and neck.

SPECIALIST
Okay Mrs Brannigan.

The specialist returns to the foot of the bed. Martha buttons up her shirt, correcting him.

MARTHA
Ms Brannigan, I’m separated.

The specialist continues without looking up from the notes he is making.

SPECIALIST
It’s early days yet but given your age and the nature of your injuries, I can’t see that there will be much possibility for improvement beyond that which has already eventuated.

MARTHA
What does that mean?

Finally the specialist looks up at Martha, clarifying himself with clinical indifference.

SPECIALIST
It means that, while you will probably walk again, you will no doubt have a number of significant functional limitations.

Martha’s face tenses. She attempts to make light of the moment.

MARTHA
So Kamasutra’s out then?

The specialist forces a terse smile before returning to his notes.

Martha is clearly upset by the news.
Hannah and Felix have a coffee in Hannah’s lounge room near the French doors. Hannah reads the obituary pages of the newspaper. Felix, devouring a chocolate bar, looks as blue as the large bruise on his cheek.

FELIX
So are you okay?

Hannah is distracted.

HANNAH
These things are so generic. Listen to this...

She begins to read out aloud from the paper.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
George, you were a wonderful husband and father and will be forever in our thoughts. RIP.

Hannah looks up.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
Can you imagine having something so ordinary written about you when you die?

Felix thinks about this for a moment.

FELIX
Yes.

Hannah continues reading. Felix takes another large bite of chocolate and talks with his mouth full.

FELIX (CONTD.)
He broke up with me.

Hannah addresses his lack of manners.

HANNAH
Do you ever swallow?

FELIX
Depends who he is.

Hannah finds this amusing. She returns to the newspaper.

FELIX (CONTD.)
Anyway are you listening? He left me.

HANNAH
Who?
Felix is irritated by her disinterest.

FELIX
Sebastian...from yoga.

HANNAH
Oh.

She awkwardly tries to comfort him.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
Sorry.

FELIX
He got back together with his ex.

Felix heats up.

FELIX (CONTD.)
He was always going on about what an arsehole he was.

Hannah motions to his bruise.

HANNAH
Is that who gave you the shiner?

Felix shakes his head.

FELIX
Nah. Sebastian did that.

Hannah raises an eyebrow. Felix explains guiltily.

FELIX (CONTD.)
I kind of hit him first.

Felix glances at the coffin, which still lies on the newspaper in the corner of the room, filled with a few vinyl records and books.

FELIX (CONTD.)
Bit morbid don’t you think?

Hannah shrugs as she looks towards the coffin.

HANNAH
It’s just a box. Needed something for storage.

FELIX (to himself)
Whatever gets you off.

Hannah throws him a slightly irritated glance.
HANNAH
Isn’t there someone else you can go and annoy?

FELIX
Not really.

After a moment Felix finishes his chocolate bar and stands. He motions to the newspaper.

FELIX (CONTD.)
I thought you were going to stop reading those things after the article. They’re turning you into a miserable cow.

Hannah doesn’t look up from her paper.

Felix gives her a kiss on the top of her head and walks towards the front door.

He stops near a hatstand by the entrance and turns back to Hannah. He teases.

FELIX
You know, a nice skeleton here wouldn’t go astray.

Hannah grins.

HANNAH
See you Monday.

Felix shuts the door behind himself.

89. INT. SUPERMARKET. NIGHT

Hannah stands at the checkout as a teenage boy with bad acne scans her items.

SFX: Apart from the frequent beep of the checkout scanner and an occasional car passing along the quiet street outside, it is very still.

Hannah begins to pack her items into boxes.

SFX: There is a commotion outside.

Hannah looks up. From her POV we see Jonathon having an argument with a scantily dressed woman in the doorway of an adjacent building.

From our distance we can only make out the occasional heated word as the two push and shove each other.

Jonathon walks away from the woman. She begins to cry as she collapses back onto a brick wall.
WOMAN
You fucking bastard...

Jonathon turns and walks back towards the woman. He forcefully pushes her up against the wall and begins sucking on her neck.

Hannah can't look away. It is intoxicating.

After some initial resistance, the woman eventually succumbs. She hangs like a rag doll against the wall, as Jonathon appears to suck the life out of her. He hitches up her skirt and fondles her between the legs with no fear of being seen.

It begins to rain lightly outside as Hannah continues to watch the two lovers. She is aroused by the spectacle.

SFX: The abrupt high-pitched sound of a register button getting stuck breaks Hannah’s gaze.

She turns back to the checkout operator who is fretfully smacking the side of the register to try to stop the noise. He eventually manages to do so. He blushes painfully as he looks to Hannah.

CHECKOUT OPERATOR
That’s $55.30 thanks.

Hannah gives him the money and waits for her change. She looks back towards the building.

Jonathon and the woman are nowhere to be seen.

90. INT. MARTHA'S ROOM. DAY

Martha sits on the edge of the bed, attempting to do some leg exercises under Tamdar’s guidance. She has small ankle weights on and is trying to straighten one leg at a time.

TAMDAR
A little slower, just focus on extending your knee.

Martha looks worn out. She again attempts to straighten her leg with great difficulty. She is overwhelmed.

MARTHA
No. No more.

Tamdar can see Martha is having a hard time dealing with her injury. He lets her be and gently begins to remove the weights from around her ankles.

Martha watches him.
MARTHA (CONTD.)
How old are you?

Tamdar turns back towards her.

TAMDAR
Thirty-four.

Martha glances out of the window.

MARTHA
My daughter is a similar age. I was only a baby when I had her. My mother said it was a sin to abort a child of God.

Martha looks back at him.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
I was very beautiful back then you know.

Tamdar does not doubt this.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
Now I’m just old.

Tamdar sees that Martha is close to tears.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
My boyfriend hasn’t even visited me.

Tamdar wants to help her.

TAMDAR
This will get easier.

Martha looks back out of the window.

MARTHA
I don’t believe you.

Tamdar is too exhausted to continue with the motivational speech. Who is he fooling? He sits down next to Martha.

TAMDAR
Neither do I.

Martha is moved by his honesty. She lets out a laugh. Her eyes soften.

Tamdar finds himself attracted to Martha in this truthful moment. We recognise his fragility for the first time.

Martha begins to unbutton her blouse to reveal her naked breasts. Tamdar becomes aroused by this sight.
Martha takes his hand and places it onto one of her breasts. She closes her eyes with pleasure as he caresses them.

SFX: Someone in the clinic corridor drops a number of lunch trays. They clatter loudly onto the floor.

This brings Tamdar out of the moment. He looks towards the corridor and then back at Martha who has lain back on the bed.

Tamdar walks towards the door and shuts it, preventing us from watching him and Martha any further.

91.  INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR. DAY

Jonathon walks down the corridor as Joshua comes out of his daughter’s room, calling out to him.

JOSHUA
Dr Kingsley.

Jonathon turns around to see him.

JONATHON
Hi. You’re leaving today right?

JOSHUA
That’s right.

JONATHON
How long have they given you off?

JOSHUA
I’m taking the whole season. We’ll fly back after Christmas.

Joshua offers him a signed baseball glove and ball that he has been holding.

JOSHUA (CONTD.)
Here...I figured you’re into baseball so.

Jonathon takes the glove and ball. He laughs.

JONATHON
I used to play with my brother when we were kids. Wasn’t much good though.

He lifts the glove and ball.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
But thanks, this is great.
The two men stand awkwardly for a moment.

   JOSHUA
   I know it’s your job and all
   but...

Joshua chokes up.

   JOSHUA (CONTD.)
   ...what you did for my girl.

Jonathon brushes off the compliment.

Joshua tries to keep it together and slaps Jonathon on the back.

   JOSHUA (CONTD.)
   You’re a legend mate.

Jonathon smiles.

Another awkward moment as both men struggle to think of someway to finish the conversation.

   JOSHUA (CONTD.)
   Have you got kids?

   JONATHON
   Yeah.

   JOSHUA (CONTD.)
   Well you know what I’m saying then, you’d die if anything happened to them, right?

Jonathon nods in agreement but his heart just isn’t in it.

92.  INT.  RUNDOWN FLAT.  NIGHT

Tamdar is in bed attempting to sleep.

SFX: The next-door neighbour is at his wife again.

The walls seem paper-thin. Tamdar wraps his pillow around his head and turns on his side.

The row becomes violent, evident from the screams of the wife and the endless crying of their baby.

It’s going to be a long night.

93.  INT.  MONTAGE.  NIGHT

MONTAGE: We see Hannah watching late night infomercials in her apartment; we see Tamdar cannot sleep. He knocks on the wall he shares with his neighbours; we see Hannah switching
off the lights in her apartment one by one; Tamdar gives up trying to sleep, he gets out of bed; Hannah goes to turn off the television but changes her mind; Tamdar is lying on his couch playing an old acoustic guitar that has a few strings missing but his guitar is almost drowned out by the neighbour who is still rampant; only the sound of the tv filters through Hannah’s dark apartment as she walks into her bedroom and closes the door behind herself; Tamdar sits in a late night petrol station café looking dejected and tired.

94. INT. MARTHA’S ROOM. NIGHT

Hannah is doing some marking at a small table in Martha’s empty room. She feels a little flushed from the central heating and pulls off the jumper she is wearing. The jumper gets caught on her necklace. As a result Hannah’s undergarment is pulled up to reveal her stomach and bra. She begins to struggle awkwardly, her arms above her head.

HANNAH
Fuck, fuck.

Tamdar, looking worn out, appears in the doorway. He smiles to himself, watching Hannah. He wonders if he should look away, but can’t help his attraction to her.

Something catches Tamdar’s eye. Hannah’s shirtsleeve has crept up her arm slightly to reveal some deep scars on her left forearm. Tamdar is a little thrown by this.

Hannah senses someone in her presence and stops struggling, her arms still fixed above her head. She listens carefully.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
Is someone there? I’m...stuck.

Tamdar begins to laugh.

Hannah finally manages to untangle herself. Her hair is a mess. She snaps at him.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
Do you often watch women undress?

Tamdar smiles at her sharpness. He sees her likeness to Martha.

TAMDAR
Yes.

Hannah remembers Tamdar’s job description. She pulls down her shirt. A slight embarrassed smile creeps onto her face.
Tamdar approaches Martha’s bin and removes the bag. Hannah pretends to return to her marking but continues to watch him as he ties the top of the bin bag.

**HANNAH**
Where in Africa are you from?

**TAMDAR**
Somalia.

Hannah raises her eyebrows.

**HANNAH**
Must be pretty different to here.

Tamdar considers this.

**TAMDAR**
Yes...and no.

Tamdar puts a new bin liner into the bin. Hannah studies him.

**HANNAH**
You don’t say much do you? It’s like the words have to punch themselves out of your mouth.

Tamdar grins.

**TAMDAR**
I’m tired. My neighbours don’t let me sleep.

**HANNAH**
I haven’t been sleeping much either.

Tamdar nods. After a moment he takes the rubbish and starts to leave the room.

**HANNAH (CONTD.)**
I’ve got something that might help.

Tamdar turns back to face her.

Martha is wheeled into the room by Jason, catching the end of their conversation. She does not like the competition, throwing Hannah a disapproving look as Tamdar leaves.

95. **INT. INSIDE RENTAL CAR. NIGHT**

Hannah is driving a rental car with Tamdar in the passenger’s seat. She tries to work out how to switch on
the heating but has some trouble. She smacks impatiently at various buttons.

Tamdar reaches forward and calmly finds the right switch.

    HANNAH
    Thanks.

They continue driving. Tamdar looks at her.

    TAMDAR
    You weren’t injured in the accident?

    HANNAH
    Nup. Not a scratch on me. I must have nine lives.

Hannah realises Tamdar does not understand this idiom.

    HANNAH (CONTD.)
    It’s a saying. You know how cats always land on their feet when they fall...

Tamdar nods.

    HANNAH (CONTD.)
    ...well it’s like they have nine lives, nine chances.

Tamdar understands. He looks out of the window.

Tamdar tests the water.

    TAMDAR
    Do you remember anything from the accident?

    HANNAH
    Not much.

They continue driving in silence. Hannah secretly glances at him, remembering.

96.  INT.  HANNAH’S APARTMENT. NIGHT  

Hannah and Tamdar enter Hannah’s apartment.

Hannah heads straight for the kitchen. Tamdar takes a look around her apartment.

Hannah removes a bottle of wine from the cupboard and begins looking for two wine glasses. She pulls odd glasses from the cupboard; realising she does not own two wine glasses, she settles on some vodka instead.
She pours the spirit into a glass and knocks back a shot to steady her nerves. She pours another two glasses and adds some ice.

Tamdar casually looks through the many digital tapes on Hannah’s shelf. She notices this and hurriedly approaches him, handing him a vodka.

HANNAH
Here.

Hannah remembers the coffin. Tamdar has not noticed it yet. He is busy studying her ominous paintings of the ocean.

Hannah walks casually towards the coffin, attempting to be inconspicuous. She drags the coffin into her bedroom. Her struggle is rather comical.

Tamdar looks to see where she has disappeared around the corner, a little puzzled by the noise. He calls out to her.

TAMDAR
You like the ocean?

Hannah shuts her bedroom door and returns, relieved.

She sits down on her couch, glancing up at the artwork.

HANNAH
Painting it, yeah.

She reaches inside the drawer of her coffee table, removes an envelope and rollie papers and begins to roll a joint.

TAMDAR
You don’t like to swim?

HANNAH
I can’t swim.

Tamdar is surprised.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
Can you?

Tamdar shakes his head. He sits down next to her.

Hannah brings the rolled joint to her mouth and licks the paper. She lights it and takes a drag.

HANNAH
I’m sure it’s overrated.

Tamdar laughs.

TAMDAR
But we don’t know.
Hannah agrees. She offers him the joint. He takes it.

97.  INT.  HANNAH’S APARTMENT. NIGHT

Tamdar sits on the floor next to her coffee table folding the envelope that was holding the marijuana.

We see Hannah has fallen asleep on the couch. Tamdar places a blanket over her.

We hear Hannah’s apartment door gently close and see Tamdar has left her a present. The envelope sits on her coffee table in the shape of an intricately folded paper boat.

98.  INT.  CLASSROOM. DUSK

It is the end of class. Hannah is cleaning the whiteboard. She senses someone behind her and turns around.

Jonathon stands a few meters away, spinning a world globe that sits on a nearby bookshelf.

Hannah gets a fright.

    HANNAH
    Jesus.

She returns to cleaning the whiteboard.

    HANNAH (CONTD.)
    Do you always have to be so fucking creepy?

    JONATHON (CONTD.)
    Do you want to get a drink?

    HANNAH
    Your girlfriend didn’t look too happy the other night.

Jonathon doesn't lose his cool.

    JONATHON
    She’s my cousin.

Hannah starts to gather her things.

    HANNAH
    Must be pretty close.

Jonathon is now flicking through a language text.

    JONATHON
    Yeah something like that.

He throws the book back down.
JONATHON (CONTD.)
Are you coming or what?

Hannah does not answer.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
Fuck yourself then.

Jonathon starts to walk away. Hannah becomes frustrated. She wishes she could resist him.

HANNAH
Hey.

99. INT. CLINIC STAFFROOM. NIGHT

We are in the clinic’s staffroom. Tamdar has finished his shift and is collecting his coat from a locker.

SFX: We hear the sounds of sexual interaction.

Tamdar peers through the crack of a nearby door.

100. INT. STORAGE ROOM. NIGHT

Through the crack of the door we see Jason having sex with a head injury patient in a small storage room.

The young woman’s hair is shaven and reveals a large scar on her head. Jason holds her up against a shelf as he has his way with her.

101. INT. CLINIC STAFFROOM. NIGHT

Tamdar watches them for a moment, then returns to collect his things.

Jason has finished. He walks the young woman through the staffroom into the corridor and shuts the door behind her.

Jason checks to make sure no one else is in the staffroom. Tamdar notices this but continues to clear out his locker.

Jason approaches him and holds out a large bundle of fifty-dollar notes.

JASON
Here.

Tamdar looks at the money. Jason smirks at him.
JASON (CONTD.)
We sold the tape. The guys say it’s only fair you get a cut of it.

Tamdar looks him hard in the face and does not take the money. He shuts the locker door and begins to walk out.

Jason was prepared for this reaction. He calls after him.

JASON (CONTD.)
You better keep your mouth shut. It’d be a shame if the cops or immigration were to get an anonymous phone call, if you get what I mean.

Tamdar stops. He does not like being threatened. He looks at Jason warningly, but then leaves without a word.

Jason laughs to himself smugly and pockets the money.

102. INT. JONATHON'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

We are tight on Jonathon’s steady surgeon fingers as he pulls the wings off a fly. The fly buzzes helplessly.

We see that Jonathon and Hannah lie apart, naked on a dishevelled bed. Hannah rolls onto her stomach and sees what Jonathon is doing.

HANNAH
You know they say people who hurt animals are generally psychotic.

Jonathon lets go of the wingless fly. It scurries across the bed, away from him.

JONATHON
It’s a bloody fly - one of the lowest things on the food chain, the scum of the earth.

Hannah straddles him.

HANNAH
So are you.

Jonathon lies back on the bed, looking up at her above him with a lustful grin on his face.

Hannah studies him.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
You look small from up here.
JONATHON
What the hell’s that supposed to mean?

Hannah shrugs.

HANNAH
You just do.

Jonathon places his hands on Hannah’s hips. He tries to push up into her but Hannah pushes him back. She wants him to play by her rules.

Hannah reaches down to the floor and picks up her stockings, using them to tie Jonathon’s hands to the bed head. Jonathon obeys. He lets out a laugh.

JONATHON
You don’t have an ice pick on you or anything, do you?

Hannah slowly begins to grind herself into Jonathon. He closes his eyes in pleasure.

Hannah watches him as she brings him close to orgasm.

HANNAH
Tell me why you like fucking me.

Jonathon’s eyes gaze up at her body as she moves over him. He doesn’t seem to hear her in his aroused state. Hannah’s gyrations slow down.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
I asked you a question.

Still no answer. Hannah stops moving altogether.

JONATHON
What are you doing? Don’t stop.

HANNAH
Answer me.

Jonathon is frustrated.

JONATHON
What...you want to have a fucking conversation? Now?

Hannah pushes herself up onto her knees towering over Jonathon, threatening to leave him there.

He realises he has to play along.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
Okay. Okay.
Hannah sits back down on his legs listening.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
I don’t know. I guess because you’re like a bloke. You take what you want and that’s it. There’s not all that other bullshit.

HANNAH
What do you mean?

JONATHON
Well, take this religious chick I used to see, she had to cry to have an orgasm.

Hannah finds this rather sad.

HANNAH
Every time?

Jonathon nods.

JONATHON
It was fucking exhausting.

He looks at her hard.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
I answered the question.

Hannah reaches for Jonathon’s tie on the floor and uses it to blindfold him.

She squats over Jonathon and moves herself onto his mouth.

Jonathon feels her pubic hair on his face and begins giving her oral sex. We are tight on Hannah’s face as she tilts her head back writhing in ecstasy.

After a while Jonathon pulls one of his hands free from the stockings and forcefully pushes Hannah back down on top of himself.

Hannah is fed up.

HANNAH
Is that it?

Jonathon starts to thrust into her.

Hannah sits, bored and lifeless. Jonathon becomes irritated.

JONATHON
Put a little pussy into it will you.
Hannah lets out a laugh.

HANNAH
I was trying to.

Jonathon has had enough of her teasing. He pushes her off him and starts to undo his other hand restraint.

JONATHON
This relationship’s doing fucking wonders for my self-esteem, you know that.

Hannah doesn’t care.

Jonathon gets off the bed and walks over to his chest of drawers on which we see a mirror with a small mound of cocaine. Jonathon has a line of coke. Hannah watches him.

HANNAH
I’m just suggesting you find out how to please a woman rather than jerking off on that ego snow for a change. You might even find you like it.

Jonathon turns to her, wiping the powder from his nose with the back of his hand.

JONATHON
I don’t get any other complaints.

Hannah starts to get dressed. She is casual.

HANNAH
I think I’m pregnant.

Jonathon looks sharply at her.

JONATHON
What? How? You’re not on the pill?

HANNAH
I fucked up.

JONATHON
Jesus. You sound like a bloody teenager.

Hannah stays silent as she continues dressing. Jonathon starts to fret.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
This is all I need.
Hannah snaps at him.

HANNAH
Hey, I didn’t say I wanted it either. Why don’t you have it.

JONATHON
How do you know it’s mine?

This stings. Hannah glares at him.

Jonathon is infuriated.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
There’s no way I’m having another kid.

Hannah zips up her skirt and turns to leave. She is clearly hurt by his reaction.

Jonathon catches her by the arm.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
Do you hear me?

Hannah yanks her arm away.

HANNAH
You’re a jerk, you know that.

She walks out of the door.

Jonathon does another line of coke.

103. INT. MARTHA’S ROOM. DAY

Tamdar lies awkwardly on top of Martha, postcoital.

Martha is frustrated. She wrestles for him to get off her.

MARTHA
I thought you were a real man.

Tamdar looks ashamed. He stands, pulls up his trousers, and leaves Martha’s room.

104. INT. MR BRANNIGAN’S KITCHEN. DAY

It is raining. Mr Brannigan stands by his kitchen window looking out at the upturned blue Frisbee collecting rain in his garden.
Jonathon sits at the kitchen table, struggling to feed his son some take-away Thai food. Charlie is being difficult. He pulls away from the spoon and spits out any food that has managed to make it into his mouth.

Jonathon is frustrated.

JONATHON
Charlie, stop it.

Charlie continues to struggle. Jonathon takes him firmly by the arm and looks him straight in the eyes.

JONATHON (CONT'D.)
Stop it!

Charlie squeals in equal frustration, flailing his arms around his head.

Jonathon is overwhelmed. He sits back in his chair and drops the spoon onto the table as he watches his distressed son fitting.

The class is finished.

Tamdar waits until the other students have left before approaching Hannah.

TAMDAR
Are you hungry?

Hannah picks up her things.

HANNAH
I’m always hungry. Haven’t you noticed the size of my thighs?

Tamdar laughs.

Hannah teases him as they start to walk out of the room.

HANNAH (CONT'D.)
See you’re not supposed to laugh at that. You should lie and tell me my thighs are voluptuous or something.

TAMDAR
Compared to African women you are very small.

Hannah switches off the lights.
HANNAH
Oh good. So I can stop sucking
my stomach in around you then.

She shuts the door behind them.

107. INT. CHARLIE’S BEDROOM. NIGHT

We see Charlie asleep in his bed. His mouth is still
covered with the remains of his failed dinner and he is in
the same soiled clothes. Jonathon sits on the edge of the
bed, his head in his hands.

108. INT. RUNDOWN FLAT. NIGHT

Tamdar is cooking Hannah a traditional African dish of red
beans, couscous and flat bread in his dated open plan
kitchen. He is a competent cook.

Tamdar walks onto the outside balcony corridor of the block
of flats and picks some fresh herbs he has grown in a small
pot.

He returns to the kitchen and finely chops the herbs, adding
them to some dry ones that he has roasted and ground
in a mortar and pestle.

Hannah watches him with admiration, a glass of red wine in
hand.

HANNAH
I don’t understand how anyone
can be bothered cooking.

Tamdar holds up the mortar and pestle to her face.

TAMDAR
Smell.

Hannah is pleasantly surprised by the aroma.

HANNAH
Mmmm...

TAMDAR
It tastes better when you make
it with your own hands.

Hannah smiles at his obvious passion for food.

HANNAH
Yeah but then you have all the
dishes, which just spoil
everything.
Tamdar chuckles at her laziness. He continues working away in the kitchen.

Hannah starts to walk around his dingy flat.

HANNAH
Doesn’t this place get to you?

Tamdar shrugs.

TAMDAR
It’s cheap.

Hannah looks out of the window at the dimly lit housing estate.

HANNAH
It reminds me of one of those places where a dead body goes unnoticed for weeks...you know, until people complain about the smell.

Tamdar glances up at her before returning to his chopping.

TAMDAR
There’s a story that a baby on the third floor once had her nose and upper lip chewed off by a rat while she was sleeping in her cot.

Hannah is horrified.

HANNAH
Urgh...

Tamdar continues.

TAMDAR
Supposedly it was attracted by the smell of milk on her breath.

HANNAH
God. That’s bloody awful.

Tamdar agrees.

Hannah looks back out of the window.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
Which neighbours keep you up?

Tamdar points to the right wall. The neighbours are quiet tonight.
Tamdar places a large plate onto a colourfully laid table and motions for Hannah to sit down as he returns to the kitchen to collect one last dish.

Hannah takes a seat.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
So if you pass this English exam will your qualification be recognised here?

Tamdar arrives at the table carrying the dish which is obviously too hot for his bare hands. He places it on the table and waves his hand to remove the heat.

TAMDAR
I also have to repeat some study.

Tamdar sits down and they start eating.

HANNAH
Mmmm...this is good.

Tamdar is pleased.

They continue eating for a while.

Hannah looks back to him.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
You’d pass the exam.

Tamdar is doubtful.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
Will you sit it this year?

Tamdar is unsure.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
You should. I mean, you can’t stay in that miserable clinic, cleaning up after people. It must drive you crazy.

Tamdar agrees.

They continue eating.

109. INT. RUNDOWN FLAT. NIGHT

Hannah and Tamdar have finished their meal and another bottle of red wine.
Hannah is looking through an envelope full of well-fingered photos that have yellowed with age while Tamdar plucks away on his guitar, occasionally commenting on the photos.

**TAMDAR**
My father, Tafadzwa.

We see the photo is of an athletic looking man with his shirt off standing next to a Ute.

The second photo we see is of Tamdar as a young boy and two slightly older boys who have their arms around him, smiling.

**TAMDAR (CONTD.)**
Jjunju and Mutoh, my brothers.

Hannah continues through the photos. The next photo is of a young African woman glancing shyly at the camera.

**TAMDAR (CONTD.)**
My wife, Junita.

Hannah lingers on the photo for a moment.

**HANNAH**
Is she still in Somalia?

Tamdar’s face tightens. He stops playing the guitar and leans it against the table.

**TAMDAR**
She did not want to leave her family...

Tamdar stands, picks up their dirty plates and walks towards the kitchen.

**TAMDAR (CONTD.)**
...but she will come soon.

Hannah notices doubt in Tamdar’s voice but she can see that it pains him and stops probing.

Tamdar rinses their plates as Hannah comes to the last photo of his mother.

She inspects the photo closely as Tamdar sits back down.

**HANNAH**
Is this your mum?

Tamdar nods.

**HANNAH (CONTD.)**
You’ve got the same shaped face as her.
Tamdar likes this observation.

They remain silent for a long moment. Hannah carefully places the photos back into the envelope and hands it back to Tamdar, who watches her with interest.

TAMDAR
Why can’t you swim?

Hannah shrugs.

HANNAH
We lived on the beach when I was growing up. There was this long dirt track from our front garden that went right up to the water, but I never went in.

She smiles as she recalls.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
I used to race my dad along the track on my bike...

She lifts her hands up like she’s flying.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
...with no hands of course. I’d close my eyes for a few seconds, listen to the waves and see how far I could push myself, you know. I loved that feeling of floating through the air. That was until I fell. See...

She opens her mouth to reveal a chip in her front tooth.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
...marked for life.

Tamdar grins.

SFX: We hear the early morning birds sing outside.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
What time is it?

Tamdar leans back in his chair and glances towards the microwave in the kitchen, surprised at the late hour.

TAMDAR
Three o’clock.

HANNAH
Perfect.

Hannah stands and walks into Tamdar’s kitchen. She returns with a large saucepan.
Tamdar watches her, perplexed.

Hannah walks towards the wall he shares with his noisy neighbours and gives Tamdar a big grin.

Tamdar is still at a loss.

The rare early morning silence is shattered as Hannah starts gently striking the saucepan against the wall in a rhythmical pattern, like a bed thumping against it. The strikes slowly become louder. She paces them with shrilling sexual moans as though she and Tamdar are in the midst of wild sex.

Tamdar watches Hannah. He likes the fire in her.

The neighbours have been woken up. The husband pounds on the wall.

Hannah and Tamdar both start laughing.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
Have a go.

Tamdar is a bit hesitant.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
Go on, it’s good for the soul.

Tamdar joins her. He pulls the saucepan from her hand and gives his retort, grunting and groaning as he smacks the saucepan against the wall. He seems extremely liberated for a moment. Hannah continues alongside him.

SFX: Suddenly there is a mighty hammering on Tamdar’s front door.

Tamdar and Hannah look at each other in fits of laughter.

Hannah motions for Tamdar to stay back.

HANNAH
Let me do it.

Tamdar shakes his head.

TAMDAR
He’ll go.

Hannah ignores Tamdar and walks towards the door.

Tamdar wonders what she is up to now. He makes himself scarce in the kitchen.

Hannah switches off the light, strips off all of her clothes and gives herself bed hair.
SFX: The neighbour knocks loudly again.

As Hannah passes the dining table on her way to the door we see her take a sharp bread knife. She conceals the knife behind the door as she slowly pulls it open, peering out with sleepy eyes.

The stout neighbour stands enraged in the outside corridor wearing tracksuit pants and a singlet. He is stunned to find Hannah alone, naked and uninhibited in the darkness. This breaks his wrath.

Tamdar also cannot believe his eyes. From the kitchen he admires Hannah’s naked silhouette.

HANNAH
What do you want?

The man looks past Hannah into the dark flat, searching for the source of the noise. His eyes come back to Hannah, baffled.

MAN
Are you alone?

HANNAH
What does it look like?

The man’s eyes trace Hannah’s body. He lingers on her crotch.

MAN
Where’s the fella that lives here?

HANNAH
What do you want?

From the man’s lustful expression it is clear what he wants. He adjusts his swelling member and smirks at Hannah.

Hannah smiles sweetly back at him. She speaks with an unsettling calmness.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
I don’t get guys like you. You must know you’re repulsive, yet you seem to think it’s a privilege for a woman if you so much as spit in her direction.

The neighbour was not expecting this dressing down. His smug smile fades.

MAN
Watch it slut.

Tamdar looks on, unsure of what to do.
Hannah lets out a laugh.

HANNAH

Or what?

She raises her voice and steps towards the man, the knife still concealed behind the door.

HANNAH (CONTD.)

What are you going to do?

The man is taken aback by her bravado. He shakes his head.

MAN

You crazy bitch.

He heads back to his flat.

Hannah steps into the outside corridor, calling after him.

HANNAH

Stop making all that fucking noise.

Tamdar hastily moves towards Hannah and takes the knife from her.

TAMDAR

Jesus Hannah.

Hannah laughs as Tamdar drags her back into the flat.

They wrestle playfully until Tamdar pulls her naked body strongly against him. Hannah stops laughing. Tamdar looks down at her breasts with intense desire. He lifts his hand and slowly but firmly pinches one of her nipples. Hannah likes his confidence.

Tamdar clutches Hannah’s buttocks. He picks her up and moves her passionately against the front door. They kiss intensively before making their way down to the floor.

Tamdar takes Hannah’s arms and pins them above her head, holding her wrists down with one hand as he begins to gently tease her breasts with his mouth. Hannah’s face is flushed, she twists her body with pleasure. From her POV we watch Tamdar enjoying her body.

Tamdar lifts his mouth away for a moment and looks down at Hannah in her restrained state. This stops him in his tracks. He slowly loosens his grip on Hannah’s wrists and sits up.

Hannah is baffled.

HANNAH

What’s wrong?
Tamdar is conflicted.

    TAMDAR
    It’s late.

Hannah, still lying awkwardly on the floor, repeats his justification in bewilderment.

    HANNAH
    It’s late?

Tamdar stands and starts to clear the table.

Hannah sits up slowly.

She begins to get dressed as she glances after Tamdar who walks into the kitchen.

110.  EXT. DIRT TRACK. FBACK. DAY

SFX: We hear the ocean.

In the orange afternoon light and from young Hannah's POV as she rides her bike, we see a pair of men's 70s style flared trouser legs, riding a bicycle along the dirt track beside us.

111.  INT. MR BRANNIGAN’S KITCHEN. DAY

Mr Brannigan is washing dishes. Something through his kitchen window catches his attention.

We see Isabelle climbing his high fence to fetch her brother’s frisbee.

Mr Brannigan smiles at her boldness. He is pleased to see her again. He notices her skirt creeping up her thigh as she struggles to lift herself over the crest of the fence. This seems to stir up something inside of him.

Isabelle misjudges her footing and falls suddenly to the ground, hitting her head hard and losing consciousness in his garden.

Mr Brannigan is fretful, unsure of what to do. He rushes to the back door and opens it.

112.  EXT. MR BRANNIGAN’S GARDEN. DAY

Mr Brannigan takes a step into the garden. As he does so his breathing speeds up and the garden starts to spin around him.

He hastily returns to the safety of the house.
Mr Brannigan remains in the open doorway, staring out at Isabelle who lies a few meters from him, still not moving. He is conflicted. He considers trying to reach her again but his anxiety paralyses him.

After what seems like a lifetime Isabelle regains consciousness. She sits up slowly rubbing her head. She stands brushing herself off. She notices Mr Brannigan in the doorway and smiles at him.

ISABELLE
I hit my head.

Mr Brannigan nods.

MR BRANNIGAN
Are you hurt?

Isabelle thinks about this for a moment.

ISABELLE
Not really. I hit it all the time.

She laughs.

Mr Brannigan also laughs, relieved.

Isabelle picks up the frisbee. She looks at him with her big brown eyes.

ISABELLE
Our neighbour said that you’re a bad guy. Is that true?

Mr Brannigan likes her candidness but wishes she were asking him a different question. His eyes drop to the ground. He takes a moment to answer.

MR BRANNIGAN
I’ve done some bad things.

Isabelle empathises with him.

ISABELLE
And some good things?

Mr Brannigan smiles at her astuteness.

MR BRANNIGAN
I guess.

Isabelle motions to his strange positioning in the doorway.

ISABELLE
Don’t you like your garden?
MR BRANNIGAN
I prefer to stay inside.

Isabelle finds this amusing.

ISABELLE
You’re strange.

Mr Brannigan nods.

ISABELLE (CONTD.)
People say I’m strange too.

They remain quiet for a moment, smiling at one another. Isabelle motions that she has to leave.

ISABELLE (CONTD.)
Mum will get worried.

Mr Brannigan nods. He steps aside slightly.

MR BRANNIGAN
Come through the house. You don’t want to fall again.

Isabelle looks at him thankfully, a big grin on her face.

ISABELLE
Okay.

She follows him inside.

113. INT. HANNAH'S APARTMENT. NIGHT

Hannah is typing away at her laptop.

SFX: The phone rings.

ANSWERING MACHINE
Hi this is Hannah. Leave a message.

ANSWERING MACHINE
JONATHON (O.S.) (FILT.)
Are you there?

Hannah looks at the machine.

JONATHON (O.S.) (FILT.)
Come on pick up the phone. I need to blow off some steam.

Hannah does not move.

Jonathon hangs up.

Hannah walks towards the machine and deletes the message.
114. EXT. STREET. NIGHT

Hannah and Tamdar walk along a quiet back street in conversation. They share a joint.

Tamdar looks up and notices that they are walking past a small public outdoor swimming pool. Hannah notices this too.

115. EXT. OUTDOOR SWIMMING POOL. NIGHT

Hannah and Tamdar stand over a shallow 25-meter swimming pool, looking into the water. Behind them we see a large fence, which they have obviously just scaled. The pool is dark but for some streetlights illuminating areas of the water.

HANNAH
You first.

They glance at each other and laugh at their mutual fear.

116. EXT. OUTDOOR SWIMMING POOL. NIGHT

Tamdar, wearing only his underwear, now stands in the shallow end of the pool. The water barely comes up to his waist yet he looks nervous.

It is cold. The heat steams off Tamdar’s body.

Hannah stands on the top step of the pool in her knickers and bra. She hesitates to enter the water.

Hannah takes another step down into the water as Tamdar wades a little further into the pool.

Tamdar glances back and sees the terror in Hannah’s eyes as she looks down at the water, frozen.

117. INT. THE BRANNIGAN’S BATHROOM. PBACK. NIGHT

From young Hannah’s POV we are pushed into her mother’s murky bath water.

118. EXT. OUTDOOR SWIMMING POOL. NIGHT

Tamdar decides to return, and offers Hannah an arm for support. She takes up his offer and begins to descend slowly into the water.
Hannah holds tightly onto Tamdar, who now also appears thankful for the company. As they go a little deeper into the dark pool, Hannah's breathing increases.

After a few more steps, she panics.

HANNAH
I can't do this. It's getting too deep.

Tamdar pulls her a little closer.

TAMDAR
Close your eyes.

Hannah feels the warmth and power of Tamdar's strong body. She looks up at him anxiously.

HANNAH
What?

Tamdar closes his eyes.

TAMDAR
It's just like riding your bike.

Hannah is now only a few centimetres from Tamdar's face, which she closely observes. Tamdar opens his eyes slowly and smiles at her. The desire between them is palpable. Their lips linger close to one another.

After a moment Hannah shifts her eyes and realises that Tamdar has slowly taken them deeper into the pool. She now stands stunned with the water up around her chest. Somehow the panic has left her. Tamdar grins back at her.

119.  INT. MR BRANNIGAN'S LOUNGEROOM. DAY

Mr Brannigan sits watching t.v.

Hannah walks out of the kitchen with her empty grocery box and some cleaning products.

HANNAH
I'll see you next week then.

Her father nods, not looking her way.

As Hannah reaches the front door she notices the blue frisbee sitting on the lounge room table. She glances back at her father with concern.

120.  INT. JONATHON'S LOUNGEROOM. DAY

Charlie has again been placed too close to the television.
Jonathon is on his mobile, pacing around his lounge room, which is unfamiliarly dishevelled.

CANDICE, an elderly Greek woman who wears an apron, is cleaning the room.

**JONATHON**
(into phone)
Sarah it’s me again. Look I told you I couldn’t keep him any longer. I need to get to work.

Jonathon glances at his son. He turns his back on him and drops his voice slightly.

**JONATHON (CONTD.)**
(into phone)
Where the fuck are you?

121. INT. HANNAH’S BEDROOM. NIGHT

It is dark but we can make out the shape of the coffin, which still lies in its recent hiding spot under Hannah’s bed.

We pan up to see Hannah cannot sleep.

SFX: We again hear that she is haunted by the sounds of the car accident.

Hannah picks up the phone and dials a number.

122. EXT. JUNGLE. FBACK. DAY

SFX: We hear distorted sounds of war zone and shouting.

We return to Tamdar’s nightmare.

We see young Tamdar kneeling watching his mother’s assault.

The leader of the rebels steps back from her, doing up his trousers. He turns and leers menacingly towards Tamdar, calling something out to him in Somali. The other stoned rebels laugh.

Tamdar starts to shake his head, trembling.

The man’s smirk fades. He calls out to the young boy who cocks the gun directly in Tamdar’s face threatening to shoot him if he does not obey.

The leader again calls out to Tamdar motioning towards his mother who has now sat herself up in the shallow water and pleads for Tamdar to spare his own life by doing what the rebel commands.
We are tight on his mother’s face and then Tamdar’s. The love between them is strong.

SFX: We hear a phone ringing.

123. INT. RUNDOWN FLAT. NIGHT

Tamdar awakes in a sweat.

He realises that his phone is ringing between the shrilling screams of the neighbour’s baby.

124. EXT. OUTDOOR SWIMMING POOL. NIGHT

Tamdar and Hannah stand in the shallow end of the dark pool.

They begin to lower down into the water, eventually going under for a moment.

We are under water with them.

Hannah has her eyes closed.

SFX: The swirling water moving gently around their bodies creates a peaceful echo.

This is juxtaposed with:

125. INT. THE BRANNIGAN’S BATHROOM. FBACK. NIGHT

Young Hannah thrashes around frantically in the bath water as her mother holds her down.

126. EXT. OUTDOOR SWIMMING POOL. NIGHT

Still under water with Tamdar, Hannah now opens her eyes.

Everything appears slightly in slow motion as she watches her and Tamdar’s limbs move gently below the surface.

The two re-emerge. We see the experience has changed something in them.

127. INT. JONATHON’S LOUNGEROOM. DAY

We see Jonathon have a few lines of coke off his kitchen bench. He tries Sarah again on his mobile. She does not answer.
128. INT. MARTHA’S ROOM. DAY  

Hannah has come to visit her mother. She glances into Martha’s empty room.

129. INT. CLINIC CORRIDOR. DAY

Hannah approaches Jason who sits at a counter looking through a car magazine.

HANNAH
Do you know where my mother is?

Jason sneers.

JASON
With her boyfriend.

Hannah ignores his comment.

Jason points down the corridor.

JASON (CONTD.)
Left at the end of this corridor and it’s the last door on your right.

Hannah motions to the car magazine.

HANNAH
You reading that or just jerking off at all the pretty pictures?

Hannah walks off down the corridor.

Jason is annoyed that she had the last laugh.

130. INT. DARK CLINIC CORRIDOR. DAY

Hannah continues down a second dark corridor, which appears to have had a power shortage. A few fluorescent ceiling lights flicker on and off.

Hannah wonders whether she has come the wrong way as she moves deeper into the darkness in front of her.

She eventually sees a room with some light streaming into the corridor.

As she walks towards the open door, we hear the sound of water running.
131. INT. CLINIC SHOWER ROOM. DAY

From Hannah’s POV we see Martha sitting naked on a plastic bed in the shower still wearing a neck brace. Although her skin and breasts sag, she is naturally beautiful.

Tamdar stands over her with his back to Hannah, supporting Martha’s with one hand while washing her body with a portable showerhead.

Martha becomes aroused as Tamdar washes her. She closes her eyes with pleasure.

This arresting sight stops Hannah dead in her tracks.

132. INT. THE BRANNIGAN’S CORRIDOR. FBACK. NIGHT

From young Hannah’s POV we again see Martha, during her lovemaking with the bearded man, turn and glare at us with a look that could turn us to stone.

133. INT. CLINIC SHOWER ROOM. DAY

Martha is now staring at us with this same cautionary look, daring Hannah to interrupt her and Tamdar.

Hannah stares helplessly at Tamdar, who is unaware of her presence.

She spins on her heel and rushes away from the disturbing scene.

134. INT. CLINIC CORRIDOR. DAY

Hannah rushes past Jason who looks to where she has come from and laughs knowingly.

135. INT. JONATHON’S BATHROOM. NIGHT

Jonathon is awkwardly attempting to bath Charlie in his marble bathroom. Charlie’s long limbs hang over the edge of the bathtub. Jonathon uses a flannel to rub down his son’s body. He cups his hand over Charlie’s face to stop the shampoo from running into his absent eyes.

136. INT. BAR. NIGHT

Hannah, Jane and Felix are seen in a busy bar.

A stage is set up for karaoke.
Hannah, wearing a revealing dress with a pair of cowboy boots, looks intoxicated as she steps up onto the stage. She does a little curtsy as the crowd cheers her.

Hannah cups her hands around the microphone as she begins. We hear her sing Ani Di Franco's song, Grey. She is a competent singer.

HANNAH
(into microphone)
The sky is grey, the sand is grey, and the ocean is grey.

The crowd whistles as Hannah continues.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
(into microphone)
And I feel right at home, in this stunning monochrome, alone in my way. I smoke and I drink and every time I blink I have a tiny dream.

137. INT. CLINIC SHOWER ROOM. FB. NIGHT

We return to Tamdar showering Martha. She smiles at him believing he means to pleasure her.

We continue to hear Hannah singing.

HANNAH (O.S.) (CONTD.)
But as bad as I am, I’m proud of the fact that I’m worse than I seem.

Martha takes control of the showerhead and brings it in between her legs, lying back on the bed in enjoyment as the water hits the spot.

HANNAH (O.S.) (CONTD.)
What kind of paradise am I looking for? I’ve got everything I want but still I want more.

Martha reaches up for Tamdar to come on top of her, the water spilling down her body.

HANNAH (O.S.) (CONTD.)
Maybe some tiny shiny thing will wash up on the shore.

Tamdar's face turns grave.

HANNAH (O.S.) (CONTD.)
You walk through my walls like a ghost on tv, you penetrate me.
Tamdar takes the showerhead from Martha and turns off the water. Martha feels disgraced as he begins to clinically dry her off with a towel.

138. INT. BAR. NIGHT

Hannah is still singing.

    HANNAH (CONTD.)
    (into microphone)
    And my little pink heart is on
    its little brown raft, floating
    out to sea. And what can I say
    but I’m wired this way, and
    you’re wired to me.

A DARK HAIRRED MAN sits in the corner of the bar watching Hannah.

139. EXT. CLINIC FOYER. NIGHT

It is raining hard.

Tamdar stands undercover near the entrance.

    HANNAH (O.S.) (CONTD.)
    And what can I do but wallow in
    you, unintentionally.

From the entrance Jason runs past Tamdar and jumps into Brent’s waiting Subaru.

Brent and Tay give Tamdar a threatening stare as they drive past him slowly.

    HANNAH (O.S.) (CONTD.)
    What kind of paradise am I
    looking for?

Tay sticks his hand out of the window and pretends to shoot Tamdar.

Tamdar pulls up the collar of his jacket and heads off into the rain.

    HANNAH (O.S.) (CONTD.)
    I’ve got everything I want but
    still I want more.

140. INT. CHARLIE’S BEDROOM. NIGHT

Charlie is asleep. Jonathon sits over his son, his face disturbed as he watches him for a long moment. Charlie looks peaceful.
We continue to hear Hannah singing.

    HANNAH (O.S.) (CONTD.)
    Maybe some tiny shiny key will
    wash up on the shore.

141. INT. BAR. NIGHT

Hannah is still singing.

    HANNAH (CONTD.)
    (into microphone)
    Regretfully, I guess I’ve got
    three simple things to say. Why
    me...

142. INT. CHARLIE’S BEDROOM. NIGHT

Jonathon lifts a nearby pillow and begins to move to cover Charlie’s face with it.

    HANNAH (O.S.) (CONTD.)
    ...why this now, why this way?

Jonathon closes his eyes as he slowly lowers the pillow.

    HANNAH (O.S.) (CONTD.)
    With overtones ringing,
    undertows pulling away. Under a
    sky that is grey, on sand that
    is grey, by an ocean that’s
    grey.

Jonathon seems to realise the depravity of his actions. He opens his eyes. He can’t do it.

Jonathon pulls the pillow back and hastily leaves the room.

143. INT. RUNDOWN FLAT. NIGHT

Tamdar has arrived home. He is drenched.

SFX: We hear the neighbours are fighting again.

Tamdar goes to switch on the light but realises the power is out.

    HANNAH (O.S.) (CONTD.)
    What kind of paradise am I
    looking for? I’ve got everything
    I want but still I want more.

Tamdar throws his wet jacket onto the couch with frustration, slumping down next to it in the darkness.
144. INT. BAR. NIGHT

Hannah has finished the song. Everyone applauds.

Felix whistles.

Hannah laughs as she makes her way back through the crowd towards Felix and Jane.

The MC calls up the next singer.

MC
(inside microphone)
Okay next up we have Peter Jenicho.

Felix hands Hannah her drink as she reaches them.

SFX: The music for ABBA’s, Dancing Queen starts up.

Hannah calls out to Felix over the noise.

HANNAH
It’s your song.

He grins back at her.

Hannah starts to sway her hips provocatively to the music.

Jane sits down on a stool watching her, secretly wishing she had the confidence to dance so freely.

Peter starts to sing. He is clearly tone deaf. He hits a painfully bad note.

Felix winces in reaction to the note.

FELIX
Oooh Fuck.

Felix is engrossed by Peter’s performance.

FELIX (CONTD.)
It’s so bad, I can’t look away.

Jane laughs.

Hannah, heavy-eyed, stumbles slightly as she dances.

Her dark haired admirer notices this. He says something to a male friend who glances in Hannah’s direction.

145. INT. BAR. NIGHT

It is later in the night. There are only a few people left in the bar.
SFX: Someone is singing a love ballad on stage.

Hannah is talking to tone deaf Peter and his friends.

Felix calls to Hannah over the music.

   FELIX
   You want to share a cab?

Hannah struggles to hear him.

   HANNAH
   What?

Felix raises his voice.

   FELIX
   Let’s go.

Hannah slurs her words.

   HANNAH
   We still haven’t done our song.

   FELIX
   Next time, I’m beat.

Peter hands Hannah a shooter, which she downs immediately. She waves Felix off.

   HANNAH
   Go then.

Felix notices her state.

   FELIX
   Come home with me.

Hannah gives him a drunken grin.

   HANNAH
   Thought you didn’t like girls.

Felix is too tired for her sarcasm. He takes her gently by the arm and starts to pull her towards the exit.

Hannah is irritated. She struggles.

   HANNAH
   What are you doing?

Felix loosens his grip and stops walking.

   FELIX
   You don’t want to stay here.

Hannah angrily shakes off his hand from her arm.
HANNAH
How the hell do you know what I want?

Peter notices their struggle. He moves over to them, trying to play the hero.

PETER
Everything alright?

Felix fobs him off.

FELIX
Go murder another song mate.

Peter tries to think of a clever retort.

HANNAH
I’ll tell you what I don’t want. I don’t want to go home with a fucking lonely fag, okay.

Peter finds this amusing. Felix is offended.

As soon as the words have left Hannah’s mouth she regrets them.

FELIX
Whatever.

Felix turns and disappears into the crowd. Hannah calls after him.

HANNAH
Felix, come on, you know it’s just the Tequila talking.

Felix ignores her and continues walking.

PETER
Leave him.

Peter and Hannah walk back to Peter’s friends. She catches the dark haired man and his friend watching her from across the room.

146. INT. MONTAGE. NIGHT

MONTAGE: We see Hannah cockily approach the dark haired man. She begins to dance in between him and his friend; we see Tamdar struggling to sleep; we watch Jonathon snort a line of coke off his kitchen bench, and another; we see the dark haired man lustfully kissing Hannah against the dirty wall of the men’s toilets. He moves her into a cubicle and attempts to undress her. Hannah teasingly ducks away from him. He pursues her as his friend joins them in the cubicle; Jonathon’s nose starts to bleed profusely. He reaches for a tea towel and tries to clean up the mess;
Hannah is now on her knees giving the dark haired stranger a blowjob. His friend also starts to undo his trousers.

147. INT. HANNAH’S BEDROOM. DAY

Hannah lies in bed still in her outfit from the previous night, including her cowboy boots. She wakes with a nasty hangover. Her head seems to weigh a ton as she peels herself off the bed to sit up.

Hannah tries to get her bearings. She reaches for her handbag, which lies upturned on her floor, and checks that all of her belongings are there - her purse, her keys, her mobile phone.

As Hannah takes out her mobile it triggers a memory:

148. INT. MEN’S TOILETS FBACK. NIGHT

MOBILE PHONE FOOTAGE: We hear the sound of a mobile phone camera taking shots and see blurred fragmented images of Hannah on her knees in the toilet cubicle giving the dark haired man a blow job as his friend takes photos of her with his phone.

This is intercut with:

149. INT. HANNAH’S BEDROOM. DAY

SFX: We continue to hear the sound of the mobile camera as Hannah remembers.

She grimaces with each click.

150. INT. MEN’S TOILETS FBACK. NIGHT

MOBILE PHONE FOOTAGE: The dark haired man now taunts Hannah with the mobile phone as his friend undresses her. Hannah stumbles around the cubicle, laughing as she tries to get away from him, but the man catches her and pushes her against the cubicle wall.

END OF MOBILE FOOTAGE.

151. INT. HANNAH’S BEDROOM. DAY

The memory disturbs Hannah. She looks remorseful.
152. INT. JONATHON’S FRONT DOOR. DAY

Hannah still dressed in the same clothes as the previous night stands at Jonathon’s front door. She has just rung the doorbell.

After a moment Jonathon’s scantily dressed lover from the earlier scene answers. She is a little rough around the edges.

WOMAN
Yeah?

Hannah glares at her. Jonathon calls out from another room.

JONATHON (O.S.)
Who is it?

The woman looks at Hannah’s boots.

WOMAN
Some cowgirl.

Hannah tries to enter Jonathon’s apartment but the woman pushes her back like a bouncer. She smirks at Hannah.

WOMAN (CONTD.)
Did I invite you in?

Hannah is seething. Without warning she spits at the woman. It hits her straight in the face. Jonathon appears just in time to witness this.

The woman brings her hands to her face, stunned.

Hannah turns on her heel and leaves quickly down the stairwell. The woman is right behind her.

WOMAN (CONTD.)
You’re fucking dead bitch.

Jonathon chases them. He manages to catch the woman by the arm.

JONATHON
I’ll deal with it.

The woman tries to pull herself free.

WOMAN
She fucking spat on me.

Jonathon pulls her back more forcefully.

JONATHON
I’ll deal with it.

Jonathon legs it down the stairs after Hannah.
He catches up with her a few storeys down.

JONATHON
What the fuck’s wrong with you?

Hannah claws at him trying to break free.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
Calm down, calm down.

153. INT. JONATHON’S LOUNGE ROOM. DAY
Jonathon passes money to Candice while giving her instructions. She glances towards Charlie who is watching cartoons and nods reluctantly.

154. EXT. OLD COAST HIGHWAY. NIGHT
Hannah and Jonathon, not wearing helmets, are on Jonathon’s motorbike speeding along the old coast highway near the beach. They are both high, enjoying the wind against their faces.

Jonathon calls back to Hannah over the engine.

JONATHON
I need a drink.

Hannah struggles to hear him.

HANNAH
What?

He raises his voice.

JONATHON
I need a drink.

155. INT. THE BRANNIGAN’S LOUNGE ROOM. NIGHT
Hannah and Jonathon enter the front door of the Brannigan’s family home. Moving boxes line the walls of the half empty lounge room.

Hannah heads towards a kitchen door.

Jonathon, chewing madly on some gum, takes in the house.

JONATHON
Aww...the family home.

He follows Hannah.
JONATHON (CONTD.)
This isn’t exactly what I had in mind.

HANNAH
There’re no bars around here. Trust me, if there were my mum would’ve found them.

156. INT. THE BRANNIGAN’S KITCHEN. NIGHT

They enter a kitchen we recognise from an earlier flashback scene. It is still stuck in the seventies, both in style and décor.

SFX: We can hear the ocean.

Through the window Jonathon sees a small dimly lit track leading to the water.

JONATHON
Pretty cool place.

HANNAH
Do you want to buy it?

A cuckoo clock hangs on the wall. Jonathon stands next to it as Hannah opens a liquor cabinet.

She pours them a whisky each and hands one to Jonathon who downs it in one go. Hannah does the same and pours them another.

JONATHON
Must be worth a bomb by now.

Hannah picks up a half empty box, carelessly pouring her mother’s delicate crockery onto the kitchen floor. A few items smash from the impact.

Jonathon laughs at her ruthlessness.

A small cuckoo from the clock suddenly appears and sings. It is ten o’clock.

Jonathon jumps back in fright.

JONATHON
Fuck!

Hannah takes the bottle of whisky and the box and exits the kitchen.

Jonathon challenges the cuckoo. He moves from side to side, arms up like a sparring boxer as it finishes its last calls.
157. INT. THE BRANNIGAN'S LOUNGE ROOM. NIGHT

Hannah and Jonathon head up a staircase.

158. INT. THE BRANNIGAN'S HALLWAY. NIGHT

They now walk down a long hallway. We recognize it from the earlier flashback scenes.

Jonathon glances into the bathroom, again recognisable from the earlier flashback scenes.

They reach a door at the end of the hall and enter.

159. INT. HANNAH'S OLD BEDROOM. NIGHT

They walk into Hannah's childhood room. Jonathon looks around it with little interest. Hannah opens her cupboard and places a few remaining items into the box.

Jonathon glances at a family photo stuck on the wall.

JONATHON
Someone forget a Christmas present one year?

We see one family member's face has been cut out of the photo.

Hannah looks up.

HANNAH
That's my grandad. My mum and him didn't get along.

Jonathon laughs.

JONATHON
What, so she just cuts him out of every photo?

Hannah shrugs.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
That's rough.

Hannah sits down on the bed. Jonathon picks up some juggling balls and starts to juggle.

HANNAH
Why don't you and your mum get along?
JONATHON
She says I have problems.

HANNAH
Why?

JONATHON
Because I sent back all the letters she wrote us after she left.

Jonathon replaces the balls.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
She broke my little brother’s heart.

HANNAH
I didn’t know you have a brother.

Jonathon sits down on the bed next to her.

JONATHON
Had a brother.

HANNAH
What happened to him?

JONATHON
He OD’d on his 21st birthday. My dad was never the same after that.

Jonathon picks up Hannah’s old teddy bear.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
Is this why you brought me here?

He holds up the teddy like a trophy next to his facetious expression.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
To have a little therapy session with Mr Bear?

Hannah realises the futility of her attempt to connect with him. She pulls the photo from the wall, places it into the box and walks out of the bedroom.

160. INT. THE BRANNIGAN’S CORRIDOR. NIGHT

Back in the corridor, Jonathon trails behind Hannah who stops underneath a ceiling manhole.

Hannah uses a pole with a hook on the end to open the manhole and pull down a staircase leading up to the attic.
INT. THE BRANNIGAN’S ATTIC. NIGHT

The attic is damp and dark, apart from some moonlight coming in through a small skylight window.

Hannah goes to switch on the light but the globe has blown.

JONATHON
Man it stinks in here.

HANNAH
It’s from the rain.

Jonathon swigs away at the bottle of whisky as Hannah reaches blindly into the dark and finds her pile of notebooks, which she places into the box that she is carrying.

Jonathon takes the box from Hannah and slowly places it on the ground, pulling her close.

JONATHON
You know, when you stopped returning my calls I realised just how much I would miss fucking you.

He starts to undress Hannah.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
So, as much as I’d like to help you with your housework...

Hannah looks up at him, part illuminated by the moonlight. She wishes he could be right for her even though she knows he is not. She touches his face gently. This intimate gesture unmans Jonathon who looks at Hannah with a painful vulnerability.

He kisses her affectionately for once.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
I need you to let me inside you, okay.

As they kiss Jonathon moves Hannah backwards into the darkness. She makes contact with something. In her aroused state, she takes a second to register, or care.

When she finally glances towards the obstruction around her shoulders, we realise it is a pair of naked feet.

Hannah stops kissing Jonathon and slowly looks up. In the moonlight we see her father hanging naked from a banister. A knocked over chair and crucifix lie nearby.
Jonathon, still kissing Hannah’s neck, takes a moment to notice her disengagement. When he does, he also looks up and backs away, stunned.

In his drug stupor Jonathon lets out a twisted laugh.

**JONATHON**
Jesus...who the fuck’s that?

Hannah does not answer him. She stares up at her father with strange fascination.

Jonathon’s medical side kicks in. He moves hastily towards Mr Brannigan.

**JONATHON (CONTD.)**
We've got to get him down.

Hannah is unresponsive. She watches Jonathon seize the bottom half of her father’s body.

Jonathon awkwardly reaches for the knocked over chair.

**JONATHON**
Give us a fucking hand will you.

**HANNAH**
(quietly)
Don't touch him.

Jonathon continues to struggle with Mr Brannigan’s legs.

Hannah raises her voice.

**HANNAH**
Don't touch him.

Jonathon is confused.

**JONATHON**
He could still have a pulse.

Hannah face is pained. She shakes her head.

Jonathon takes another look at Mr Brannigan and agrees it’s too late.

Hannah's expression turns cold.

**HANNAH**
Go.

Jonathon backs away from Mr Brannigan and walks towards the attic steps.

Halfway down the steps he looks back up at Hannah, who stands guard at her father’s body.
JONATHON
I wasn't here okay.

Jonathon leaves.

Hannah sits down onto a cardboard box near her father.

162. INT. MONTAGE. NIGHT

MONTAGE: Hannah walks unsteadily around her apartment drinking vodka from the bottle; Hannah stands in her bathroom, she picks up a towel and hangs it over the bathroom mirror; Hannah sits down in her empty bath and continues drinking; we watch her pass out in the bath.

163. EXT. DIRT TRACK. FBACK. DAY

SFX: We hear the ocean.

In the orange afternoon light and from young Hannah's POV as she rides her bike, we again see a pair of men's 70s style flared trouser legs, riding a bicycle along the dirt track beside us.

164. INT. CHURCH. DAY

Sunlight shines through the church’s stained glass windows. We recognise the church from the earlier flashback scene of Hannah’s parents’ first meeting.

Hannah sits on a pew staring at the altar.

SFX: The sound of the large church doors opening catches her attention.

Due to the blinding daylight flooding in behind the silhouetted figure, Hannah for a moment believes she is seeing her father. We see a trace of his face on the silhouette. In this magnificent illuminated spectacle, he appears celestial.

Entranced, Hannah stands slowly as the person moves into the church.

The door finally steals the light from behind Jason who pushes Martha, in her wheelchair, into the church.

Hannah realises she is mistaken. She sits back down.

MARTHA
I told you she’d be here.

Jason leaves.
Martha wheels herself closer to her daughter.

They sit in silence.

Martha looks to the stage area where she used to sing in the choir.

MARTHA
Both of our fathers were selfish men.

Martha turns to Hannah to explain.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
The auctioneer says no one wants to buy the house because it needs too much work done. Neither of them ever fixed a fucking thing.

Hannah does not seem to be listening. Martha glances around the rest of the church.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
That aid at the clinic asked after you. You’re not falling in love with him are you?

Hannah ignores her.

Martha glances back at her daughter. She notices something in her eyes.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
Haven’t you seen what they do to women in his country?

Hannah lets out a hopeless laugh.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
I’m just saying, that kind of history...it’s in his blood. He can’t help it.

HANNAH
Why do you hate me?

This catches Martha by surprise.

MARTHA
What a ridiculous thing to say.

Martha tries to avoid the question.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
You’ve been drinking. I can smell it on your breath.
Hannah leans in and desperately tries to get her mother to embrace her by lifting Martha’s arms around herself.

**HANNAH**
Touch me mum, please touch me.

Martha is torn. She sees Hannah’s pain but can’t give her what she needs. She peels off her daughter’s arms from around her neck.

**MARTHA**
For God’s sake Hannah, pull yourself together.

Hannah is devastated. She lets out a high-pitched wail like a young child.

**HANNAH**
You fucking hate me.

Martha finally snaps.

**MARTHA**
Yes, I hate you.

Hannah stops crying.

**MARTHA (CONTD.)**
Are you happy now?

Hannah is not.

**MARTHA (CONTD.)**
No of course you’re not. You’ve never been happy with what I’ve given you...

Hannah can’t believe what she’s hearing. She scoffs.

**MARTHA (CONTD.)**
...you’ve always wanted more. Well I can’t give you any more okay. I can’t. Your father never lifted a finger, he was always here...

She motions to their surroundings.

**MARTHA (CONTD.)**
...trying to save his wretched soul, and now you’re mourning him like he was some kind of bloody saint.

She looks back at Hannah.
MARTHA (CONTD.)
I did the best I could for you.

This brings Hannah to boiling point.

HANNAH
The best you could. My whole life you let me think I was the reason why dad was never home, when it was you who pushed him away, like you did to grandad.

Martha face becomes strained.

MARTHA
You have no idea what you're talking about.

HANNAH
Explain it to me then.

Martha drops her eyes shamefully. Hannah is exhausted.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
Just tell me the truth for once.

Martha takes a moment to gather the courage.

MARTHA
My father was the first man that I loved. The only man I think I've ever loved...

Hannah looks at her mother, surprised to finally be receiving the information she has longed for.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
But he loved me in a way that I didn’t want him to.

Hannah is stunned by this revelation.

Martha is close to tears.

MARTHA (CONTD.)
When he found out I was pregnant he stopped loving me. He never spoke to me again.

Hannah’s expression turns to dread. Was he her father? She regrets pushing her mother for the truth.

HANNAH
You’re lying.

MARTHA
No.
Hannah won't accept this. She raises her voice.

HANNAH
You’re lying.

Martha shakes her head.

HANNAH
I don’t want to hear anymore of your poisonous bullshit, do you hear me? You’re disgusting.

Martha is deeply wounded by this comment. She goes to slap Hannah hard in the face.

Hannah catches her by the wrist before she manages to make contact. She glares at her mother, before throwing her arm back towards her and walking out of the church.

165. EXT. RUNDOWN FLATS CORRIDOR. DAY

We see Tamdar leave his apartment and pass the woman from next door who is hanging some washing on a small clothes horse in the decrepit outside corridor of the block of flats. She appears to be carrying the weight of the world on her shoulders. Tamdar notices that she has a black eye.

SFX: We hear a commotion.

Tamdar and his neighbour look up to see two officially dressed men and a police officer leading a woman of Middle Eastern descent along the other end of the corridor of the flats towards a stairwell. The woman is protesting loudly. It appears she is being deported. A concerned friend holds the woman’s young son in her arms who is sobbing and reaching out for his mother.

A number of neighbours of varied ethnicity have their heads sticking out of their front doors watching the event.

Tamdar looks on empathetically before heading down another stairwell.

166. INT. HANNAH'S BATHROOM. NIGHT

Hannah opens her bathroom cabinet and removes a small medical box. She opens the lid of the box, which we see contains a few razorblades, ointment and swabs.

Hannah ritualistically pulls up the left sleeve of her pyjamas. Her face is blank as she takes out a razor blade.
MONTAGE: In fast motion, we watch a few days passing. We watch city streets as the light arrives and disappears outside; we see Felix taking Hannah's class; we see Tamdar working in the clinic mopping a patient’s vomit off the floor; we see Martha sitting alone in her room looking out of the window at the rain.

INT. JONATHON’S APARTMENT. LATE AFTERNOON

Jonathon has finished work. He looks exhausted from a long shift.

SFX: His mobile rings as he enters his apartment.

He answers it.

JONATHON
(into phone)
Dr Kingsley.

Candice appears from the kitchen and puts on her coat to leave.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
(into phone)
Hi Joy.
(listens)
Why, who is it?

Jonathon listens. His face falls. He looks towards Candice.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
(into phone)
I...I’ve got my kid here.

Candice takes her coat off again and walks back into the kitchen.

INT. INSIDE PORSCHE. LATE AFTERNOON

Jonathon snorts a small amount of coke off his finger as he drives back to work.

INT. HANNAH'S BEDROOM. LATE AFTERNOON

Hannah, looking painfully hung-over and dressed only in an oversized t-shirt and briefs, lies on her stomach in bed in the dull afternoon light of the room.

Tamdar, in his clinic uniform, sits on the edge of the bed, a bag by his side. He looks towards the window, which is covered by a dark curtain.
TAMDAR
Can I let some light in?

Hannah doesn’t respond.

Tamdar glances at her. He places the bag next to Hannah on the bed.

TAMDAR (CONTD.)
I made you some food.

Hannah sits up and hugs her knees like a young child.

HANNAH
I’m not hungry.

Tamdar watches Hannah tenderly as her lips part revealing her chipped front tooth. He reaches forward and gently traces the chip with his finger.

Hannah is a little surprised to have Tamdar’s finger in her mouth.

Tamdar pulls back and brushes the outline of Hannah’s bottom lip. She looks at him in anguish before leaning in to kiss him.

Tamdar lifts Hannah onto his lap. She looks small in his large stature, like he could crush her with one blow. Hannah wraps her legs around him. They ache for each other’s touch, finally acting on their deep desire for one another.

Hannah grabs blindly at Tamdar’s uniform, pulling his shirt above his head. She begins to caress his hairless chest with her mouth. Tamdar closes his eyes and moves his hands over Hannah’s head, stroking her hair as she kisses him.

Tamdar rolls himself on top of Hannah and removes her briefs. This time he allows himself to be intoxicated by Hannah’s smell and body.

From Hannah’s POV we see Tamdar stroke the inside of her legs and begin to kiss his way up her inner thighs, savouring the softness of her skin.

Hannah experiences intense pleasure as Tamdar performs oral sex on her. She reaches for his hand. He takes her hand and squeezes it tightly.

We see that this eventually becomes all too intimate for Hannah. She pushes Tamdar’s head away and reaches frantically for his trousers.

Tamdar now notices that Hannah just seems to be going through the motions, her blank expression belying her actions.
He tries to get her to slow down.

**TAMDAR**

Hannah...wait.

Hannah begins to undo Tamdar’s trousers.

Tamdar takes her face in his hands, addressing her perfunctory sexual manner.

**TAMDAR (CONTD.)**

You’re not here.

Hannah ignores him and continues to pull down his trousers.

Tamdar becomes anxious as she exposes his flaccid penis. This time he is more forceful, pushing her away.

**TAMDAR (CONTD.)**

Wait!

Hannah is humiliated and done being rejected by Tamdar.

**HANNAH**

Why did you come here?

We can see Tamdar can’t find the words to explain. This frustrates Hannah.

**HANNAH (CONTD.)**

Why?

**TAMDAR**

I was worried about you.

Hannah doesn’t want his sympathy.

**HANNAH**

And what, you wanted to rescue me?

Tamdar pulls his trousers back up and gets off the bed.

Hannah heats up. She follows him, backing him against the wall.

**HANNAH (CONTD)**

Because that’s your thing isn’t it, saving women.

Hannah becomes increasingly more upset.

**HANNAH (CONTD.)**

Isn’t it?

Tamdar’s intense feelings for her are written all over his face. He reaches out for her. Hannah smacks his hand away.
HANNAH (CONTD.)

No.

Tamdar reaches out again.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
Don’t touch me.

Hannah pushes him back hard against the wall.

Tamdar slaps himself across the face a number of times to let out his frustration. He does not want to hurt her.

Hannah yanks the curtain open. The sudden bright light punishes Tamdar's eyes.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
You can’t put the light back into my shitty little life, do you hear me? You can’t rescue me.

Tamdar looks at her point blank. Now it’s his turn to call her bluff.

TAMDAR
Why not? That’s what you wanted from me isn’t it?

Hannah struggles to answer the question. This irritates Tamdar.

TAMDAR (CONTD.)
What do you want?

HANNAH
I don’t know. Okay. But I know I don’t want some fucking martyr who just lets everyone shit all over him.

Tamdar looks down at the ground.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
What is it you’re running from?

She has found Tamdar’s jugular.

TAMDAR
You don’t want to know that.

HANNAH
Try me.

Tamdar is intense. He stares hard at her.

TAMDAR
I’m not your fool.
Tamdar reaches for his shirt, stepping into the additional light in the room.

**HANNAH**

So what, you’re just going to run again?

Hannah now sees a number of severe old scars across Tamdar’s chest and back. She’s never noticed them before. This slows her down.

**HANNAH (CONTD.)**

What...who did that to you?

Tamdar stays silent. He knows what she is referring to. He slips his shirt over his head.

Hannah softens.

**HANNAH (CONTD.)**

I’m sorry I didn’t mean to...

Tamdar grabs Hannah's left arm.

We see she has been busy. Her forearm is a mess. Hannah jerks her arm away in shame, knowing she’s a hypocrite.

Tamdar lets out an angry laugh.

**TAMDAR**

What good is it to have nine lives, when you have one foot in your grave?

They stare heatedly at one another. They are both hurting. Tamdar’s honest face makes Hannah feel foolish.

He walks out.

171. **INT. HOSPITAL MORGUE. NIGHT** 171

A number of bodies lie on trolleys covered by sheets.

Jonathon stands next to JOY, an unkempt middle-aged woman in a medical gown who pulls a body in a body bag out of a trolley compartment.

**JOY**

We didn’t realise you were connected until we got hold of her parents. They’d been holidaying in Europe and didn’t even know about the crash til this morning.
Joy unzips the bag. Jonathon instantly recognises Sarah.

JOY (CONTD.)
I’ll give you a minute.

Joy walks through the swing doors leaving Jonathon alone.

He stares down at Sarah with a deep sadness.

JONATHON
Shit Sare...

172. INT. CLINIC CORRIDOR. NIGHT

Tamdar is coming out of a room pushing the dinner trays trolley.

Down the corridor he sees a matron talking to two police officers. Tamdar recognises Constable Macpherson from the accident. He uses the tall trolley to block himself from their view.

The matron points in his direction and the police officers head down the corridor.

Tamdar leaves the trolley and hurries away.

173. INT. CLINIC FOYER. NIGHT

Tamdar approaches the clinic’s exit where Jason stands guard waiting for him. He approaches Tamdar swiftly. He is stressing and tries to block Tamdar from leaving.

JASON
You better not mention any names to those cops.

This time Tamdar does not back down. He comes powerfully at Jason, his stature forcing Jason back against the counter.

Jason throws his arms up in surrender as he lets Tamdar past.

JASON (CONTD.)
Fuck man, okay, okay.

174. EXT. LANE WAY. NIGHT

We are in a dark lane way. Tamdar is fleeing from the police.

He comes out of the lane way and is clipped by a car, which speeds along a quiet street that meets it.
Tamdar skids across the bonnet and hits the bitumen. He lies motionless.

The car screeches to a halt.

The driver leaves his headlights on and steps out of the car.

We see it is Jonathon. He peers into the darkness assuming to have hit a dog. He whistles but hears no sound.

JONATHON
Where are you, you mutt?

Jonathon moves to the front of the Porsche and notices his dented bonnet is significantly marked with blood.

He hears a shuffle and looks up anxiously to see Tamdar in the darkness, attempting to stand with great difficulty.

JONATHON (CONT'D.)
Oh fuck.

Tamdar cowers in pain looking back at the headlights with a fierce demeanour.

Jonathon tries to explain.

JONATHON (CONT'D.)
You came outta nowhere. I...

Jonathon notices Tamdar’s severely injured his leg.

JONATHON (CONT'D.)
Shit mate, your leg.

Tamdar backs away and starts to hobble off.

JONATHON (CONT'D.)
I'll take you to the hospital. I’m a doctor.

Tamdar disappears back into the night. Jonathon calls out to him.

JONATHON (CONT'D.)
It was an accident mate.

He waits for a moment, looking into the darkness, then returns to his car.

He inspects the bonnet, shocked again by the amount of blood it carries, and looks up to where Tamdar has disappeared.

JONATHON (CONT'D.)
Fuck!
175. **INT. RUNDOWN FLAT. NIGHT**

SFX: The neighbour’s television is turned up ridiculously high. We hear an action scene with gunshots and screeching tyres. The baby is screaming its lungs out.

Tamdar is sitting under the windowsill in the darkness of his flat. He is out of breath.

Tamdar’s movements are sharp and hasty as he looks around the room with paranoia. He is visibly traumatised. His wounded leg seems to be the least of his concerns.

176. **EXT. HANNAH’S APARTMENT. NIGHT**

Hannah meets Jonathon out the front of her apartment building. She looks worse for wear. Jonathon snorts some more coke off his finger.

**JONATHON**

You look like shit.

**HANNAH**

Cheers.

Hannah walks past him.

177. **INT. RUNDOWN BATHROOM. NIGHT**

SFX: The neighbour is now yelling at his wife.

Tamdar is in his bathroom tending to his badly injured leg. He shakes from the shock and pain but his mind seems elsewhere.

178. **EXT. JUNGLE. FBACK. DAY**

We return to Tamdar’s nightmare.

Tamdar’s mother is still pleading for Tamdar to spare his own life by doing what the rebel commands.

179. **EXT. JUNGLE. FBACK. DAY**

Tamdar is now next to his mother, the AK-47 again at his head. His mother lies back into the shallow water and forces a small smile for him, as if giving him permission.

Tamdar moves on top of her. His mother turns her face away from him into the water.
We are tight on Tamdar as a tear falls down his troubled young face.

180. INT. RUNDOWN BATHROOM. NIGHT

Tamdar washes blood off his hands. This evokes another memory in him.

181. EXT. JUNGLE. FROMBEHIND. DAY

Young Tamdar and his mother now kneel next to each other in the muddy water. Tamdar’s head hangs in shame. His mother looks concerned for him. She takes his hand.

The leader of the rebel gang stands over them.

In one swift movement he pulls out a blade and slits Tamdar’s mother’s throat. A look of shock flashes across her face as the life drains from her and she deflates face first into the water, her hand still in Tamdar’s.

Tamdar is distraught. He scrambles towards his mother lifting her limp body. A red pool of bloody water surrounds her.

182. INT. RUNDOWN BATHROOM. NIGHT

Tamdar’s hands are shaking as he finishes rinsing the blood from his hands and turns off the tap.

183. EXT. OLD GRAVEYARD. NIGHT

Hannah and Jonathon are having sex on a tombstone in the middle of the dark, abandoned graveyard opposite Hannah’s apartment.

From Hannah’s POV, we see Jonathon above us in the missionary position as he pushes into her.

The dark sky and fog above him circle his head like a black halo. His face is stern as he penetrates Hannah.

184. INT. RUNDOWN FLAT. NIGHT

Tamdar is back under the windowsill. His leg is bleeding through the bandage.

SFX: Underlying the neighbours’ screams is an eerie drone of a war zone.

FX: Tamdar’s eyes are playing tricks on him. The walls appear to be closing in, the small flat now like a prison cell.
Young Tamdar is kneeling over his mother’s limp body. The leader of the gang puts a fatherly hand on his shoulder.

Tamdar looks up at him with anger and confusion. The man takes the red scarf from around his neck and ties it around Tamdar’s.

He slings a gun across Tamdar’s shoulders and leads him towards the other young rebels. Tamdar takes one last look back at his dead mother.

The adrenaline in Tamdar’s system makes him breath rapidly through his nose.

His expression takes on that of a warrior with a mission.

He leaps to his feet and opens his front door.

Tamdar walks down the outside corridor and with his good leg kicks open the neighbour's door.

The neighbours’ flat is a real dump. There is hardly any furniture except for cardboard boxes that hold clothes and baby nappies.

A bottle of cheap bourbon is on a table along with an overflowing ashtray.

The crying baby lies on a mattress in the corner of the room.

The neighbour and his wife are struggling on a couch. The man has his hands around his wife’s throat.

Before the man is able to act, Tamdar pulls him off his wife and begins punching him.

The man is evidently petrified of Tamdar, he is no contest for him.

The woman rushes over to her child.

Tamdar really hammers his fists into the man, again and again.
189. EXT. OLD GRAVEYARD. NIGHT

Jonathon is grinding forcefully into Hannah.

Still from Hannah’s POV, the image drifts in and out as she appears to detach herself from the situation.

We are tight on her vacant face as Jonathon grunts and groans.

JONATHON (O.S.)
That’s it...ohh...

Hannah is shutting down. Like an office block turning its lights off one by one.

Jonathon's hand pushes hard against her chest.

190. INT. THE BRANNIGAN’S BATHROOM. FBACK. NIGHT

A younger Martha is standing naked at the bathroom mirror. Her murky bath water is seen in the background. She is not a pretty sight. Her mascara has run down her blotchy face. She appears to be drunk as she clumsily attempts to remove her spoiled mask.

Martha stares into the mirror directly at us.

MARTHA
Spying on me again?

Young ten-year-old Hannah appears from behind the bathroom door.

191. EXT. OLD GRAVEYARD. NIGHT

Jonathon’s hand has moved up to Hannah’s neck as he continues thrusting into her.

Hannah's expression becomes disturbed.

192. INT. THE BRANNIGAN’S BATHROOM. FBACK. NIGHT

A dark circle slowly appears on young Hannah’s pale blue dress as she urinates out of fear of her mother.

A yellow puddle of urine streams onto the tiled floor. Hannah stands shaking in dread.

Martha lunges towards Hannah, her face like a woman possessed. She grabs her daughter by the hair and pulls her towards the dirty bath water.
MARTHA
 I know what you've been doing, you filthy girl.

Hannah squeals in protest.

HANNAH
 No mum...no.

193. INT/EXT. MONTAGE. DAY/NIGHT

MONTAGE: We see Jonathon above us thrusting into Hannah; we hear Martha calling out Hannah’s name as the mini starts to roll and spin; we see Mr Brannigan’s naked body hanging from the banister; we see young Hannah dressed as a duck at her birthday blowing out her candles; we are tight on Tamdar’s face as he stands in the pool with his eyes closed, he opens his eyes staring at us.

194. EXT. OLD GRAVEYARD. NIGHT

Hannah opens her eyes. Her anguish is now obvious. She seems to come to, and tries to remove Jonathon’s hands from around her neck.

HANNAH
 I can’t breathe.

Jonathon continues to thrust into her.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
 Stop. I can’t breathe.

Hannah attempts to push Jonathon off her but he is too strong.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
 Stop. Stop.

195. INT. NEIGHBOUR’S LOUNGEROOM. NIGHT

Tamdar cannot stop. He is merciless as he continues to strike his neighbour, who can no longer put up a fight, his face a bloody mess.

Tamdar pins the man against the wall with his arm against his throat. His beaten body hangs like a punctured balloon.

His wife starts hitting Tamdar’s back, screaming for him to stop.
Jonathon’s face becomes contorted as he appears close to orgasm.

    JONATHON
    Just wait a second.

Hannah is swinging her arms and kicking her legs, screaming for him to stop.

Jonathon puts his hand over her mouth.

    JONATHON (CONTD.)
    Just let me cum.

Hannah’s eyes widen in panic.

We are under water again with a young Hannah, whose head is being pushed into the bathtub towards us.

Martha’s menacing naked figure is blurred above Hannah holding her down.

The churning water covers the frame, obscuring Hannah’s frightened face as she thrashes around attempting to fight off her mother.

Hannah’s body is trembling. She begins to laugh. The tone of her laughter is low and disturbing.

Jonathon attempts to continue.

    JONATHON
    Stop it.

Now it is Hannah who won’t stop. Her laughter becomes uncontrollable.

Jonathon’s thrusts slow down as he loses his fervour. He tries to shut out Hannah’s laughter by closing his eyes, but her cackle rings in his ears.

    JONATHON (CONTD.)
    Fucking shut up.

Hannah continues laughing. Jonathon is enraged. He smacks her hard across the face.

Hannah stops laughing. Her lip bleeds.
The sight of blood brings Jonathon out of his drug-fuelled frenzy. He hesitates.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
Shit, sorry I...

Hannah makes the most of the opportunity and kneels him in the groin.

Jonathon doubles over, holding his groin.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
Ahhh...

Hannah scrambles out from underneath him. She is out of breath but she is free.

Jonathon is curled up in the foetal position on the tombstone. He moans in pain.

We are now tight on Hannah as her world slows down. She seems to come out of a long slumber. She glances around the macabre surroundings and then at Jonathon.

HANNAH
We’re done.

Hannah turns to walk away.

Jonathon looks up at her in frustration.

JONATHON
Stop with the fucking games, will you.

Hannah keeps walking.

Jonathon tries to sit up. He looks desperately after Hannah, realising this time she is serious. He calls out to her.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
Marry me.

Hannah turns back to face him. Jonathon lets out a pathetic laugh.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
I figure if we’re going to have this kid...

He shrugs sheepishly, a stupid grin creeps onto his face.

JONATHON (CONTD.)
Marry me.

Hannah can’t believe his nerve. She walks away for the last time.
Jonathon’s pain is too much. He falls back into his position, holding his groin, groaning.

JONATHON (CONTD.)

Fuck.

199. INT. NEIGHBOUR’S LOUNGEROOM. NIGHT

The neighbour’s wife is still hitting Tamdar on the back.

This slowly makes him come out of his violent rage. He looks at the woman pleading for him to stop.

Tamdar turns back to the semiconscious man under his arm.

He is shocked. What has he done? He has gone too far. He jerks his arm away in disgust.

The beaten neighbour slides down the wall onto the floor. He reaches out blindly to his wife, like a frightened child.

Tamdar backs away.

The woman rushes over to her husband, embracing him. He touches her tenderly, tears streaming down his disfigured face as he apologises.

Tamdar observes their closeness. He is deeply ashamed.

He goes to help the man to stand but his wife comes at Tamdar, protecting her husband. A deep roar resonates out of her small frame.

WOMAN
Get out you animal. I’m calling the police.

Tamdar does not know what to do. After a moment he turns and leaves.

200. INT. HANNAH’S BATHROOM. NIGHT

Hannah sits on the floor of her shower in the darkness. The hot water provides some solace as it falls down her body.

201. INT. RUNDOWN FLAT. NIGHT

Tamdar walks back into his flat in a daze. He goes back to his spot under the window and waits for his retribution.
202. INT. HANNAH'S BATHROOM. NIGHT

Hannah stands naked in front of her bathroom mirror, which is still covered by the towel.

She removes the towel, picks up a pair of scissors and starts to cut off her long hair.

When she is done Hannah looks down at her naked pregnant body. She sees it in its totality for the first time. She touches her growing stomach and breasts then looks back at the mirror, contemplating her reflection.

203. INT. HANNAH’S APARTMENT. NIGHT

Hannah lies on her couch twirling the paper boat Tamdar made her.

204. INT. RUNDOWN FLAT. DAY

Tamdar is asleep under the windowsill.

SFX: There is a knock on the door.

Tamdar wakes in alarm. He stares at the door. Who has come for him? The police? His neighbour’s friends? Immigration?

He peers out from behind the curtain and sees Hannah standing in the dreary corridor. This comforting image throws Tamdar.

205. INT. RUNDOWN FLATS CORRIDOR. DAY

Hannah speaks through the door.

    HANNAH
    Tamdar?

206. INT. RUNDOWN FLAT. DAY

Tamdar sits quietly.

    HANNAH (CONTD.) (O.S.)
    I know you’re in there.

Tamdar stands up slowly. He hobbles over to the door and stands behind it.

He wants to let Hannah in but he can’t. People get hurt when he’s around.
207. INT. RUNDOWN FLATS CORRIDOR. DAY
Hannah will not leave him. She rests her forehead against the door.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
You’re right. I’ve been trying to disappear my whole life.

208. INT. RUNDOWN FLAT. DAY
Tamdar can relate.

209. INT. RUNDOWN FLATS CORRIDOR. DAY
Hannah places her hand onto the door. They are only centimetres from one another.

HANNAH (CONTD.)
Don’t disappear.

210. INT. RUNDOWN FLAT. DAY
Tamdar is moved by this comment.

211. INT. RUNDOWN FLATS CORRIDOR. DAY
Hannah listens for a sound inside the flat.
After a moment she drops her hand and walks away.

212. INT. RUNDOWN FLAT. DAY
Tamdar hobbles over to the window and watches her leave.

213. INT. THE BRANNIGAN’S LOUNGEROOM. DAY
Hannah sits in silence at the dining table. She looks around the room, soaked in history.
Removalists come in and out of the lounge room taking furniture and boxes.
Hannah notices a box is still open and goes to tape it up.
On the top of the box’s contents Hannah notices a photo frame that holds a photo of her as a young girl, riding a blue bike with large handlebars.
We go into the photo as the action starts to move.
214.  EXT.  DIRT TRACK.  FBACK.  DAY

SFX: We hear the ocean.

In the orange afternoon light we watch young Hannah ride towards us with eyes closed and arms out like she’s flying.

215.  INT.  THE BRANNIGAN’S LOUNGEROOM.  DAY

Hannah opens a large album she finds underneath the framed photo.

The album is filled with hundreds of distant photos through trees and bushes of Hannah riding her bike near the beach. The shots are so distant, we can hardly make her out.

Hannah is a little perplexed by this. She continues to turn the pages when something catches her attention.

We see Hannah has found a photo of her and her mother on a bike riding alongside her. Martha has a camera around her neck.

The image fades into:

216.  EXT.  DIRT TRACK.  FBACK.  DAY

SFX: We hear the ocean.

In the orange afternoon light, young Hannah is still riding.

We now see the men’s 70s style flared trouser legs in context. The shot tilts upward and we see Martha is wearing the trousers as she rides alongside Hannah, racing her. Martha has a camera around her neck, she is laughing.

Hannah’s young face is also glowing.

217.  INT.  THE BRANNIGAN’S LOUNGEROOM.  DAY

Hannah realises she has been mistaken.

She pulls back the covering paper and takes out the photo.

218.  EXT.  JONATHON’S COURTYARD.  DAY

Jonathon sits in his small courtyard on a garden bench opposite Charlie in his wheelchair. Joshua’s baseball glove lies in Charlie’s lame hand.
Jonathon is attempting to make Charlie catch the baseball. He gently throws the ball towards the glove. Charlie’s eyes are glazed over.

The ball constantly hits Charlie in the middle of his chest and rolls down his front.

Jonathon is despondent. His throws grow a little more aggressive as he irrationally attempts to break through his son’s catatonic state.

After a few more throws, something stops Jonathon.

We see a tear move down Charlie’s blank face.

For the first time Jonathon notices the life force still inside his son. He breaks down, moving towards Charlie and embracing him tenderly.

JONATHON
I’m sorry mate. I’m sorry.

219. INT. HANNAH’S APARTMENT. DAY

SFX: The television is on.

Hannah opens the French doors of her apartment. The peaceful spring afternoon spills into her apartment.

220. INT. HANNAH’S BEDROOM. DAY

Hannah stoops down and pulls the coffin out from underneath her bed.

221. INT. HANNAH’S APARTMENT. DAY

Hannah has removed the vinyl records and books from the coffin and sits cross-legged in front of it, this time painting its interior.

After a moment Hannah picks up the remote control and switches off the television.

She continues painting in the silence. We watch her composed face as she strokes warm red onto the pine interior.

HANNAH (V.O.)
I thought I understood what it meant to be a woman. To know her fear...
222. INT. HANNAH’S BEDROOM. NIGHT
The shot is blurred. A bedside lamp adds a warm hue to the room.

HANNAH (V.O.) (CONTD.)
...her desire...

Hannah, covered by a light sheet is lying on her stomach masturbating. Her body moves with the arriving pulsations as we watch her bring herself to climax. Her face is full of pleasure.

223. EXT. OUTDOOR SWIMMING POOL. NIGHT
From a birds-eye view we see Hannah in the middle of the dark pool floating face down in the water.

HANNAH (V.O.) (CONTD.)
...her pain.

224. EXT. OUTDOOR SWIMMING POOL. NIGHT
We are now under water, below Hannah’s body, watching her stare blankly towards us.

225. EXT. OUTDOOR SWIMMING POOL. NIGHT
Hannah comes up for air to see Tamdar watching her through the fence. She is pleased to see him.

226. EXT. OUTDOOR SWIMMING POOL. NIGHT
Tamdar moves through the water towards Hannah. They hold each other tightly sharing their grief.

HANNAH (V.O.) (CONTD.)
But all I really felt was her rage.

Hannah’s face is full of emotion. She begins to cry. Slowly at first but the floodgates cannot hold. She starts to sob into Tamdar’s naked chest, clearly relieved to finally let it all out.

We stay with them for a long moment.

227. EXT. CEMETERY. DAY
Hannah approaches Martha who sits in her wheelchair among a few relatives in front of Mr Brannigan’s red coffin covered with flowers.
SFX: We can just hear the prayers of a priest.

PRIEST
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside still waters.

In stark contrast to the black swarm of the other mourners at the funeral, Hannah stands next to her mother wearing a fresh yellow dress.

Her mother glances sideways at her.

MARTHA
What have you done to your hair? You look like a lesbian.

Hannah finds this amusing. She watches Martha wheel herself forward and place a flower on her husband’s coffin.

Hannah’s voice over continues.

HANNAH (V.O.) (CONTD.)
I never saw mum as a woman. She was just everything I was told a mother shouldn’t be and I hated her for that.

The priest continues as the coffin is slowly lowered into the ground.

PRIEST
Though I walk through death’s dark vale, yet will I fear none ill.

Hannah notices that her mother is trying to hide her tears behind her large sunglasses.

HANNAH (V.O.) (CONTD.)
I’m not sure whether I will ever really understand the things that she did...

Hannah places a hand on her mother’s shoulder.

Martha tries to remain composed but clearly appreciates this rare gesture of affection.

Hannah takes one last look at her father’s coffin as it disappears.

228. INT. HANNAH’S APARTMENT. DAY

We are tight on Hannah’s strained face. Her hair is a lot longer.
We see that she is on a hospital bed in her lounge room having a homebirth.

HANNAH (V.O.) (CONTD.)
...but she gave me life and so she’s deeply familiar to me all the same.

A midwife lays Hannah’s newborn baby on her chest. It is a girl.

229. EXT. BEACH. LATE AFTERNOON

It is a calm summer afternoon. The light creates a nostalgic atmosphere. The waves are small.

We see Hannah in bathers walking down the dirt track away from her family home, which is in soft focus in the background of the shot.

We now notice that the house, with a ‘For Sale’ sign still in front of it, is on fire. Flames engulf the attic, smashing its windows as the walls of the house start to collapse.

Hannah continues walking towards the water, without looking back. She seems different, stiller somehow. On her hip she carries her two-year-old daughter, AMELIE, also in bathers and minus floaties. In her other hand she carries an urn.

HANNAH (V.O.) (CONTD.)
Mum was diagnosed with cancer a year after dad died.

Hannah appears confident as she walks into the surf. When the water reaches chest height, she stops walking.

Amelie wriggles for Hannah to let her down. Hannah lowers her daughter into the ocean and lets go of her. We see Amelie is a natural swimmer - a water baby.

HANNAH (V.O.) (CONTD.)
There were so many things that I wanted to ask her, to say to her, but she was gone so quickly.

Hannah removes the lid of the urn and looks at her mother’s ashes. She pours them into the water in front of her and her daughter.

The wind picks up some of the dust of the ashes and blows it across the waves but the majority spread around Hannah and Amelie in the water.

Hannah submerges with her daughter. We follow them under.
They smile at each other as they swim through the ashes, which swirl and dance around their bodies.

HANNAH (V.O.) (CONTD.)
Sometimes I still think I hear her voice...

The ashes begin to drift and are slowly swept away, dispersing with the waves.

Hannah and her daughter surface.

HANNAH (V.O.) (CONTD.)
...but then I realise it’s my own.

Hannah looks down the lens, straight at us.

Fade to white.