

# CINEMA COMPARAT/IVE CINEMA



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Cover Photo: Maya Deren

# Presentación

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*Cinema Comparat/ive Cinema* is a biannual publication founded in 2012. It is edited by Colectivo de Investigación Estética de los Medios Audiovisuales (CINEMA) at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF), and focuses on comparative cinema and the reception and interpretation of film in different social and political contexts. Each issue investigates the conceptual and formal relationships between films, material processes and production and exhibition practices, the history of ideas and film criticism.

*Cinema Comparat/ive Cinema* addresses an original area of research, developing a series of methodologies for a comparative study of cinema. With this aim, it also explores the relationship between cinema and comparative literature as well as other contemporary arts such as painting, photography, music or dance, and audio-visual media.

*Cinema Comparat/ive Cinema* is published in three languages: Catalan, Spanish and English. The journal is biannual and the numbers are published in summer and winter. The journal is peer-reviewed and uses internal and external evaluation committees. The journal will also accept visual essays on the topic raised in the issue, both as part of a written article or as an autonomous work.

*Cinema Comparat/ive Cinema* is an open access scientific journal recognized by international indexes such as DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals) and Latindex (Regional Information System for Online Scientific Journals of Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal).

Finally, each issue of the journal is complemented by documentary materials and texts published online, which facilitate and enrich the topics studied in each volume, thus establishing links between longer research projects and monographic focuses throughout this process.



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# Portrait as an actress, self-portrait as a filmmaker

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Gonzalo de Lucas

Many female filmmakers have filmed themselves in a way that resembles the diary, the notebook or the self-portrait. At the same time, many female filmmakers began their careers working as actresses. Considering such overlaps in film history, we might now ask the question: in the work of female filmmakers, is there anything that could be considered a reflection of, or reaction to, the way they were observed and filmed by others, therefore turned into images, into the reverse shot?

In studying the performance of actresses, beyond critical or biographical texts, wouldn't it be better to start with these images, to see how some actresses have expressed their thoughts on cinema through their ways of directing and performing, of showing themselves, or filming and being in contact with actresses and actors? In fact, by facing the masculine construction of both film language and history, these filmmakers have often created images that originate in unexplored spaces of experience. First of all, greater efforts should be made to screen their films, because the work of some of the best actress-filmmakers has been buried or marginalised, almost not screened, disseminated or edited, at least outside their countries of birth –in this respect we might think about the films of Kinuyô Tanaka, Aparna Sen or Juliet Berto, works by a pioneer like Lois Weber, or a classic filmmaker like Ida Lupino.

This curiosity for answering –from or against the reverse shot– by creating other images –seen from other places or with other approaches– can be noticed in the ways of filming the *use of time*, the intimacy of its length and its experimentation, or the signs of time as engraved in bodies, in filmmakers that either have filmed themselves as figures, image or voice, or that have made self-portraits through portraying the other or the personal space: Lois Weber, Anne-Marie Miéville, Jocelyne Saab, Chantal Akerman, Kinuyô Tanaka, Marguerite Duras, Barbara Loden, Anne Charlotte Robertson, Juliet Berto, Maya Deren, Shirley Clarke, Jackie Raynal, Carolee Schneemann, Yvonne Rainer, Marie Menken, Margaret Tait, Forough Farrokhzad, Agnès Varda, Naomi Kawase, Rose Lowder, Marjorie Keller, Coleen Fitzgibbon, Manon de Boer, Ute Aurand, Raymonde Carasco, Rebecca Meyers, Gunvor Nelson... •



# About the feminine

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Maya Deren

I think they are the films of a woman and I think that their characteristic time quality is the time quality of a woman. I think that the strength of men is their great sense of immediacy. They are a “now” creature and a woman has strength to wait, because she’s had to wait. She has to wait nine months for the concept of a child. Time is built into her body in the sense of becomingness. And she sees everything in terms of it being in the stage of becoming. She raises a child knowing not what it is at any moment but seeing always the person that it will become. Her whole life from her very beginning it’s built into her is the sense of becoming.

I think that my films putting as much stress as they do upon the constant metamorphosis one image is always becoming another. That is, it is what is happening that is important in my films not what is at any moment.

I intended it almost as a mythological statement in the sense that folktales are mythological archetypal statements. The girl in the film is not a personal person. She’s a personage. [...] Their Goddess of Love (Erzulie, in *Voodoo*) is a very fascinating and complex idea. She is, in fact, the goddess of all the luxuries, which are not essential to survival. She is the Goddess of Love, which unlike sex is not essential to propagation. She is the muse of the arts. Now, man can live without it, but he doesn’t live

very much as man without it. It is strange that one would have to go to an apparently primitive culture such as Haiti to find an understanding in such exalted terms of what the essential feminine not feminine role might conceivably be that of being everything which is human, everything which is more than that which is necessary. Taken from this point of view there is no reason in the world why women shouldn’t be artists, and very fine ones. •

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*Recording reproduced in the documentary In the Mirror of Maya Deren (Martina Kudláček, 2001).*

## About *Fuses*

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### Interview to Carolee Schneemann by Scott MacDonald

**Scott MacDonald:** Have audiences for *Fuses* changed much over the years?

**Carolee Schneemann:** Oh, yes. There was that revelatory time when *Fuses* was first shown around 1967-68, when not a lot but a certain number of women and a very large number of men in the audience felt that it was giving them back a sort of wholeness. They said it was very positive for them, and women would say that they had never looked at their genitals and had never felt accepting of them and this was a chance to make the kind of integration and ‘fusion’ about self they really wanted. There’s a thread of that that keeps going on. There is also tremendous resistance to it—silliness and pain that’s masked as a kind of hostility or tacky aggressiveness. One of the most extreme things happened when I was in the audience at Cannes. About forty men went berserk and tore up all the seats in the theater, slashed them with razors, shredded them, and threw all the padding around. It was terrifying, and peculiar.

**MacDonald:** They came prepared?

**Schneemann:** I don’t know; the theater was full. *Fuses* was on the program of special jury selections, most of which were socially political (it was 1968) compared to *Fuses*, which was sexually political. The people who went crazy were French, youngish; they looked sort of middle class in their dress. I don’t know what they were screaming or why. I was very bewildered. I thought at the time that it had to do with the lack of predictable pornographic narrative sequence. There was also a fight at the University of Massachusetts in 1973, where some man in the audience said he didn’t get a hard-on, so what’s the point to it? And a woman in the back row said to him something like, ‘You didn’t get a hard-on because you wouldn’t recognize something that was truly sexual if it sat on your lap.’ And he turned around and said, ‘Who the fuck do you think you are? You’re just another one of those dumb bitches who...’, something or other; I don’t remember exactly. Anyway, she called him a stupid prick—this is in the university auditorium!—and the professors were banging on the tables, and the students were yelling, and somebody took a newspaper and hit the man

on the head with it. Finally they remembered me and shouted, ‘What do you think about the audience fighting?’ And I said, ‘It seems to be very cathartic for you; it’s better than struggling over dull questions.’

In 1972 or 1973 at the Art Institute in Chicago there was a group of lesbian separatists who were extremely angry about the film. They said, ‘There’s no role model for us in here, and we don’t want to have to look at it.’ Well, of course, I felt that, first, they didn’t have to look at it, and, second, they were perfectly justified to object to it, because if they needed a role model, the heterosexual one in *Fuses* was going to be antagonistic. But then a woman yelled to them, ‘All my life I’ve been pushed around by fascistic men telling me what to look at and what it means, and I’m not going to be pushed around by fascistic women telling me what to look at and what it means.’ Big applause from another contingent. And then still another woman put her head up and said, ‘The role model in the film is the fact that the filmmaker envisions her own life, and we should see it in that way.’ More fighting and arguing.

About three years ago, in California, *Fuses* was seen as ‘sentimental shit.’ You don’t usually hear much about what people really say or think about your work. Other things invitations, phone calls, who remembers your name, stuff like that are telling you what kind of rating you’ve got in the art world. Anyway, there was this time in California where, I’m told, people really hated it and booed and walked out. I try to make all my things to go on their own for a long duration; it’s up to them to absorb the shocks.

**MacDonald:** The amount of negative reaction seems strange to me. Just in terms of colors and textures *Fuses* is so beautiful to look at.

**Schneemann:** Well, it used to be considered too ugly to look at: jumbled, broken, chaotic. In California it seems to have become too beautiful. Perhaps the California people were into leather and, straps. A lot of things have been considered indulgent in the past couple of years. Heterosexual love has been a luxury

that some women cannot psychologically afford. It's too fraught with compromise and diversion of energies that have to be women-identified among and with other women.

**MacDonald:** It seems very apparent when I watch *Fuses* that though you and Jim Tenney had known each other for a long time, you were still pretty fascinated with each other. At least on one level, all the different lighting conditions in the film, the different tones, all the different technical things that go on suggest your long-term erotic exploration of each other.

**Schneemann:** Also there is a prolonged time duration in it. It doesn't have the titillating quality of dramatic immediacy.

**MacDonald:** It suggests that you can sustain that level of passion over a long period of time.

**Schneemann:** Hopefully, yes. That's a normal expectation of mine. *Fuses* is, in part, an answer to Brakhage's *Loving*, which Jim and I are in. Brakhage made *Loving* because of his fascination with the erotic sensitivity and vitality that was between Jim and me. That was something very important for him to be seeing and caring about. But I felt that *Loving* failed to capture our central eroticism, and I wanted to set that right. Actually, I hate what happens when I'm in somebody else's work, with the exception of a Bill Brand film, *Split Decision*, which is all invention anyway. I always feel a tremendous distortion has been enacted on me, despite my hope that some coherent self will come through.

Another thing I was thinking about at the time is the issue of equity be-tween couples. There's a tremendous resistance to that; there's always got to be one person on top, right? I always thought it was a particular value that a couple could have this equity between them, and Jim took a lot of flack for that. Men, in particular, thought he wasn't getting the advantages he should. They didn't mean about the sex, but in our daily life. People would be around and see that he was going to do the dishes while I cooked, or that they couldn't come over at a certain time because that's when I was working in my little part of the house and couldn't be disturbed. There was a tremendous amount of hostility towards me, as if he was being victimized by something if I wasn't going to serve him. But it had a double edge; it had an erotic fascination because it was also very sexy. People were always saying, 'You can't live like this.'

Also, they presumed that influences only went one way. Jim influenced me; I could never in twelve years be an influence on

him. Almost no one thought we could both be good for each other. That kind of thing is still going on. I used to watch it with other people. When John and Yoko were first together, the general response, other than that of the fascinated fans, was vicious. All the artists would say, 'Lennon is ruining her quixotic imagination,' and all the pop people would say, 'He's with that freaky avant-garde woman, and she's ruining his mind.' Never the celebration of the two of them bringing to each other what they did. •

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*Extracts of the interview by Scott MacDonald to Carolee Schneemann in: Scott MacDonald (1988). A Critical Cinema. Interviews with Independent Filmmakers. University of California Press. Berkeley.*

# Conversation on *Wanda* by Barbara Loden

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Marguerite Duras and Elia Kazan

On Autumn 1980, Elia Kazan arrived in Paris for the re-release of *Baby Doll* and *America America*. Marguerite Duras, who wrote on his cinema in *Green Eyes*, meets him for *Cahiers du Cinéma* and talks him about *Wanda*.

**Marguerite Duras:** I want to distribute *Wanda*, your wife, Barbara Loden's film. I am not a distributor. I mean something else by this word. I mean to use all my energy to make certain that this movie reaches the French public. I believe I can. I think that there is a miracle in *Wanda*. Usually there is a distance between the visual representation and the text, as well as the subject and the action. Here this distance is completely nullified; there is an instant and permanent continuity between Barbara Loden and *Wanda*.

**Elia Kazan:** Her acting career showed her that no script was permanent. For her, there was always an element of improvisation. (I am speaking English in order to be more precise.) There was always an element of improvisation, a surprise, in what she was doing. The only one, as far as I know, who was like that is Brando when he was young. He never knew exactly what he was going to say, therefore everything would come out of his mouth very alive.

**M.D.:** The miracle for me isn't in the acting. It's that she seems even more herself in the movie, so it seems to me –I didn't know her– than she must have been in life. She's even more real in the movie than in life; it's completely miraculous.

**E.K.:** It's true. She had great difficulty in communicating, except in moments of strong feeling, passion or rage, sexual passion, anger, etc., when the controls would snap. In some way there was an invisible wall between her and the world, but her work permitted her to make some openings in this wall. She would do this every time. She played with me in the theater in a play by Arthur Miller; I don't like the play but there was one good thing in this play: what Barbara did.

**M.D.:** What play?

**E.K.:** *After the Fall*.

**M.D.:** I haven't seen it. I am insisting because I was very moved by her being herself in her movie. It's as if she had found a way

in the movie to make sacred what she wants to portray as a demoralization, which I find to be an achievement, a very, very powerful achievement, very violent and profound. That's the way I see it.

**E.K.:** In this movie she plays a character we have in America, and who I suppose exists in France and everywhere, that we call *floating*, a wanderer. A woman who floats on the surface of society, drifting here or there, with the currents. But in the story of this movie, for a few days the man she meets needs her; during these few days she has a direction and at the end of the movie, when he dies, she goes back to her wandering. Barbara Loden understood this character very, very well because when she was young she was a bit like that, she would go here and there. She once told me a very sad thing; she told me: 'I have always needed a man to protect me.' I will say that most women in our society are familiar with this, understand this, need this, but are not honest enough to say it. And she was saying it sadly.

**M.D.:** Personally –this is getting a little beyond the subject– I feel very close to her. Like her I'm acquainted with the cafes, the last ones open, where you linger without any other reason but to while away the time, and I'm very well acquainted with alcohol, very intensely, the way I'd be acquainted with someone.

**E.K.:** You know, *Wanda* is a movie that was made with no money. With \$160,000, which doesn't pay the salaries of a big crew for a week. I was there all the time during the shooting; I took care of the children, I played nursemaid. The crew consisted of a cameraman, a sound engineer, a technician, an assistant, and, on occasion, me.

**M.D.:** (Laughter.) I'm familiar with this kind of production. (...) There's a public for *Wanda*. Perhaps America is uncivilized in a way that I'm not very familiar with, that I haven't explored. But what I do know is that there is a public for this movie. It's simply a matter of finding it, of letting it know that this film exists. If I let them know, since the cinema I do is on that track, in that same off-beat split, they will come the way they come to see my movies. I want to make it clear that my doing this has nothing to do with her being a woman and my being a woman. If a man had made this movie, I would stand up for him in the same way. (...)

**M.D.:** I need information about Barbara Loden. I'd like to know your views and hers about the fact that this marvelous movie hasn't worked.

**E.K.:** Barbara was bitter, but not only because of the film. The film was well-received among English intellectuals and here as well, however, she never had enough money for her next projects, and this was painful for her. She had some things ready, for example, she wanted to film Wedekind's *Loulou*. The screenplay was finished but she had no money. She had a screenplay about a film star (*A Movie Star of my Own*), which in my opinion was very good, but there was no money. She always had the feeling of knocking on doors that remained closed.

**M.D.:** Yes, but it's because this movie should have worked... Are there in America circuits around film archives or film clubs? My movies have been seen, Godard's ones as well...

**E.K.:** It has been shown in universities, but anywhere else. She ended up doing speeches with the movie in universities. She answered the questions of the audience after the screening, she came along with the film. She also went to many schools in the South and the West. She was very proud of it. She owed that just to herself, so she was very proud.

**M.D.:** How long ago did she shoot the film?

**E.K.:** In 1971. The shooting went on for seven weeks, in Pennsylvania. I was there, directing the extras, stopping the cars, etc. And I took care of the children.

**M.D.:** Do you recommend me reading the screenplay of *Wanda*?

**E.K.:** I don't think so. If you want it, I can give it to you, but I think it is better just to watch the movie. She changed the screenplay every day. It was me who wrote the first screenplay, as a favour, to give her something to work with. Then she rewrite it over and over again, and it ended up being her screenplay instead of mine. It became her screenplay. And each day, during the shooting, she kept changing everything...

**M.D.:** *Wanda* is a movie about "someone". Have you ever directed a film about someone?

**E.K.:** I did a film about my uncle, *America America*. All my family is here.

**M.D.:** When I say someone, I mean someone who has been isolated, someone who has been considered on himself, separated from social conditions where he is. Like extracted from society and observed by you. I think there is always something in the self, in you, that society cannot reach, something insurmountable, impenetrable and decisive. •

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*Publication: Cahiers du Cinéma, June-August 2003. Conversation excerpts selected by Serge Daney, Jean Narboni and Dominique Villain in Cahiers du Cinéma, December 1980. Translation from French: Esmeralda Barriendos. English translation partially based in the one by Carol Barko for Green Eyes.*

# About Film-Diary

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Anne-Charlotte Robertson

I had no way of explaining why I had breakdowns. It was another inexplicable thing in my life. When I was a kid growing up, I never thought I'd be having delusions, and be hospitalized. In 1981 I started the diary, and in 1981 I didn't have a breakdown. I think it might be because I was going to film school: I had somewhere to go, I had a camera to borrow. I made several other short films the fall of 1981 and then began the diary.

One short film was called *Locomotion* [1981]. It shows me against a blue wall, screaming and exhibiting the side effects of medication I had observed in the hospitals. The first real breakdown that I got on film was in 1982. I showed my delusions. I showed that I was afraid that root vegetables suffered, so I was going to take them back to the garden and replant them. You can see me getting on my big rain slicker and getting out the beets and carrots and onions and preparing to take them back, making sign language in front of the camera.

In fact, that first breakdown occurred shortly after a person at school threatened he'd call the cops and take the camera away from me. Losing that camera, I lost my mind. Every time there's a breakdown, I try to take pictures of it. My problem with a film diary (and with a written diary) is that sometimes I become so paranoid and obnoxious. Voices in my head become so frightening, and I cannot bring myself to document them. It's just too terrifying.

I believe in film being necessary every day. Monet did his haystacks and I have done the gazebo in the backyard. This winter I was so depressed, after getting out of the hospital and being put under a whole lot of restrictions, I was taking pictures every day of the gazebo in all kinds of weather. •

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*Excerpts from the conversation of Scott MacDonald with Anne-Charlotte Robertson in: Scott MacDonald (1992). A Critical Cinema 2. Interviews with Independent Filmmaker. University of California Press. Berkeley.*

# Nothing to say

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Chantal Akerman

In the synopsis of the film *Chantal Akerman par Chantal Akerman*, I wrote that *if this film were directed by anyone else, he could make “as if” more easily. As if the filmmaker’s words contained the truth about his work, as if they actually opened a breach on the origin of his desire to do, and then keep doing. As if he, the filmmaker, his face, his smile, his silences and his body told more about his job, and finding the word of the author were always a temptation, rather than trying to know more through himself, and he, eventually, reveals himself, if a veil actually exists.*

I wrote that *to do something on herself and his own work raises many questions, disturbing questions indeed (...) The question of the I and the documentary, the fiction, the time and the truth, and, therefore, a lot of questions, which obviously cannot be answered in this particular film.* Neither in this book. And why not? Because. Because I don’t understand, at least I don’t understand everything. And, probably, if I had understood everything, I wouldn’t do anything.

In the synopsis of this film I call *Cha Cha*, I added: *This questions a whole life and even many others. Then, which pact may I establish with myself, how may I make as if?*

*This pact may be the pact of an assessment. Now I’ve been working for 25 years –36 years now–, and sometimes I have the impression of a desperate gesticulation. One film after another, and all that spent energy, a dodge of being in the real (...) Everything would be so simple if it were possible, if there were progress, if there were a tension towards something clearer, to do a better film each time and what a better film is. Everything would be so simple if an assessment were possible.*

*I could appear as my double, a stronger, more intelligent double, one that had understood what its other double had tried to do for such a long time. But with a mere thought on it, fear overwhelms me, as happens to the hero of that Dostoievski’s story, who burst into home absolutely pale without taking off neither his coat nor his hat, walked through the corridor and, as if struck by a lightning, he stopped in the threshold of the room. As I have already done in some of the films where I have performed, I could*

*also show me in a burlesque manner to not take me seriously. I could tell the same for this book. Word by word. Stop repeating those old stories, my father used to tell me, and my mother kept silent. There’s nothing to repeat, my father used to tell, there’s nothing to be told, my mother used to tell. It is about this nothingness that I work. •*

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*Excerpt of the book Akerman, Chantal (2004), Autoportrait en cinéaste. Paris. Centre Pompidou.*



# About the Women Film Pioneers Project

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Alejandra Rosenberg

## ABSTRACT

In this conversation, the author discusses with Sofia Bull and Kate Saccone about the Women Film Pioneer Project, which is edited by Jane Gaines and Monica Dall'Asta and published online by Columbia University's Center for Digital Research and Scholarship. The conversation starts with general descriptions of the WFPP, that also touch on the internal methodology of the project, and is taken towards more specific discussions on the relations between cinema studies and digital humanities; women's role and professions in the silent era; and on the importance of rethinking the hegemonic discourse of film history.

## KEYWORDS

Women in film, silent era, pioneers, research communities, Jane Gaines, film history, digital humanities, Alice Guy, Lois Weber, Elvira Giallanella, Dorothy Arzner, Maude Adams, Alma Reville, Gene Gauntier.

I had the pleasure to chat with Sofia Bull and Kate Saccone on a chilly morning in May in New York City regarding the Women Film Pioneers Project<sup>1</sup>. Edited by Jane Gaines and Monica Dall'Asta, WFPP is published online by Columbia University's Center for Digital Research and Scholarship.

I met Kate at her office and together we "skyped" with Sofia, who lives in the UK (where she is a Professor in Film at Southampton University). In a small real and cyber space, the three of us represent three generations of women working for WFPP: Sofia, who has collaborated with the project since 2005 and is currently the co-editor of the Overview Essays; Kate, who started working with for the project in 2011 and is currently the Project Manager; and me, one of the new Research Assistants who entered the project nine months ago.

**Alejandra Rosenberg:** Just to warm up, what is the Women Film Pioneers Project?

**Kate Saccone:** The Women Film Pioneers Project is many different things. On the one hand, it is an online resource that advances research on female filmmakers in the silent era, who were more than actresses and who worked behind-the-scenes as directors, producers, editors, screenwriters, distributors, and more. On the other hand, it is also a community, a network, of scholars all over the world who are interested in women in early cinema.

**Sofia Bull:** The output of this research project is hard to define because of its digital nature: in one sense, it could be described as a data-base, in another, as an online publication.

**KS:** También es un portal que lleva al lector hacia varias direcciones, a través de enlaces con los archivos FIAF de todo el mundo. Así, el portal apunta a otros recursos externos, mientras que, al mismo tiempo, contiene artículos e investigación originales.

**SB:** We could say that it is a resource for research, while it also is a place where we publish research.

**AR:** I think WFPP is extremely interesting in how it plays with two temporalities by publishing research in innovative ways while researching about something that happened a century ago.

**KS:** Yes, I agree, and going off of that, it is also very much a part of the contemporary moment in the relationship between cinema studies and digital humanities, where there are a number of fantastic digital or online-only resources that focus on early cinema research, including Media History Digital Library<sup>2</sup> and the Media Ecology Project<sup>3</sup>.

**AR:** It is also very stimulating how the Women Film Pioneers Project constructs an international community of scholars, opening and crossing the borders of national scholarship.

**KS:** Yes, it is so trans-national just in terms of the contributors involved and the archives that they use in their research. When you reconnect at a conference or silent film festival, there is always this really great sense of a global community.

**SB:** The main aim of the project is, on the one hand, to find more things about women in the silent era by doing re-historical research. However, on the other hand, one of the aims is also to foster this research community; creating a tool for activism in the present era. A way to give women in the film industry, and women scholars as well, the sense of a long running history. Everyone is so aware nowadays about how there are not enough female filmmakers, and how it is a struggle for female filmmakers today. But I think it is interesting that not that many people know that there has always been female filmmakers and that the percentages were actually comparatively high in the silent era... and that can be a source of inspiration nowadays.

**AR:** Usually when one talks about women filmmakers, one thinks of Agnès Varda, Maya Deren... but we tend to forget that women were also present at the birth of cinema and it is very painful to realize that we were never taught about all these women that also founded and shaped cinema, as, for instance, Alice Guy or Lois Weber.

**SB:** Some of these women have been known for a long time but the sort of notion that women were involved in film culture (not just in filmmaking but also owning cinemas, writing about film from a very early age...) is something that is rarely talked about. And partly it is because people didn't know about it and, actually, WFPP has been instrumental in making this information available. It is only now that people are understanding the scope of that early era. Personally, I believe it is very important to understand the scope because, otherwise, when you only have a few figures, they seem like exceptions,

1. <https://wfpp.cdrcs.columbia.edu/>

2. <http://mediahistoryproject.org/>

3. <https://sites.dartmouth.edu/mediaecology/>

making it hard to see them as part of a canon; it makes them appear like rare birds, in a sense.

**KS:** I just re-read Jane M. Gaines' and Monica Dall'Asta's prologue in *Doing Women's Film History*<sup>4</sup> and I love how they highlight that we need these women today just as much as they need us now. The example they use is Elvira Giallanella, an Italian woman who directed a film that was only discovered in 2007: it didn't get seen until recently. This transnational community of scholars in the present day needed this discovery (and others) to continue to help show that there were all these women working as directors in the silent era. At the same time, Elvira also needs us now to have the public screening of her film that she never had. It is really a wonderful dialogue between the past and the present; between filmmakers, researchers and viewers.

**AR:** In her research, Gaines is also very interested in the historiographical difference between 'what has happened' and 'what is said to have happened'; a distinction which is engaged with activism through WFPP, as, thanks to the project, one can see that 'what is said to have happened' doesn't coincide with what really happened, since all these women never made it to the discourse of history.

**SB:** What I really appreciate with the project is that it's encouraging all the researchers that are involved with it to think actively and reflexively about historiography and about the process of writing history, and to not just somehow re-write history in order to create a new set of facts... We are trying to have an awareness about the complexities and difficulties in writing history, which involves the awareness of the difficulty in finding historical facts. It is not just a simple process of re-visiting history: it is a much more complex attempt on thinking about historical writing and what it means to introduce female figures into that story.

**KS:** In our guidelines we actually instruct contributors not to write an encyclopedia-like entry. As Sofia said, this reflexive approach is crucial. We want contributors to interrogate the research process itself as they visit archives and see what is available and what is lost in terms of archival resources (films, documents, etc.). We are very upfront about this from the beginning and very aware of the challenges and questions facing this type of historical recovery work.

**AR:** I guess you are hyper-conscious of being one of the

producers of history and, as such, being critical of the ways in which that has been done, or is being done.

**SB:** Well, yes, we try not to reproduce the mistakes of others but, maybe, at the same time, we might be committing other mistakes as we might be missing on things that we don't even know we are missing.

**AR:** Kate, since you mentioned the guidelines, how does the project work more specifically?

**KS:** Basically, we have two sections: the Career Profiles, which are short (around 1000-1500 words)...

**BS:** ...and the Overview Essays, which are longer (between 1000 and 4000 words).

**KS:** The Career Profiles, which are written by established film scholars and archivists, are focused on a single individual (although sometimes a career profile has two to three pioneers featured in it, because they could be sisters who worked exclusively together, like the Ehlers sisters, who worked in Mexico and in the United States). These profiles are mainly focused on the filmmaker's career and we don't necessarily need all the biographical information (childhood, etc.). It also includes a bibliography, a section with relevant archival paper collections, and the filmography. This last section, the filmography, is the most important part of the Profile because we list extant films and all the archives that hold prints so that the readers have a way to find these films. We have also been trying to add more clips to the profiles, as well as DVD information when available. Also, images are very important to us and we have a mix of portraits, film stills, screenshots, and documents (like death certificates, etc.) featured in each profile, when these images are available.

**SB:** The Overview Essays started out by the fact that the project went global and that there was this sense that there should be some sort of text that wasn't focused on the individual women but on the different parts of the world that these women were active in. Therefore, we were asking the scholars to write an Overview Essay in which they could discuss more generally women's role in cinema in a certain part of the world during the silent era. Then, we thought that we could use the Overview Essays for more contextual aspects, like having Overview Essays on different kinds of professions (for instance, on female cinematographers) in which we could link in the essay to all the

4. KNIGHT, J., GLEDHILL, C. (eds.) (2015). *Doing Women's Film History: Reframing Cinemas, Past and Future*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

individual Career Profiles, creating, thus, a digital space-essay that would gather all the links together. So, quite recently, we have started extending the Overview Essay section, thinking about it as a publishing platform for more general texts and articles on women and silent cinema, focused on different themes, geographical areas... thus, we are more flexible now on the kind of texts that we publish. In other words, the Overview Essays are a different space opened up for different kind of articles, which are all now peer reviewed, working, thus, as an academic journal more than an online data-base.

**KS:** And just to give a scope of the types of Profiles that we have, they range from pioneers who worked in Germany, in Turkey, Egypt, former Czechoslovakia, Russia, France, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, China, Japan... the list goes on. As of today we have 214 published profiles, about 200 assigned profiles –which means they are currently being researched and written–, and over 600 unassigned names. And that is clearly not all the women that worked in the silent era... One of the things that Jane Gaines always says, and that she has made me aware of, is that although many women became famous or successful, there are a bunch of women who failed to have a film career, or who were anonymous workers in labs and offices and we will never know their names... So this is just the tip of the iceberg.

**SB:** That is also something that the Overview Essays try to cover: the fact that it is impossible to trace all these individual people..

**AR:** So there are more than a thousand names that WFPP wants to research on... What is the exact range of time that the project focuses on?

**BS:** Formally, we are covering from the birth of cinema to the coming of sound.

**KS:** Yes, but we also do make some exceptions. For instance, in some places like Latin America, China, Japan and India, sound came later, so we are a little bit more flexible depending on the region. Also, occasionally the community of scholars discovers a pioneer who we need to include, like Esther Eng, who started working later in the 1930s. However, she was this very radical, queer, independent director, producer, screenwriter and distributor, working outside of Hollywood –in San Francisco and in Hong Kong– and we felt like we had to include her in the project. But, typically, as Sofia said, our range is from the birth of cinema to the coming of sound.

**BS:** ...which, as Kate said, is so different from country to country, which is one of the problems that we are finding as we

expand globally. For instance, some parts of the world didn't have any women in the silent era but did have some in the early sound period. Or rather, I should say, we don't know if there were any women working in the silent period; there might have been but they haven't been "discovered" yet.

**AR:** Talking more specifically about these women, my sense is that many of them began as actresses and then started to acquire other roles behind the cameras, such as directors...

**KS:** Yes, many were actresses who then went on to become screenwriters and producers and directors. But many others started out as directors or screenwriters and then added acting to their resumes, or never acted at all and only worked behind the camera or in some other capacity. It's difficult to generalize, as there are just so many ways that women worked in the early global film industry..

**BS:** The problem for me is that I think directors are important. However, and one of the things that I really appreciate with our project is that we try to acknowledge a big range of professions. And part of the issue of writing women out of film history is maybe this sort of auteurist tradition: if you look beyond directors, you will find so many women that were doing amazing things and that had quite a lot of influence.

**KS:** Yes, in college, no one ever taught me about all these women. Not only did they not teach me who Dorothy Arzner was, or who Lois Weber was, or who Alice Guy was, but they would never even cover someone like, say, Maude Adams, who worked in a totally different capacity than a director. Adams, who also was a stage actress, did research into lights and lighting technology and the end result of her research became the industry standard during the sound period. We really need to look beyond just the auteurist model to understand the full scope.

**SB:** Also, one of the interesting things that comes up is that there were a number of women working in collaborative relationships with male directors but that didn't always get the credit that they should have gotten, like Alma Reville (who was married to Alfred Hitchcock).

**KS:** Yes, for example, there was an actress in Russia, Olga Rakhmanova, who started out as an actress and then became a screenwriter. She ultimately became a director in her own right, but her first directorial "credit" was when she was on a location shoot and suddenly the director died and she stepped in to help to finish the film and is credited as co-director in one version of the film, and not credited in a later version. This lack of stable attribution is characteristic of so many women's careers. Also,

Gene Gauntier, in the United States, who was working with the director Sidney Olcott. In her memoirs, she talks about how she was essentially co-directing but she never got the credit. I know memoirs should not always be taken as absolute truth, but these personal accounts do give us more information about what credit was denied in collaborative relationships. Or Lois Weber, who while credited, co-directed many films, like *Suspense*, with her husband, which raises complex questions about authorship and creative control in the collaborative relationship. .

**AR:** There seems to be something very patriarchal of the way credits are established, with a necessity of distinguishing and separating each role...

**SB:** Yes, that is part of the problem that we have sort of mentioned, obviously. A lot of these collaborative women who worked with men never got a formal credit and we only know that they worked on the film because there are other documents or oral accounts telling us that she was involved in a much bigger role than the one that was acknowledged. We don't really know but there is an assumption that that would have happened more to women than to men.

**AR:** Do you think that the depictions of women would be different, if there were women in the crew? Or is that impossible to know?

**SB:** It is not necessarily the case that the films directed or written by women were more feminist in the sense that we perceive the concept today but, potentially, one would assume that there was a higher likelihood of them including female perspectives or female stories... But one of the things that is hard about this is that so many of the films are still lost and it is hard to make any sort of generalizing comment. Many of the films are not here and available so that we can actually do that. Thus, it is hard to draw conclusions of the text, or of the ideology or their meanings, in relation to the portrayal of women (although it might be more possible to do so in individual cases)... I think this question of the representation of women by women in early cinema is something that is also very important and that potentially we could be covering in the future with our Overview Essays.

**AR:** Is there something else that you would like to add?

**SB:** I think one of the things that we often talk about regarding women filmmakers is that, as the research shows, there was a flexibility of roles in that early era, particularly outside of the bigger companies. Thus, there were a lot of women who were doing many different roles: they were not just actresses and directors; they were also actresses, directors, producers, set

designers, screenwriters... all at the same time and in different productions, which is something very exciting to think about.

**KS:** Yes, this is really crucial. The Women Film Pioneers Project features a wide range of occupations and the list is always growing as we add the terms that the contributors find or that were used in that time. For example we have film critics and film scholars –one of my favorite pioneers is Frances Taylor Patterson who was one of the first university lecturers on film: she started teaching a screenwriting course in 1917 at Columbia University. Also, we feature costume designers, title designers, and titles writers, like the Swedish title-writer, Alva Lundin, who Sofia wrote an entry on for us, as well as exhibitors, projectionists... it is a very wide range of occupations. So we work with a meta-data librarian to create a taxonomy of occupations as they come in, which reminds me that I should point out that this project is produced by Columbia Libraries and Columbia's Center for Digital Research and Scholarship, more specifically. So we work with web developers, and meta-data librarians, and specialized librarians, and computer programmers to create the digital project that you see... But, going back to the taxonomy, it's a growing list of occupations that fosters some really fascinating discussions and raises complex questions. For example, last year we published a profile on Finnish pioneer, Jenny Strömberg, and it wasn't clear to us if she had financed the production of a film about her hunting dogs, a film in which she also appeared. We didn't know what to call her, and we were going back and forth with the author of the article, and with the meta-data librarian, questioning what we should call her "occupation." We didn't want to put "producer" because that is misleading, so we ended up putting "society matron" as her occupation, because it was her status in society that perhaps influenced the production of this film. However, the great thing about this being a digital project is that, if the contributor does more research in the future, and finds evidence of something different, we can change the information immediately. If this was a published book, which was how the project was envisioned initially, that wouldn't be possible.

**AR:** One of the great things about it being digital is that it enables the project to be accessible to everybody, right? A simple search on the internet would lead you to the website, and you can start reading and getting deep into the topic.

**KS:** Right. Many more people find us, and access us, than if the project was a book. Also many family members and relatives of these women write to us, recognizing their grandmothers, great-aunts... and they reach out to us with information, documents, etc. creating a very nice community outside academia.

**SB:** We get a wide audience, which is very good. Definitely we reach many more people due to the digital nature of the project. The challenge for the project is also to come up with interesting pathways on the website for people to discover things that maybe they weren't looking for initially. That way the reader can easily cross professions, borders... which is also one of the interesting things of the project: its global nature. Not only how we cover different national contexts but that we find many women that had international careers from quite early on, and a sort of geographical fluidity of filmmaking in the early era: women were moving around much more than we would assume.

**AR:** It is interesting to question how to incorporate these women into a film history class. I see cases where there is a week reserved to "women directors" but I would disagree with that approach as it is creating an exception from that type of label. Why would a week be called "women directors" if all the other weeks are not called "men directors"?

**KS:** Yes, it's like if it was the specialty week!

**AR:** Wouldn't it make more sense just to integrate everyone without creating the difference, so that students would learn everything without thinking that women filmmakers should be an exception?

**BS:** It is a very interesting question, the question on how to teach women in cinema. And, in one way, it can be good to highlight it –and a lot of people would go for that in an attempt to make it visible–, but, obviously, as you say, ideally we should be including it more organically, sort of across the board. But the issue remains: as long as female filmmakers are an exception it becomes difficult to not treat them as such... But you might have to not treat them as such to make sure they are not an exception.

**KS:** I was just thinking about this issue last month when the Film Society of Lincoln Center had their Queer Cinema Before Stonewall series, which featured a handful of films by our pioneers... and they were not labeled as "women films", they were just part of the larger program, which was fantastic. And it was great to see films by Alice Guy-Blaché or Dorothy Arzner in dialogue with Vincente Minnelli and Kenneth Anger. At the same time, part of me wanted to only highlight these women's specific screenings because their films are so rarely shown and

they are so rarely a part of the conversation. It gives me hope that, due to the growing awareness of how horrible it is today for female directors, producers, screenwriters, etc., I am seeing a lot more articles, screenings, and resources available (like the Nordic Women in Film<sup>5</sup>). It is an exciting moment to see that some of these questions and issues are being raised and these discussions are being held in the public sphere.

**AR:** What I love about the project is that if we are able to put all these women in the discourse that we construct of history, we are enabling female students to also see themselves as directors, as they will have a larger scope of role-models to identify with, a scope not only constructed mainly by white men.

**SB:** Definitely. And, hopefully, the project is important for obviously re-writing that history but, also, as a source of inspiration for future filmmakers and future female scholars. In this sense, it has worked as a supportive network that allows young scholars to start publishing and to try to do some serious historical research, while also getting lots of help and lots of contacts from other women across the world. Basically, it is a very nice group of people.

**KS:** Exactly! It's been great to get to know all of these wonderful scholars and their work, but also to get to know these pioneers very intimately (at least that is how I feel with every new entry, as I work closely with the author to edit, reread it, and publish it)... I feel like all of these women are very present in my life, they are very inspiring creatively, and I am very conscious of their work as I go about my life –not only do I now see my gender actively involved in cinema's past, but these women continually challenge me today. •

5. <http://www.nordicwomeninfilm.com/>

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# Medeas. Interview with María Ruido

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Palma Lombardo

## ABSTRACT

Interview with the researcher and director María Ruido, posed a tour of the filmmakers who have marked her career. The mythological figure of Medea stands as spokeswoman of an imaginary's lights and shadows built by women before the camera. Exposed, brave and contradictory women.

## KEYWORDS

Akerman, selfportrait, cinema, Carri, Duras, feminism, Kawase, maternity, mythology, women, subjectivity.

María Ruido defines herself as a visual artist, researcher and cultural producer. The images and bodies leak from her work, brave and resistant, survivors of a story that threatens to banish them from what is visible. The banishment is worth mentioning when María tells me that her latest work is closely linked to the mythical figure of Medea, a roaming woman by imposition. A complex and revolutionary character that contrasts with the more traditional notion of femininity and, especially, with the concept of motherhood.

‘Medea is a “bad mother”, one that doesn’t do what is expected of her,’ she says. And that is her starting point, her darkness and at the same time her strength. Like the filmmakers that have inspired her, María Ruido searches in her personal experience the way to bring to light a hidden reflex, something that persists as a long shadow despite our efforts to ignore it. Here Medea is interesting not only for opening the wounds of mother-daughter relationships but also because her character shows a woman that defies her destiny in the world.

‘Many cinematic versions punish Medea for the crime she committed against her own progeny, starting with Pasolini’s adaptation. However, in Euripides’s version, Medea escapes on a carriage driven by winged horses. After all, she is a feared and powerful sorceress, direct descendant of Circe and the Sun. The chorus of Euripides’s play is a very interesting song to the unfair condition of women.’ María thinks that later interpretations of the play have insisted on linking her children’s murder with the spite that her husband’s abandonment, Jason, has provoked in her. Nonetheless, there are more interesting theories that see in Medea’s act an outburst of cruel and conscious rebellion in light of the impossibility of accessing the position of power that Jason had promised her. It is the vengeance of a woman who knows she is capable of exercising authority, an authority that is denied to her precisely because of her feminine condition. I tell María that Medea is without a doubt a controversial character, as it is not easy to think about a maternity that does not revolve around unconditional dedication but that is based on the manipulation and exploitation of these affections to culminate her macabre intentions. Even so, personal experiences often invite us to confront images of the world that are far from the ideal of representation. ‘To work from subjectivity is a key element, and the relationships with parents are an example of something that can enormously mark your life. And the trauma of these experiences, or even the absence of these figures (maternal and/or paternal), can draw the course of the stories. That is precisely the reason why I have been inspired by women that, with a very tough and complex baggage, have had the courage to speak about it.’

We mention absences and I think of Kawase and her obsessive search for her father. Of those hands that try to touch the images, to cling to them as if they were the only testimony able to safeguard a piece of the universe that belongs to us. When there is no lineage with which to root our position in the world, maybe the images offer a refuge to link us with what resists taking form. María confesses her fixation with these ghosts: ‘I am obsessed with people that disappear. In *The Inner Memory* (*La memoria interior*, 2000) I had the hope of finding the answer in the images, laying on the table my parents’ abandonment. But no matter how much you stir up old memories, the pain and the obsessions remain. In the beginning it seems that everything is fine, but then you realize that they were actually still present, that they were swept under the rug. All of a sudden everything explodes and you have family scenes that almost remind me of *The Celebration* (*Festen*, 1998) by Thomas Vinterberg. Not in the origin of the trauma, of course, but in that appearance of calmness, of festivity, which hides a storm. I think it is important to deal with the trauma, to know it is there. For me, images have been helpful for personal research, but also to feel questioned by a screen that talks to me from subjectivity. And to talk from subjectivity allows you to see that it is very probable that what happened to you also happened to someone else. To have courage from that family pain. Filmmakers such as Marguerite Duras, for example, are interesting to me not so much because they offer answers but because of their capacity of exposing themselves in a visceral way. She tells everything in a very brutal way, she is able to express what you could only tell yourself silently in the privacy of your home. She can speak to you from the most absolute desire, show you the type of person that you don’t want to be, but that deep down you know you are.’

Almost in unison we mention *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959). In a woman’s confessions to her Japanese lover, the taboo of the flesh is again revealed, what should stay hidden in the dampness of an attic. ‘The main character cannot resist that urge. She knows that the man she loves is German, the enemy, and that the others will see it as an act of treason; she knows she will be humiliated, that they will cut her hair, but she cannot –she does not want to– live a different way. She resists until she goes mad, and that is of remarkable courage. It is curious, because as a person I would probably not want to meet someone like Duras. She was extremely unstable, she had a sickening obsession with men, problems with alcohol... but one can still say that she openly embraced all of her contradictions. Her works have the ability to really stir you deeply, until you vomit. And you don’t always put so much subjectivity in your work, something that personal. Without a doubt, she was a great artist locked in a horrible personality.’

With these words, it seems that Medea's aura soars over our heads again. The power of these filmmakers resides in canalizing their personal difficulties to transform the image into a scream. Sometimes from pain, sometimes from protest. 'Duras's relationship with her mother reminds me of the one I have with my own mother. They were victims of their time in which their only option was to reproduce and raise their progeny. Women that, if presented with the opportunity, may not have chosen to be mothers. In some way, we –their sons and daughters– were a burden that they had no right to give up. And in that tough context, you have to become something like an insect. Put armor on and carry on. In Duras, for example, many of her novels are about the life conditions in the colonies and the putrefaction that affects family relationships. On some occasion, Duras even suggests that her mother hates her.' It is a painful confession, but one that fits perfectly with the gazes that we are trying to comprehend. Cinema can delve into the surface of calm reality, presents us with characters so monstrous that they are similar to us.

'In that sense, I have to admit that I did not like Chantal Akerman's last film (*No Home Movie*, 2015). I couldn't tell you exactly why, but there is something that seems distant to the story it wants to tell, even artificial. I usually like her fictions or documentaries more than when she talks about herself. There is something that disturbs me when she explains herself. Of her last film I am suspicious precisely of that too pacific relationship with her mother. I don't know Akerman's situation before committing suicide too well, but I have the feeling that she knew that this was the film she was leaving as testament and that is why I find it strange that she wanted to avoid any conflict in it. It's as if she wanted to embellish the frictions, to fill the rifts with a camera that doesn't seem to find its place in the space. There are very dubious shots. And Akerman wasn't exactly a person without personal problems. In her self-portraits we perceive a very closed person, between her and her thoughts there is a kind of wall. In fact, it's curious that in her self-portraits we see an abundance of closed rooms and hermetic spaces.'

It seems inevitable that María's words take us to *La chambre* (1972), one of Chantal Akerman's first films. There we see the filmmaker, lying in bed, until the movement of the camera eliminates the body from the framing to focus on the details that make up the small world of her bedroom. A certain circular order is produced, infinite, close to the suffocation of the space. I tell María that maybe Akerman wanted to remain unnoticed; the self-portrait isn't an easy genre. To expose your skin before the cinematic device, as we were saying regarding Duras, is many times a matter of courage. Of knowing that the

camera will pierce our heart. Maybe in that kind of Akerman's "shyness", in that act of protecting oneself behind a wall of apparent coldness, we are seeing a seed of what later on will be the main character of *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975).

'*Jeanne Dielman* really impressed me when I saw it, it's a very interesting film. Akerman filmed it with a very firm hand, with really premeditated fixed shots. Very different from the type of images that she offers in *No Home Movie*. While in the later Akerman there is a kind of abandonment or neglect, in *Jeanne Dielman* it is quite the contrary; the control of the image is absolute.' I then ask María if she thinks that Delphine Seyrig's acting corresponds to that distant personality that she sees in Akerman when she treats personal elements, or even if we can glimpse any autobiographic elements.

'To be honest I don't think so. I think Seyrig's style is more in line with the acting model of French cinema in the 70s; that containment in acting, that evident distance with the character, marking the limits of representation. More than an autobiographic film, I think it's a militant film, with a clear feminist message. I am especially fascinated by the way that the film treats time. I am more and more convinced that what we need in films to say things is time, and Akerman manages that flawlessly. We have to watch Seyrig peeling potatoes over and over again, in a totally mechanical way, until one day, simply by buttoning her jacket wrongly, the closed and routine world she knew falls apart. In the end what's important is not the ending, the scene of the murder, but the expansion of the whole process to get there.'

We agree on the fact that *Jeanne Dielman* is an overwhelming story, and without a doubt the constant flux that is given to time in each scene turns it into a film of slow enjoyment. It is not easy to get carried away by that low intensity current, by that residue that settles in until it festers and explodes in a heartbreaking final scene. Once you get there, you understand that it could not be told in a different way. This thought inevitably brings us to debate about how times have changed in contemporary fiction, or how to incorporate the new communication devices in it.

'Resuming Akerman's thread about her last film, there is a scene in which she has a Skype conversation with her mother. It's curious how it ends up being a quite empty exchange of words, very significant of that type of communication. That kind of "No, you hang up..." that keeps on going over and over again. I felt like screaming at the screen. There is nothing I find colder or more heartbreaking than a Skype conversation. But at the

same time I think it's something that cinema has to learn to add from now on, it needs to find a way to represent it, because they are mechanisms that we are getting used to in our daily lives at a frenetic pace. They are tools that are changing the way we use words, they interpose a screen in our relationship with others. But it isn't easy to introduce the aesthetics of new technology in the cinematic language and make it seem organic. I'm still trying.'

In fact, new technology is also modifying the perception of oneself, the meaning of the self-portrait. We both agree on the fact that the selfie is a terrifying concept. We think of it as the narcissistic reverse of that depth that we perceived in the images of subjectivity.

'Art history is full of portraits that don't say anything, and the selfie could be one of its most dangerous manifestations, in the sense that we are obliged to overexpose ourselves without saying anything about us. I think of Warhol's portraits, where the human face is completely inscrutable, empty, there is nothing behind it. It proves that a face can lack content. Warhol's portraits talk about other things: of the commercialization of images, of their circulation in wealth, but they are not talking about the person you have in front of you. Besides, he also didn't position himself at all. Very few people knew the character that was behind Andy Warhol.'

I ask María if perhaps, in the selfie era, it is worth it to reclaim a self-portrait unconnected to self-worship

'Well, now that you say it, I don't know if you know *The blonds* (*Los rubios*, 2003), a film by Albertina Carri that talks about something so painful and personal such as the disappearance of her parents due to the Argentinian dictatorship. But she does

it through memory, from what little she remembers of them from when she was a little girl. Instead of acting as herself, she decides to build an alter ego in the actress Analía Couceyro. An actress that not only looks like her but also has a very peculiar personality, a very personal acting style. She portrays herself through the fragmentation of memory, reproduces the dark moments with scenes played by Playmobil toys... I think it's a very interesting way of talking about oneself without the need to stand before a camera.'

While I finish writing this interview, and in the curiosity that drives me to type the name of Analía Couceyro in Google, I find that years ago she participated in one of the many interpretations of Medea's play on stage. The coincidence of this discovery practically turns into the final confirmation of the fact that Medea's aura still wandered through the silences and pauses of our conversation. In the end, all her fury, so terrible and yet so liberating, so similar to ourselves that we would almost not want to accept it, again makes an appearance as a hurricane. Curiously, one of our last word exchanges revolves around the capacity of the myth to tell the stories that we dare not confess.

'The myth can achieve that we share collectively a difficult to assume truth. That we dare discuss it. The myth can be a channel of empowerment, as it turns some of our most personal and painful issues into universal matters.' •

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## PALMA LOMBARDO

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experimentation and cinematographic research. She has worked in museums as coordinator of activities, and collaborates with different projects dedicated to cultural management.



# Lois Weber: the female thinking in movement

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Núria Bou

## ABSTRACT

Lois Weber, as an actress and filmmaker, portrayed in her films the tension that, in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women who wanted to maintain some of the Victorian traditions while listening to the *New Woman* empowering speeches experimented. Lois Weber was able to illustrate the appearance of a new female psychology by visualizing in a complex and conflicting way the difficulty of *becoming a woman* in the era of progress. The article, based on the analysis of some of her female characters' body language, reveals the way in which the filmmaker gave form to the inner thinking of her characters on screen, defending the importance of the (moral) female gaze, realistically—and with an emerging modernity—exploring the construction of a female subjectivity that was pure thinking in movement.

## KEYWORDS

Body, thinking in images, actress, woman filmmaker, female subjectivity, silent film, modernity.

Lois Weber, in the role of the mother of a newborn baby, is about to call her husband, who is working in the city, at the moment where she discovers that their nanny has packed her bags to leave the house, because, as she writes in a note, she is not willing to work *in such a solitary place*. Right after reading these farewell words from her nanny, she lets herself be carried away by her own body, which, in a visceral way, leads her to the telephone. Weber reflects, restlessly looking at her surroundings, the fear that makes her be alone, but slowly overcomes her discomfort: with a reflexive countenance, she leaves the telephone and follows her decision with a shrug, sighing, as if trying to belittle her first fright; with a small smile she shows that she will not disturb her husband. But we can also see a certain inner satisfaction, the pride of knowing that she can be alone, of feeling self-sufficient. The main character of the short film *Suspense* (Lois Weber and Phillips Smalley, 1913) represents a *good wife* of Victorian appearance, while showing a decisive security that characterized the emancipated women of the new twentieth century. Indeed: in the fictions of the first decade of the century, the Hollywood's creators drew attention, in their female characters, to what integrating the new empowering speeches of the New Woman could mean for a woman who had received a Victorian education. Lois Weber, as a woman and filmmaker, was sensitive to these inner female movements and felt the need to dramatize, in her characters' bodies, this predicament: she managed to portray the appearance of a new female psychology, by visualizing in a complex and contradictory manner the difficulty of *becoming a woman* in the modern era.

### 1. The body of thought of an actress/filmmaker

*Suspense*, a ten-minute short film, is an extraordinary avant-garde film in which the main action is sometimes seen in a parallel way, sometimes using a split screen, a single segmented shot –in this case in three triangles– that frames different scenes. In this small exploit of suspense, we can see the pleasure of experimenting with the cinematic language and we notice a constant and meticulous framing and planning research<sup>1</sup>. Even if the film is also signed by her husband Phillips Smalley, her own writing will start to take shape, the one of a filmmaker who will afterwards, and by herself, continue to prove that precision was key to express intensely what was

happening on the screen. *Suspense* is an absolutely controlled short film, an exploit of rationality in the use of analytic editing that shows the concise style of Lois Weber. Thus, it would not be strange if she herself had written the script, as she had been the scriptwriter of almost all the films she directed. Lois Weber, who also produced most of her films, had said that 'a real director should be absolute' (WEBER in SLIDE, 1996: 57). That is why she also performed as lead actress in her first films, usually embodying the housewife with nineteenth century roots. Researcher Louise Heck-Rabi (1984: 56) assures that, in 1914, Lois Weber was more popular as an actress than as a director; and historian Anthony Slide (SLIDE, 1996: 59) states that in the year 1913, a critic of the magazine *The Moving Picture World* praised Weber's performance of a young matron, claiming that her body *irradiated domesticity*. The director had started performing, in the year 1911, this role in marital plots and continued to embody it until 1917. When she stopped acting, she was prone to choosing similar figures to her: it is the case of Anita Stewart or Claire Windsor, two actresses that she discovered and made famous<sup>2</sup>, and with whom she continued to explore the complexity of female domesticity at the beginning of the century.

Who knows if the public's identification of Weber as a housewife is what made the director decide not to perform in *How Men Propose* (1913), a short film in which the female character does not want anything to do with domestic life: she pretends to be interested in three gentlemen who, one by one, declare their love for her; afterwards, she promises them, individually, matrimony and even accepts an engagement ring (which she changes every time for her own portrait). In the end, she sends them a note thanking them for their help: now she will be able to write an article on how men propose. The film is a very well constructed joke in which the viewer can see the very similar reactions of the three gentlemen –firstly of nervousness, then of happiness–, while her body language increases in theatricality and sense of humor. Lois Weber, in spite of using a comedian tone, does not ridicule or parody the female figure. The balance with which she manages to dignify the protagonist's mischief has to do precisely with her rigorous appearance of a domestic woman, which hides the bright, emancipated girl. We could read the short film as a warning: a woman is never just what she seems.

1. I think of the husband when he is driving home at top speed and the police follow him: this car chase is resolved in a single shot, by means of seeing the pursuers' car through the rear view mirror. It is clear that Lois Weber was exploring the different ways of presenting parallel actions. Another example of a synthetic exploit can be seen in the way that Lois Weber uses the high-angle shot: firstly, we see, in a high-angle shot, how the maid leaves the key under the

entrance mat and, afterwards, we see the burglar entering the household and, seen from the same high-angle viewpoint, discovering the key, right where the maid has left it.

2. Other actresses that she discovered were Mary MacLaren, Mildred Harris and Esther Ralston, amongst others, and she also promoted Frances Marion's scriptwriting career.

Indeed: Lois Weber, living between two eras, dedicated herself as an actress –and especially as a director– to explain the ambivalence that always gnaws in a feminine figure. In this sense, it is not strange that she performed in *The Spider and her Web* (1914, codirected with Phillips Smalley), a short film in which she embodies a vampire named Madame DuBarr, who destroys the heart –and savings– of the men she attracts malignly. One day, a scientist that wants to end the woman's terrible power, makes her drink a potion to make her believe she is sick. Madame DuBarr, with the aim of straightening out her life, adopts an orphan child, but afterwards discovers the scientist's scam, which makes her want to return to being her past vampire self; in the end, though, she realizes she cannot leave the child with whom she has established a deep intimate bond. More than moralizing about the maternal goods, Lois Weber explores how habits are retained: firstly, she shows how it is hard for the character to change her vampire habits and, afterwards, how it is hard for her to abandon her maternal feelings. This dialogue –and tension– between two ways of being a woman highlights the integration of opposites that a female body holds. Nancy F. Cott (1987) explains, from the historical context of the first decade of the century, that the change of century opposed two generations—the older generation with nineteenth century habits and the younger one with new modern proclamations. But as Karen Ward Mahar explains further (2006: 91), some women, on and off screen, retained habits from the past while embracing the freedoms of the New Woman. Lois Weber is a good example of this: on screen she *irradiated domesticity* while she was, indisputably, a modern woman who triumphed as an actress and director. In real life, she revealed that she believed in marriage: 'There is no doubt that marriage is the most important event in our lives and the least studied or understood' (WEBER in SLIDE, 1996: 16). According to historian Anthony Slide, the relationship between Lois Weber and her husband Phillips Smalley had started to establish itself in a very Victorian manner: during the first two years of marriage, she did not work and stayed home while her husband travelled as a theatre producer. Afterwards, Weber rebuilt her life as an actress, wrote scripts and started to make films with Smalley, but he ended up becoming jealous of his wife's triumphs: Slide details that the 1914 reporters wrote about Weber's creative importance in the films that they signed together (SLIDE, 1996: 30). And, still, Lois Weber continued to worry about being a good wife, as we can see in her later statements and the films she made, where the main characters, as I will develop later on, struggled between a domestic life and a more autonomous one. This interest in evoking in her films issues that were related to her own personal life is revealed in a more open way in *The Marriage Clause* (1926), a semi-

autobiographical examination' (SLIDE, 1996: 29) of the first years of her marriage which she made four years after her divorce to Smalley. In summary: Lois Weber was a woman that, from her Victorian moralism, started to follow some of the recent standards of modernity, but made visible the tension that implied coexisting with these two ways of thinking; she used the camera to capture what she was experimenting and, through her female characters, was able to fix her thinking in movement.

## 2. The moral Truth of a female body

*Sincerely, Lois Weber*, signed the director on a photograph of her figure at the beginning of the film *Hypocrites* (1915), a film that she directed by herself and was considered her artistic milestone. It is a moral fable in which Lois Weber criticizes the hypocrisy of politicians, businessmen and lovers of the new century, through the medieval gaze of a preacher, where a minister fails to make *The Naked Truth* known to the community, a symbolic figure that everyone misunderstands because it appears completely naked. Lois Weber's boldness of allowing a naked woman on screen –that even showed her body frontally– stirred the censorship. *Hypocrites* became a scandal wherever it was shown (Boston's mayor demanded to *dress* the symbol of Truth, requesting to paint the frames where the naked character appeared), but, in the end, it became a public and critic success. Lois Weber did not perform *The Naked Truth*. Probably she did not dare to show herself naked, but the truth is that some magazine wrote that Lois Weber had dared to perform in the film the naked symbol of the Truth (HECK-RABI: 56). And, in fact, they weren't completely wrong: *Hypocrites* can be understood as a personal manifestation of how she wanted to treat the female body on screen: far from wanting to give it a sexual sense –but using the erotic power of a naked female– she translated the sensuality of a body into a moral concept, into a space of reflection.

Lois Weber had worked as a social activist in the streets in the name of the Evangelical church; thus, she knew the importance of reaching the people and she tried to make her cinema a piece of reality, a means of shaking the public, to morally educate viewers. In the first decade of the century and especially during the years of the First World War, Weber, as Richard Koszarski (KOSZARSKI: 140) states, 'reached an enormous success combining an astute commercial sense with a rare vision of cinema as a moral instrument.' In fact, when Hollywood wanted to legitimize the cinematic spectacle, amongst the bourgeoisie, it had to demonstrate that fictions could be something more than car chases or love stories: moral values emerged in David Wark Giffith and Cecil B. DeMille's most prestigious productions, two

directors that were competing with Lois Weber's productions in the year 1915<sup>3</sup>. The most popular actresses of the time such as Mary Pickford or Mabel Normand also ideologically took part in the films that they performed in and, off screen, declared themselves in favor of president Wilson's interventionism, in patriotic speeches or by selling government bonds: on and off screen, these actresses asserted a clear moral conduct of how the American citizen should act. Researcher Veronica Pravadelli (PRAVADELLI: 2014, 107) claims that in that first decade:

'Women were believed to be more suitable than men to promote cinema's reputation, due to their alleged moral superiority. (...) Women could maintain the morality of the nation through a spiritual management of the private sphere, of the home and the family. This moral superiority has favored women's determination outside the domestic space to battle social problems such as poverty, prostitution, slavery, alcoholism, etc. It is in this tradition that women are perceived as essential to the moral improvement of cinema (and of the nation)<sup>4</sup>.

What I am interested in highlighting from the words of the Italian historian is that woman's *moral superiority* embraced the sphere of reality; that is why, from the stars' position –the case of Mary Pickford– or from cinematic creation, in Hollywood, women of the beginning of the century made themselves heard. It can't be fortuitous that, in the film, the only two figures that understand the symbolic figure of the Truth are of the female sex: a woman –in love with the preacher– and a little girl. Thus, Lois Weber evoked the relevance of the (moral) female gaze; in the same way that she defended that the female body was more than just an object for the masculine gaze, she initiated a reflexive journey about female subjectivity.

### 3. The body/cinema as a space for reflection

A year later, Lois Weber directed *Where Are My Children?* (1916), a film, sixty-two minutes long, signed with Phillips Smalley, that revolves around abortion and birth control, from the gaze of different female characters. But Lois Weber focuses in the movement of Mrs. Walton's thinking (Helen Riaume), a rich woman, married to a wealthy lawyer, that expresses the feelings that torment her, not so much for having aborted<sup>5</sup>, as, mostly, for not having told her husband. Lois Weber visualizes the reflective movements of this character, next to a husband

who longs to have children, who plays with their neighbors' children or watches, entranced, the children that surround him whereas Mrs. Walton does not show any maternal gestures towards them. One scene that stands out is when the couple welcomes the husband's sister to their home, who has just had a baby, and while Mr. Walton lavishes looks and caresses on the baby, his wife does not show any emotion. Lois Weber does not ridicule Mrs. Walton's attitude (but she doesn't praise it either): the director constructs a female character that, in theory in a natural way, does not have a maternal vocation.

But her husband's desire to have children makes her rethink her vocation. This is where Lois Weber focuses all her attention to express it cinematically. To reveal in images the thinking of the woman that shifts between conviction and doubt, the director shows Mrs. Walton walking around her room; after, she lowers her head, she ponders slightly moving her face; afterwards, she stand up firmly, as if she were making a new decision and, in the end, she sits down and smiles staring vacantly, convincing herself that she is able to please her husband. Her body language is not that different from the one I described at the beginning of the article, regarding the short film *Suspense*. And the idea is similar, because, in both cases, the purpose is to dramatize the intimate debate that the woman experiences when, in her mind, two in theory opposing logics arise: the one that belongs to the nineteenth century world and the one that responds to the century of woman's emancipation. Lois Weber focuses on trying to capture cinematically the difficulty of joining them. Thus, the thinking in movement of her characters visualizes the attempt –and sometimes the failure– of synthesizing these two stereotypes, transforming the female body into a space for reflection.

Against a conventional resolution, Lois Weber doesn't make the main character of *Where Are My Children?* finally consent to being a mother, but inserts a narrative turnaround in which the couple cannot reconsider anything as a family: the husband discovers that she has concealed her abortion and cannot forgive her. The film ends with a scene in which the couple is sitting in front of a fireplace, in two different armchairs, without looking at each other, showing the isolation that has reigned between them during the years. Lois Weber superimposes the image of three children that play among the couple; a dissolve brings us, twenty years later, to the same framing, with both

3. In the year 1915 she was the most important director of Universal Studios, as popular as D.W. Griffith or Cecil B. DeMille, and in 1917 she created her own production company: Lois Weber Productions. See Annette Kuhn and Susannah Radstone (ed).

4. For more information on the matter of female moral superiority, see the revealing study of Karen Ward Mahar (2006).

5. There are many purely moral interpretations of this film by historians. Anthony Slide (SLIDE, 1996: 15) already claims that Lois Weber's work has not been very studied, even by feminists that have not learned to value the director's cinematic talent, refusing the moralism or the not too radical portrait that she made of the female figuration. Veronica Pravadelli's book is an exception: see p. 108-114 about the film *Where Are My Children?*

characters now old, swallowed by the solitude of their silence; the children from before are now three adult boys which, superimposed, surround the couple lovingly. Lois Weber, in this ending where she captures the thinking's immobility, the disastrous density of the passing of time, catapults the film to a cinematic modernity without precedents: I am referring to the modernity of the *time-images* with which Deleuze describes the images that contain thinking, those where the action stops being the main character, so that temporality can emerge. Lois Weber had found modernity because she had explored feelings from the strictest realism.

Five years later, when her cinema started losing the public's favor, the critics highlighted a film such as *Two Wise Wives* (1921) that did not have dramatic situations, there was no action, the heroines were not perfect, but, precisely for these reasons, it 'seemed true and, more than that, quite likely' (SLIDE, 1996: 117). In opposition to what the *dream factory* was offering, Lois Weber starts the film as if it were the ending of a classic movie to openly question the conventional ending of the Hollywood narrations: *Two Wise Wives* opens with a sign that reads: 'Most stories end: "And they lived happily ever after"' and, subsequently, it shows a couple that is walking towards a lookout, while the sun is setting. The own Lois Weber had said: 'I was tired of unrealistic happy endings' (MAHAR, 2006: 141). After reproducing this conventional happy ending at the beginning of her film, the director tries what classic Hollywood had always concealed: visualize what could happen after the *Happy End*.

*Two Wise Wives* presents the story of a couple in which the wife (Marie Graham, performed by Claire Windsor) is jealously looking after the household and trying to please her husband until a more modern woman (Sara Dely, embodied by actress Mona Lisa), also married but not focused on her husband at all, tries to seduce the first woman's husband. Lois Weber portrays these two females, as if they could not be part of the same body, but, however, shows the meeting points of union between them. And, in both cases, there is a criticism of both the domestic and modern woman. Precisely because of this Lois Weber's final thesis is not clear: it is impossible to know with certainty which model of a woman does she finally stand for (and here it is important to bear in mind that the title equally describes both women: *Two Wise Wives*). In fact, I understand that the director deliberately does not choose any of the *wise women*, because what interested her was the transition that

happens between them. Anthony Slide (SLIDE, 1996: 114) points out that, at the end of the film, the main characters will have learned from each other: Sara will treat her husband better and Marie will not be solely focus on hers. Again, Lois Weber becomes an extraordinary filmmaker showing the protagonists' feelings that, with their differences, make up the two worlds of the female reality of the beginning of the century. Lois Weber's cinema tries to transgress the positive-negative, active-passive or housewife-emancipated woman duality, because, in her films, there is a visible research for synthesis, to put into dialogue –without opposing them– the new modern woman of the new century with the domestic femininity of Victorian roots. And this is finally her moral: a moral that obliges the viewer to think thoroughly, beyond the Cartesian structure of a binary thinking. And of course not everyone was willing to make that effort: as Karen Ward Mahar demonstrates, Cecil B. DeMille's marriage comedies were having a great success in the same moment, as they were 'pure entertainment', whereas Lois Weber started to be harshly criticized for trying to 'sell a moral' (MAHAR, A2006: 148). A moral, yes, but open, not subject to a Manichean thinking, but to the contractile movement of reflection.

#### 4. The synthetic subjectivity of femininity/of Lois Weber

*The Blot* (1921) was also disliked by the public, but the critics defended it: Lois Weber's cinematic talent is so visible that it is considered her masterpiece even today<sup>6</sup>. Actress Claire Windsor embodied the leading role of Amelia Griggs, a girl who works as a librarian and belongs to a family with serious economic problems. The concise portrait that Lois Weber makes of poverty, in real settings with some non-professional actors, is of extreme concision (in this sense, the close-ups are always used to reveal objects which are worn, broken or full of holes, generating a very physic perception of poverty). The character of Amelia is captured, from the beginning, as a body that escapes immobility: introduced in a fixed way through a pencil drawing, the main character comes to life, making the drawing on her face disappear. Amelia begins moving slowly, as if Lois Weber wanted to remind us that, in her cinema, female action is resolved with small gestures that come from inner thoughts. Although having directed two movies, *A Midnight Romance* (1919) and *Mary Regan* (1919), where the female characters embodied heroic deeds along the same lines of the serial popular queens, Lois Weber, after the public failure of *Mary Regan*, went

6. A consideration that is based on the few films that can currently be watched. Slide calculates that Lois Weber made around forty films, apart from uncountable short films (about 100 IMDB seconds), but that only about twelve films have been preserved (SLIDE, 1996: 15). Furthermore, most of them are

found in archives or libraries and not all of them can be completely viewed: some are missing reels.

back to marriage and domestic films, maintaining her accurate study of the reflexive female inner being. We must bear in mind that, while the director was busy portraying this, Hollywood's cinema, in the first decade of the century, constructed different female figurations to represent the *new woman* of the century of progress –chased naïve girls, melodramatic heroines, main characters of adventure serials or overwhelmed comedians–, all of them of an unstoppable external movement. And at the beginning of the 20s, the new flapper had invaded the screen, the young, dynamic, hardworking and dancing girl. Lois Weber was not able to impose her reflexive art at the voracity in which the audience demanded action and entertainment films: her rhythm could not be heard and, slowly, she lost the favor of all the publics<sup>7</sup>.

It is fascinating, taking into account that *Two Wise Wives* had also not succeeded, that Lois Weber, with *The Blot*, continued to maintain her slow –and realistic– rhythms and built a female character such as Amelia Griggs, a woman with a static gesture (who spends long scenes lying on a sofa, resting from a fever that has left her weak, without energy). But Amelia is a hardworking, cult and refined woman who, even with her sickness, has a dense mental activity, worried about her family's poverty. At the same time, the film talks about the love that a poor preacher and a rich man have for her. The fact that the mother tries to make her daughter choose the more well-off man is symptomatic to distinguish, once again, inside the female sphere, the nineteenth century tradition –that only thought of a good marriage– and the main character's gaze which receives both men with affection but without clearly orienting her desire. The rich man's character is in no way ridiculed or vulgarized: on the contrary, he is an honest, sensitive, open man who even becomes friends with the preacher. At the end of the film, Amelia gets engaged with the rich man, but, shortly afterwards, on the porch, in the last scene of the film, she reveals her feelings openly, with the minimum body language, but making clear and concise the movement of her thinking. Amelia watches as the preacher who she has just tenderly said goodbye to leaves; the poor man walks on a path and turns to the house that he just abandoned; she doesn't

seem to notice the distant masculine gaze and, in a close-up, folds inwardly, smiles, as if she were imagining a fantasy and, finally, looks upwards demonstrating that she is fulfilling her wish<sup>8</sup>. Her sigh links with a reverse angle shot of the preacher, who also sighs looking in the girl's direction. But neither knows of the other's longing. In one of the most modern open endings<sup>9</sup> of the history of cinema, without specifying what will happen next, violating the conventional Happy End of Hollywood's classic cinema, Lois Weber inserts the boundless desire of a woman who conceives her happiness in a mental dimension, probably not corporeal at all, but who offers it freely by an intimate movement outwards. With this gesture, Amelia synthesizes Lois Weber's way of writing, giving form to a female subjectivity of the beginning of the century that she retains corporeally, but that can be read interiorly. Amelia synthesizes, from the body of thought, the female habits of the nineteenth century tradition with the liberated cries of desire of the New Woman. •

7. After this film, Lois Weber only directed seven more. The last one with sound: *White Heat*, 1934, in which she addressed the topic of interracial love. She had so many problems with the Hays Code censorship that the film was not even distributed.

8. To understand which gesture I am referring to: BOU in SEGARRA: 71.

9. The open (and modern) ending in realistic exploration films can be found, thoroughly discussed, in later films such as Stroheim's *Greed* (1924) or Murnau's *Tabu* (1931). And, obviously, Chaplin's *City Lights* (1931) a film that also ends with a reverse angle shot.

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# 'One must at least begin with the body feeling': Dance as filmmaking in Maya Deren's choreocinema

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Elinor Cleghorn

## ABSTRACT

For the Ukrainian-American experimental filmmaker Maya Deren (1917-1961) filmmaking *was* dance. Through her own presence as actor, her technical and mechanistic manipulations of performed movement into dance, and her embodied dance-like engagements with filmic technicity, Deren innovated a radical approach to the making of dance-film, which was heralded in the mid-1940s as 'a virtually new art of "choreocinema."' This essay explores the ways in which Deren's 'choreocinema' derived from her long-held feeling for dance, and argues that her acting roles in *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), *At Land* (1944) and *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (1945/46) constitute complex choreographic imbrications of performance, direction, and filmmaking. While Deren's filmmaking is synonymous with the enmeshment of her 'self' within the films themselves, her performances are predicated upon her immersion in dance as a refutation of the personal dimension. Through examination of the impact of Deren's interest in dance as ritual, collective, and depersonalized expression, this essay argues that Deren's acting roles exemplify her ambition to utilize dance, created by the manipulations of the filmic instrument, to articulate female subjectivity released from the margins of normative social and cultural codifications. In turn, this essay looks towards the resonance of Deren's innovations through the work of dance-filmmakers including Shirley Clarke, Amy Greenfield and Sally Potter, proposing that a particular attunement to dance has, for feminist filmmakers, enabled 'choreocinema' to evolve in the form of nuanced meditations upon embodied labor, artistic agency, and the ever-motile configuration of female subjectivity.

## KEYWORDS

Maya Deren, choreocinema, dance, dance-film, feminism, subjectivity, performance, embodiment, labor, ritual.

In the first scene of her film-dance *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (1945/6), Maya Deren appears, leaning against a doorframe. She crosses the threshold, takes up a chair, and begins to unwind a skein of wool. The film's protagonist, played by dancer Rita Christiani, enters the frame and with her arm raised moves towards the room occupied by 'Maya' as if compelled to do so. The camera follows Christiani's approaching hand while Maya, the skein held in a taut diagonal across her body, nods towards a ball of wool placed upon an opposite seat. Christiani sits down and the two women, watched over by an austere muse played by diarist and writer Anaïs Nin, commence the ritual that will bind them as doubles in the protagonist's dance through the strictures of social obligation towards the expansive freedom of subjectivity. With the skein wrapped about her hands and her palms open, Maya mouths a silent conversation, her head swaying. While Christiani's action of winding is executed at a naturalistic pace, successive shots of Maya unravel in slow motion. Achieved by intercutting profile shots of Christiani filmed at a consistent speed of 24 frames a second and Maya at increased frame rates, the sequence proposes the simultaneity of two different orders of time: the effect is akin to a sudden discordance in a musical phrase, like a bitonal clash. Camera motor manipulation transforms the sweeping gestures of Maya's arms into the stuttering articulations of a puppet; her facial expressions contort, and her mouth movements evoke unheard incantations. As the sequence draws to a climax, Maya unravels the skein completely; captured at 148 frames a second, her hand gestures converge into a dance of uncanny grace and her hair clouds about her face, 'moving slowly in the lifted, horizontal shape possible only to rapid tempos' (DEREN, 1946a:48). Freed of the skein, her eyes closed, Maya raises her hands as her head tips back, and for about ten seconds the screen is given over to an ecstatic portrait of Maya Deren, trembling at the edges of motion.

Maya Deren performed in three of her six completed films; *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), *At Land* (1944), and *Ritual in Transfigured Time*. In her shooting scripts and pre-productions notes she refers to her roles as 'Maya' or simply 'girl' or 'woman', and in her theoretical writings she distances her discussion of the films from the question of her presence as an actor. Deren's work, however, is synonymous with the enmeshment of her 'self' within the films themselves. In *Meshes*, Maya exists everywhere at once, fractured into four iterations of the protagonist's subconscious as she dreams through a disorienting poetics of domestic containment. In *At Land*, shards of Maya are gathered together in the protagonist's mythological quest to preserve a 'constant identity' amidst the volatile fluidity of the external world (DEREN, 1988:365 original de 1946b). In *Ritual in Transfigured Time*, Maya appears as the protagonist's counterpart, at once a double of Christiani and her familiar

spirit, in a social choreography that moves towards the accomplishment of the protagonist's 'critical metamorphosis.' (DEREN, 2005:225, original de 1946c)

Deren came to filmmaking with a 'very deep feeling...for dance' (DEREN, 1984:431, original de 1941). While she never undertook formal training, she identified as a dancer; but rather than pursuing a career as a performer she made her fascination with dance as cultural expression the focus of her progression as a writer and researcher. In 1941, Deren approached choreographer and anthropologist Katherine Dunham to propose that they collaborate on book for children explaining the origin and meaning of dances 'in a simple, anthropological way' through illustrations and poetic text (Ibid.). Later that year Deren was employed as Dunham's secretary and editorial assistant, and she joined her company, the first self-sustained African-American and Afro-Caribbean dance group in the U.S., on their national tour of the musical *Cabin in the Sky*. Throughout the 1930s Dunham carried out field work studies of Caribbean dance forms, particularly those specific to Trinidad and Haiti, and thus Deren had access to her extensive research materials, which included 16mm footage of dances performed in religious and communal ritual contexts. When her position with Dunham ended in 1942, Deren focused on her own academic study of ritual dance forms, and later that year she published an essay titled 'Religious Possession in Dancing' in the journal *Educational Dance*. Deren had not yet conceived of making films, but the essay introduces an organization of thinking around the somatic conditions and psychological effects of ritual dance and ceremonial possession that permeated Deren's optic from the beginning. For Deren, ritual dance affected an exemplary condition of 'depersonalization', in which the participant, propelled through into possession by physical endurance and with the cooperation of the community, is freed 'from the specializations and confines of personality.' (DEREN, 1946a:20)

Deren's choreographic direction of bodily movement in her films, including those in which she appears, draws upon the language of dance in order to absolve the personal dimension and refute characterization. Dance in Deren's filmmaking is never merely decoration or flourish: rather, dance unfolds as a corporeal articulation of human subjectivity released from the codified social and cultural margins that determine individual identity. Dance also issues forth a transformative force: the body embodies and structures the passage of time, strives beyond muscular and gravitational limitations, and extends animate impulses to spaces and objects. The possessed body presented Deren with a model for a particular condition of filmic dance because, in the ritual context, the devotee is the instrument of collective expression residing beyond the will of the individual:

dance, initiated by the participant's somatic and psychological investment in the ceremony, is then mediated and sustained by extrinsic forces, the rhythms of drum and song, which not only act upon the dancing body but inhabit its very pulse. In Deren's filmmaking, dance derives from the camera and its mechanistic manipulations, from the technicity that she enfolded into her screen bodies in order to affect, as she put it, a 'transcendence' of the 'intentions and movements of individual performers' (DEREN, 2005:227, originally from 1946c) In her discussion of a sequence in *Ritual* in which the gestures and greetings of guests at a cocktail party are choreographed into a frenetic dance of social animation, Ute Holl writes; 'A dance appears on screen that has never been danced, that instead has been created by camera and editing work. Emotions are... produced by technical devices. They are engendered beyond the intentions of the actors' (HOLL, 2001:165). When Deren 'acted' in her films, she inhabited filmic space as an embodied articulation of her own choreographic vision. She moves as an instrumental dancer, transposing the patterning described in her shooting scripts into motion, designating the attentions of her body towards her own transformation into a choreo-filmic entity.

As a dancer, Deren had an innate ability to compose her body in her filmic performances, to accomplish textures of meaning through a simple step, a raise of the hand, or a blink. In her movements she transforms exertion into uncanny grace. In *At Land* she twists her torso with ponderous precision as she climbs the wooded stump of a tree; she crawls across a banqueting table as if swimming, full-bodied yet somehow weightless. *Meshes* progresses along the rhythm of her strides; her arm extensions are controlled and balletic, her limbs slink across the surfaces of walls and corridors. When Deren began experimenting with filmmaking, she handled the Bolex as an extension of her body, as a curious prosthesis. As she writes of the tentative beginnings of *Meshes*; 'I started out thinking in terms of a subjective camera, one that would show only what I could see by myself without the aid of mirrors and which would move through the house as if it were a pair of eyes...' (DEREN, 2005:203, originally from 1946) Deren's first filmic material was her own body, and while *Meshes* largely abandons the subjective perspective, the protagonist's movements extend from Deren's embodied intimacy with the camera, from her willingness to be moved by it, to submit to its manipulations. Later Deren conceptualized the camera as an 'active participant' in the creation of her filmic dances: not only could the camera extract qualities of dance through the repetitions, expansions, accelerations and attenuations its mechanism could bring to movement, but its flexibility, as a hand-held instrument, enabled the movements of the filmmaker to be incorporated into the film, to become the muscular derivation of motion within the

frame (DEREN, 2005:172-173, original de 1960). Filmmaking, for Deren, was dance: a labor striving to be unburdened, an exhibition of effort releasing from weight. Deren's roles in *Meshes*, *At Land* and *Ritual* constitute a complex imbrication of physical performance, choreographic direction, and embodied filmmaking. In the finale of the wool-winding scene in *Ritual* 'Maya' is overtaken by the exquisite exhaustion of the delineation of her movements into slower and slower motion. Here, Maya's body performs a referential inversion of the work of Deren's filmmaking. The wool-winding sequence instigates the process of possession that draws the film into its fantastical temporal order, and as Maya is being possessed within the film, she exhibits Deren's mechanistic and material possession of the film. As the skein unravels completely and Maya vanishes into the ball of wool, one is reminded of the metamorphosis that befalls Ovid's Arachne, whose skilled grace at winding, weaving, and working wool condemns her body to the form of her labors, as if a spider: 'from that belly, yet she spins her thread' (OVID in INNES (transl.), 1955:138). While she was making her final completed film, the technically and choreographically ambitious astral ballet *The Very Eye of Night*, Deren described herself as a spider, spinning the project out of her own guts (DEREN, 1953). But in *Ritual*, Deren's mythological vision, 'Maya' escapes the containments of domesticity to dance into the formless depths of the ocean, where she melds with Christiani's protagonist, her labors transfigured into the pure cinematic substance of the negative image. In *Meshes*, *At Land* and *Ritual*, Maya dances conditions of female corporeality that mythologize a woman's struggle to relate herself to herself, unmoored from the modes of societal and sexual identification that attempt to contain her. In turn, it is through these dances that Deren makes visible the work of her filmmaking: Maya embodies the strenuous physical, material, and mechanistic labors of an artist striving, as Millicent Hodson writes, to create 'with every step an iconography of female experience' (HODSON, 1984:xi).

In her book *A Politics of Love: The Cinema of Sally Potter*, Sophie Mayer discusses Potter's 'incorporation of dance into film' in her 1979 experimental narrative film *Thriller*, a re-imagining of Puccini's 1896 opera *La Bohème*. Potter trained as a dancer and choreographer from 1971, first at the London School of Contemporary Dance, where she studied with Richard Alston and Siobhan Davies, before forming the performance duo Limited Dance Company in 1974 with dance artist and choreographer Jacky Lansley. As Mayer argues, Potter's emphasis on dance and dancing bodies in her films, including in *The Gold Diggers* (1983) and *The Tango Lesson* (1997), is predicated upon a concern with making visible the artistic labor of filmmaking: 'Dance is not the ahistorical perfection of ballet or the mass production chorus line of Busby

Berkeley films, but an individual's work on herself, through the repetitive, difficult process of rehearsal and failure required to produce creative expression' (MAYER, 2009:45). In *The Tango Lesson*, Potter herself plays the role of Sally, a filmmaker whose fascination with learning tango leads her to offer a dancer, Pablo, a role in her film in exchange for teaching her to dance. For Mayer, the value Potter places on the strenuous, exhaustive effort inscribed in performance as a labor of the body obviates identification with 'star performers because of their celebrity': rather, the visibility of labor connects Potter's viewers to her performers' 'private selves', expressed through the 'discipline of performance' (MAYER, 2009:75). In Deren's filmmaking, the cinematic incorporation of her dancing body into the very warp-and-weave of the films makes visible, and as Mayer puts it, valuable, the physical, material, and mechanistic labors of her art making, thus conjuring a locus for the formation of Deren's artistic subjectivity that exempts her the reduction of her 'bodily appearance' to an emblem of her 'star construction' (Ibid). Like Potter's filmmaking, Deren's innovations in filmic dance evolved through an intense attendance to what it meant to *work*, and through working, to *move*. In 1955, while she was making *The Very Eye of Night*, Deren wished to withdraw *Meshes* from circulation because she considered it represented the 'virtually unintelligible' expressions of a medium that was now her 'mother tongue' (DEREN, 2005:191, originally from 1965). Yet she locates a profound point of departure in a sequence that she refers to as the 'four strides.' Holding a knife, one of the dreaming 'Mayas' begins to move towards another Maya, sleeping on a chair. She rises and begins to stride; in close-up her sandaled foot lands first on sand, on grass in the next frame, then on to pavement, and finally on to a rug<sup>1</sup>. The sequence culminates with the knife-bearing Maya returned to the room, advancing upon the sleeping Maya. Deren choreographed the 'four strides' with the intention to convey the implicit violence of an individual's psychological journey; as she writes, 'What I meant when I planned that scene is that you have to come a long way –from the beginning of time– to kill yourself...' (Ibid, 192). Writing in 1955, in a letter to James Card, curator of moving image at George Eastman House, Deren describes the illuminating impact of witnessing the embodied work of her own filmmaking in *Meshes*. In the four strides sequence, in which this work makes itself visible as seam, as suture, Deren identified the emergence of one of the most fundamental principles of her choreographic filmmaking; the dynamic

continuation of bodily movement across oneiric dislocations in time and space. This 'short sequence', she writes, struck her 'like a crack letting the light of another world gleam through...' in the metaphorical closed room of *Meshes of the Afternoon*. Deren writes:

'...as I used to sit there and watch (*Meshes*) when it was projected for friends in those early days... I kept saying to myself "The walls of this room are solid except right there... There's a door there leading to something. I've got to get it open because through there I can go through to someplace instead of leaving here by the same place I came in."

And so I did, prying until my fingers were bleeding. And so came to a world where the identity of movement spans and transcends all time and space...(Ibid).

*Meshes* was not a dance film per se, but rather, as Deren put it, a 'choreography in space', in which dance derives from the protagonist's naturalistic movements across 'a world of imagination' (DEREN, 2005:221, original de 1945) described by the film's shifting spatiotemporal propositions. When she began to explore the possibility of creating a dance 'expressly for camera' (DEREN, 2009: 262, original de 1945) in 1945, the 'four strides' sequence, which she performed, choreographed, and edited, yielded a radical approach to the treatment of the dancing body on film, described by dance critic John Martin as '...the beginnings of a virtually new art of "choreocinema" in which the dance and the camera collaborate on the creation of a single work of art' (MARTIN en DEREN, 1988:366, originally from 1946). Following the making of *At Land*, and propelled by her interest in ritual dance and by the unique choreographic capacities of the camera's movements and mechanisms, Deren made *A Study in Choreography for Camera*, 'a dance so related to camera and cutting that it cannot be "performed" as a unit anywhere but in this particular film' (DEREN, 2005:222, original de 1945). Made in collaboration with Talley Beatty, a dancer Deren met whilst working with Dunham, *Study* presents a solo dancing body traversing across an expansive, symbolic geography. Deren described the film as a 'sample of film-dance', and she hoped it would usher in 'a new era of collaboration between dancers and filmmakers...one in which both would pool their creative and talents towards an integrated art expression' (Ibid). While Deren does not actually appear on screen she is almost overwhelmingly present as the agent of the film's choreographic innovations, as director

1. Although Deren described this as the 'four strides' sequence, there are actually five close-ups of her foot, the first two landing onto sand.

of Beatty's movements, and as the muscular propulsion for the mechanistic enhancement of his pro-filmic performance. Deren's choreocinematic conceit, predicated upon the embodied inscription of the work of her filmmaking into the movements of the screen body, was particularly influential for women artists transitioning to filmmaking from dance, such as the experimental filmmaker and documentarian Shirley Clarke, and the film and video artist and purveyor of cine-dance Amy Greenfield. Writing in 2002, Greenfield discusses the ways in which *Study* 'redefined the possibilities for the transformation of dance into avant-garde film' (GREENFIELD, 2002:21). Greenfield describes the climactic movement in *Study*, the 'idealized, floating leap' (DEREN, 2005:224, originally from 1945) in which Beatty makes an unhindered ascent sustained for almost thirty seconds, as Deren's leap. Achieved by cutting together separately filmed fragments of footage of Beatty as he rises, plateaus and descends, the leap appears to release the dancer from the pull of gravity, conjuring an instance of dance entirely specific to Deren's filmic manipulations. Greenfield came to filmmaking in 1970 after ten years training as a dancer and choreographer, and her cine-dance is predicated upon the enmeshment of her own performances in front of the camera, her choreographic direction of movement behind the camera, embodied cinematographic negotiations of space, and intricate processes of editing. In *Element*, made in 1973, Greenfield struggles naked through mud, her limbs rhythmically emerging and submerging as the camera dances across her body. *Element* was filmed by Hilary Harris, an experimental and documentary filmmaker who made his own dance-film, *Nine Variations on a Dance Theme*, in 1966. Greenfield directed Harris' camerawork to alternately synchronize with and oppose the intense language of her movements, activating the camera's volatile collusion in the communication of a uniquely cinematic 'female-human-experience' (GREENFIELD en HALLER, 2007:159). For Greenfield, Deren's emphasis on embodied camerawork as the derivation of the motile energies of dance, as conceptualized in her writings following the making of *Study*, was profoundly influential on her own transition from dance and choreography into experimental filmmaking. As she writes, 'Deren wrote of the incalculable and uncategorizable kinds of movements possible with the handheld camera in direct relationship to the body. This became the hallmark of my use of the camera' (GREENFIELD, 2002:26). Deren similarly influenced Clarke, who made her first film *Dance in the Sun* in 1953 after studying with Martha Graham, Hanya Holm and Doris Humphrey, in her creation of cine-dance in choreographic collaboration with the camera. Clarke made *Dance* on a Bolex she received as a wedding present: the film features choreographer and dance artist Daniel Nagrin performing 'fluid movements intercut between an interior and exterior location' (RABINOVITZ,

1991:97). After meeting Deren and viewing her works in 1953, Clarke was particularly inspired by the choreographic principles of *Ritual*, and in films including *In Paris Parks* (1954) and *Bridges-go-round* (1958) she extends cine-dance beyond the dancing body, to the inherent rhythms of everyday activities and the pace of urban spaces.

Maya Deren was by no means the first female artist to explore the relation of dance and film, but she stands out as the most illuminating cynosure within this historical nexus. Throughout the earliest decades of cinema's 'experimental mode', a number of pioneering women artists sought alliances between film and dance. Film scholar Antonia Lant has suggested that women tended to 'gravitate' towards dance in part because the form encompassed a particular attunement to embodied experience (LANT, 2006:145). For artists exploring the relation of film and dance before Deren's inauguration of choreocinema in the 1940s, certainly an intuitive impulse towards dance was foundational to the creation of radical constitutions of film art. The technological, conceptual, and aesthetic innovations of Loie Fuller, Germaine Dulac, Lotte Reiniger, Mary Ellen Bute, Stella Simon, and Sara Kathryn Arledge, for example, undoubtedly extended from each artist's embodied relationship to dance and choreographic movement, either through performance, choreography, or spectatorship. However, the diverse and complex motile, temporal, sensorial and perceptual conditions that have arisen from each of these artists' unique confluences of dance and film completely challenge restrictions of 'film-dance' to the normative margins of a gendered sensibility. Furthermore, an examination of the contributions of these artists through the lens of their closely held 'feelings' for dance enables a critical recuperation of their personal motivations, which thus necessitates a discursive prioritization of individual subjectivity and creative agency. For each of the artists mentioned, dance was not merely a representational subject or a stylization of movement. Rather, dance functioned as the presiding impetus structuring their works' propositions of time, space, and movement, which in turn arose from their respective conceptualizations of filmmaking, at the material level of production, as intentionally choreographic operations. Deren's choreocinema introduced the concept of filmmaking *as* dance, as a creative union of bodily performance, choreographic patterning, and technical manipulation predicated upon the foregrounding of female artistic agency. As Maria Pramaggiore has shown, Deren's 'self-representation' films –*Meshes*, *At Land* and *Ritual*– resist 'cultural imperatives surrounding gender and sexuality', and as such envisage female '...desire and identification as...a fluid discovery rather than as certitude' (PRAMAGGIORE, 2001:240). In turn, it is the *work* of Deren's filmmaking, the strenuous physical, material, and mechanistic

labors of an artist striving against the reductive margins female identification is too often contained within, which is activated in the films in which she appears. As Pramaggiore writes, Deren's filmmaking '...(treats) the dialectics of individual identity as a limiting choreography' (Ibid, 239): by composing her films in adherence with the logics of ritual, Deren created a model through which to 'defamiliarize and circumvent' (Ibid) such limitations. In Deren's films, dance derives from the application of the unique capacities of the medium to the originary performances of her screen bodies, which converge in choreographic complexes that locate meaning as always made in movement. When she appears on screen, the identity of Maya

Deren is indeed defamiliarized, but through the fragmentations, multiplications, accelerations and attenuations to which she subjects her own body, 'Maya' is conjured as the choreographic projection of Deren's 'conscious manipulations' (DEREN, 1946a:20), which combine to describe female subjectivity and feminist artistic agency as indeterminate, interstitial and always in motion, always in formation. •

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Elinor Cleghorn is a writer, researcher, lecturer and film programmer specializing in early feminist filmmaking and theories of embodiment. She received her PhD from Birkbeck College, University of London, in 2012 with a thesis exploring the embodied filmmaking of Maya Deren, Lotte Reiniger and Loie Fuller. In 2011, Cleghorn curated *Maya Deren: 50 Years On*, a dedicated program of screenings, discussions and events commemorating the 50-year anniversary of the filmmaker's death, at the British Film Institute in London. She

has given invited talks on Deren's filmmaking at Nottingham Contemporary, BFI Southbank, Camden Arts Center, and Tate Modern, and participated in a variety of symposia and research events on feminist filmmaking at venues including ICA London, BFI, Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, and the London Feminist Film Festival. Her writing has appeared in *Screen*, *The Moving Image Review* and *Art Journal*, *LUX Online*, and *The International Journal of Screendance*.

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# Nothing of the Sort: Barbara Loden's *Wanda* (1970)

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Cristina Álvarez López and Adrian Martin

## ABSTRACT

American Barbara Loden has become a figure of screen myth: actress, model, wife of Elia Kazan, teacher, and writer-director of a sole, remarkable feature film, *Wanda* (1970). Dead in 1980 at the age of 48, Loden and her film, despite gaining sporadic, passionate attention around the world, largely fell outside of most film histories, even feminist film history. Is this because it is a film about a proletarian character (played by Loden herself) who is passive, alienated, mostly non-resistant to male manipulation and abuse? *Wanda* raises complex issues of self-portraiture in cinema: Loden both is, and is not, mirrored in her character. Often mistaken for 'artless' or purely 'direct' filmmaking, this analysis seeks to uncover the rigorous principles of performance, scripting and *mise en scène* that underpin *Wanda* and make it such an overwhelming, uncompromising and incomparable monument of cinema.

## KEYWORDS

Women's cinema, feminist theory, Barbara Loden, *Wanda*, *mise en scène*, acting, self-projection.

## I.

'In the three films by women that have impressed me the most – *Deux fois* [1968], *Je, tu, il, elle* [1974], *Le camion* [1977] – there is something extraordinary: the way the actress-auteurs are on both sides of the camera, without this having any consequences. There is a calm violence there which points up the difference with the male actor-auteur: look at Lewis or Chaplin, for them passing from one side of the camera to another means risking travesty, feminisation, and playing with this risk. Nothing of the sort [*rien de tel*] with women.' (KROHN, 1977: 28-29; DANNEY, 2001: 28)

When Serge Daney spoke these words to Bill Krohn in 1977, celebrating the work of three emerging filmmakers of that decade (Jackie Raynal, Chantal Akerman and Marguerite Duras), he was no doubt unaware of Barbara Loden's *Wanda* (1970), which he mentions in none of his writings. Three years later, however – in 1980, the same year that Loden died from cancer at the age of 48 – Duras herself was certainly well acquainted with the film. In her dialogue with Loden's husband Elia Kazan (which appears in the book *Green Eyes*, an expansion of a special *Cahiers du Cinéma* issue that Daney helped organise, plus later contributions to the magazine), Duras makes a strong claim, somewhat in the same vein as Daney's initial observation about the developing cinema of 'actress-auteurs':

'I consider there to be a miracle in *Wanda*. Usually there is a distance between representation and text, between subject and action. Here, this distance is completely annulled. There is an immediate and definitive coincidence between Barbara Loden and *Wanda*. [...] This miracle, for me, is not in the acting. It's because she seems more truly herself in the film – I didn't know her personally – than she could have been in life. She's more authentic in the film than in life. That's completely miraculous.' (DURAS, 1990, translation altered)

Barbara Loden has become a figure of myth. Her story calls out for a biopic: growing up in a small town, repressive environment; early work as a glamorous model (photos from this period proliferate on the Internet); marriage to Kazan and appearances in his great films *Wild River* (1960) and *Splendor in the Grass* (1961); the legend and continuing influence of her acting classes (see David Krasner's popular 2011 manual *An Actor's Craft: The Art and Technique of Acting*). And then the dark side, mined by Bérénice Reynaud in her game-changing essay (first written in 1995) 'For *Wanda*' (REYNAUD, 2004),

and subsequently by various commentators, novelists and performers (see KARÁCSONYI, 2014): Loden the overlooked and the exploited; a screen for all manner of twisted male projections; a pawn in the psychodramatic games of the powerful men around her (on stage, cast in the Marilyn Monroe role in Arthur Miller's *After the Fall*, directed by Kazan; interpreted, not entirely kindly, by Faye Dunaway in Kazan's tortuous 1969 autobiographical film *The Arrangement*); unable to raise finance for any project that she developed in the decade after *Wanda*.

Unfortunately, the myth (as myths often do) has come to obscure the actual, material achievement of *Wanda* as a film. There is a tendency to simplify, and to do so along the lines of several, unwitting feminine stereotypes: Loden who is transparently 'more herself' in the film than in life, according to Duras – and therefore, implicitly, not involved in the production of art or artifice; or as a female director who passes from one side of the camera 'calmly', in Daney's offhand formulation. Yet there is also (as Daney says, in his paradoxical fashion) a *violence* involved – and violence can well entail, in cinema, a splitting of self within representation, a complex and fractured mirroring of art and life, imagination and actuality. These are some of the aspects of Loden's achievement as both director and actor in *Wanda* that we wish to explore here.

Our discussion of Loden and *Wanda* seeks to place it within a particular continuum of female actor-directors. Some precedents we will merely mention here: Ida Lupino, Agnès Varda, Mai Zetterling. Then, a particularly significant confluence that occurs in the early 1970s: not merely the avant-garde exemplars of Yoko Ono, Akerman, Duras and Raynal (see MARTIN, 2001), but also Anna Karina (*Vivre ensemble*, 1973), and Elaine May, both as leading player in *A New Leaf* (1971), and in the casting of her daughter, Jeannie Berlin, in *The Heartbreak Kid* (1972) – thus bringing in the crucial area of women's self-depiction in screen comedy, a topic often overlooked in considerations of this field. In the present moment, a larger relevant grouping necessarily appears, including Lena Dunham, Diane Keaton, Miranda July, and Laura Dern as star and co-creator of the remarkable TV series *Enlightened* (2011-2013). And there are intriguing relays between these two key periods and their personnel, such as the oddball 'psychic comedy' *In the Spirit* (1990) by Sandra Seacat, another famous acting teacher, featuring May and Berlin, and co-written by the latter<sup>1</sup>. We will not discuss all these people

1. It is also intriguing to note the interrelation of many of these names with the cinemas of, on the one hand, John Cassavetes and, on the other, Woody Allen. May directed Cassavetes and Peter Falk in the extraordinary *Mikey and*

*Nicky* (1976); Falk acts in *In the Spirit*; May, Berlin and Keaton have worked with Allen.

and oeuvres in depth, but we shall sketch the map of a future, broader analysis.

## II.

Loden described *Wanda* as being about a woman unable to adapt to her environment. She fits in nowhere, never understanding the rules of any place or situation. 'Life is a mystery to her', Loden said in a 1972 television interview (MK2, 2004). Wanda is frequently shown on the move, traversing large distances by bus or car. Yet, even when she is actually going somewhere – such as in early scenes where she is on her way to a family court hearing, although we are not immediately made aware of this fact – the film renders her voyaging as an irresolute drift, without clear destination or purpose. Like Gilles Deleuze in his *Cinema 1* conjuring the modern 'voyage/ballad' film with all its errant disconnections (DELEUZE, 1986: 209), Loden renders Wanda's trajectory as part of a narrative that is only loosely ever 'stitched up' or driven forward – even when it reaches the bank robbery scenes.

Wanda is an estranged body in motion, wandering through city streets. She crosses vast industrial landscapes and barren coal mining fields. There is never any home, family or community anywhere for her, never any sign of belonging. Pictorially, Wanda's figure tends to be decentred in the film frame, jammed in or blocked from view by elements of her surroundings (such as traffic). She is frequently on the verge of slipping away at the margins of the screen; even Nicholas Proferes' camerawork makes a show, at times, of struggling to keep her in view.

Loden makes an extremely precise portrait of a woman who neither *has* any space of her own, nor can *make* any space her own. As Reynaud notes, this is one of the closest affinities between *Wanda* and the films of Chantal Akerman, especially those in which the director herself appears as the central, performing figure: *Saute ma ville* (1968), *Je, tu, il, elle*, *L'homme à la valise* (1983). When Wanda fills just a tiny part of any room that she is in, curled up in a foetal position; when she recedes into a corner or against a wall; when she puts herself on the extreme edge of a bed – it is as if she wanted to occupy the least amount of space possible.

Wanda often hides in plain sight: surrounded by others, denied any privacy or intimacy. And yet, at the same time, she is usually overlooked, avoided, unacknowledged. Wanda is an invisible woman. All this is expressed in how Loden introduces Wanda into the film during its opening minutes, where a sudden

pan reveals her to be sleeping on her sister's family couch. Nothing indicates, until this instant, that she is even present in the scene we are witnessing. Her figural position here as a literal *misfit*, even (as the plot will later literally make her) an *outlaw*, is ironically echoed in a rhyming pan shot that is also a sudden 'reveal': the movement to the bar owner tied up behind the counter, in the scene that introduces Mr Dennis (Michael Higgins) and inaugurates his strange relationship with Wanda. Both of these displaced bodies are passive, locked in – and both, in their different ways, are victims. This link made between Wanda and the hapless bar owner is not gratuitous: like him, she is hidden, suppressed, made invisible, cornered into a space that does not belong to her, and over which she has no control.

The path through which Loden arrived at this character and her story is intriguing and suggestive. The film was inspired by a news item that Loden had read in 1960 concerning a woman, Alma Malone, who took part in a robbery and then, on trial, thanked the judge who sentenced her to prison (see RÉMOND, 2013). Loden was struck by this paradox: a woman thanking a man in a position of authority for preventing or denying her freedom, her autonomy. Perhaps what Loden sensed in this tale was not so much the notion that this woman was accepting and willing to take punishment for her mistakes or criminal record; rather, it was the idea that this punishment puts an end to a false idea of 'freedom' – an aspect of 1960s countercultural ideology which the film implicitly questions. Only certain people, after all, get to be free in the way that era promised in its most utopian dreams of escape and revolution.

Accordingly, Wanda's privileged space in the world, and in the film, is the *threshold*. She always hangs back at these thresholds – office doorways, domestic windows, car doors, even just some piece of architectural junk sitting in a landscape – waiting for permission to enter, for instructions on what to do, where to move, and when to speak. Anyone who casually assumes that *Wanda* is a film without a precise or systematic *mise en scène* – it is often described as being staged and shot in the spirit and manner of 'documentary reportage'! – needs to look at how rigorous and expressive this pattern becomes across the entire movie.

Like Wanda, Loden came from a poor family, and grew up in a community that offered no alternatives of a better, different, more 'educated' life. She somehow escaped from all that – 'to refuse to fit into it was a salvation for me', she categorically states in the original audio recording of her 1970 interview

with Michel Ciment (MK2, 2004)<sup>2</sup>– but Wanda does not, and cannot. The identification that Loden felt with Wanda is both direct and indirect, coming both from ‘inside’ and ‘outside’: she *could* have been Wanda, assumed her destiny, if she had stayed in that community. It was one *possible self* for Loden, hence a mirror or shadow double that could be extrapolated into a fiction.

Wanda is thus an unusual and ambiguous heroine. In “For Wanda”, Bérénice Reynaud suggests that the historical erasure of the film, over many years, is closely related to its sensibility and subject. She writes: ‘Loden wanted to suggest, *from the vantage point of her own experience*, what it meant to be a damaged, alienated woman –not to fashion a “new woman” or a “positive heroine”’ (REYNAUD, 2004: 231). Wanda instinctively rejects dominant values of family and society –she leaves them behind, goes elsewhere– but she does so without any real consciousness of her action or its meaning. ‘It’s a matter of ignorance’, Loden stated to Ciment (MK2, 2004).

Wanda –an effectively homeless ‘floater’ as Loden described her, referring to a pervasive social type in modernity, which is also the subject of Varda’s *Sans toit ni loi/Vagabond* (1985)– is not an anarchist or a revolutionary. Her rejection of the world entails no possible alternative to it. The film poignantly conveys Wanda’s helplessness, her passivity, her lack of initiative; her dependence upon men, and her need to be validated by them. Loden declared that she was able to relate to the character’s passivity because: ‘I was a victim. I’ve been in analysis and I was told that, in my life, I’ve played the role of the victim and the orphan. So it was a matter of personal observation’ (CIMENT, 1975: 36).

The film acutely portrays the repeated process whereby Wanda silently ‘accepts’ the invitations of men, and later goes to bed with them without any resistance. Loden depicts this dynamic as something almost ‘natural’, as something in which Wanda seems to acquiesce without thinking too much or being troubled by it. She becomes instantly, pathetically attached to these men who ‘rescue’ her, even if their agenda is selfish, and the small amounts of money they give her will have to be

compensated for with sex –thus placing her in a position of unwitting prostitution.

However, there are small gestures, tiny expressions of defeat, of being caught in these dynamics, which register flickers of consciousness on her part –see, for instance, her wordless gesture in the bar when, after the divorce and the rejection by her boss, a man pays for her drink. Toward the film’s end, it becomes ever more difficult for Wanda to accept this spiral. Her suffering becomes more evident, as if she can no longer bear the full weight of it –a pain that, moreover, she neither really expresses nor communicates. Wanda’s panicked reaction to a random guy’s sexual aggression in the penultimate, near-rape scene –a passage whose sadness is reminiscent of Bresson’s *Mouchette* (1967) and the Dardennes’ *Rosetta* (1999)–signals a clear affinity between Wanda as a female figure and the ultimate response of Jeanne Dielman to a male client in Akerman’s 1975 masterpiece.

Loden’s reference above to psychoanalysis is evocative, because of its link to notions of a necessary split in identity, and in perceptions of one’s self –the distance or perspective upon the self which a successful psychoanalysis strives for. Loden commented, just after making *Wanda*, that she found it extremely difficult to act and direct at the same time. For someone like her, an actress turned director, it was not simply the new role or craft of directing that she found difficult; rather, it was the combination of both functions at the same time. She remarked that, from the outside, it is very easy to see what is wrong in a scene, but since she had to be also inside the scene, the process became hard. This dialectic of interior/exterior implied by the dual role of actor/director finds a mirror in the dialectic of life/film, and even in character (Wanda)/real person (Loden). Loden spoke positively about psychoanalysis teaching her things about herself. In light of this, the decision to both act and direct in *Wanda* can be considered a kind of extreme exorcism, an exteriorisation –in order to understand better oneself, to reach a truth about oneself. In this sense, Duras was absolutely right: Loden perhaps did find a way to become more real, more authentic, in the film than in her everyday life.

2. Like many edited interviews (especially those translated into a language different to that in which they were conducted), Ciment’s published transcription of his 1970 discussion with Loden is extensively rephrased, rearranged and, in parts, condensed or paraphrased. It is essentially an accurate record. However, some key statements by Loden –as well as the identity of a female co-interviewer!– are left out. We have closely compared the *Positif* version with the audio recording as (incompletely, alas) included on the MK2

DVD of *Wanda*, and have cited throughout our text some of the missing phrases that appear in the latter. (Another example, for the record: when Loden cites authors who have influenced her, she includes Guy de Maupassant alongside Zola and Céline.)

## III.

Now let us turn to more specifically cinematic matters of representation. We have already cited Duras' praising of the film's 'miracle' –its transparent bringing-forth of a woman (Loden equals Wanda) on screen. Her impression was that this miracle was not a matter of the actor's performance, and thus not an active production of artifice, of stylisation. Here, we must take the contrary position to Duras: it is indeed through a superb conjunction of body, behaviour and space that Loden the actor and Loden the director achieve this heightened quality, this revelatory laying-bare of Wanda's presence on screen. To overlook or 'foreclose' on this materiality of the film is itself a repressive act, of the type too often performed on the creative work by social minorities or those deemed marginal (including women). For it is through this particular, very concrete 'miracle' that *Wanda* has become –for those fortunate enough to have encountered and appreciated the film– a veritable axiom of cinema.

We are evoking here an artistic process that goes light years beyond Pauline Kael's dismissal of *Wanda* as 'an extremely drab and limited piece of realism' (KAEL, 1982: 640). Indeed, it is the fate of several radical masterpieces of independent, low-budget cinema –Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* (1977) and Lynne Ramsay's *Ratcatcher* (1997) are two others (see ÁLVAREZ LÓPEZ & MARTIN, 2015)– to be swallowed up and flattened out (whether in negative or positive accounts) by this facile labelling as 'realist', thus making content more important than form, and assuming once again an immediate transparency of this real-life content simply 'shining through' an indifferently woven cinematic surface.

Let us look at Loden's performance style as a demonstration of this intricate and intensive art and artifice. The variation of Constantin Stanislavsky's Method that Loden used (with affinities to Michael Chekhov's technique; see CHEKHOV, 1985) was a combination of: the actor's imagination; expressive gestures; postural concentration; careful attention to objects or props associated with a character; and controlled line readings. Her performance as Wanda radiates a suppressed intensity through usually minimal means: her gaze –Chekhov taught his acting students to "radiate" from their eyes (CHEKHOV, 1985: 32, 108); the forward slump of her body; the turning of her head; her blank, affectless voice; and, above all, the physical prop of her hair, which is constantly arranged into different shapes, and just as constantly gets in Wanda's way, as one more part of her world that she cannot control. All of this can be studied at length via a formal analysis of the film, of the type that we present in our audiovisual essay *Woman in a Landscape* (2016) devoted to *Wanda*.

<https://www.fandor.com/keyframe/video-woman-in-a-landscape>

It is here that useful comparisons (or a figural networking) with Elaine May, Lena Dunham and Laura Dern can be made. As Luc Moullet once rightly remarked of his own comedic art at the moment of *La Cabale des oursins* (1992): when a director becomes an actor in his own work, the motto must be 'stoop to conquer' –i.e., don't be afraid of making yourself look ungainly, ugly, ridiculous. This becomes especially intriguing –because of the heavy constraints of patriarchal ideology– when we consider the female actor-*auteur*, who is more likely than her male counterparts to be labelled *grotesque* in pursuit of the same goal. Part of the provocation here comes from a militant *deglamourisation* that cuts right across social norms: Moullet or Nanni Moretti have never had to worry about the special, transgressive kind of *frisson* that takes place on screen when Loden, May (in *A New Leaf*) or Dunham (in her feature film *Tiny Furniture*, 2010, and her TV series *Girls*, 2012-2016) deliberately make themselves appear frumpy, awkward and *un-beautiful* (in societal terms) –or when May directs her own daughter, Jeannie Berlin, in the extremely deglamourised role of the obsessively-eating 'first wife' of a chronically deluded, fantasising man in *The Heartbreak Kid*.

The affinity between Loden as Wanda and Laura Dern as a screen figure has been little noticed by cinephiles, but it is strong. There are general grounds for comparison: both have dealt with the fame of a partner, or parents, in the same industry. Both were associated, early in their careers, with precocious, sexualised roles, male fantasy-projections (see, for an intriguing commentary on this, Dern's role in Joyce Chopra's *Smooth Talk* [1985], adapted from a Joyce Carol Oates story). And both gravitated to exploring roles of lost, alienated, threatened, 'misfitting' women who do not match the typical norms of feminine beauty, success and value.

Then, more specifically, Loden and Dern share a very similar physical appearance: the 'all-American girl' type, blonde, thin, tall, blue-eyed. These could easily be the physical characteristics of a model, if trained and 'framed' appropriately (as Loden, in her career, frequently was). But, by the same token, this type harbours something eccentric, ill-fitting, excessive –even grotesque. Like Loden in *Wanda*, Dern in some of her performances makes much of her estranged body in motion, her uncomfortable tallness, her slump, her gawkiness. Think of how the act of crying deliberately deforms her 'good looks' into a kind of grotesque mask in David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986). This tendency is taken much further, both by Lynch in

*Inland Empire* (2006) and Dern herself as star and co-creator of *Enlightened*, whose opening plot event (the Dern character's complete humiliation and 'meltdown' at work) offers a classic example of 'stooping to conquer'.

#### IV.

In its time, and still today, *Wanda* escapes any tidy generic classification. It is not a 'criminal couple on the run' movie like Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) –which Loden regarded as phony, 'idealised– full of beautiful things, beautiful colours, beautiful people' (CIMENT, 1975: 37). By the same token, within our contemporary context, *Wanda* not does play by any of the standard 'indie film' templates. It is not a quirky romance, a story of personal redemption, or of family reconciliation. The cries –which, in our time, have a doleful New Age ring– for screen depictions of a 'new woman' or a 'positive heroine' (to recall Reynaud's analysis) still impede radical progress and provocation in women's cinema. *Wanda* is not the kind of film that, yesterday, today or tomorrow, could ever pass the lamentable, blunt blade of the idiotic Bechdel Test (see BECHDEL, 2016), with its policing of supposedly enlightened –but, in truth, fatally comforting and reductive– 'mirror images' of contemporary women!

*Wanda* is also –to move to a more congenial and productive comparison– fundamentally unlike the cinema of John Cassavetes with which it is often aligned. "Cassavetes' *Faces* [1968] has all the clichés of the Actors Studio", Loden commented in 1970. 'It recalls every improv class, with its acting cliché of drunk people. And I have a different attitude to him about content' (CIMENT, 1975: 38). And what was this radically different attitude of Barbara Loden's sole feature

film? Where the force of Cassavetes' cinema is externalised, melodramatic, explosive, often (in both the psychoanalytic and everyday senses) *hysterical*, Barbara Loden chose to explore a more mysterious and *implosive* energy. As Reynaud sums it up, *Wanda* explores 'the opaque, ambiguous territory of unspoken repression that has so often defined the condition of women' (REYNAUD, 2004: 230).

One of the unmade projects of Barbara Loden was an adaptation of Kate Chopin's famous novel *The Awakening*, the author's original title for which was *A Solitary Soul*. (Mary Lambert, another overlooked director, brought the story to the screen as *Grand Isle* in 1991.) A website devoted to Chopin informs us that *The Awakening* is 'about a married woman seeking greater personal freedom and a more fulfilling life. Condemned as morbid, vulgar, and disagreeable when it appeared in 1899, it is today acclaimed as an essential American book' (CHOPIN, 2016). Does this thumbnail description remind you of the fate –past, present and future– of any particular film? •

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# The Trouble with Lupino

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Amelie Hastie

## ABSTRACT

The only actress to direct herself in a film during the Classical Hollywood era, Ida Lupino was also a television actress and director. The trouble with Lupino, this essay argues, is not that Lupino did too little historically, but that she did too much. Moving across various roles in film and television and, in fact, moving between film and television industries, she became increasingly difficult to categorize. And if Lupino isn't always legible historically, certainly her work as a television director can't be easily "read." Though she directed television between 1956 and 1968, the majority of her directorial work for the small screen was between 1960 and 1964, when she worked on over 40 episodes all told. Thus, finding overt and consistent visual patterns across her work is nearly impossible, given the range of series, styles, genres, and the 14-year period in which she worked in a medium in which not the director but the writer and producer are the primary creative forces. However, one discernible pattern emerges through her work as a television actress: several of her television appearances directly or indirectly remark both on her work as a director of the small and big screens and on her position historically. Through these fictions –whether Lupino was directly "type-cast" or not within them– the pattern that surfaces functions to narrate the end of this actress-director's career. Taking into account her varied, seemingly "illegible" work, scholars must design other models for the historical and textual analysis of this significant American figure.

## KEYWORDS

Ida Lupino, television direction, actress-director, *Mr. Adams and Eve*, *The Bigamist*.

## Double Take

The premise of the 1957-1958 US television series *Mr. Adams and Eve* (CBS) is narrated in its animated opening credit sequence: 'This is Mr Adams. And Eve. They play husband and wife who are movie stars. Starring Ida Lupino and Howard Duff. And in real life they really are husband and wife. It's Mr. Adams and Eve.' One glorious episode entitled 'Mr. Adams and Eve and Ida' (1958) begins with a shot on a stage of three figures, their backs to the camera, in director's chairs: a man in the middle and a woman on either side. The lights darken on the women as the focus comes onto the man. His chair reveals it's 'Howard Adams,' and soon Howard (played by Howard Duff) turns around to announce: 'I've got a little problem. See, there are two women in my life. Over here is Eve Drake.' Cue to Eve, played of course by Lupino, who turns right to face the audience and announce, 'Hello, Darlings.' The camera cuts back to Howard, who continues: 'And over here is Ida Lupino.' As the camera shifts, she turns to the left, removes her glasses, and says 'Hello, Darlings.'

The premise of this particular episode is as follows: Howard and Eve are set to shoot a film, but the director has become ill. As the producers debate a replacement with the stars, Howard recalls seeing 'a picture on television the other night' that has all the ingredients for the film they're working on. He can't remember the director or the title, even though 'it's someone we all know,' but he describes the plot of Lupino's 1953 *The Hitch-hiker*. Eve suddenly begins to boil, announcing, '*The Hitch-hiker*, that's what it was called, and it was directed by Ida Lupino,' before she storms out of the room. In spite of Eve's jealousy of Lupino –based both on the fact that everyone mistook her for Lupino when she got to Hollywood and that Howard 'used to go with her' – Lupino takes on the role of director, ultimately winning over Eve along with the producers.

The episode ends back where it began, with the three figures in their director's chairs on a nearly darkened stage. Howard faces the camera to say: 'Now my problem is which one do I go home with?' Both women get up, walk to either side of Howard, and the three stroll out together, arm in arm. As the credits soon announce, the episode was written by a woman, Louella MacFarlane, though not, in fact, directed by one (Lupino directed only one episode of this series). *Mr. Adams and Eve* was based, too, as the credits say, on characters developed by

Collier Young, Lupino's second husband. And the series was produced by Bridget Productions, Inc., a company named for Duff and Lupino's daughter.

These visual details, along with the facts of the production, are significant in light of the one film that Lupino both directed and starred in: her company The Filmakers' 1953 production *The Bigamist*. Alongside Lupino's turn as Phyllis, wife number two, the film starred Edmund O'Brien in the titular role (as Harry Graham) and Young's current wife Joan Fontaine as Harry's first wife, also named Eve; it was written and produced by Young. Both Joan Fontaine's mother and Collier Young also made minor appearances. Though the episode of *Mr. Adams and Eve* explicitly refers to *The Hitch-hiker*, its complex familial and marital ties neatly match those of *The Bigamist*. And so, too, does its final image seem to comment on Lupino's directed 1953 film. *The Bigamist* ends with Harry standing in the middle of the courtroom after the judge has declared that the question after his jail sentencing is not which woman *he* will choose, but rather which woman will choose to take him back. Howard's embrace of both "Eve" and "Ida Lupino" suggests the opposite.

Of course, this scenario is of another sort entirely, as here we (and Howard) see a different pairing. Not two different women, but two different roles that one woman played: as director and as actress. Moreover, given the context for the series alongside the narrative premise, she plays these two roles in the two media forms of film and television. Howard's embrace of these two women/roles seems an easy resolution of how and whom to choose; in fact, there's hardly a choice to be made, as Lupino is both women already. But historically and industrially, such resolutions have been far more difficult.

## Have Camera, Will Travel

Lupino directed six films for her independent companies from 1949-1953; after The Filmakers folded, she directed only one more theatrical release, *The Trouble with Angels*, in 1966<sup>1</sup>. But during this period, she continued to act for both film and television, and she directed over five dozen episodes of various television series from 1956-1968. One might think such work, so rare for a woman during this period (in fact no other historical figure of this period, male or female, can boast the same record), would have secured her place in film and television history. But instead, it seems, Ida Lupino, like her "angels" before her, has

1. Her directorial debut, originally uncredited, was *Not Wanted* (1949), which she took over from Elmer Clifton when he fell ill. This film was for the original independent production company, Emerald, which she and Young joined with

Anson Bond. As I go on to note, she and Young then started the company The Filmakers with Malvin Wald.

apparently caused some trouble. I don't mean the trouble she was said to have caused as an actress in the 1940s, demanding better roles as a contract player at Warner Brothers and getting herself suspended in the process. I mean the trouble she has caused for history, particularly a broad history of film, both in the industry and in the academy. The fact of the matter, with some exceptions, Lupino has managed a kind of disappearing act from history. Most film historians know who she was, and she certainly appears within historical records. But for one of only two women directing films in Hollywood during the Classical film era<sup>2</sup> –1930-1960– she has been sorely neglected in terms of film restoration and current distribution as well as scholarly production<sup>3</sup>.

The trouble with Lupino, I want to suggest, is not that she did too little, but that she did too much. Moving across various roles in film and television and, in fact, moving between film and television industries, she became increasingly difficult to categorize. And when it comes to film (or television) and, in effect, to film and television scholarship, particularly scholarship in the US, that's a problem. I want to take advantage of this special issue to think about her work as an actress and director in television in particular, ultimately considering how the former metaphorically (but also industrially and historically) informs the latter.

British-born Ida Lupino began her career as an actress, following the family tradition on each parent's side. Lupino became known on screen and on sets as fiercely independent; this characteristic eventually led to her formation of an independent film production company, The Filmakers, with her second husband Collier Young and writer Malvin Wald. Their films were largely realist social dramas, particularly the five films Lupino directed for the company. For instance, their second film, and Lupino's first official outing as a director, was *Young Lovers* (1949), also known as *Never Fear*. Co-written by Lupino and Young, the story is about two young dancers engaged to be married when one of them contracts polio. *Young Lovers* was followed by *Outrage* (1950); *Hard, Fast and Beautiful* (1951); *The Hitch-hiker*; and, finally, *The Bigamist*. All

of her directed films, in one way or another, addressed social issues, ranging from unplanned pregnancy to rape to familial relations; most explicitly addressed definitions of legality and criminality, calling for a sympathetic legal system<sup>4</sup>.

Lupino and Young's company folded soon after, largely as a result of their attempts to distribute their own films (ironically, a turn to a kind of small-time vertical integration). She appeared as an actress in one of the company's last films, *Private Hell 36*, alongside third-husband Howard Duff, but she didn't direct for the company after *The Bigamist*, and it was thirteen years before she would direct her last film *The Trouble with Angels*. However, only three years passed before she began her work as a television director; her first gig was with the *Screen Directors Playhouse* (NBC, 1955-1956), a series that invited film directors to come to television. This work, 'No. 5 Checked Out,' was also arguably her most "cinematic" television outing –or at least the text that is most consistent, visually and narratively, with her work for The Filmakers.

Mirroring her work in film, however, Lupino's initial primary involvement with television was as an actress. She was one of the primary members of an anthology series (which presented a new story each week, like a theatrical play or a film) called *Four Star Playhouse* (CBS) from 1953-1956. And, even more interestingly, as I mention above, she and her husband Howard Duff starred in their own situation comedy created by Lupino's former husband Collier Young in 1957-1958. Following these star turns, Lupino began to direct television regularly; in fact, she was the only woman regularly directing US television at this time (it's still relatively rare for women to direct American television; in the 2014-2015 season, women made up approximately 14% of television directors<sup>5</sup>). Based on the success of her film *The Hitch-hiker*, she was particularly hired to direct adventure series largely starring men, especially westerns and crime series such as *77 Sunset Strip* (Roy Huggins, ABC, 1958-1964), *The Fugitive* (Roy Huggins, ABC, 1963-1967), *The Untouchables* (ABC, 1959-1963), and *Have Gun, Will Travel* (Herb Meadow and Sam Rolfe, CBS, 1957-1963). She also often worked with or around prominent male *auteurs* in the field, or at

2. Dorothy Arzner was the other woman director in Hollywood during the Classical era.

3. Her directed films have not been restored, and not all of her directed work is even available today on DVD. Moreover, my BFI book on *The Bigamist* (London: British Film Institute, 2009) was only the second academic book published on her work after Annette Kuhn's edited collection *Queen of the B's: Ida Lupino Behind the Camera* (NY: Prager, 1995); none have been published since, and neither have any major scholarly essays in English language film studies. Two

recent books, however, have included extended analyses of Lupino's television appearances: Mary Desjardins' *Recycled Stars: Female Film Stardom in the Age of Television and Video* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2015) and Christine Becker's *It's the Pictures That Got Small: Hollywood Film Stars on 1950s Television* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2009).

4. Please see my book *The Bigamist* for further discussion of her work as film director and star during this period.

the very least men who banked on their names when they came to television, including film director Alfred Hitchcock (*Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, CBS and NBC, 1955-1962), television wunderkind Rod Serling (*The Twilight Zone*, CBS, 1959-1964), and horror film star Boris Karloff (*Thriller*, NBC, 1960-1962). Though she directed between 1956 and 1968, the majority of her directorial work for the small screen was between 1960 and 1964, when she worked on over 40 episodes all told. As the 1960s drew on, her work as a director in television became less stable, and her last job was in 1968 (two years after *The Trouble with Angels*). In a couple of cases, she guest-starred on a series she also directed (such as *The Twilight Zone*), but only once did she direct an episode in which she also appeared ('Teenage Idol' of *Mr. Adams and Eve*, in 1958), and only occasionally did she co-write those works she also directed or appeared in ('The Case of Emily Cameron' [1956] for *Four Star Playhouse* and 'No 5 Checked Out').

Importantly, directing television is a very different profession than film directing; in a US context, television series are largely more of a writer's medium than a director's one, and those with creative control are writers, creators, executive producers, and headlining stars. Directors are usually less attached to a series than a writer or, of course, a producer; they are hired to put the vision of the series' creators into place. (In the language of the early *Cahiers du Cinéma* writers concerning filmmakers, they are largely "metteurs en scène.") Given that she was particularly hired on an irregular basis (the most episodes she directed of any one particular series were nine for *Thriller* and eight for *Have Gun, Will Travel*), becoming a television director, for Lupino, meant losing creative control. Moreover, because, with some exceptions, she was only a temporary employee on the set, she wasn't working in as collaborative an atmosphere as she was with *The Filmakers*.

And if Lupino isn't always legible historically, certainly her work as a television director can't be easily "read." That is, finding overt and consistent visual patterns across her work is nearly impossible, given the range of series, styles, genres, and the 14-year period in which she worked on a medium in transition. The primary discernible patterns are, rather, industrial and based both on gendered cultural narratives as well as those fictions she was working with. That said, one pattern that

emerges across her work –starting with 'No. 5 Checked Out' for *Screen Director's Playhouse*– is her use of a two-shot staging for conversations between characters. This stylistic approach is a risky one: since both actors are before the camera at the same time, both need to produce a solid performance at once (whereas a shot-reverse-shot format can be edited together between multiple pieces and performances). But it's a risk that pays off as well: it reveals the duration of time and the space in which both characters exist together, therefore producing a greater sense of reality (a hallmark of Lupino's work for *The Filmakers*). And, as television director Robert Butler describes it, the approach shows that Lupino 'shot not the words but the drama,' in effect working against a common ethos of television<sup>6</sup>.

Her work as a television actress, with the exception of *Four Star Playhouse* and her comedy with Duff, was somewhat similar to her work as a director, in that she was primarily hired for guest appearances on regular series. During the heyday of her directing for television, she made only a fraction of guest appearances, but she continued as an actress in both film and television as her work as a director came to a halt in 1968. However, I want to argue that a commentary about her work as a television director emerges through her occasions as an actress on television. Indeed, as the years went on, several of her television appearances directly or indirectly remark both on her work as a director of the small and big screens and on her position historically. Through these fictions –whether Lupino was directly "type-cast" or not within them– another kind of pattern emerges, one that narrates the end of this actress-director's career.

#### «Holy Disappearing Act!»

Hence, one of her final appearances, in the second full episode of the 1975 *Ellery Queen* (Richard Levinson and William Link, NBC), the opening announcement seems an eerie commentary over a shot of guest star Lupino: 'In a few minutes this woman will be dead.' She appears for just five minutes of the nearly fifty-minute episode before mysteriously falling to her death from her balcony after experiencing elements of an 'Ellery Queen' novel coming to life as she reads it, such as sounds of a dog barking and of a car arriving outside<sup>7</sup>. But in fact this "story" began fifteen years prior to her appearance on *Ellery Queen*,

5. See Martha Lauzen, «Boxed In: Portrayals of Female Characters and Employment of Behind-the-Scenes Women in 2014-15 in Prime-Time Television». *Boxed In*, [http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/files/2014-15\\_Boxed\\_In\\_Report.pdf](http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/files/2014-15_Boxed_In_Report.pdf)

6. Conversation with the author, June 21, 2016.

7. This series was known for its self-reflexivity. In each episode, the character Ellery Queen, a mystery writer who helps his police detective father solve mysteries, would turn to the camera to ask the audience if they had solved the case themselves.

in what might be her most well-known television gig. In 1960, at the age of 42, she appeared in an episode of the series *The Twilight Zone* entitled ‘The 16mm Shrine.’ Here Lupino played a washed-out movie star named Barbara Jean Trenton who could no longer get any film roles because she was past her prime. As Mary Desjardins writes, Barbara Jean ‘can’t get enough of herself’ (2015: 80). The episode, not entirely unlike that of *Ellery Queen*, opens as such: ‘Picture of a woman looking at a picture. Movie great of another time. Once brilliant star in a firmament no longer a part of the sky, eclipsed by the movement of earth and time. Barbara Jean Trenton, whose world is a projection room, whose dreams are made of celluloid....’

Of course, as Desjardins and Christine Becker also note, this story is not so very different from the film *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, 1950). Nor is it so different, in a sense, from Bette Davis’s film *All About Eve* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1950), which, like *Sunset*, wrestles with the experience of the aging actress.<sup>8</sup> As the episode goes on, Trenton’s agent attempts to rouse her out of her nostalgia for the olden days. He gets her a potential role for her old film studio, where she had previously been known (not unlike Lupino herself) as one of the most difficult actresses the studio head worked with. But the part is for a mother and, as Trenton says, she ‘doesn’t play mothers.’ She storms out of the office and retreats to her screening room, ultimately and literally disappearing into the world of celluloid. The cinematic and television screens now converge: Trenton’s film into which she enters is forever projected in her home theater, which viewers watch on their television sets.

Eight years after her *Twilight Zone* appearance, Lupino plays the guest villain on the mod television series *Batman* (Bill Finger, Lorenzo Semple Jr. and William Dozier, ABC, 1966-1968) as the ‘Entrancing Dr. Cassandra’ (1968), an expert in the occult who has designed a pill to make her (and her sidekick husband Cabala, played by her sidekick husband in real life Howard Duff) invisible. Entering their alchemy lab after a successful heist, Cabala asks, ‘How do these pills work, Doc-y baby? Are we really invisible?’ Answers Cassandra, donned in hot reds and pink to match the pink walls of her lab, ‘No, but we may as well be. You see, after taking the pill, we blend into the background so perfectly no one can see us.’ And the alchemist goes on to announce that her goal is to make ‘other cats do what I crave

them to do,’ intending ‘to succeed where my foremothers failed.’ She plans to free all the arch criminals in Gotham City so that ‘we become an invisible empire, with yours truly as queen.’ Within this scene –and the episode overall– is a sense of the prescience of the star-director’s eventual disappearance from the screen, but in this case the onus is on the woman herself rather than the industry: she pops her own pill. Such a position isn’t entirely far from the truth, given Lupino’s commitment to directing television in the early-mid 1960s in particular. In fact, this episode played the same year Lupino directed for the last time<sup>9</sup>.

Nearly ten years later still, Lupino’s final role on television comes on the infamous crime series *Charlie’s Angels* (Ivan Goff and Ben Roberts, ABC, 1976-1981), in which three beautiful women have left their lowly jobs in the Los Angeles police department to become private detectives, working for a man we never see named Charlie. In this episode entitled ‘I Will Be Remembered’ (1977), Lupino plays another washed out movie-star, Gloria Gibson (the name patently recalling Gloria Swanson of *Sunset Boulevard*), also on the edge of a nervous breakdown. She hires Charlie and his team of “angels” because she believes someone is trying to drive her insane, using scenes from her past films to frighten her. When the angels learn about her case, Kelly says, ‘Gloria Gibson. I saw one of her pictures on TV last week.’ Together they recall the actress-character of the film as a great survivor –or, in their ‘70s lingo, as a ‘very heavy lady.’ But they also recall elements of the film as part of the visions that Gibson has seen, wondering over whether she’s ‘flashing back on her old films’ or whether ‘someone’s doing a ‘*Gaslight*’ number on her.’ Entangled in the story of this fictional character is a history and language of classical Hollywood film, demonstrated, too, by Lupino’s very appearance. When the four of them soon meet, the angels allude to their concerns about whether what she saw was real, prompting Gibson to say, ‘I know what you’re thinking... They were in scenes from my movies. But I *did* see them. I am not unbalanced... Somebody’s trying to drive me crazy. Or kill me.’ Asks Jill: ‘Why would anyone want to do that?’ Gibson responds, ‘You don’t know Hollywood...’ In this episode, however ironically Lupino’s last on television, the character she plays is fighting her own disappearance, knowingly reading for the role of the mother in an updated version of one of her own films; at the meeting

8. Of course in the case of *All About Eve*, Davis also plays a mere 40-year old.

9. Tellingly, given her increasingly “spectral” status in the industry, her last directed work was an episode of the series *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* (Jean

Holloway, NBC y ABC, 1968-1970), itself a sitcom based on a 1947 Hollywood film.

with the studio head and director, she offers a monologue about the difference between film and theater which seems to hail as much from a director as an actress. Soon after she's admiring her name attached to her own trailer on the set.

Across these individual episodes of four very different series emerges a commentary that extends from *Twilight Zone* yet also repeats that evident in 'Mr. Adams and Eve and Ida.' Here is an anxiety about the aging actress writ large, but so too is there an anxiety about a woman's control over her own image. In fact, Christine Becker notes a similar trope in *Four Star Playhouse's* 'The Case of Emily Cameron,' in which Lupino appears 'as both the controller and controlled.' Writes Becker, the fact that this woman is punished for being domineering 'mirrored Lupino's own attempts in the press to shape her image as [a] female director' (BECKER, 1971: 176). Part of that 'punishment,' perhaps, is that the film star has shifted into the home, whether in the narratives of the various series or on the very screens on which viewers see her. And in each, Lupino acts out a series of paradoxes: disappearance and re-appearance, controlled and controller, star and director.

Of course Lupino had other roles during this time, some of which were on well respected television series, others on campy sitcoms, and still others on low-budget and fairly crummy films. And of course other actresses of the time played the role of the aging Hollywood star, on the road to disappearance (or perhaps already there)<sup>10</sup>. Certainly, then, Lupino's roles across all of these television series certainly tell a common story of aging actresses overall, but what I find fascinating about them is how they narrate Lupino's own increasing disappearance on screen as an actress, off screen as a director, and, ultimately, as a serious subject of film history. Unfortunately, in part her work in television was responsible for this demise; as a director she lost the creative control she had in the past, and as an actress increasingly she could only seek bit parts. In this way, her work between acting and directing and between film and television functions as both a model and a cautionary tale for many actress-directors working today, particularly in a US context. Television does indeed offer the space to direct, with relatively more opportunity for women than does film, but this opportunity comes with a price: the loss of a sense of autonomy and even, often, collaboration. And certainly directing television, with some exceptions, also means the loss of signatory authorship.

10. See Mary Desjardins, «Norma Desmond, Your Spell Is Everywhere: The Time and Place of the Female Film Star in 1950s Television and Film», *Recycled Stars*, 57-98.

### Epilogue: The Television Shrine

When Eve is fretting on set about the mutual attention between Howard and Ida, her producer says, 'She's just a director, he's an actor, they're doing a scene. ... Darling, you have him at home.' In the scene at their home that follows, however, Howard watches a film on television starring Ida Lupino. Eve attempts to get his attention by wandering into the room in a fabulous outfit. But he pays her little mind, announcing, 'It's one of Ida's old pictures,' and she storms out the door. In other words, Eve also doesn't have him at home, because at home he is paying more attention to Ida on the home screen who is herself more than 'just a director.'

In their fight both to work and to be remembered, the self-reflexive characters Barbara Jean Trenton, Gloria Gibson, and Eve Drake seek life and rebirth on the silver screen. But historically speaking, director-actress Lupino largely found her shrine and possible salvation on the small set. Recognizing her work in part as a cautionary tale, we might begin to imagine how women director-stars today can succeed in this path that their foremother paved. At least, setting side by side these screens, industries, and roles Lupino played as director and actress, we can breathe life into her diverse history and our study of it. •

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# Presence (appearance and disappearance) of two Belgian filmmakers

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Imma Merino

## ABSTRACT

Agnès Varda and Chantal Akerman are two filmmakers that, within film modernity, have invented their own rules and experimented with new ways of representation, without disregarding the fact they are making cinema from their experience as women. Each one in her own way, in her own images and sounds, has introduced her subjectivity and has become physically present through her body and her voice. Akerman burst into cinema in 1968 with *Blow Up My Town* (*Saute ma ville*), an explosive short film where she self-represented or maybe self-fictionalised; that was an attempt she continued later on, both by performing in her own films and by being embodied by other actresses, thus turning physically more invisible; meanwhile, in her more intimate, essay-like and even documentary films, her presence sometimes manifested through forms of absence, as it is shown in her last film, *No Home Movie*. We can also find Varda's doubles in her last fiction films, whereas in her essay documentaries the filmmaker's body has become more visible, acknowledging a subjectivity she had previously expressed through her narrative and reflective voice. The culmination of this physical presence is found in *The Gleaners and I* (*Les glaneurs et la glaneuse*, 2000), a documentary which links portraits of gleaners from contemporary world with the self-portrait done in the old age, and the autobiographical movie *The Beaches of Agnès* (*Les plages d'Agnès*, 2008).

## KEYWORDS

Self-portrait, self-representation, body, double, documentary, mirror, subjectivity.

Agnès Varda (1928) and Chantal Akerman (1950-2015) were born in Brussels twenty-two years apart, which, evidently, makes them belong to different generations and –with their connection to French cinema and culture– take part in the development of cinematic modernity in different ways. Varda is a *Nouvelle Vague* pioneer and, at the same time, being a woman amongst men, an outsider in the movement until her late appreciation. Akerman is a *Nouvelle Vague* heir who practically always made cinema from the sidelines. Each one in her own way –with notable stylistic differences– has thought about the fact of being a woman (and about women's bodies) to show the female alienations and liberations, has diluted the limits between documentary and fiction to invent her own formats and, amongst other aspects and in relation to the matter at hand, has made herself physically present in her images, where there are also personal traces through fictional characters and the filmmaker's narrative and reflective voice. Curiously, though, we can observe an inverse process: while Varda has progressively made herself physically present in her images, Akerman's body increasingly became invisible expressing that presence through her voice.

In the notable year of 1968, Chantal Akerman burst into cinema like an explosion that, even with a minimal scope, has had delayed and long-lasting effects. It was with *Saute ma ville* (*Blow Up My Town*), a short film that ends with a literal explosion, where an oven bursts into pieces, belonging to a young singer with a 'Chaplinesque' attitude (Akerman herself) who clumsily carries out a series of domestic activities, which, in this way, are subverted in relation to the assigned female roles. It is a literal explosion, but with a symbolic dimension – in 1968 it is a gesture that appeals to a will of destruction as the possibility to build something new. Likewise, due to Akerman's death and the suicidal pulse that is glimpsed in this first piece where the alternation between vitality and depression –so common in the director's filmography– is traced, the explosion seems to have acquired a premonitory sense in an uncertain terrain between the literal and the symbolic. In any case, part of the singularity of *Saute ma ville* has to do with the fact that the filmmaker herself comes into scene.

A photographer that started making cinema in 1954 with *La Pointe Courte*, a film set in a fishermen's neighborhood of Sète that traces the becoming of a filmography between realism

and artificialness or between life and its representation, Agnès Varda made herself physically present in her images for the first time a year before Chantal Akerman. Before that, sharing the voice-over narration with Michel Piccoli without highlighting the subjectivity, she had left a carnal trace with her voice in *Salut les cubains!* (1963), a montage of the animated succession of photographs shot in Cuba in the first years after the revolution and, therefore, while the Castrist regime was being established. In any case, in the year 1967, Varda physically appeared for the first time in her cinema with *Oncle Yanco* (*Uncle Yanco*), a short film in which, from the story of an artistic uncle who lived as an old hippie on a boat in Sausalito, she explored her own identity searching in a Californian harbor for her father's hidden Greek roots, which he had never spoken about. The filmmaker appears occasionally in the shot as if she wanted to keep the newly found uncle company and, at the same time, as if she wanted to make a physical record of the personal search of her origins. But there is also the 'modern' gesture of making the cinematic device visible (while having lunch with a group of people, she asks that they 'cut' the take) and of showing the possible existence of representation in the documentary: the film, with the presence of the clapperboard, starts with the repetition of a scene in which Varda and her uncle Yanco reproduce the moment of their encounter. Two years later, while the filmmaker lived in Los Angeles and had started her own projects after having arrived accompanying Jacques Demy in the adventure that brought him to film *Model Shop* (1969) for Columbia Pictures, the gesture of cinematic modernity seems to be more conscious with *Lions Love*, a hippie fantasy with Viva and the creators of the musical *Hair* (James Rado and Jerome Ragni), which, by its own artificial character, is at the same time a document about the Hollywood of the time. The thing is that there is a scene in which, next to a camera, Varda is reflected in a mirror that, since *Cléo de 5 à 7* (*Cléo from 5 to 7*, 1962), had turned into a recurrent object in her cinema, inhabited by reflections, duality, changing identities, the tension of realness and its representations. Moreover, there is a curious sequence in *Lions Love* that, following what Varda has explained<sup>1</sup>, refutes certain assumptions. In this sequence, the independent filmmaker Shirley Clarke<sup>2</sup>, a possible North American double of Varda, seems ready to commit suicide because her Hollywood producers do not grant her the final cut and, therefore, the freedom of making her own film. Suddenly, Clarke says: 'I'm sorry, Agnès, but I'm not an actress and

1. In the seminar 'Le cinéma mis en question par une cinéaste', which she gave from the 10th to the 15th of October of 2011 as a visiting professor for the Ferrater Mora Chair of Contemporary Thought of the University of Girona.

2. Shirley Clarke (1919-1997) founded the New American Cinema Group with Jonas Mekas. When Varda included her in *Lions Love*, so that she could embody a New Yorker independent filmmaker who argues with Hollywood's producers, Clarke had made some impactful films, such as *The Connection* (1962), which

shows a group of heroin addicts in an apartment in New York City while they wait for the dealer's arrival. With the unclean and unkempt texture of the images, it has a documentary's appearance, or the one of a sample of *cinéma vérité*, but it is a fiction written and planned by Jack Giber, who adapted one of his theatrical plays. Both filmmakers share the fact of questioning the language and the limits of documentary and fiction, as well as a sense of independence for which Varda had similar problems in Hollywood to Clarke's (acting both as herself and as a fictional character) in *Lions Love*.

cannot pretend I'm taking the pills.' She adds that she would never commit suicide for a movie. Then, Varda furiously comes into scene telling her that, if she doesn't do it, she will do it herself. Is Varda's intrusion an act? A game? An action to create distance from fiction? Varda claims that her intrusion was not premeditated and that it was not even improvised. Simply, it happened; the camera continued filming and Varda decided to include it in the final cut as a record of a moment where Shirley Clarke did not participate in the game of fiction and in which a filmmaker intercedes to demand what was agreed to another filmmaker who, curiously, made films with a documentary appearance. Strange sequence.

Expressing her own subjectivity through her voice-over both in essay documentaries (in a special way in *Ulysse*, an extraordinary short film from 1982 in which she questions the memory from a photograph taken many years before in an Atlantic French coast beach where we can see the back of a naked man, a child sitting amongst the rocks and a dead goat) and the fictions *L'une chante, l'autre pas* (*One Sings, the Other doesn't*, 1977) and *Sans toit ni loi* (*Vagabond*, 1985) leaving proof that she is the narrator, Varda did not appear in the image again until twenty years after *Lions Love*. This was in *Jane B. par Agnès V.* (1988), which is insinuated as a portrait of actress and singer Jane Birkin, who constantly appears disguised as a different array of characters<sup>3</sup>. Varda appears occasionally from a very elaborated sequence in which Jane Birkin is in front of a mirror while we hear Varda's voice-over: 'It is as if I filmed your self-portrait. But you won't always be alone in the mirror. There will be the camera, which is a part of myself, and who cares if I sometimes appear in the mirror or in the field of vision.' While she says these last words, the camera turns around and, next to Birkin, the filmmaker appears in the mirror after the camera has also been made present in a new gesture of the conscious cinematic modernity. The game of representation and self-representation becomes visible. In any case, it is interesting that Jane Birkin herself considers that, in *Jane B. par Agnès V.*, there is less of a portrait of herself than a self-portrait of the filmmaker through the stereotype she embodies<sup>4</sup>.

Not often has a hand stroking a back made the love of a person to another so visible in a cinematic image as Varda's in *Jacquot de Nantes*, a 1991 film in which the filmmaker reconstructs Jacques Demy's childhood and teenage years; but Demy also

appears in the latter months of his life, and the camera captured the imprint of his sickness in his body, following the surface of his skin full of spots: a way of retaining him in the images, of resisting death? The filmmaker has said that it was her way of keeping him company. After Demy's death, Agnès Varda dedicated herself to his memory with two more films where he is also present in the images: *L'univers de Jacques Demy* (*The World of Jacques Demy*, 1995), participating as one of the witnesses who remember the filmmaker, and *Les demoiselles ont eu 25 ans* (*The Young Girls Turn 25*, 1993), in relation to the celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Les demoiselles de Rochefort* (*The Young Girls of Rochefort*, 1967) at the town where it was filmed. They are two films in which the viewer is directly addressed for the first time, situating herself directly in front of the camera's lens. In this same position, but with a shyness that doesn't allow her to look the camera in the eye and, therefore, the viewer, Varda reveals what might be her biggest confession in the interior of her cinema. It is in *Deux ans après* (*The Gleaners and I: two years later*, 2002), sequel of *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse* (*The Gleaners and I*, 2000), a documentary with a great impact with which she portrays an array of people who scavenge things (the 'glaneurs') and herself ('the glaneuse') as a gatherer of images. In her confession in *Deux ans après*, Varda admits that she had not noticed that, in the prequel, she had filmed her hands, with spots and other imprints of old age, in a similar way as she had filmed Demy's skin in *Jacquot de Nantes*. She explains that this was suggested by critic Philippe Piazzo: 'Everyone had seen this except me. And I don't want to come across as an idiot or naïve, but it impressed me how much one can work without knowing. One doesn't work in the meaning and continuity. They tell me that my cinema is very coherent. They can say what they want, obviously, but the thing is I work as I can.' Her conclusion: '*On ne sait jamais ce qu'on filme* (you never know what you're filming).'

It is with *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse* that, apart from being present in her voice-over comments, Varda decidedly physically appears in her images. Nevertheless, she only appears in four minutes of the total eighty minutes. Although what is predominant is the portrait of an array of modern gleaners that define the social theme of the film in relation with a consumer society that throws things away while others pick them up to survive, Varda's presence had her accused of narcissism and impertinence, for example by one of the *glaneurs* (Alain F.,

3. In an interview with Jean-Claude Loiseau published in the 132nd issue of the magazine *Première*, in March of 1988, Agnès Varda explains: 'In this portrait, she was not in a state of confidence but representing. For me, she appears as mysterious as before the film.'

4. In an interview with Jane Birkin, by Paloma Gil and Imma Merino, published in the magazine *Presència* on the 3rd of July of 1994, the actress mentions:

'In her film there are many more things about her than of myself. It is more her own portrait. I have given more of myself through some fictions, I have reflected myself more. Although possibly I ended up giving what the director wanted of me and what happens is that you end up being just like she sees you.'

who feeds himself with the markets' leftovers while he survives selling a magazine and, selflessly, teaches evening lessons to immigrants) who, in *Deux ans après*, blames her of not being in accordance with the film's theme. Varda replies that she is also a gleaner (of objects, but mostly of images) and that she filmed herself for honesty: just like a portrait, she had to honestly be exposed in front of the camera. In any case, contradicting Alain F., Varda's body is not an impertinence in the film, it is relevant. While she filmed a hand, which held a postcard that reproduces Rembrandt's self-portrait, with her other hand, she realized there was a bright relationship with one of the film's themes: the passing of time and its imprint in things and bodies. Integrated these images in the film, the self-portrait is a representation of the world while the portrait of other bodies and objects becomes a self-portrait. This statement from Italian philosopher Franco Rella comes to mind:

'The representation of the world becomes a representation of itself, the portrait (of a face, but also of a thing or a scene) becomes a self-portrait. To show the world in its change means to show the world in the change itself, to the point that, as Baudelaire says, the self evaporates or, as Rimbaud says, the self becomes someone else' (RELLA, 1998: 58).

A Serge Daney's theory also comes to mind, which he expressed in an article published in *Libération* on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January of 1982 in relation to the diptych formed by *Mur Murs* (*Mural Murals*, 1981) and *Documenteur* (1981), which Agnès Varda filmed at the beginning of the 1980s during her second stay in Los Angeles. *Mur Murs* is an outgoing documentary about the muralism in Los Angeles and *Documenteur* is an introverted film in which, also with the presence of murals, a woman (with a child interpreted by Mathieu Demy, the son of Demy and Varda) lives in pain and strangeness after separating from her husband: a way of self-portraying herself through an interposed character (and the presence of editor Sabine Mamou) in a moment of crisis and, actually, of separation of the couple. In Daney's article, he mentions that, in relation to the hypothetical discovery of the mix between fiction and documentary, this has always existed in cinema. He adds that, in fact, every film is a 'document', which he argues with revealing intuition: "A documentary, remember that, was always on something. It weighed over the sardines, the shepherds, the plebs, the orchids, the Fidji islands, the fishermen, the colonies, the others, Whereas a document is with. A document informs about the state of the matter which is being filmed or will be filmed, and about the filming body as well. One with the other. A film/document such as *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse* certainly informs about the state of the matter that it films and about the state of the body that films.

In showing the postcard of Rembrandt's self-portrait, Varda says: 'Here we have Rembrandt's self-portrait. It is always the same, a self-portrait.' And then she covers the postcard with her hand. Isn't this a way of suggesting that any self-portrait shows and at the same time hides? Some years later, with *Les plages d'Agnès* (*The Beaches of Agnès*, 2008), Varda becomes omnipresent in the film because she herself is the topic of the film, where she remembers her own life. The self-portrait takes the temporal dimension of the autobiography, an unusual genre in cinema. Nevertheless, although showing herself and remembering her life, there is a warning at the beginning of the film. In a beach, she sets up an installation of mirrors while the wind makes her scarf cover her eyes. Laughing, she tells her assistants that this is her idea of a self-portrait: some deformed mirrors and a scarf over her face. Apart from the images filmed in the present with her physical presence and her comments, the filmmaker uses in *Les plages d'Agnès* her own filmography, as well as photographs and other documents and objects, as if it were an archive, as a form of memory that, through selected fragments, lets her evoke different moments of her life and her times. At the same time, it is indicated that there are biographic elements transformed in fiction material and embodied in characters that act as doubles or as more or less deformed mirrors. In a certain way, it reminds me of the game of *Chantal Akerman par Chantal Akerman* (*Chantal Akerman by Chantal Akerman*, 1996), the film for the series *Cinéma, de notre temps* in which Akerman presents as a possible self-portrait (and also an autobiography) the chaining of different sequences of her films, which shape a formal research between fiction and documentary, diary and essay. Akerman, though, mostly uses fictions, which makes it even more interesting and complex in relation to the multiple ways of self-portraying herself. In this way, as *Chantal Akerman par Chantal Akerman* suggests, the filmmaker would represent or split herself differently in characters embodied by Aurore Clément (like in *Les rendez-vous d'Anna* [*The Meetings of Anna*, 1978] in which a filmmaker travels from the German city Essen to Paris), in the starving Maria de Medeiros of *J'ai faim, j'ai froid* (1984) or in the girl that wanders through Brussels discovering her sexuality and feeling lonely in *Portrait d'une jeune fille de la fin des années 60 à Bruxelles* (*Portrait of a Young Girl in the Late '60s, in Brussels*, 1993). The idea of the splitting identity is clearly addressed in *Lettre d'une cinéaste* (1984), one of the filmic letters with which different filmmakers responded to a request by *Cinéma, cinémas*, a television program of the French Antenne 2 channel that was broadcasted from 1982 to 1991. In this eight-minute filmic letter Akerman confesses that she makes cinema because she hasn't dared to try writing, although it is essential for her creative process: 'To make a film, one always needs to write.'

To write to clarify what one wants to film; to write to choose, elaborate, order the experience; to write to think, to understand the world and oneself. Chantal Akerman turns her *Lettre d'une cinéaste* into a kind of humorous self-portrait in which she explains what one has to do, apart from writing, to make a film: get up, get dressed, eat, have actors and a team at hand. But not only in her case, but also in the case of actress Aurore Clément, so that the idea of splitting identity, of the (self) representation through actors is addressed.

Nevertheless, we can consider that Akerman did not only split or project herself in characters embodied by actresses. She herself played fictional characters, although it is possible to question ourselves if these characters are a representation of her or a way of becoming someone else. I have talked about *Saute ma ville*. Eight years later, in *Je, tu, il, elle (I, You, He, She, 1974)*, she made herself physically visible in the images to narrate the journey of an experience that starts in solitude, while she writes and eats sugar in an apartment, passes through the contact with someone else (the truck driver played by Niels Arestrup) and finishes with the reencounter with the body of another woman to represent female sexuality in an alternative way: a final and long scene in which, contradicting the 'voyeurism', two naked bodies embrace and rub against each other with a frankness and crude sobriety contrary to pornographic cinema. In any case, does Akerman represent a character named Julie? Or does she represent herself? Maybe both. After all, the presence in an image of a body (something which also applies to the actors) is in itself a form of self-representation. As, on another hand, in a self-representation there can be a game with oneself, a disguise, a desire of being someone else or inventing oneself.

Contrary to Varda, who has made herself more visible in her images with the passing of time, Akerman has become physically invisible in her cinema, although she sometimes reappears, such as in *L'homme à la valise (The Man with the Suitcase, 1983)*, which, as if it were a self-fiction in which she herself is in an imaginary situation, welcomes us to contemplate what aspects of Akerman herself are in a character that, after two months of absence, returns home with the need to work (indeed, in a meaningful way, she wants to write) and finds that the friend to whom she has lent her apartment to does not want to leave. Or such as in *Portrait d'une paresseuse (1986)*, in which, in her bed, she lays at the feet of her beloved Sonia Wieder-Atherton to listen how she plays the cello. In any case, even if she doesn't appear physically, her personal and biographical imprints are present in her films, always in the search of new ways. In fact, the physical absence together with her full presence soon came with *News from Home (1977)*, in which she herself reads the

letters she received from her mother, Natalie, during her stay in New York in 1973. It was the filmmaker's first stay in this city. Three years later, in 1976, she returned to film the images of *News from Home*. Akerman revisited the places she knew from her previous solitary walks around the city, before filming only 170 minutes for a film that lasts 80 minutes. The memory and reflection of the lived experience had done their work. Once time had passed, the memory of the spaces revealed what was the precise place where the camera had to be set up to reveal a personal gaze linked to a feeling of alienism (and at the same time the wish of knowledge of an alien reality) which is also perceived in some of her later films, filmed either in Eastern Europe, in the American South, in either side of the border between Mexico and the U.S. or even in Tel Aviv. After time had passed, Akerman, who had always rejected sentimentalism so that a deeper emotion could appear, read her mother's letters with a distance that allows to communicate the experience: we can recognize her wish of her daughter being happy, but at the same time the longing for the 'prodigal' daughter and even reproaches because she doesn't write back, the insistence that she take care of herself, that she don't wander about dangerous neighborhoods and don't go out at night. Time passes and mothers do not change. Maybe neither do the daughters. Thirty years later, during the filmmaker's stay in Tel Aviv while filming *Là-bas (Down There, 2005)*, Natalie Akerman, now by telephone, still tells her daughter that she misses her, that she should take care of herself and be careful. Chantal, conscious of her mother's restlessness due to the possible attacks, wants to calm her down: 'I don't take the bus, I don't go to supermarkets or to the movies.' In *Là-bas*, a film close to the filmic diary, we don't see Chantal Akerman's body. We observe what she sees and films from the window of her apartment in Tel Aviv. She also reveals her thoughts. In this way, while we glimpse the neighbors, she expresses that it reminds her of her past: she remembers herself as the girl who watched other children playing ball in the streets of Brussels. She watched through the window and withdrew into herself. She continues to do that. To look at others, to observe the world and withdraw into herself living the ambiguity of a state that brings solitude but also creation. The secluded and open self behind the window.

Between *News From Home* and *Là-bas*, intimate and essay-like films in which the relationship with her mother in the distance is present, Chantal Akerman went searching for her roots in Eastern Europe to show it in the silent images of *D'est (From the East, 1993)*, with her majestic lateral tracking shots; she expressed the state of her body, even if it is not visible, through her musical but at the same time hoarse voice (due to the passing of time and maybe the effects of tobacco) in such

personal documentaries such as *Sud* (*South*, 1998), filmed in the still racist American South, and *De l'autre côté* (*From the Other Side*, 2002), in which she explores both sides of a section of the border between Mexico and the United States filming a wall that reminds us of the fence of Nazi concentration camps. When Akerman went to Barcelona in the year 2006, invited by the MICEC (the International Contemporary European Film Festival), I asked her if these images of the wall had been filmed thinking of the fences of concentration camps, of which Natalie Akerman was a survivor. She answered yes, with the conviction of something that is evident, and that they were also filmed so that the viewer would think about it. There is another film, the last one, that we need to address: *No Home Movie* (2015), in which Natalie Akerman's survivor state is present as much as the difficulty of speaking about this experience of maximum horror. The mother (who in some way inspires the body language, related with the repetition of domestic activities, of the protagonist of the masterpiece *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* [*Jeanne Dielman, 23 Commerce Quay, 1080 Brussels, 1975*]), occupies the center of *No Home*

*Movie* and, unlike other occasions, her face and body are present, while her daughter practically does not appear in the image. The latter, as a daughter and a filmmaker, considers how to film her mother in the moment that the decay of her body announces that the transition to death is imminent. Then, the camera adopts a modest distance while the framing encloses the apartment with the feeling that it is a full space that is being emptied of life. This is the last film, so decidedly premonitory that it finishes with the curtains closing. It is not only the end of the mother but it also announces the death of the filmmaker herself, of whom we can feel in *No Home Movie* a vital apathy. Or maybe we know this through her suicide, which arrived a few months after the film. In the end, even with her self-portraits and biographic imprints, what can we know about Varda and Akerman through their cinema? Let's remember the ending of *Chantal Akerman par Chantal Akerman*: 'My name is Chantal Akerman and I was born in Brussels. And that's the truth.' The rest is maybe the work of our suppositions and our imagination: a self that shows itself, also hides. •

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# Identity self-portraits of a filmic gaze. From absence to (multi)presence: Duras, Akerman, Varda

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Lourdes Monterrubio Ibáñez

## ABSTRACT

The present article aims to analyze the nature of the filmic self-portraits of three of the greatest directors in francophone cinema: Marguerite Duras, Chantal Akerman and Agnès Varda. They all generate an *identity self-portrait* that shows the essences of their respective filmic gazes. Three self-portraits that describe a route from absence to (multi)presence, from identity to alterity and intersubjectivity, from fiction to autobiography, from artistic to intimate space, from literary presence to that of visual arts, and which share the same primordial desire: the vindication of their female filmmakers' status through cinematic reflexion. Marguerite Duras only showed her image in one single work, *The Lorry* (1977), to then embody, through her voice-over, different female characters who remain absent from the filmic image. A duality-identification is then generated between the filmmaker and the fictional characters, and the latter compose a *self-portrait in absence* of the director in *Le navire night* (1979), *Aurélia Steiner* (1979), *Agatha and the Unlimited Readings* (1981) and *The Atlantique Man* (1981). Chantal Akerman, while dividing herself into filmmaker and actress at the beginning of her career, created three works that represent her *existential self-portrait*: *News from Home* (1977), *Down There* (2006) and *No Home Movie* (2015). Films of a diaristic nature where the self-portrait is constructed through the conflict with maternal alterity and self-identity, and which is embodied by the dialectic presence-absence of Akerman in the film. Finally, Agnès Varda creates a *self-portrait of the multipresence* born from her interest in alterity, from the portraits of others created in *Jane B. for Agnès V.* (1988) and *Jacquot de Nantes* (1991), and which she continues in *The Gleaners and I* (2000). In *The Beaches of Agnès* (2008) the meeting between autobiography and art installation enables her to generate multiple self-images, present and past, real and fictional, in order to achieve a collage-puzzle of herself.

## KEYWORDS

Marguerite Duras, Chantal Akerman, Agnès Varda, self-portrait, filmic gaze, first-person enunciation, identity and alterity, presence and absence.

The filmic self-portrait has been analysed by different authors as one of the forms of the 'cinema-I' described by Philippe Lejeune in *Cinéma et autobiographie: problèmes de vocabulaire* (1987), and used to transpose the question of autobiography from literature to cinema. The different discursive modes of this 'filmic writing of the self' include clearly identifiable devices, such as the diary or the letter, and more elusive ones, like the self-portrait, all of them fusing and confusing in distinct experiences:

'[...] although the filmic self-portrait is difficult to elucidate, this doesn't mean that it lacks a playing field, provided that the autobiography's portrait of a life is replaced by the inscription of life, and the narrative anchor to the discontinuous record of the self, which is regulated by reminiscence and poetic meditation' (FONT, 2008: 45).

Raymond Bellour, meanwhile, uses Michel Beaujour's work on literary self-portrait (1991: 3) as a starting point to offer in his *Autoportraits* (1988) a definition of filmic self-portrait through five attributes, while previously highlighting its differences from autobiography:

'The self-portrait is thus located on the side of the analogical, the metaphorical and the poetic rather than on that of the narrative: "It tries to build its coherence through a system of mementos, repetitions, superpositions and correspondences between homologous and replaceable elements, in such a way that its general appearance is one of discontinuity, anachronistic juxtaposition, montage". While autobiography is defined by a temporal closure, the self-portrait appears as a never-ending totality, where nothing can be delivered in advance, because its author announces: "I'm not going to tell you what I did, but rather who I am". The author of self-portraits begins with a question that reveals an absence from the self, and everything can end up being an answer; he so moves seamlessly from a void to an excess, and doesn't know clearly either where he is going or what he is doing [...]' (BELLOUR, 1988: 341-342).

Next, the author presents the reasons why digital technology 'seems to lend itself more to the adventure of self-portrait than cinema does' (BELLOUR, 1988: 344). These writings of the self were produced in France during modern cinema as a result of the expression of subjectivity in film work, and according to Bellour's comments on self-portrait, they proliferated from the 1980s onwards.

In *L'autoportrait en cinéma* (2008), Françoise Grange concludes that the defining essence of the filmic self-portrait lies in the impossibility of its *fixing*:

'The film takes its images, erases and replaces them. This permanent absence is a symptom of cinema's potential to

portray the self. Its flux moves through time, it transports a never-completed image in the process of an ever-expanding future' (GRANGE, 2015: XXIII-7).

In accepting this unavoidable presence-absence dialectic, the author puts forward two considerations that we will take as the point of departure for our study. Firstly, as far as presence is concerned, the notion of self-portrait goes beyond the dimension of mere self-representation:

'Making a self-portrait does not just mean presenting the actual image, it means proposing a search for the image as an imperceptible, piercing presence of an absence that plagues us all. A self-portrait is a presentation of our obsession with always being someone else, of finding ourselves in an untraceable place that is impossible to locate, when we would so desire to determine its position. Like a leap in the dark, the self-portrait is the experience of a journey through the spaces, times, and layers that run through those worlds we think we inhabit, but which actually inhabit us' (GRANGE, 2015: XXIII-4).

As Beaujour says: "Trapped between absence and human being, the self-portrait must make a detour to produce what will essentially always be an intertwining of anthropology and thanatography" (1980: 13). Secondly, the self-portrait 'condenses and presents, on several fronts, a cinematic thinking', and this implies not only 'describing the self in cinema', but also 'describing cinema itself'. Both qualities 'give off mirror flashes in which they can observe each other; they can progress together at evolutionary distances' (GRANGE, 2015: XII-17). Using this characterization, we will call this filmic experience an *identity self-portrait*, because it seeks the expression of the filmmaker's identity through her *filmic gaze*, as the materialization of her cinematic thinking, overcoming the limitations that the application of a mere generic perspective would entail. As Domènec Font says:

"The "writing of the self" has the same imprecise outlines and the same heretical status as the essay film, and is frequently tied in with it: it is a personal writing that exists within a difficult generic frame rather than in a less problematic clear characterization" (2008: 47).

This article aims to discuss and compare the nature of the identity self-portraits of three of the greatest filmmakers in francophone cinema: Marguerite Duras, Chantal Akerman and Agnès Varda. The choice of these three authors is justified not only by their contributions to the shaping of the filmic self-portrait, but also by the engaging itinerary they trace from modern to contemporary cinema through different axes: from absence to (multi)presence, from identity to alterity and intersubjectivity, from fiction to autobiography, from the artistic to the intimate. They are experiences of the filmic self-portrait

that share the same, primal desire: to vindicate their status as female filmmakers through cinematic reflection, through their *thinking about cinema*. As Varda states in *Filmer le désir* (Marie Mandy, 2002): ‘The first feminist gesture consists of saying [...] I look. The act of deciding to look [...] the world isn’t defined by how I am looked at, but by how I look at it’.

### **Marguerite Duras. Coalescent self-portrait in voice and absence**

The last period in Marguerite Duras’ film career develops what we have called ‘literary-filmic coalescence’, a fusion of the two artistic disciplines which is produced based on the need to *turn into voice* the literary text over the film image, with the aim of achieving both literary and filmic narrative deconstruction and artistic destruction (MONTERRUBIO, 2013). One of the most revealing embodiments of modernity’s *time-image* defined by Gilles Deleuze is thus produced, by destroying the sensory-motor schema of classical films’ *movement-image* and producing ‘the indiscernibility of the real and the imaginary’ (1989: 274). The independence of the visual image and the sound image, the interstice between them and the voice-over’s enunciation as a pure act of speech (1989: 256-257, 278, 243) all generate a coalescent time-image that negates representation and defines what has been called the India cycle – *Woman of the Ganges* (*La femme du Gange*, 1972), *India Song* (1975) and *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert* (1976). In *India Song* the filmmaker portrays, for the first time, one of the *absent voices* of the film, which in the final part becomes the narrator of the sound story.

Her next project, *The Lorry* (*Le camion*, 1977), was the only film where its maker appears on screen, in the *chambre noire* space of the reading, where writing is made voice; from where it is possible to *hypothesize* a film. We share the views of Grange, who defines this work as a self-portrait: ‘Self-representation in situation (directing actors) turns into the self-portrait of a filmmaker who is inhabited by a particular vision of cinema’ (GRANGE, 2015: XXII-13,16). The filmmaker’s self portrait produced during the creative act expresses her cinematic thinking through a filmic gaze that causes narrative deconstruction, just like in the India cycle. This deconstruction, which has, once again, a coalescent nature between literary writing and filmmaking, is produced by ‘the fluctuation between the actual and the virtual’ that Julie Beaulieu analyses (2015: 122). Moreover, the splitting between the reality of the reading (filmmaker and actor) and the film’s invention (the woman and the truck driver) produces an identification between filmmaker and character, thus tackling the creative identity-fictional alterity duality that comes to define the identity self-portrait in the rest of Duras’ filmography. In her conversation with Michelle Porte, the filmmaker says: ‘It’s me [the woman in the

truck] as well, of course, as I can be all women [...] Anyway, I’ve reached this point: talking about myself as if about someone else, getting interested in myself as someone else would interest me. To talk with myself, perhaps, I don’t know’ (DURAS, 1977: 132). As Youssef Ishaghpour notes, there is an ‘irrepressible identity and duality of Duras and the woman in the truck’, that ‘consists of talking about the self by saying ‘she’: a fickleness of a mental image circulates, without ever taking shape, moving away from Duras towards an indeterminate distance and then returning by projecting itself over her film image to un-make it’ (ISHAGHPOUR, 1982: 263).

After *The Lorry*, Duras never appears again in the visual images of her works, switching instead to narrate them all through voice-overs, which fit in with Michel Chion’s definition of *I-voice* (1999: 49) and more particularly of “textual speech”; with it, Duras attains the inventive dimension of her works: ‘But in comparison with literature, textual speech in film is doubly powerful. Not only does it cause things to appear in the mind but also before our eyes and ears’ (Chion, 1994: 174). *Le navire Night* (1979) shows once more the two spaces – those of creation and of the potential fiction – that are already present in *The Lorry*. This time, the voices of Duras and Benoît Jacquot are framed within an autobiographical story about a visit to Athens, as the author herself points out in the prologue to the literary text. The filmmaker’s identity turns once more into a fictional character, this time present just through her voice, in order to narrate a story, once again, about a woman, F., through the negation of her *mise-en-scène*, which is this time replaced by the space of the set where it should be filmed, and the actors that should perform it. The Durasian self-portrait once again vindicates its creative identity through a shot in the visual image. Among the elements of film creation shown, the camera presents a blackboard on which we can read a piece of dialogue we have just heard between Duras and Jacquot. In this dialogue their respective lines (MARG and *Benoît*) are identified, offering a visual image of the talking characters’ identity. In this way, Duras’ artistic identity generates a new self-portrait to show her view of the recurrent themes of her creation: the experience of desire and loving passion as defined by the absence of their characters, based on the same creative identity-fictional alterity duality.

In *Aurélia Steiner Melbourne* and *Aurélia Steiner Vancouver* (1979) Duras’ identity disappears completely in order to embody her main character, who is also absent from the visual image. Both Aurélias are embodied in her voice, blending together with it. The author herself explains the identification between filmmaker and character: ‘If you like, when I talk I am Aurélia Steiner [...] To wake Aurélia up, even if she is born from me’ (DURAS, 1996: 151). Both the duality in the two

abovementioned works and the identification in this case are produced thanks to the characters' *emptying of identity*, which in *Aurélia* is produced through the epistolary mechanism: 'this name designates strictly what *I* means: an "empty form", the mark of subjectivity in its universal and singular dimension' (VOISIN-ATLANI, 1988: 192). They are female subjectivities which are defined not only by their absence in the image, but also by the omission of their names (the woman in the truck, F.) and/or the absence or contradiction of their biographical references, so allowing the merging with the filmmaker's identity when insisting on the Durasian vision of desire, passion, incest, identity conflict with the ancestors and, in this case, the Holocaust. These two new Durasian self-portraits in voice and absence offer two crucial images of this identification, which is transferred to the characters. In *Melbourne* the image of Aurélia could appear on a Parisian bridge, thus turning the film screen into a mirror where Duras-Aurélia is reflected. In *Vancouver* the main character tries to solve her identity conflict through the continuous expression of her name, which becomes voice and writing. Even more so, the inscribing of this name and an excerpt of the text onto the film screen, both handwritten, identify Aurélia's and Duras' writing and handwriting.

In *Agatha and the Limitless Readings* (*Agatha et les lectures illimitées*, 1981) the filmmaker introduces an element that adds a new dimension to the coalescent self-portrait: Yann Andréa, the author's partner, becomes an actor in the film, along with Bulle Ogier. The work, which narrates the story of incest between Agatha and her brother, is again split in two spaces. The visual image shows two silent characters who go through the hall of a hotel –Roches Noires– and don't meet until the film's conclusion. The sound image presents the dialogue between Agatha and her brother at the moment of their final separation. While the visual image is played by Ogier and Andréa, the sound image is produced by his voice and Duras'. The filmmaker embodies once again the main character: 'It's me, Agatha' (DURAS, 2014: 139). However, this time the fictional loving alterity is personified by Duras' real loving alterity, thus densifying the identification between character and filmmaker. Moreover, the visual image is divided between outdoors, on the beach, and indoors, in the hotel. The former, which is identified with the male voice, represents a space of fiction, of diegesis, of the childhood memories of those characters we hear in the sound image, as a symbol of the present absence of the remembrance that is evoked. The latter is constituted, firstly, as an extradiegetic space of Durasian writing, linked with her voice, where the revelation of the film mechanism is once again produced. While the voice of Agatha-Duras articulates a new childhood memory of the siblings, the visual image follows the female character wandering through the hotel. Then the camera is shown in a mirror and the character looks towards

it, breaking the cinematic fourth wall and destroying the fiction linked to the outdoor space, so as to reveal the extradiegetic space of the film construction, the writing space. Ogier's glance towards the camera is a glance towards Duras, once again creating a superb metaphor for the filmic device as a mirror that produces the self-portrait, a mirror in which both the visual character and the sound character-filmmaker look each other. All of this is possible thanks to the power of the Durasian voice-over, which Ishaghpour discusses in these terms:

'The voice belongs neither to the representation nor to the presence, it is not representable; instead it determines representation. Through voice, the integral voice-over, Duras rends the magic of cinema as a universe for identification and imaginary fascination' (ISHAGHPOUR, 1986: 280).

Finally, *The Atlantic Man* (*L'homme atlantique*, 1981) is constructed using discarded images from *Agatha...*, to create a work where more than half of the image is composed of a black screen, over which we hear, for the last time, Duras' voice. On this occasion this voice formulates the filmmaker's own conscience, which is no longer narrating a fiction, instead it is directed at the actor Yann Andréa over images of him, mixing them with her reflections on their love relationship over the black screen. Hence, *The Atlantic Man* rids itself of the fiction of *Agatha...* to present a last self-portrait of Duras in relation with Andréa's loving alterity. This self-portrait refers more than ever to absence, which once again brings together the artistic aspect of the work in progress with the more intimate aspect of the love experience: 'I don't know any more where we are, at what end of which love, at which start of what other love, in which story we've got lost. My knowledge ends in this film. It ends because I know there is no single image that could extend it'. The destruction announced in *The Lorry*: 'Let cinema go to its ruin, that is the only cinema' (DURAS, 1977: 74) is completed in *The Atlantic Man*. The filmmaker's voice and the black visual image are the end point of a splendid self-portrait of voice and absence through the Durasian literary-filmic coalescence: 'Through the drift of the self-portrait, Duras' films aimed for a *mise-en-scène* of a conscience of an individualized subject who is the owner of everything' (GRANGE, 2000: 463). A *mise en absence*, we might say, of a female authorial conscience that vindicates its condition of filmmaker by taking up once again the primordial feminist gesture described by Varda, and which Beaulieu analyses regarding Duras: 'a position-taking which leads into a politics and a philosophy in whose center we can find the woman, the author and women (female characters)', to develop themes previously considered taboo, exemplifying 'the re-appropriation of the woman's body and its feelings' (BEAULIEU, 2010: 35-36). It is a feminist gesture that different authors have also linked to the transgression and the subversion of the classical narrative associated with the movement-image

(‘subverting the male-centred system of representation of classical and mainstream cinema [...] rejecting the traditional perspective of the male gaze’), and particularly with the Durasian coalescent voice:

‘[...] these female voices [...] place enunciation on the side of feminine identity, traditionally undermined in narrative cinema. Even more, these female draw attention to social marginality and convey historical memory, establishing a parallel between social, economic, and cultural segregation in patriarchal Western society and off-screen and non-diegetic elements in film representations’ (MAULE, 2015: 38, 56, 30).

This identity self-portrait of a female filmmaker is materialized through the absence of her image and the presence of her voice, to develop in this way the duality-identification between the author and her female characters, in what is the borderline experience, never surpassed, as far as relations between literature and cinema are concerned.

### **Chantal Akerman. Existential self-portrait in the face of maternal alterity**

The *presence* of Chantal Akerman in her films has taken up different positions. While at the beginning of her career she divided herself into filmmaker and actress in fictional works –*Blow Up My Town* (*Saute ma ville*, 1968), *The Beloved Child*, or *I Play at Being a Married Woman* (*L'enfant aimé ou je joue à être une femme mariée*, 1971), *La chambre* (1972), *Je, tu, il, elle* (1974)–, in the early '80s she showed her presence as a filmmaker of work-in-progress documentaries –*Tell Me* (*Dis-moi*, 1980), *On Tour with Pina Bausch* (*Un jour Pina a demandé*, 1984), *Les années 80* (1983). This dialectic of actress-filmmaker is also explored through the distance and irony of autofiction in *The Man with the Suitcase* (*L'homme à la valise*, 1983), *Letter from a Filmmaker* (*Lettre d'un cinéaste*, 1984) and *Portrait d'une paresseuse* (1986). However, the existential self-portrait, using one's own identity as a film material, is explored in three works that traverse her whole filmography: *News from Home* (1977), *Down There* (*Là-bas*, 2006) and *No Home Movie* (2015).

*News from Home* is made by reading the letters that Akerman's mother sent her during her first, intermittent period in New York, between 1971 and 1974. It is on her second trip to the city, in 1976, when the filmmaker shoots the film material that composes the work. Therefore, the film starts with the filmmaker reading her mother's letters, while at the same time it shows her perception of the city of New York through the camera. The sound image of the reading of the letters (where the *I-voice* reproduces a maternal textual speech), as well as the visual image of the perception of the city, the space where they are received, turn into an *abyssal self-portrait* that brings together the alterity of the maternal gaze on Akerman with the

subjectivity of her own filmic gaze, and with both characters remaining absent from the visual image –and, in the case of the mother, also from the sound image: ‘For Akerman, giving voice to her mother's letter raises ambivalent issues of inheritance and of emotional indebtedness [...] Akerman's voice silences her mother's in a simulacrum of communication’ (MARGULIES, 1996: 151). The filmmaker offers an image of the generation gap that separates her from her mother, which is an essential identity fracture in herself and her work, a chasm between the family reality of her mother in Brussels and the professional desires of the daughter in New York. As Brenda Longfellow notes, the film is defined: ‘[...] as evidence of an irreparable divide [...] the daughter's insurmountable difference from the mother, a difference that is at once spatial, generational, political and sexual’ (LONGFELLOW, 1989: 79). Thus, the letters are defined by the perceptions of their addressee. The anxious, demanding and constant murmur of maternal worries for her daughter, as well as the insistent asking for news, become an identity attribute of the filmmaker herself: ‘Akerman demonstrates that subjectivity is a function of connexion to others, is constructed within a social context, that it arises and articulates itself only through its relation to others’ (BARKER, 2003: 44). It is a mother-daughter bond which verges on pathological identification: ‘I live at the rhythm of your letters’, where the life experience of the sender depends on the epistolary production of the addressee. Consequently the self-portrait is built through *maternal alterity*: the daughter's perception of how her mother experiences her absence, and the confrontation between this perception and her own identity. It is a self-portrait in maternal alterity that presents its existential depths through the absence of her words and her image, but in the presence of her voice and her filmic gaze.

In *Chantal Akerman par Chantal Akerman* (1996) the filmmaker expresses her belief that it is possible to make the desired professional self-portrait through her filmic work. However, the *sine qua non* condition of the people in charge of *Cinéma, de notre temps* was that she had to appear in the image and talk about herself, and this stipulation resulted in the film being divided into two parts. In the first, Akerman tries to present the motivations and circumstances that led her to become a filmmaker. In the second, various excerpts from her films are edited without any external comment. Thus it confirms that mere self-representation is absolutely insufficient for generating a self-portrait that springs from a search for a perhaps impossible image. This search actually takes place in the second part, which, ‘containing in fact no image representing the filmmaker, *potentially* evokes her’ (BEGHIN, 2004: 210). A last shot returns to an image of Akerman looking at the camera and saying her name and birthplace as the only possible truth, perhaps making clear the failure of identifying self-portrait

with self-representation. Such an identification would seek an auto-objectivation which is impossible or, at least, pointless. Two years later, the installation *Self-portrait/Autobiography: a work in progress* (1998) seems to achieve the desire that had remained unattained in the previous film. The images of *From the East (D'Est, 1993)*, *Jeanne Dielman...* (1975) and excerpts from other films are accompanied by Akerman reading from her novel *Une famille à Bruxelles* (1998), published that same year. The statement 'If I make films it's because I didn't dare to try writing', which is present in the first part of *Chantal Akerman par Chantal Akerman*, reveals its full importance here. The forced self-representation in the previous film becomes now effectively a search for identity through the reading of an autobiographical story that deals with family narration after the father's death, to materialize one more time the mother-daughter conflict. Once again, the presence of the voice and the absence in the image generate Akerman's self-portrait in relation with maternal alterity.

Almost a decade later, *Down There* shuts itself away inside an apartment in Tel Aviv to offer a new *identity self-portrait* of the filmmaker. While in *News from Home* it was possible to identify the film's point of view with Akerman's subjective gaze, this time the static camera registers the exterior events through the windows while the author's presence remains outside the frame, from where we can listen to her movements and actions and the phone calls she makes. This shift of position in relation with *News* is completed with the advent of her voice-over, outside the space-time shown, from where she releases a flow of conscience that turns the film into a deep, personal diary of a depressive crisis. In this manner, the film becomes a self-portrait of a split identity that transports the mother-daughter chasm in *News* into the filmmaker's very self, where the filmic dispositive expresses the intimate impossibility of connecting the interior with the exterior: 'I'm disconnected from almost everything [...] I can hardly look, I can hardly hear. Half blind, half deaf. I float, sometimes I sink, but not completely [...] To sum up, I don't know how to live [...] There's something broken in me. My relationship with the real, the quotidian. We perceive this reality as almost enclosed. Vision is limited through the apartment windows, listening is restricted to the city murmur and the camera detaches from the filmmaker: it no longer shows her subjectivity, it becomes a witness of her retreat, of the 'immobility and absorption', so as to generate a film diary where 'the only thing that remains is the naked and poignant evidence of exterior exile. "I am not fleeing from the yellow star. I'm with it, it is inscribed in me"' (BÉGHIN, 2011). The off-space of the voice is disconnected from the in-space of the image, as an expression of the identity crisis that Akerman recounts. This interior exile is also revealed through the identity

present in Israel, which is also split between its reality and its mythical significance. This identity crisis finds its essential image in the only shot where the filmmaker actually appears (apart from those in the interior of her apartment where she partially enters the frame). The image shows Akerman on the beach, facing away, in the distance, without any link to the camera that is filming her, without any voice-over connecting her to her conscience. By using, on this occasion, the device of the diary, the author manages to create another self-portrait which is produced through the dialectic of presence-absence, both in front and behind the camera in the visual image, both outside the frame and in the off-space in the visual image.

Her last work, *No Home Movie*, meant overcoming the conflicts with maternal alterity exposed in *News...* and the identity crisis shown in *Down There*, to create, at last, a self-portrait *of the presence*. No wonder that this self-portrait has a literary precedent in her narration *Ma mère rit. Traits et portraits* (2013), in which it is again constructed from the maternal alterity. The film, which is devoted to the last moments of her existence, cancels out the distance with her and resolves the intimate split. Now both mother and daughter *appear* and *talk* in the image. Their presences and their words come together in their *bodies* to destroy the absence and make the voice-over disappear, just as these two elements had materialized the identity conflict in the previous works. Moreover, Akerman introduces a handheld camera, which turns into an expression of the conciliation between identity and alterity, as it allows the filmmaker to film while she is being filmed by the static camera. Different images disclose the meanings of this final *self-portrait in presence*. First, mother and daughter share the space – particularly that of the kitchen, whose meaning, in relation to *Jeanne Dielman...* (1975), is crucial – and conversation, as they remember the family past together, sharing their memories and perceptions. In addition, the filmmaker observes her mother in her daily experience, follows her with the handheld camera while both of them are recorded by the static one. In this way, the creation of the maternal portrait is also a reaffirmation of the own self-portrait, which at last reconciles the artistic sphere with the intimate one. Secondly, the generational chasm shown in *News...* through the epistolary correspondence is now mitigated through *Skype* conversations, where mother and daughter are present in voice and image again. The previous distance between them is cancelled out, an idea that Akerman highlights by zooming in on her mother's image on the computer, until she *disfigures* it. Finally, and again with the handheld camera, the filmmaker faces her own image through the self-filming, first, of her shadow in the water, and later of her reflection in the kitchen window. Death imposes the mother's definitive absence, with which both the film and the

filmmaker's career end. Along this career, Akerman offered us a self-portrait of her identity intimacy through her cinematic thinking:

'[...] what one could call the dramatic formalism of Chantal Akerman resides in forceful strategies of enunciation that articulate, dialectically, impression and observation, subjectivity and otherness, the present and the past [...] In a poetics that is also a formal politics, the essential figures of her filmic writing –repetition, ellipsis, interruption– articulate the working of the unconscious (repression, the compulsion to repeat) as they partake of a very personal interpretation of history' (DAVID, 1995: 62-63).

Through these three films Akerman combines her film poetics and her film politics, her cinematic thinking, to compose an existential self-portrait that evolves from absence to presence, portraying an identity conflict against the maternal alterity that contains various crucial feminist issues. The status of filmmaker is revealed as primary in the intimate need to produce a cinematographic image of herself, offering that first gesture of *looking at herself* that Varda had talked about.

#### **Agnès Varda. Self-portrait of multipresence and intersubjectivity**

The non-fiction cinema of Agnès Varda is mostly defined by the voice-over, first-person narration of the filmmaker, making evident her subjective gaze, as narrator of the film story, in what she has called *subjective documentary*. This is the case with works like *Salut, les cubains!* (1963), *Black Panthers* (1968), *Daguerréotypes* (1977) or *Mural murals* (*Mur murs*, 1981), among others. However, Varda's sound presence becomes a visual one when it comes to creating a portrait of the other. The one in *Oncle Yanko* (1967) shows the filmmaker on the screen, announcing so the theory realised by *Jane B. for Agnès V.* (*Jane B. par Agnès V.*, 1988), a film analysed in Cybelle H. McFadden (2010), in which the portrait of the object requires the presence of the subject who is making it, including a self-portrait of the filmmaker as part of the portrait of the actress. At the beginning of the film Varda explains her theory to Birkin in these terms:

'[...] it is as if I filmed your self-portrait. But you won't be alone in the mirror. The camera, which is a bit like myself, will be there, and it doesn't matter if I appear in the mirror or the frame [...] You just need to follow the rules of the game and to look at the camera as often as possible. To look at it squarely, otherwise you won't be looking at me.'

The filmmaker synthesizes this thesis in a lucid shot. A pan shows Birkin looking at Varda via a mirror, then it shows Varda, and finally it shows the actress looking at the camera

through the mirror. In this way, the filmmaker affirms that both the portrait and the self-portrait are generated through the relation with the other, through a film apparatus that turns into a mirror where one must *look at oneself*: 'The filmmaker defines a playing field between the camera –a substitute for the eye– and the mirror that returns its gaze, between the portrait of her model-like actors and the self-portrait of the filmmaker who is revealed through her own images' (RIAMBAU, 2009: 136). A shot of the camera and one showing Varda behind it express the need to include a vindication of the filmmaker's work within the work itself.

In *Jacquot de Nantes* (1991) the presence of Varda's voice-over as the narrator of the story is completed with a series of extreme close-ups of the face and the hands of Jacques Demy, highlighting the presence of Varda's intimate gaze. This link between subject and object is again synthesized through the filmmaker's presence and the character's gaze at the camera. Varda appears in the image in a single, decisive shot; the camera explores Demy's face, producing a smile, then shows the filmmaker's hand caressing his shoulder. This hand synthesizes 'the multiplicity of female figures Varda embodies in *Jacquot de Nantes* in relation to Jacques/Jacquot: she is at once the filmmaker, the partner, but also Jacquot's mother, the one who creates, through fiction, the boy that Jacques Demy was' (LE FORESTIER, 2009: 175). In this way, Varda offers a new, simultaneous portrait-self-portrait, as we can see in the next-to-last shot in the film, where the filmmaker's voice-over sings *Démons et merveilles* while the handheld camera looks along the seashore until it meets Demy's gaze. This simultaneity is also produced in the two later works devoted to the filmmaker, moving from the space of memories to the space of biography: *The Young Girls Turn 25* (*Les demoiselles ont eu 25 ans*, 1993) and *The World of Jacques Demy* (*L'univers de Jacques Demy*, 1995).

The digital handycam allows the filmmaker to experiment with new possibilities to make her self-portrait in *The Gleaners and I* (*Les glaneurs et la glaneuse*, 2000), until she synthesizes her proposal in a particular gesture: 'This is my project: to film with a hand my other hand. To enter into the horror. It seems extraordinary to me. I have the impression that I am an animal. Worse than that. I am an animal I don't know'. Varda experiments with self-filming, with the possibility of filming herself while she handles the camera to show how she gathers heart-shaped potatoes, how she catches trucks on the road or how she examines the alterity of aging with the same interest she shows when approaching the people she interviews. Her grey hair and the wrinkles on her hands correspond to the ones in Demy's portrait in *Jacquot de Nantes*, showing again the

link between identity and alterity. The filmmaker talks about this correspondence between the portrait of the loved one and the self-portrait in the conclusion of *The Gleaners and I: Two Years Later (Deux ans après, 2002)*, where she states, looking at the camera, that she wasn't aware of the link between the two images. Knowing nothing of his work as a psychoanalyst, Varda by chance interviews Jean Laplanche in relation to his work as a vine grower, and then he presents his *antiphilosophy of the subject*: 'the subject finds its origin, first, in the other'. As Claude Murcia states:

'To think about the other so as to think about oneself, that is what Varda does in her quest for her own alterity [...] *The Gleaners and I* seems to be an attempt at grasping the self, one's own body and the anguish it generates due to its finite condition. This procedure implies the acceptance of this alterity that constitutes oneself and the other' (MURCIA, 2009: 48).

*The Beaches of Agnès (Les plages d'Agnès, 2008)* is created as 'a new postmodern hybrid between autobiography and self-portrait' (BLUHER, 2013: 63). It is a hybrid built like a kaleidoscopic collage, where Varda, in addition to being author and narrator, is now the film's main character. It is a film in which:

'[...] the subtle sliding toward self-portrait manages to temper and metamorphose the impasses of the autobiography, by opening all kinds of intermediate paths [...] equally successfully, it achieves autobiography through the medium of the self-portrait and vice-versa, thus creating by herself, like a hapax, a unique form of use' (BELLOUR, 2009: 17).

While until that moment the self-portrait had been generated based on the image and voice of the filmmaker, both in front of and behind the camera (self-filming included), and always in relation with her interest for alterity, now Varda uses two new elements to generate what Bluher calls 'performative self-portraits' (BLUHER, 2013: 59): autobiographical recreation and the artistic installation. In both cases, real and present Varda appears offering new, powerful meanings. In the first case, the filmmaker recreates old autobiographical scenes while including herself in them, generating the *mise en abyme* of the self-portrait in its creative and playful sense: 'She constantly emphasizes her self-invention [...] It is as if Varda created herself, *sui generis*' (CONWEY, 2010: 133). In the childhood recreation on the beach Varda puts herself next to her fictional child self-portraits to declare: 'I don't know what recreating a scene like this means. Do we relive the moment? For me it is cinema, it is a game'. Later on, she recreates the family environment at Sète, her photographic activity in *La Pointe Courte* (1955) and the writing of her first screenplay. In this

last recreation, self-portrait *mise en abyme* is produced through the reproduction of the same action in the same space by both presences: the past and fictional, and the real, present one, thus highlighting the experience of subjective time, also in the case of the self-portrait. This is inherent to all Varda's works we are analysing here.

Concerning the installation, as Bellour points out, this is identified with the notion of *mise-en-scène*: 'We find ourselves in a subtle, strange, in-between, where cinema acts as contemporary art' (BELLOUR, 2009: 19). At the beginning of the film, the installation of the mirrors on the beach shows, once again, portraits of her collaborators and of herself, enabling the installation to contain an experience of the creative self and a new image of her self-portrait. Symmetrically, the film concludes by showing the installation *Ma cabane de l'échec* (2006), a space that is covered with the photochemical film of the projection copies of *The Creatures (Les créatures, 1966)*, where Varda's presence generates a new self-portrait that also gives the installation a new and powerful meaning: 'When I am here I have the feeling that I inhabit cinema, which is my home. I feel that I have always inhabited it'.

Varda's self-portrait is defined by the filmmaker's multipresence through different positions in simultaneous devices: in front of and behind the camera; reflected in multiple mirrors; as a fictional recreation which is the product of auto-invention; as an artistic creation in the space of the installation. It is a self-portrait that can only be completed with the portrait of her beloved ones, those whom she mentions at the beginning of the film: '[...] the others are the ones that truly interest me and that I like to film. The others, those who intrigue me, motivate me, question me, confound me, excite me'. Among them, the loved ones that are already disappeared, and of course, 'the most loved among the dead ones', Jacques Demy. Varda takes up the abovementioned shots of his portrait from *Jacquot de Nantes*, to now complete them with her words: 'My only solution as a filmmaker was to film him, from very close: his skin, his eye, his hair, as a landscape, his hands, his blemishes. I needed to do that, shots of him, made from his own matter. Jacques dying but Jacques still alive'. Self-portrait is again defined as a collage-puzzle, constantly transforming and being updated, and that is only possible thanks to the mirror of alterity: 'Only the movement of our thinking and our emotions can shape a "portrait-puzzle" in a "game of human mirrors" that makes us penetrate into the real and plunges us deeply, to return us its visible and indefinite dimension' (BLUHER, 2009: 185). This is, then, a self-portrait of multipresence, as a result of an intersubjectivity that goes beyond the dialectic of identity-otherness. Agnès' *identity beaches* are always inhabited by

others. As she explains regarding her family: '[...] altogether, they are the sum of my happiness. I'm not sure if I know them or if I understand them, I just go towards them.'

Varda's self-portrait is therefore configured as the portrait of her creative experience, of her process of cinematic reflection on that first gesture of *how I look*, destroying the genre stereotypes. This is a gaze that longs for meeting the others and generates the multiplicity of its own image:

'Her goal is not only to give expression to her particular voice, but it is to show, to make visible the creative process as she experiences it as an aging woman with a long and formidable career. This process reaps the important benefit of producing the female cinematic body – a composite entity of the filmmaker constructed by the film' (MCFADDEN, 2014: 70).

### Identity, presence and cinematographic thought

The study of these filmmakers' filmic self-portrait has given us a itinerary from absence to presence which also describes the evolution of cinematic thinking from modern to contemporary cinema. Marguerite Duras generates her *coalescent self-portrait of voice and absence* through artistic subjectivity, by projecting her identity onto fictional female characters that are absent from the visual image but embodied by Duras through her voice-over. This cinematographic approach materializes in exemplary fashion modernity's time-image, based on the fusion of literature and cinema, destroying the sensory-motor schema of classical cinema's movement-image. Chantal Akerman, meanwhile, develops the dialectic of identity-alterity that define postmodernity, by exploring its belonging concepts of *extimacy* (IMBERT, 2010: 331) and *strangerhood* (BAUMAN, 1991: 101). In this way, she offers an *existential self-portrait facing the maternal alterity*, in relation with the diary form, where the presence of the voice-over and the absence of her own image express an identity conflict which is overcome by the presence *next to and in front of* the other. This filmic self-portrait is moreover located halfway between the previous influence of literature and the new one of visual arts. Finally, Agnès Varda creates a *self-portrait of the multipresence and the intersubjectivity* that springs from the portrait of the other and the interest for alterity to construct a self-portraiting, a multiple and intermedial collage-puzzle which is produced thanks to the intersection between autobiography and artistic installation. It is an intersubjectivity that goes beyond the dialectic of identity-alterity and that is identified with contemporary cinema. In these three self-portraits, the mirrors of fiction, maternal alterity and intersubjectivity bring us back to the *sought presence* of the filmmakers to which Grange referred.

This is a route from absence to presence that we can synthesize with the apparition of the beach as a shared element in the three self-portraits. It is a beach that is always deserted in Duras' films –*Aurélia Steiner Vancouver, Agatha...*– a space of fiction and absence where a coalescent literary-cinematic self-portrait is projected through the embodiment of different female characters thanks to her writing made voice. It is a beach of shared experience with alterity, where nonetheless Akerman portrays herself as isolated and split –*Down There*– materializing the identity conflict, and where later on she will meet her image again in the water to film it –*No Home Movie*– and to show thus its possible overcoming. In Varda's multiple, always-inhabited *identity beaches*, the self-portraiting collage manifests an intersubjectivity that goes beyond the dialectic of identity-alterity.

All of these images vindicate the filmmakers' female status through their respective cinematic reflections. Duras destroys the rules of the classical narrative to realise a female filmic enunciation using her own voice, which offers her own topics and reaffirms herself as a creator; Akerman experiments with *filmic self-absorption* and seeks an essential image that must overcome the identity conflict in the face of maternal alterity, and which it is materialized through the dialectic absence-presence both in the cinematic image and sound; Varda produces a self-portrait of multipresence as a result of her need to look at the other, a work that is born from the intermedial hybridization of all the artistic practices. Creating, looking into oneself and looking at the other as self-portraiting gestures of feminist vindication. •

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# Jorge Oter; Santos Zunzunegui (Eds.)

## *José Julián Bakedano: Sin pausa / Jose Julian Bakedano: Etenik gabe*

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María Soliña Barreiro

### **Incomplete duality. A monograph on José Julián Bakedano**

The first monograph on José Julián Bakedano is, like him, a fragmentary, yet solid, collage that emanates love for cinema. Santos Zunzunegui and Jorge Oter, supported by Alhóndiga/Azkuna Zentroa de Bilbao and The University of the Basque Country/ Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, edited the book *José Julián Bakedano: Sin Pausa* last May. The publication of this collective book, both in Basque and Spanish, was accompanied by a film series of the author's filmography.

As far as Bakedano is concerned, his nearly twenty films are not enough to identify him as an author. Neither his more than 30 texts, 300 film programmes or the hundreds of catalogues of The Bilbao Fine Arts Museum make him a scholar. José Julián Bakedano has consolidated the Basque cinematographic culture for over 40 years. His work, even if fragmentary, has a great value because of its extension. His figure is a collage of a firm, continuous, generous and cubist love for cinema. Cubist, because it is in the accumulation of cinematographic facets, of perspectives, where the creative action crystallizes in culture, according to Bakedano's own definition of culture. His work, in a wide sense, is articulated in a constellation that has maintained the Basque cinematographic culture since 1966, when he wrote his first article in 'Film Ideal'.

*José Julián Bakedano. Sin Pausa* goes over the author's filmic work through reviews and analysis of different authors like Endika Rey, Félix García de Villegas, Íñigo Larrauri, Germán Rodríguez, Maialen Beloki, Rubén Corral, Nekane E. Zubiazur and Marta Fernández Penas. The book also offers the author's perspective in an extensive interview made by Jorge Oter and Germán Rodríguez, and his figure is approached in texts by Santos Zunzunegui, Luis Eguiraun, Joseba Sarrionandia,

José Antonio Sistiaga and Leopoldo Zugaza. The book concludes with a brief selection of Bakedano's own reviews, his filmography and bibliography.

There is a big disparity among the texts that compose this edition. Some are brief, intense and somehow sensationalists reviews; others are deep and analytic, and reveal a sense of both *territorialness* and openness in Bakedano's work. The strength of the proposal is to approach a figure of cinema in a wide sense, by understanding the relevance of the substratum that was built by his generous contribution in all the fields of film culture: criticism, directing, programming, curating, dissemination, creation. However, the achievement of that goal, that is, to study both the producer of films and the one who brings them to the audience, is limited by the selection of Bakedano's texts included in the monograph, which is restricted to two reviews.

Going through both completed and uncompleted works, the book makes possible to understand the transformations of Basque cinema and art from the Transition to our days. In *Oraingoz izen gabe* (*Todavía sin nombre, Still without name*, 1986) Bakedano demonstrates to Antxon Ezeiza and Koldo Izagirre that Basque is 'valid as a dramatic language'; in the news *Ikuska 9* (1980) he goes through contemporary Basque art, in different works portrays pieces by Uzelai, Chillida, Nagel or Basterretxea, and many of his projects fall through because of lack of financial support. In his works he develops a *territorial* cinema, an *atmosphere*, reaching a great spontaneity by creating from his own, progressively emancipated culture.

His filmography throbs with duality, which is felt in the titles, the topics, the editing and even in the technique (deconstruction and reconstruction). A good example is *Bi* (1976), *La carta del*

*amigo* (2007) and the constant movement between plastic and visual arts, by using matters, times and spaces from sculpture or painting into cinema.

The origin of the book is found in an unnoticed draft. A special issue of the *Pausa* Journal, edited by PhD students, finally became this first monograph of José Julián Bakedano. All the texts were reviewed, some of them were expanded, and some were written specifically for the new edition. Love for art is thus in the genesis of the book itself, and as a result we find the unevenness and freedom that arise as its essential features.

*José Julián Bakedano. Sin Pausa* is not a book about a filmmaker, neither about a curator or a critic. It is all of them, and none at the same time. It is about a man of cinema, a man that accomplished to crystallize a certain cinephilia and cinematographic culture in his country out of his passion for the cinematic art. •

