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## **Femme noir: a subcategory of neo noir film**

## **Certificate of Original Authorship**

I, Louise Alston, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Doctorate of Creative Arts in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the exegesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution. This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program.

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Date: 05.09.2019

## **Acknowledgements**

Feedback and support for this thesis has been provided by my supervisor Dr Gillian Leahy with contributions by Dr Alex Munt, Dr Tara Forrest and Dr Margot Nash. Copy editing services provided by Emma Wise. Support and feedback for my creative work has come from my partner Stephen Vagg and my screenwriting group. Thanks go to the UTS librarians, especially those who generously and anonymously responded to my enquiries on the UTS Library online 'ask a librarian' service.

This thesis is dedicated to my daughter Kathleen, who joined in half way through.

## **Format**

This thesis is composed of two parts:

Part one is my creative project. It is an adaptation of Frank Wedekind's Lulu plays in the form of a contemporary neo noir screenplay.

Part two is my exegesis in which I answer my thesis question. I do this by acknowledging literature in the area of thought around my thesis question, exploring case studies and discussing my creative process.

## **Abstract**

This study identifies a new subcategory of film noir, the femme noir. Traditional film noir films use gendered binaries, male gaze and scopophilic treatment of the female characters to limit and fragment women characters. This dynamic is most obvious in the binary between the 'looking' male protagonist and the 'looked at' femme fatale. This binary traps female characters in positions that have limited agency and scope within film narrative. Gendered binaries are a phallic pleasurable expectation and a way in which film noir recreates patriarchy.

The film noir film narrative is traditionally the enactment and expulsion of male sexual anxiety on screen. The femme fatale character typically personifies this male sexual anxiety. The film noir film story tends to follow the male protagonist and his journey to uncover a mystery surrounding the femme fatale. By the end of the film, the femme fatale is revealed, punished or rehabilitated according to the will of the male protagonist. By the end of the film noir film, patriarchal status quo has returned. However, I propose that when the protagonist in a film noir film is a woman, the traditional gendered binary of film noir films is undermined.

In the subsection of film noir films I identify as femme noir, a 'looking' female protagonist meets the gaze of the femme fatale. She recognises not a binary opposite, but a dark sister, an abject version of herself. This study proposes that the dynamic between a woman protagonist and a femme fatale is that of a reflection. By the end of a femme noir narrative, the femme fatale is not uncovered and expelled, instead her essence is absorbed by the female protagonist.

I propose that the femme noir narrative is about the female protagonist's journey to accept and absorb the essence of her abject reflection. The two woman characters together create a type of wholeness that resists the limitations and fragmentations of traditional film noir women. This study will

suggest that in femme noir films, feminist meaning can still be created within a traditionally sexist genre using its familiar tropes and signs.

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## Chapter 1 – Introduction

Lovely ladies, men adoring  
Learn from lovely Lulu's fate:  
Don't decide to go out whoring  
When the Ripper's at the gate

–Frank Wedekind, *Earth Spirit*

In this research, I propose a new subcategory of neo noir film – femme noir. I will identify the femme noir subcategory through the examination of four femme noir film case studies and through the creation of a femme noir creative project – a screenplay entitled Lulu. The screenplay is a contemporary adaptation of Frank Wedekind's Lulu plays (*Earth Spirit* 1895 and *Pandora's Box* 1904). I will reflect on femme noir through several theoretical frameworks. I will review these theoretical frameworks as though they are lenses through which I will look differently at my screenplay and motivate new ways of thinking about my creative project. These theoretical lenses are liberal feminism, psychoanalysis, Lacan's mirror theories, theory of the abject, queer theory and The Uncanny. As I investigate my case studies, I will refer to contemporary feminist theorists who are also writing in a post-Mulvey discourse.

This research project centres on the following question:

***How can feminist meaning be created in film noir?***

I have used a number of different approaches to try to answer this question which include:- an examination of the tropes and rules of film noir and neo noir; an examination of a number of theoretical lenses in relation to understanding film noir, neo noir and my new proposed sub category, femme noir; case studies of four recent films which I will argue are femme noir films; the writing of a contemporary femme noir feature film screenplay adapted from the Lulu plays of Frank Wedekind; an examination of the Lulu plays to provide historical context and to show how they employ noir themes in relation to

women, and finally an examination of my own creative process in relation to the topics listed above listed above.

To ground my creative research, I have look at the gendered rules of traditional film noir and its successor neo noir to identify ways in which patriarchy recreates itself in film noir. In this thesie I will identify the ways noir and neo noir films minimise and fragment women as characters and audience members, creating pleasurable expectations in line with patriarchal goals. These patriarchal pleasurable expectations include gendered binaries which create a hierarchy privileging the male protagonist over the female femme fatale character.

Then I discuss the ways films with both a woman protagonist and a femme fatale create a more complex female subjectivity. I go on to hypothesise that reflection of a female protagonist by a femme fatale breaches the boundaries between characters and disrupts the binary gender rules of noir. I define films in which there is a female protagonist and a mirroring femme fatale as femme noir.

To make my argument that it is possible for feminist female subjects to exist in femme noir, I have undertaken four film case studies, using various theoretical frameworks (or lenses) as inspiration. I argue that feminist subjectivity can be created using and inverting the very rules and pleasurable expectations created to sideline feminist experience in film noir. My argument is supported by the creative component of my research, a femme noir screenplay.

### *The fragmented woman in film noir*

There are generally two forms of woman in film noir films, the femme fatale ('bad woman') and the 'good woman'. Both of these tropes are sexist, fragmented representations of womanhood.

In traditional film noir, the femme fatale does not conform to patriarchal female roles of wife/ mother/daughter and she often exists outside the family

unit. She is often fetishised with star casting, glamour and various other items of scopophilia such as high heels, bare legs and voyeuristic camera angles. Examples of femmes fatales include double dealing murderer Phyllis Dietrichson played by Barbara Stanwyck in *Double Indemnity* (Wilder 1944), obsessive career woman Alex Forrest played by Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction* (Lyne 1987), and the murderous bisexual Catherine Tramell, played by Sharon Stone in *Basic Instinct* (Verhoeven 1992). Although she seems to be a rebel, the femme fatale is a projection of male sexual fantasy and fears and not feminist subject.

The 'good woman' is defined in terms of her relationship to a male protagonist or other men. Examples of these include: Laura, played by Gene Tierney in *Laura* (Preminger 1944); Tracy, played by Gwyneth Paltrow in *Seven* (Fincher 1995) as pure and loving wife of Mills (played by Brad Pitt); Sophie, played by Nandu Hinds, the daughter/granddaughter to John Huston in *Chinatown* (Polanski 1974); and Claire, played by Annabella Sciorra, a caring wife and mother in *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* (Hanson 1992). The 'good woman' is used as emotional motivation for the male protagonist, or as an agent for the patriarchal status quo. She is not a feminist character either.

In the tradition of film noir films, the male protagonist is privileged to move amongst the abject in the dark city without losing his special position to view, investigate and judge. His world is highly organised along strict sexual binaries. For example, the looking/searching protagonist versus the object of his scopophilic desire, the femme fatale.

I will review how the film noir protagonist's permission to view the femme fatale is changed when the protagonist is a woman. I propose that the femme fatale mirrors her female protagonist. Instead of being opposites in a film noir gender binary, where the gaze is only in the direction of the femme fatale, in a femme noir the female subject may view and be viewed (incorporating the female experience of being looked at). This mirror dynamic resists the gendered binaries that define gender difference.

The classical noir gender dichotomy is displayed effectively in the original noir cycle of the 1940s and 1950s in films such as *Maltese Falcon* (Huston 1941), *Murder, My Sweet* (Dmytryk 1944), and *Double Indemnity* (Wilder 1944). This period established a style of dark urban sexual thriller film where gender anxieties could be dissected according to patriarchal hierarchies of man and woman, good and bad.

### *Film Noir and Neo Noir defined*

Ronald Schwartz, in his study of neo noir film, defines film noir as films 'made between 1940 and 1959 on black-and-white film stock, in which a male protagonist is usually led to his destruction by a femme fatale' (Schwartz 2005, p. x).

These films were not identified as a unified style until the term film noir was coined by French critic Nino Frank in 1946 (Schwartz, 2005, p. xi). Before this, film noir films were considered pulp entertainment and not film art deserving cultural study. American critics only began to discuss the "essential traits" of film noir in the 1970s (Silver & Ursini 1996, p3).

The term 'neo noir' has been used to describe films that refer to this classical style made after 1960. The earliest use of the term was in 1997 when a programme of 30 films entitled 'Nouveau Noir' was curated at the American Museum of the Moving Image (Schwartz 2005, p.xii). In neo noir films, the rules of noir are assumed knowledge for the audience. The films have colour technology and a relaxed production code regarding violence and sex. They introduce the ideas of psychotic violence and police corruption and they tend to have what Schwartz describes as a kind of 'cold war cynicism' (Schwartz, 2005, p. xi).

Examples of neo noir include *Basic Instinct*, *Fatal Attraction*, *The French Connection* (Friedkin 1971), *LA Confidential* (Hanson 1997) and *Body Heat*

(Kasdan 1981). Neo noir films carry an element of classic-Hollywood prestige, attracting star casts and big name (male) directors such as Adrian Lyne, Roman Polanski, William Friedkin and David Fincher.

In the seething city of the film noir world, the femme fatale is part of the abject, which the protagonist visits and engages. For example, in the neo noir film *Fatal Attraction*, Dan Gallagher (played by Michael Douglas) strays from his marriage when he has an affair with the insatiable fatale Alex Forrest (played by Glenn Close). In classical noir film *Double Indemnity*, Walter Neff (played by Fred MacMurray) steps outside the ethics of insurance salesmanship to get into league with Phyllis Dietrichson (played by Barbara Stanwyck) and kill her husband for an insurance claim. Although the male protagonist may suffer loss as a direct result of his transgressions, he generally survives the film.

The neo noir protagonist, like the noir protagonist, will participate in or view the sadistic punishment of the femme fatale for her transgressions. For example, J. J. Gittes (played by Jack Nicholson) watches as Evelyn Mulwray (played by Faye Dunaway) is gunned down as the conclusion of *Chinatown*. The protagonist may also forgive (transform) the femme fatale, on his terms. A classical example of this type of transformation is when Gilda Mundson Farrell (played by Rita Hayworth) is forgiven by Glenn Ford as Johnny Farrell (the narrator) at the end of *Gilda* (Vidor 1946). This forgiveness is part of his catharsis. In *LA Confidential*, Lynn Bracken (played by Kim Basinger) retires from prostitution to drive to Arkansas, open a dress shop and rehabilitate Bud White (played by Russell Crowe). This is part of Bud's reward.

The role of the woman in film noir is repeatedly to reward or motivate the male protagonist. Female character's story rarely exists other than as a reflection on the central male characters. In her essay 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' (1975), Mulvey quotes Budd Boetticher, a film director of the 1940s and 1950s, to demonstrate the fragmentation of women in classical Hollywood film:

What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or the fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance (p.63).

*How can feminist creative practice contribute new meaning to film noir?*

Mulvey's essay brings me to the starting point of my creative project. At the conclusion of her essay, Mulvey acknowledges that Hollywood meaning making can be challenged by alternative (independent) film production and by women filmmakers using existing film language and styles. She acknowledges that artists may use the signs of Hollywood film noir to challenge the 'ease and plenitude' (Mulvey 1975, p. 60) of Hollywood narrative fiction film. In this way over the years, independent and alternative films have injected new systems of meaning and subjectivity into the existing structure and tropes of Hollywood film noir. She says:

The alternative [to patriarchal Hollywood film] is the thrill that comes from leaving the past behind without simply rejecting it, transcending outworn or oppressive forms, and daring to break with normal pleasurable expectations in order to conceive a new language of desire (Mulvey 1975, p. 60).

Here, Mulvey seems to be appealing here to creative artists to take up current cinema meaning and practice and produce alternatives. This study will identify the ways femme noir films have done just that, creating space for female subjectivity in film noir. My creative project screenplay will use existing signs, tropes and structure of film noir but create feminist meaning.

*Femme noir defined*

I propose femme noir is a type of film noir that has emerged in the last three decades through the rise of independent film making in the wider context of post-Mulvey feminist film discourse. In femme noir, a femme fatale character mirrors a female protagonist. By this I mean that without a phallus to divide and separate them, the femme noir protagonist sees the femme fatale as someone not unlike herself. This is in contrast to a phallogentric male protagonist who sees in

the femme fatale in terms of her lack (Mulvey 1975, p.59).

In a femme noir film, two female characters force the collapse of the protagonist/ femme fatale binary. The binary transforms into a mirror. I will observe how the female characters in femme noir films, will slide into each other. The familiar trajectory of a male film noir protagonist's follows his visit to the dark underbelly of the city, where he solves the mystery of the abject and escapes relatively unscathed. The female protagonist in a femme noir film encounters a femme fatale, is lead by her into the abject underbelly of the city where she absorbs and becomes part of the abject. In her dark catharsis the female protagonist rejects femininity. She is usually dead (or part of her has died) by the end of the film.

The four examples of femme noir film I use for my case study films all feature female protagonists on a journey to absorb the abject. My case study films are: *Single White Female* (Schroeder 1992), in which Allison integrates Hedra into her sense of self; *Mulholland Drive* (Lynch 2001), in which Betty and Rita are corpses at the end of the film; *Black Swan* (Aronofsky 2010), in which Nina dies having synthesised the Black Swan and the White Swan; and *In The Cut* (Campion 2003), Frannie returns from the lighthouse bloody and silent.

Femme noir re-engages a female protagonist with her femme fatale Uncanny/abject mirror image. In femme noir, the identities and points of view of the protagonist and femme fatale merge. Typically, the narrative enters a dream-like space and a slip in the symbolic film language occurs. Femme noir unfixes female character and point of view, which is usually defined in relation to the phallic protagonist. Two women reflecting each other create whole new dynamics featuring shifting points of identity and a sense of feminist flow. Femme noir allows female subjectivity to exist within film noir film.

#### *Examples of femme noir*

My case study films each include a female protagonist and a femme fatale. I

will observe the way identity slips between the two characters. The protagonist and femme fatale characters have similar appearances, or take steps in order to have similar appearances. In all of these films the femme fatale and the protagonist stare at each other and at themselves in the mirror.



Figure 1: Hedy Carlson (played by Jennifer Jason Leigh) and Allison Jones (played by Bridget Fonda) in *Single White Female* (1992) [screenshot from the film]



Figure 2: Rita / Camilla Rhode (played by Laura Harring) and Betty / Diane Selwyn (played by Naomi Watts) at the club Silencio in *Mulholland Drive* (2001) [screenshot from the film]



Figure 3: Frannie Avery (played by Meg Ryan) and Pauline (played by Jennifer Jason Leigh) in *In the Cut* (2003) [screenshot from the film]



Figure 4: Lily (played by Mila Kunis) and Nina Sayers (played by Natalie Portman) on a transgressive night out in *Black Swan* (2010) [screenshot from the film]

### *Creative project: 'Lulu'*

The creative component of this research is a screenplay entitled 'Lulu'. It is a contemporary adaptation of Frank Wedekind's plays *Pandora's Box* (1904) and *Earth Spirit* (1895). These are collectively known as 'the Lulu plays'. This screenplay will be a new femme noir work.

The Lulu plays are about a morally corrupt dancer named Lulu who rises then falls in society to end up a streetwalker in London, where Jack the Ripper murders her. When they first appeared, the Lulu plays were considered an attack on bourgeois sexual mores. They can also be read as a misogynist attack on sexually liberated women. The fact that *Pandora's Box* is named after the Greek myth of Pandora links this violent tale to the idea of female guilt, as in the Judeo-Christian Eve figure. The mythological overtones in the title suggest that Lulu's fall and punishment is part of the natural order.

Wedekind first wrote the plays in the early 1890s as one work titled *Pandora's Box*. Because of censorship, the play was split into two parts. It is key that the Lulu plays themselves are plural, almost identical sisters except that one of them was deemed unacceptable in polite society. This duality of good and bad resonates with femme noir.

There have been several adaptations and revivals of the play, including a significant film adaptation in 1929 directed by G.W. Pabst and starring Louise

Brooks. Theatrical productions of the work had a revival in the late twentieth century at a time when German epic theatre from the modernist period became popular.

The Lulu plays' moralistic and sexual themes, not to mention it's violence make the work perfect for a film noir adaptation. In the plays, Lulu's lesbian admirer is Countess Geschwitz. Geschwitz follows Lulu to the streets of London and *Pandora's Box* ends with Geschwitz mourning the slain Lulu. I have used these two women as the reflecting characters in my femme noir screenplay.

I have written the Lulu screenplay using a three-act screenplay structure in line with the tradition of film noir and neo noir film. This methodology has been informed by texts such as Christopher Vogler's *The writer's journey: mythic structure for storytellers and screenwriters* (Vogler 2007); Syd Field's *Screenplay: the foundations of screenwriting* (Field 1982); Linda Seger's *Making a good script great* (Seger 1994); and Richard Walter's *Essentials of screenwriting: the art, craft and business of film and television writing* (Walter 2010). However, I will also look at alternative screenwriting methodology, including Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush's *Alternative scriptwriting: writing beyond the rules* (1991). As part of my process of adapting the plays to the screen, I investigate adaptation methodology, starting with Linda Seger's *The art of adaptation: turning fact and fiction into film* (Seger 1992). My choice to write a traditional film noir three act structure is informed by Mulvey's call to artist to hijack the pleasurable expectations of dominant cinema.

### *Exegesis structure*

My exegesis will continue to make my argument in the following chapters:

#### Chapter 2 – Film Noir and Neo Noir

In this chapter I will define film noir and neo noir as film categories, looking at the patterns and tropes within. I will propose that film noir relies heavily on gendered binaries to recreate patriarchy on screen. I will subsequently look at

the femme fatale figure within film noir as a location for feminist action. However, I will note the ways in which the femme fatale figure is processed by patriarchy within film noir. That is, she is punished or domesticated by the end of the film, whereas the male protagonist tends to survive unscathed. I will expand on my proposal that femme noir films collapse the gendered binaries within film noir. I will note how femme noir films track towards absorption of the abject by the protagonist.

### Chapter 3 – Theoretical Approaches

In this chapter I will discuss the different theoretical lenses I will use to examine my film case studies.

The first theoretical lens I will engage is liberal feminism. One of the goals of liberal feminism in cinema is to improve the quality and quantity of women on screen. I will examine the ways in which this is a useful exercise, given the multi-faceted ways in which patriarchy ignores and fragments the female subject. I will then look at how liberal feminism becomes most useful to my study when evaluating the historical significance of the femme fatale.

The next theoretical lens I will take up is psychoanalysis. This approach is useful for identifying phallic symbols and binaries in film noir. I will look at Barbara Creed's suggestions the femme fatale can be the bearer of the bleeding wound or the owner of the internalised phallus (Creed, 1993). This will lead me to Mulvey and the scopophilic gaze which identifies the way patriarchy is codified by film noir (Mulvey 1975, p. 60).

Following on from psychoanalysis, my next theoretical lens will be Kristeva's theory of the abject. This theory provides an excellent framework for concepts around the binary of clean and tarnished female characters. This theoretical approach also provides language to discuss the attraction and absorption of the womanly other by female protagonists in femme noir films.

I will then engage with queer theory, which opens up discussion about desire and identity between the female protagonist and femme fatale. This section will explore the ways identity and sexual otherness operates within my four film case studies.

My final theoretical lens will be Freud and Cixous' concept of The Uncanny. This idea provides language for my discussion of fractured temporal reality in femme noir. It also articulates the womanly out-of-body experience of looking and being looked at.

#### Chapter 4 – Case Studies

This chapter will examine four femme noir case studies through the theoretical lenses discussed in chapter 4.

*Mulholland Drive* (Lynch 2001)

*In the Cut* (Campion 2003)

*Black Swan* (Aronofsky 2010)

*Single White Female* (Schroeder 1992)

#### Chapter 5 – The Lulu Plays

In my sixth chapter, I will outline the Lulu plays and their significance as a theatrical work. This chapter looks at other productions and adaptations of the Lulu plays since the 1890s and how they have related to feminism. I will make a case that this work has been revived at times of significant cultural anxiety towards female sexuality. I will then focus on the contemporary context of my own adaptation.

#### Chapter 6 – Creative Process and Discussion

This chapter will detail the process and challenges encountered in the

development of my femme noir screenplay 'Lulu'. It will discuss and evaluate the application of theoretical lenses to my creative process.

## Chapter 7 – Conclusion

In my conclusion I will summarise the main points of my argument about femme noir and the creation of female subjectivity in film noir. I will suggest areas for further research, especially in relation to the lack of racial diversity in femme noir and film noir as a whole.

### *Thesis question and contribution to knowledge*

My thesis question "**How can feminist meaning be created in film noir?**" will be answered by identifying a new sub section of film noir. I call this subsection of films "femme noir". I will define this subsection by looking at case study femme noir films through various theoretical lenses and by creating a new femme noir screenplay. My contribution to knowledge is defining the femme noir sub section through case studies and a new screenplay work.

## Chapter 2 – Film Noir and Neo Noir

Film noir means...films in which a male protagonist is usually led to his own destruction by a femme fatale and winds up getting neither the money nor the dame (Schwartz 2005, p. ix).

This chapter will discuss film noir and neo noir and the rules these films use to create patriarchal pleasurable expectations (Mulvey 1975, p. 60). Firstly, I will look at film noir rules and the way they work to reinforce the status quo while also being critical of urban America. Secondly, I will look at neo noir and how rules from the original noir cycle have been recycled in recent decades and slightly tweaked to capitalise on these pleasurable expectations, either reinforcing or undermining them. I will then detail the ways femmes fatales operate in film noir and neo noir mostly to process patriarchal anxiety about independent women. Lastly, I will look deeper into femme noir and the way these films navigate noir expectations of gender and desire to create shared rules of their own.

The original film noir cycle from the displays European-inspired criticism of the United States. Socially realist in approach, they included issues such as prostitution, delinquency and corruption. In the mid-twentieth century, noir was a style of Hollywood film frequently directed by European refugees. Empowered by an outsider perspective, these films identify social decay, violence and masculine crisis inside the twentieth-century American dream.

### *Film noir*

Film noir is a term used to describe a particular style of films that proliferated from the 1940s and 1950s. These films use dark lighting effects and typically focus on the experiences of a male, 'hard boiled' protagonist, usually on a mission to solve a case. Film noir featured numerous phallic signs such as guns and suits as well as a scopophilic treatment of women characters. Robert G Porfirio observes:

The Mordant sensibilities of the “Germanic” émigrés and their penchant for a visual style which emphasized mannered lighting and startling camera angles provided a rich resource of a film industry newly attuned to the commercial possibilities of that hard-boiled fiction so popular in the 1930s... Following the success of *Double Indemnity* and *Murder, My Sweet*, both made in 1944, this “Germanic” tradition was quickly assimilated by others and the era of *film noir* was in full bloom. (Porfirio, 1976)

Film Noir films are set in a patriarchal hierarchy of city street life. Typically, they feature elements of urban anxiety including crime, corruption and violence. Film noir features were made cheaply in a kind of film production assembly line by studios with a constant need for product to fill cinema screens. Film reels of mass-produced detective films were assumed to be at the end of their lives when they were sold to French distributors ten years after they had been fed to the US market.

Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeto describe the impact of the films first reaching French audiences in 1946:

In the course of a few weeks, from mid-July to the end of August, five movies flashed one after the other across Parisian screens, movies which shared a strange and violent tone, tinged with a unique kind of eroticism; John Huston’s *The Maltese Falcon*, Otto Preminger’s *Laura*, Edward Dmytryk’s *Murder, My Sweet*, Billy Wilder’s *Double Indemnity*, and Fritz Lang’s *The Woman in the Window*... a few months later Frank Tuttle’s *This Gun for Hire*, Robert Siodmak’s *The Killers*, Robert Montgomery’s *The Lady in the Lake*, Charles Vidor’s *Gilda*, and Howard Hawks’ *The Big Sleep* imposed the concept of film noir on moviegoers. A new “series” had emerged in the history of film. (Borde, R & Chaumeton, E 1955)

It wasn’t until the French film critics of the 1950s and 1960s began to identify Hollywood films as art that anyone considered them anything but expendable. It was the French who first began to talk about film noir as a style with recurring motifs and signs.

French critic Nino Frank first used the term 'film noir' in 1946. In the first book on the subject, *Panorama du Film Noir Americain* authors Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton used the term to describe a particular sort of cinema produced in the USA from before and after World War 2 until the late 1950s (Schwartz 2005, p. ix).

Ronald Schwartz lists the following as film noir characteristics:

- 1) Chiaroscuro lighting<sup>1</sup>
  - 2) Screenplays set in urban milieus filmed mostly at night
  - 3) Frequent images of water and reflections of street life
  - 4) Inverted frames (cameras held diagonally and/or vertically, reflecting the inner thoughts of the protagonist)
  - 5) Very complex and convoluted plots usually in a voice-over by a central character, a detective, or a femme fatale who 'flashes back' to the past
- (Schwartz 2005, p. x)

The language and imagery in film noir mirrors that of masculine 'gumshoe' pulp fiction popular during World War 2. Authors of these novels include Raymond Chandler, who wrote *The Big Sleep* (1939) and *Farewell My Lovely* (1940), and James M. Cain, author of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934) and *Double Indemnity* (1936). Others included Cornell Woolrich who wrote as William Irish, author of *It Had to be Murder* (Irish 1942), which was later filmed as *Rear Window* (1954), and Dashiell Hammett, who wrote *The Maltese Falcon* (1929) and *Red Harvest* (1929).

Gumshoe pulp fiction was typically sold on train platforms and read by men. In these books, the femme fatale operates as an expression of male sexual anxiety and as the non-male feminine in the structural order of a male-dominated cityscape. The femme fatale is a shifting character who wields a certain amount

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<sup>1</sup> Chiaroscuro lighting describes lighting where there is a contrast between lit and unlit parts of the frame created by pools of light.

of her own power. In post-World War 2 society, women were most often depicted in culture as housewives and good daughters. The femme fatale is neither a mother nor a daughter. She has a portion of freedom and agency, even if she is in a tight spot and has a run-in with the law or needs to hire a private eye. She is presented as a match for the protagonist and the viewer.

As mentioned previously, dark, urban film noir films based on this literature were often made by European refugees. Refugee directors included Otto Ludwig Preminger (*Angel Face* 1953), Fritz Lang (*The Big Heat* 1953) and Robert Siodmak (*The Killers* 1943). These films, showing America's corrupt urban underbelly and male anxiety, were created and criticised by European outsiders.

In his book *The Dark Side of the Screen*, Foster Hirsch says:

Noir attracted directors noted, then, not for their warmth and rich painterly style but for their irony and distance, their unromantic tough-mindedness. And it is no surprise therefore that the best *noir* directors were German or Austrian expatriates who shared a world view that was shaped by their bitter personal experience of living in and then escaping from a nation that had lost its mind.  
(Hirsch, F 1981, *The Dark Side of the Screen*, p 115)

Film noir emerged as more critical of America than would normally be expected of Hollywood, the cultural coloniser. However, explicit criticism was limited by capitalist concerns and later by McCarthyism. Raymond Durnat observes the limitations of Film Noir as a form of social criticism thus:

The financial and industry-labour battles of the '30s are poorly represented in Hollywood, for the obvious reason that the heads of studios tend to be Republican, and anyway depend on the banks. But as the rearmament restored prosperity, the association of industry and conflict was paraphrased in politically innocent melodrama, giving *Road to Frisco* (1939) and *Manpower* (1940). (Durnat, 1970)

Film Noir, did however provide cinema with a language of signs with which the American dream of peace, patriarchy and capitalist production could be

refracted and reflected back with a dark edge..

### *Neo noir*

Film Noir conventions have continued to be used by filmmakers, particularly in thriller films for 80 years. Foster Hirsch says:

Many Noir conventions have... had a continuing influence of American film-making: the use of the city; expressionistic heightening and distortion to create suspense and to convey personality transformation; the notions of the criminal as a complex, divided character and of the criminal possibilities – the potential for violence – within the most seemingly ordinary people.  
(Hirsch, F 1981, *The Dark Side of the Screen*, p 205)

Neo noir is a term used to describe films made since the 1970s which engage elements of noir in their mise-en-scène. In 1997, curator David Schwartz at the American Museum of the Moving Image curated a show entitled *Nouveau Noir* showing about thirty films that represented the neo-noir style (Schwartz 2005, p. xii).

Schwartz proposes that *Psycho* (1960) was the first neo noir film. Other contenders for the first neo noir are *Harper* (1966) and *Chinatown* (1974). Neo noir uses much of the same dark lighting, crime and urban anxiety themes as classical period film noir but also includes elements such as serial killing and psychotic violence.

Some other notable films in the neo noir style are *Blade Runner* (Scott 1982), *Body Heat* (Kasdan 1981), *LA Confidential* (Hanson 1997), *Se7en* (Fincher 1995), *Taxi Driver* (Scorsese 1976), and *Reservoir Dogs* (Tarantino 1992). All of these films borrowed from film noir style and motifs, commenting upon masculine anxiety in a dark urban world.

These tend to be male-centred films and they often contain anxiety about female ambition, psychosexual or sexual issues, and gendered psychotic violence.

Women (when they are present) are punished or processed by patriarchal forces, for example, Alex Forrest played by Glenn Close is shot at the end of *Fatal Attraction* because of her transgressions against Dan Gallagher's family (although Dan, played by Michael Douglas, goes unpunished for his infidelity). Tracey played by Gwyneth Paltrow is a good woman who is killed at the end of *Seven* because of John Doe's sin of envy (the killer envies Mills, played by Brad Pitt).

Schwartz suggests the following qualities of neo noir:

- 1) Colour and the latest projection technology (Cinemascope and the like)
- 2) A less restrictive rating system, allowing for greater screen violence, nudity, and harsher themes on screen
- 3) Remakes from the old 'hard-boiled' school of detective fiction
- 4) Instead of good/bad detectives, screenplays deal with good/bad cops
- 5) The emergence of the serial killer

(Schwartz 2005, p. xi)

Production values and technology in neo noir have improved a great deal from the films of the classic noir era. Mulvey (1975) proposes that improvements towards a coloured, natural film look is part of a patriarchal mission of making the patriarchal gaze seem universal. She says:

Camera technology (as exemplified by deep focus in particular) and camera movements (determined by the action of the protagonist), combined with invisible editing (demanded by realism) all tend to blur the limits of screenspace. The male protagonist is free to command the stage, a stage of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates the action (p. 64).

I propose that the femme noir category draws attention to the construction of neo noir's 'natural' narrative construction and male gaze. This is part of femme noir's deconstructive mission, using and undermining the expectations of noir film. It deconstructs noir using elements such as 'unnatural' mirroring, slippage of cause and effect, and wandering into the dream space. My screenplay has a story that moves towards resolution, but I have not used the film noir gendered

binary of looking man and looked at woman. Instead, I have developed a story where two women look at each other. This resists the patriarchal pleasurable expectations that a traditional film noir narrative implies and instead 'conceives a new language of desire' (Mulvey, 1975, p. 60).

Femme noir is most resistant to patriarchy when it puts women and their relationship to each other at the centre of narrative. The way femme noir treats the femme fatale is different to the way she is treated in traditional film noir and neo noir films. In the next section I will detail the role of femmes fatales in classic film noir.

### *Femmes fatales*

When developing a feminist film noir screenplay, it is important to be aware of the history of women's voices and positions in film noir. This section summarises the history of the femme fatale cinema.

Some of the best female roles during the classical film noir period of the 1940s and 1950s were femmes fatales. Some of these include Barbara Stanwyck in *Double Indemnity* (Wilder 1944), Ann Savage in *Detour* (Ulmer 1945), Ava Gardner in *The Killers* (Siodmak, 1946), and Mary Astor in *The Maltese Falcon* (Huston, 1946). These roles were femme fatale characters who were depicted as malevolent women.

An alternative treatment of the femme fatale was as a good girl trapped in a bad world. In this case, the femme fatale was usually the girlfriend of the bad guy, but nevertheless had a heart of gold. These included Veronica Lake in *The Blue Dahlia* (Marshall 1946), Lauren Bacall in *The Big Sleep* (Hawks 1946), and Rita Hayworth in *Gilda* (Vidor 1946). These women enjoyed a flexible moral code as did femmes fatales with black hearts. Unlike the bad femmes fatales, these women were not necessarily killed by the end of the film. The good femme fatale could be forgiven at the end of the story. Although she survived, the good femme fatale was a fixture in the moral landscape of the male protagonist.

In classical film noir, according to the rules of the style, the femme fatale character was punished for her transgressions by the end of the film. Her punishment was often the focus of the end of the film. For example, at the end of *The Maltese Falcon*, Brigid O'Shaunessy (played by Mary Astor) is led away to gaol for at least twenty years, if not to be hanged. Humphrey Bogart's character Sam Spade watches as the elevator descends. It was his choice to punish her.

Phallic weapons, especially handguns, were used to kill the femme fatale. The femme fatale dies in this way in the films *Double Indemnity* and *Murder my Sweet* (Dmytryk 1944).

Some examples of femmes fatale in neo noir films include: Kathleen Turner in *Body Heat* (Kasdan 1981), Linda Fiorentino in *The Last Seduction* (Dahl 1994), Kim Basinger in *LA Confidential* (Hanson 1997), Faye Dunaway in *Chinatown* (Polanski 1974), and Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction* (Lyne 1987).

Violence against women became seemingly more random with the introduction of the psychotic killer in film noir since Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). The deaths and mutilations of women in *In the Cut* (Campion 2003), *Single White Female* (Schroeder 1992), *Mulholland Drive* (Lynch, 2001) and *Black Swan* (Aronofsky, 2010) are more graphic and bloody than in film noir from the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s.

In neo noir, violence is often explained as an unusual sickness of mind. This sickness of the mind is often attributed to the femme fatale herself, as in *Fatal Attraction* and *Single White Female*. These femmes fatales have an insatiable need for love that becomes psychotic, Alex Forrest (Glenn Close) wants Dan Gallagher (Michael Douglas) to be her husband, and Hedra Carlson (Jennifer Jason Leigh) wants Allison Jones (Bridget Fonda) to be her sister. It is their feminine desire which is the source of madness. In these cases, the sickness is violently obliterated through the narrative of the movie.

There is an alternative treatment of these good woman/ bad woman rules in *Basic Instinct* (Verhoeven 1992). In this film, Catherine Tramell, played by Sharon Stone, is unpunished for her psychotic violence and manipulating sexuality at the conclusion of the film. However, this is not a reinvention of the rules. This film is an example of neo noir using the audience's understanding of the rules of noir to power the story. The plot leads the audience and Detective Nick Curran, played by Michael Douglas, to suspect that the good woman, Dr Beth Garner, played by Jeanne Tripplehorn, is the killer. But this inversion of expectations is simply a red herring. The good woman turns out to have been good all along. The femme fatale, Catherine Tramell, turns out to be the killer. In this case, the rules are not broken, they are reinforced.

Catherine Tramell is an overtly sexual and voracious femme fatale. All the pleasurable expectations of neo noir point to the idea that she is guilty. However, the narrative challenges the audience and Detective Nick Curran to disregard film noir rules because such rules are old fashioned. With this, the film toys with the audience's awareness of contemporary feminism. The spectator is expected to understand that film noir rules are sexist. But they are merely mistaken to think that they no longer apply. In this case, as in all the others, the femme fatale is guilty.

#### *Femmes fatales in this study*

In this study, I will identify four femmes fatales in neo noir films. These are Pauline, played by Jennifer Jason Leigh in *In the Cut*; Lily, played by Mila Kunis in *Black Swan*, Rita/ Camilla Rhodes, played by Laura Elena Harring in *Mulholland Drive*, and Hedra Carlson, also played by Jennifer Jason Leigh, in *Single White Female*. These femmes fatales are, in their own different ways, transgressive and sexual women.

Hedra (referred to in the film as Hedy) from *Single White Female* is violent and mad whereas Pauline from *In the Cut* is a delusional romantic in a violent

world. Both come to a bloody end. In both cases, characters played by Jennifer Jason Leigh are mutilated. In *Black Swan*, Lily's sexuality is fluid and seems to be the focus of Nina's madness. Nina's first loss of control is associated with making love to Lily. In *Mulholland Drive*, Rita is the cause/focus of Betty's madness. Rita's sexuality is fluid and Betty falls for her, dismantling her promising Hollywood career and leading to her death.

All of these femmes fatales mirror the female protagonists and lead them away from the natural world and into a non-linear narrative space where the barriers between characters are breached. This is the heart of femme noir. It is from this point that the female protagonist begins to reject her femininity and absorb the abject, leading to the total or partial annihilation. In the next section, I will discuss in detail the qualities and motifs of the femme noir film.

#### *Femme noir*

The doubled woman is a film noir trait identified by Raymond Durgnat in his essay "Paint it Black: the Family Tree of the Film Noir":

In the shaded lights and raining night it is often just a little difficult to tell one character from another." He goes on to note in Vidor's *Beyond the Forest* Bette Davis is the spitting image in long shot of her Indian maid and in Losey's *The Sleeping Tiger*, Alexis Sith is the spitting image of her maid. Durgnat also notes the repetition of the woman in the portrait motif in *Rebecca*, *Experiment Perilous*, *Laura*, *The Woman in the Window*, *Scarlet Street* and *The Dark Mirror*. The looks upon these women are the gazes of men. They are not reflections between women." (Durgnat, R 1970)

I propose that a femme noir film is a neo noir film in which a female protagonist encounters a femme fatale and, in doing so, a reflection is created. This reflection undermines gendered dichotomies in film noir of good woman / bad woman and of protagonist / femme fatale. This reflection creates feminist meaning different to the gendered binaries of traditional film noir.

Further, this disruption has the effect of eroding character boundaries and

linear narrative. Characters are no longer subject to temporal restrictions. Identities slip and the two characters begin to occupy the same space and multiple spaces in the narrative.

In a femme noir, the femme fatale is no longer the 'lack' in opposition to the protagonist. The protagonist's relationship to the femme fatale is no longer hierarchical. She is not a sexual object / opposite for the protagonist (although the relationship is libidinous). The femme fatale is a version of the protagonist.

I will observe in my case studies that in a femme noir film, the femme fatale's physical appearance is similar to the protagonist's, sometimes as a result of changing themselves. In *Single White Female* (Schroeder 1992) Hedra Carlson (played by Jennifer Jason Leigh) changes herself to look like Allison Jones (played by Bridget Fonda). In *Mulholland Drive* (Lynch 2001), Rita / Camilla Rhodes (Laura Harring) wears a blonde wig to avoid the contract killers who are looking for her. By doing so, she reflects Betty / Diane Selwyn (Naomi Watts). In *In the Cut* (Campion 2003), Pauline (Jennifer Jason Leigh) and Frannie Avery (Meg Ryan) are both brunette, forty-something single sisters. In *Black Swan* (Aronofsky 2010), Lily (Mila Kunis) is Nina Sayers' (Natalie Portman) understudy. They share the same costume and body type.

The protagonists in femme noir regularly look in the mirror at moments when they are engaging with notions of identity.

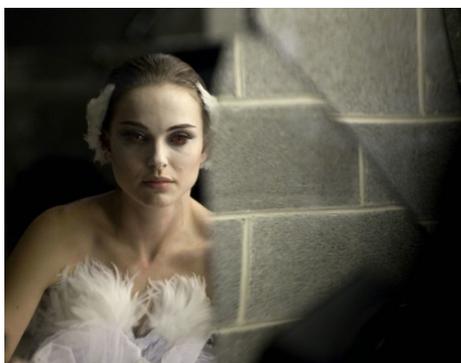


Figure 5: Nina Sayers / Swan Queen (played by Natalie Portman) sees an unfamiliar reflection in *Black Swan* (2010) [screenshot from the film]



Figure 6: Allison Jones (played by Bridget Fonda) and Hedra Carlson (played by Jennifer Jason Leigh) see Allison's new earrings in the mirror in *Single White Female* (1992) [screenshot from the film]



Figure 7: Betty / Diane Selwyn (played by Naomi Watts) and Rita / Camilla Rhodes (played by Laura Harring) both have blonde hair in the mirror in *Mulholland Drive* (2001) [screenshot from the film]



Figure 8: Frannie Avery (played by Meg Ryan) answers questions while sitting in the back seat of a police car in *In the Cut* (2003) [screenshot from the film]

The experience of being looked at is part of the experience of being a woman in society. Examining the act of looking and being looked at is part of a feminist filmmaker's tool kit. This special female understanding of spectacle in cinema was noted by Citron et al. in 1978:

Since women are spectacles in their everyday lives, there's something about coming to terms with film from the perspective of what it means to be an object of spectacle and what it means to be a spectator that is really a

coming to terms with how that relationship exists both upon the screen and in everyday life (Citron et al. 1978, p. 111).

Duality is acknowledged in reflection. The character is two in the sense that they are inside and outside themselves in the mirror. They are also two in the sense that the two characters are two parts of a feminine whole. When two characters stand beside each other and look in the mirror, two becomes four. Add to this the point of view of the camera and the eyes of the spectator and suddenly there are multiple points of flow.

In femme noir, character boundaries of the protagonist and femme fatale may be breached and a sensation of wholeness may be achieved. Reflection becomes way to overcome the fragmentation of woman in cinema.

Lacan proposes that in the mirror, the baby imagines the reflected image is more whole and more perfect than himself. Lacan calls it an "Ideal I". (Lacan, 1949)

The femme fatale in femme noir represents a collective wholeness which the protagonist is lacking on her own. In *Black Swan*, Nina can't access her sexuality for the role of Black Swan. She has trouble breaking rules, but for her reflection Lily, chaos comes easily. When the director points out Lily's ease of movement, Nina feels her own lack. In *The Cut*'s Pauline is sexually braver than Frannie. In *Mulholland Drive*, Rita is to be married to her director, making Diane aware of her own loneliness and pain. In *Single White Female*, Allison discovers Hedy has a complex sexual life in which she is confident.

The relationship between the femme fatale and protagonist in femme noir is libidinous. In *Mulholland Drive* and *Black Swan* the protagonists make love to their femme fatale doubles. In *Single White Female*, Hedy seeks a replacement sister in Allison but her murderous rage is calmed only by a loving, sexually charged kiss. In *In the Cut*, Frannie and Pauline are sisters but they are surrounded by sex and sexual violence. They are in constant discussion about

marriage, love and obsession and, on one hot New York night, they dance to music coming from the strip joint downstairs and talk about their father's romance with Frannie's mother.

Although duality is present, when a protagonist has sex with her femme noir reflection, it is almost masturbatory. In both case studies where sex between the reflecting women is present, it is unclear if the act is real or fantasy. Masturbation features in all of my femme noir case studies as do moments of sexual shame. In these scenes, loneliness is made amplified by the sexual success of the reflection.

In a femme noir film, the abject figure of the femme fatale is more than just the representation of a male protagonist's sexual fear. She invokes for the female protagonist the abject mother from which she came. Rejoining the abject undermines a patriarchal hierarchy of meaning. Kristeva says:

...the rites surrounding defilement, particularly those involving excremental and menstrual variants, shift the border ... that separates the body's territory from the signifying chain; they illustrate the boundary between semiotic authority and symbolic law. (Kristeva 1982, p. 73).

Engaging with the femme fatale is a kind of defilement, one which is rooted in the very notion of her identity which began when she differentiated herself from her mother. Reengaging with the abject invokes a pre verbal consciousness.

When viewing a femme noir film, a female spectator may enter a space where her experience of the film is not limited to linear story and phallogocentric meaning. Images, montage and inverted narrative may engage with the memories and creative impulses of the spectator to create feminist flow. Kristeva describes this semiotic dream-like state thus:

When the starry sky, a vista of open seas, or a stained-glass window shedding purple beams fascinate me, there is a cluster of meaning, of colors, of words, of caresses, there are light touches, scents, sighs, cadences

that arise, shroud me, carry me away, and sweep me beyond the things I see, hear, or think, The 'sublime' object dissolves in the raptures of a bottomless memory. It is such a memory, which, from stopping point to stopping point, remembrance to remembrance, love to love, transfers that object to the refulgent point of the dazzlement in which I stray in order to be (Kristeva 1982, p. 12).

In the sublime space created by femme noir reflection, the female spectator's identification becomes unfixed and she may project her own subjectivity, memories and experiences into viewing the film. Thus, the femme noir film resists the fixed phallogentric rules and binaries of film noir and creates multifaceted feminist meaning for and by the female spectator.

In this chapter I have analysed the rules and patterns of film noir and neo noir and shown how they promote patriarchal ideas about women, especially in how they portray the characteristics of the femme fatale. I have then proposed and described a sub-category of neo-noir which I am calling femme noir and argued that the femme noir films can disrupt the patriarchal tropes of film noir and neo noir.

In the following chapter, I will look into the different theoretical approaches (or 'lenses'), through which I have looked at my case studies and my creative work. By using different lenses to think about femme noir, I have been challenged creatively. This method has helped me to identify weaknesses and opportunities in my creative work. These lenses include liberal feminism, psychoanalysis, Kristeva's theory of the abject, queer theory and The Uncanny as investigated by Cixous after Freud.

## Chapter 3 – Theoretical approaches

In this section of my exegesis I will be discussing five theoretical lenses through which I will examine my four film case studies. These approaches are liberal feminism, psychoanalysis, Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject, queer theory and Freud and Cixous' ideas about The Uncanny. *My aim in examining these approaches is to discover how they may help our understanding of noir films in general, of femme noir films and of the ways in which the femme fatale character can be understood and transformed when we try to write that character in a femme noir film where both the protagonist and the femme fatale are women.*

### *Liberal feminism*

Liberal feminist film critics seek to evaluate and improve the role of women in cinema. For example, in an article published in the groundbreaking early liberal feminist publication *Women and Film No. 1, 1972*, Sharon Smith implores, 'Women just want a chance to be heroes; a chance to be shown as humanly (not femininely) frail; and a chance to see men in some ungainly situations in which women have so commonly been shown' (Smith 1972, p. 18).

Often the liberal feminist school of thought identifies the femme fatale as a figure who expands the available locations and roles for women on screen. Liberal feminists note that the femme fatale's transgressions may be claimed as resistance to patriarchy. For example, Matty Walker, played by Kathleen Turner in *Body Heat* (Kasdan, 1981) challenges the feminine ideal of the passive wife with her self-serving and criminal plotting.

In liberal feminist terms, the femme fatale is a transgressive, progressive and sexually powerful force. The femme fatale is not domestic or maternal. She is untrustworthy, attractive, experienced and sexually active.

In a liberal reading, female subjectivity in noir is limited to the point of view of the femme fatale and her good woman counterpoint. If a woman spectator

identifies with the femme fatale, she is more often than not punished by having to see the sexual violence experienced by that character. For example, Lynn Bracken, played by Kim Basinger, is beaten up by Bud White, played by Russell Crowe, in *LA Confidential* (Hanson 1997). Phyllis Dietrichson, played by Barbara Stanwyck, is shot at the end of *Double Indemnity* (Wilder 1944).

Identifying with punished and fragmented characters is not an unfeminist experience. One of the key goals of liberal feminism is to name sexism. Viewing and discussing the femme fatale and her punishment at the hands of men is an example of identifying patriarchy.

Liberal feminists identify the limits and punishments endured by the femme fatale as a representation of patriarchal fear of the independent woman. When the femme fatale is punished, the transgressing feminine is brought back in line and the patriarchal status quo restored. Thus the liberal feminist critic may identify how patriarchy defines and recreates itself on film.

Particularly relevant to this study, J. Grossman in *Rethinking the femme fatale in film noir: ready for her close-up* identifies Lulu's story in G.W. Pabst's film adaptation of *Pandora's Box* (1929) as a feminist one because of the way it identifies female struggle in society:

A female character may not in herself be feminist, but her story may be. A good example might be Louise Brooks as Lulu in *Pandora's Box* (Pabst, 1929) ...a social script written by patriarchy that Lulu is unaware of; a social psychology that does not allow Lulu to pursue her desires without punishment. Instead of reading Lulu, we gaze at her and mark her as destructive, as 'femme fatale' (Grossman 2009, p. 6).

Liberal feminist screen studies seek both positive female characters and examples of patriarchal oppression. In many ways the femme fatale has satisfied both of these missions. However, by focusing on the femme fatale as a location for female empowerment, the liberal feminist risks languishing in the 'inevitability' of female victimhood.

Shifting identification from the femme fatale to the male protagonist allows for a female spectator to search for meaning that reinforces her own subjectivity. The female spectator is able to identify with the femme fatale, thus experiencing the femme fatale's freedom to transgress for a while before escaping punishment by switching identification to the triumphant protagonist and thereby internalising his patriarchal world order.

In *Fatal Attraction* (Lyne 1987), the final scene depicts Dan Gallagher (played by Michael Douglas) in a fight to the death against Alex Forrest (played by Glenn Close). Although Dan leaves Alex for dead in the bath tub, she rises again and is shot by Beth Gallagher (played by Anne Archer), the good wife, on behalf of her husband Dan. In this case, the good wife wields violence against the bad 'other woman' to punish her for her transgression against heteropatriarchal family life.

The crazed, sexually transgressive Alex is shot by a calm, wifely Beth with a (phallic) handgun. This is a repetition of the classic noir handgun motif. Dying Alex leaves a trail of blood on the bathroom wall as she slides down, her face distorting as she transforms to an ugly corpse. In this case the female spectator leaves identification with the independent, strong Alex Forrest to identify with Beth / Dan Gallagher's point of view of sadistic punisher.

#### *Social context of the femme fatale*

Grossman suggests a feminist perspective of film noir must expand beyond the screen and incorporate the social context of the femme fatale. She identifies the way Victorian literature paved the way for the femme fatale of 1930s and 1940s cinema. Grossman notes that the criminal 'other woman' began appearing in popular novels and plays as a kind of backlash during a period in which the 'new woman' was emerging in the West to claim women's suffrage and entry to professions. For example, in her book *Fatal Women*, Lynda Hart describes in detail a best selling tale of a fallen woman in *Lady Audley's Secret* by Mary Elizabeth Braddon first published in 1862. (Hart, L 1994, pp. 29-46).

Fallen women were also a violation of the status quo. Lynda Hart describes the Victorian fallen woman as an expression of the horrors of female domesticity.

She says:

In the proliferation of representations of the criminal woman, there is more at stake than the Victorian spectator's appetite for the lurid and sensational. The female offender is the locus of horror, the site where the inexplicable terrors of domesticity can be explained and surmounted.

(Hart, L 1994, *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression*, p 36 )

During the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Grossman notes, there was also a formalising of the 'angel of the house' (Woolf, 1942, p. 2), that is, the trope of the sweet good wife with her special mission to care for and submit to men.

Grossman says:

Victorian novels struggling with issues of female power can usefully be seen as precursors to film noir, which inherits yet extends Victorian narrative's investigation of categorical representations of women as angel/whore, as 'good girl'/'femme fatale' (p. 93).

This good/bad binary of women characters according to patriarchal values readily recurred in Hollywood in the film noir cycle of the 1940s and 1950s. During the classical film noir period, several Victorian gothic novels were made into films. For example, *The strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Stevenson 1886) was a novel from the late nineteenth century that featured violence against women. In the 1941 film adaptation, the good woman character Ivy Peterson was played by Ingrid Bergman. Bergman's public persona aligned with the 'good' role. 'Bad girl' character Beatrix Emery was played by Lana Turner. Turner's sexually available persona aligned with the transgressive woman role. These women played supporting roles to the Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde played by Spencer Tracey (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* 1941). There was also a popular Sherlock Holmes series of films set at the end of the nineteenth century starring Basil

Rathbone.▫ These films also featured many instances of 'bad' women and 'good' women. Also part of this public imagination of the late nineteenth century period was sex killer Jack the Ripper who violently mutilated sex workers in 1888. Wedekind's *Pandora's Box* is part of misogynistic punishment mythology.

In the period between the gothic literature of the late nineteenth century and the classical film noir period of the 1940s and 1950s, there was the era of silent film. In this period, the evil and sexual woman trope appeared as the 'vamp'. Theda Bara played iconic bad girls such as Salome (Edwards 1918) and Cleopatra (Edwards 1917) and other vamps such as Caroline Knollys in *The Unchastened Woman* (Young 1925), Lolette in *The She Devil* (Edwards 1918) and Lilian Marchard in *When a Woman Sins* (Edwards 1918)

Another star playing the role of the vamp on screen in this period was Louise Brooks. In the 1929 film production of *Pandora's Box* (Pabst 1929) she played the role of Lulu. Grossman points out that this film appeared during a time of social change for women. This was a period when the 'flapper' was a prominent figure of women's fashion and behaviour. Louise Brooks represented this type. She was known for her black bob hair-do which she had from childhood and which was much copied by fans (Drowne 2004).

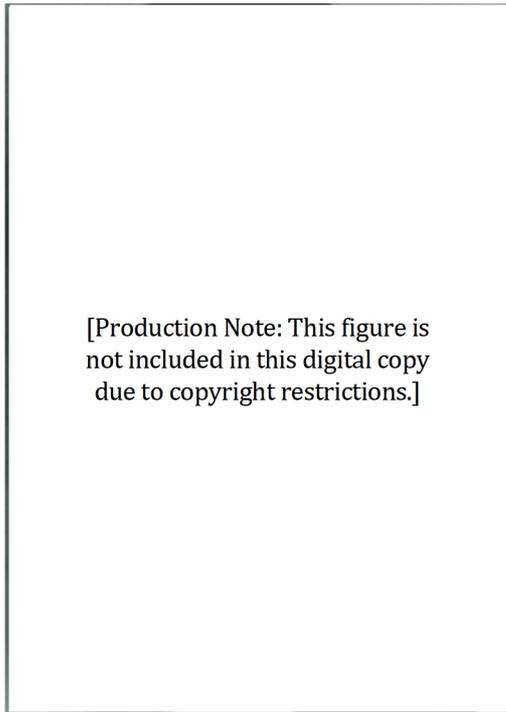


Figure 9: Louise Brooks head shot depicting the bobbed-hair 'flapper' look, 1925 [mptvimages.com]

Flappers sported short hairstyles, smoked in public and wore unrestrictive clothing. The emergence of the flapper trope may be associated with the period's recent female suffrage and the rise of women in education, professions and the workplace. Pabst's film version of *Pandora's Box* (1927) was connected to the flapper trope by the casting of Brooks. In this film, as in the original play, Louise Brooks as Lulu falls from grace and ends up being stabbed by Jack the Ripper. The flapper pays the ultimate price for her transgressions against a patriarchal order. Here, violence against a progressive woman is a kind of backlash against women's rise to autonomy. This punitive violence is presented here as the natural order through the invocation of mythology in the film's title.

#### *Femmes fatales and powerful women*

Women in power are often described as femmes fatales. Femme Fatale is a term used to describe transgressive women and can be invoked in order to delegitimise women who occupy space outside feminine boundaries. Writing about the 2008 democratic primaries, journalist and former Reagan and Bush speech writer, Peggy Noonan, invoked the femme fatale when she described the way the press covered Hillary Clinton's campaign for the democratic nomination.

In the *Wall Street Journal* she wrote, ‘they see her as the Glenn Close character in *Fatal Attraction*: “I won’t be ignored, Dan!”’ (Noonan 2008).

In 2012, Australian opposition leader Tony Abbott stood in front of a sign that read ‘DITCH THE WITCH’, and another that read ‘JULIAR...BOB BROWNS BITCH’, the word ‘BITCH’ engulfed in the flames of hell, referring to Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard.



Figure 10: ‘JULIAR...BOB BROWNS BITCH’ and ‘DITCH THE WITCH’ signs behind Bronwyn Bishop, Sophie Mirabella and protestors as Australian opposition leader Tony Abbott addressing a rally protesting against the Australian federal government’s carbon emissions trading scheme (Sydney Morning Herald, 2011) [Photographer Andrew Meares]

This language locates and subjugates powerful women by associating them with transgressing women. This acts to define powerful women as bad and outside the patriarchal status quo. Looking at this, we can see the way the femme fatale is used to judge and delegitimise the role of sexual, powerful and independent women.

The liberal feminist prism can be useful for pointing out historical and contemporary context for misogyny. It also seeks positive role models for women on screen, however, identifying with a femme fatale’s sexual power can mean identifying with violence enacted against her. However, if we want to look at how an artist can deconstruct and change hierarchical meaning making in cinema, it is not particularly helpful to limit one’s thinking to the mode of liberal feminism. I suggest that to fully understand patriarchal power in film noir and learn how a female spectator may enjoy a feminist experience in film noir, we need to examine noir through several lenses. In the next section, I will look at femme noir

through the lens of psychoanalytic theory.

### *Psychoanalytic approach*

Freud uses the concept of castration as a starting point for understanding how individuals within patriarchy create identity. He says that the castration complex (or penis envy in girls) is the single most psychic event for the developing individual's primary narcissism.

The most significant portion of (*the development of a child's original narcissism*) can be singled out in the shape of the 'castration complex' (in boys, anxiety about the penis— in girls, envy for the penis) and treated in connection with the effect of early deterrence from sexual activity. Psycho-analytic research ordinarily enables us to trace the vicissitudes undergone by the libidinal instincts when these, isolated from the ego-instincts, are placed in opposition to them; but in the particular field of the castration complex, it allows us to infer the existence of an epoch and a psychical situation in which the two groups of instincts, still operating in unison and inseparably mingled, make their appearance as narcissistic interests. (Freud, S 1914, p 92)

Freud discusses here that, a woman's identity is developed in relation to her sense of lack. In cinema, Freudian theorists recognise women as the 'lack', the 'other', the 'receiver' of the look/action/violence.

Mulvey points out the way Freudian theory approaches women. She says, 'Woman's desire is subjugated to her image as bearer of the bleeding wound; she can exist only in relation to castration and cannot transcend it' (Mulvey 1975, p. 59).

Feminist scholars in the psychoanalytic tradition read the femme fatale as a projection of patriarchal sexual anxiety. Film noir is a phallic battleground where women are depicted as castrated or castrating and therefore must become the victims of patriarchal punishment (such as in the Lulu plays). This punishment is the patriarchal solution to the sexual anxiety symbolised by the femme fatale.

In her 1993 book, *Monstrous feminine*, Barbara Creed proposes that murderous women are examples of the male fear of the '*vagina dentata*' (the castrating woman) or the '*femme castrice*' castrated woman (Creed 1993, p. 43). That is, that murderous women engage the protagonist's fear of castration. The murderous woman's demise is a satisfying fantasy that subdues this fear.

However, Creed suggests that the femme fatale, 'the woman who carries a gun in her purse', is an example of the phallic woman (Creed 1993 p. 156), that is, the woman who has retained a phallus inside herself. Creed then argues that the phallic woman and the castrating woman should not be confused: 'The former ultimately represents a comforting phantasy of sexual sameness, and the latter a terrifying phantasy of sexual difference' (Creed 1993 p. 157).

I prefer to look at the femme fatale as a representation of sexual difference. Her difference is the source of patriarchal sexual anxiety in film noir. I suggest that the femme fatale, especially in neo noir, is an example of Creed's 'monstrous-feminine', despite Creed's protestations in her book that the femme fatale is not monstrous.

Laura Mulvey identifies ways patriarchal cinema works to elevate castration anxiety:

The male unconscious has two avenues to escape from this castration anxiety; preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or slaying of the guilty object (an avenue typified by the concerns of the film noir); or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous (hence overvaluation, the cult of the female star) (1975, p. 65).

Creed and Mulvey identify ways film noir enacts male fantasy, replaying and solving castration anxiety in narrative. In film noir, the typically male protagonist investigates and a dangerous and beautiful femme fatale reveals her secrets to the looking male protagonist. Mulvey proposes that the male gaze has two

qualities, voyeuristic and scopophilic. These two looks both overcome a subconscious fear of castration. These are the qualities used when framing, casting and costuming the femme fatale in film noir.

Typically the male noir protagonist is a detective or an investigator of sorts. He is in a position to seek out, look upon and judge the femme fatale. Mulvey calls the patriarchal desire to judge and punish sadistic. The male protagonist is always on the right side of the law and the femme fatale is on the wrong side. He seeks to prove her guilt. Mulvey says that the femme fatale's guilt reminds us of her castration.

The other form of patriarchal looking in Mulvey's study is the scopophilic gaze. This is a gazing at an object for its fetish value. This operates in noir with the way a femme fatale is framed. She is objectified with star casting, beauty, fashion and glamour. The femme fatale is associated with several fetish items such as red lipstick (Evelyn Mulwray, played by Faye Dunaway in *Chinatown* 1974), glamorous hair (Gilda, played by Rita Hayworth in *Gilda* 1946) or the crotch-shot (Catherine Tramell, played by Sharon Stone in *Basic Instinct* 1992).



Figure 12: Catherine Tramell (played by Sharon Stone) is questioned by police while wearing a short white dress in *Basic Instinct* (1992) [screenshot from film]

In *LA Confidential* (Hanson 1997), there are several layers of fetishism in the

character played by Kim Basinger. She is a specialist prostitute among a harem of women ready to serve men who wish to enact their movie-star fetish. These women have undergone plastic surgery to look like movie stars. Lynn Bracken, played by Kim Basinger (already a movie star) has had her hair dyed to match actress Veronica Lake (known for her femme fatale roles in films). As part of the fantasy she dresses in the fashion Lake wears in her movies and Lynn's parlour is decked out like a film fantasy. Yet her secret chamber is girl-next-door homey and only Bud, played by Russell Crowe, may enter it.

A woman character imitating another woman for the pleasure of a male subject is reminiscent of Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). This is not a case of femme noir reflection because there is no interaction between the two women. Madeleine Elster and Judy Barton in *Vertigo* are simply doubled objects as viewed by a male subject and not the reflection between woman subjects.

Freudian theory helps us identify the symbolic functions of the femme fatale and how the femme fatale creates meaning for the male protagonist gaze Mulvey explains :

Ultimately, the meaning of woman is sexual difference, the visual ascertainable absence of the penis, the material evidence on which is based the castration complex essential for the organisation of entrance to the symbolic order and the law of the father (Mulvey 1975, p. 65).

Psychoanalytic feminist theory shows us that the male protagonist is defined by the femme fatale's 'lack'. Film Noir films generally have a narrative drive towards punishing or processing the femme fatale because of her lack.

When both femme fatale and protagonist are women a different dynamic between the characters occurs, pushing the film on a different narrative trajectory and resolution. I propose that femme noir film drives toward an abject ending where the femme fatale and the protagonist are joined by death. In the next chapter, I will look at femme noir through the lens of Kristeva's theory of the abject.

*Kristeva's theory of the abject*

My femme noir case studies incorporate themes of crime, transgression, desire and violence against the female body. Kristeva's theory of the abject allows me to discuss how, after the disruption of the male/female binary, there is still much to be said about what is acceptable and what is unacceptable in the dark city. Using this theoretical lens, I can identify that, in my femme noir case studies, instead of the patriarchal transformation or expulsion of the transgressive woman by the male protagonist, there is absorption of the abject woman into the female protagonist through some kind of death.

Kristeva describes the rejection of the abject as the process whereby a child enters the world of spoken language. She proposes that the 'I' is formed through the rejection of everything that is not 'I'. The child identifies themselves as separate from the mother's body by aligning it with the abject. The mother's body, the other, is associated with excreta, blood, and other unwholesome substances, which invoke death (Kristeva 1982, pp. 3, 32, 77).

Unlike Lacan's mirror phase, where the child (subject) enters the world of language and the symbolic and never returns to the pre-mirror phase, Kristeva identifies that the subject has an attraction to the abject. She acknowledges that the oscillation between the pre-lingual and the symbolic is ongoing. Kristeva says a fascination and attraction to the pre-lingual (the dark body of the mother) is particularly strong in female children because there is a simultaneous identification and rejection of the mother figure.

Creed says that this yearning to rejoin with the mother is accompanied by a fear of losing identity (Creed 1993, p. 72). She says that horror films are a way for spectators to re-enact abjection vicariously by expelling and destroying the mother figure. She identifies *Psycho* (Hitchcock 1960) as a film where the mother figure is both rejoined and expelled. I propose that film noir film, like horror film, is a place where an audience may vicariously enact the rejection of the mother

figure. The mother/other substitute in this case is the femme fatale. Kristeva describes abjection in terms that invoke the femme fatale:

Abjection...is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady; a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sets you up, a friend who stabs you (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4).

The femme fatale is the body of the abject in film noir. She is that which is repelling yet fascinating. She is an object of desire, yet the protagonist must not let himself be seduced. She is the thing he must reject (or remake) in order to define himself. This conflict of attraction and disgust surrounding the femme fatale ignites the narrative of film noir.

Signs associated with the femme fatale (both in classical and neo noir films) include madness, delusion, murder, blood and female sexuality. For example, in *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* (1992), Rebecca De Mornay plays Peyton, the femme fatale. Peyton lacks her own miscarried child and contaminates the protagonist's child with her breast milk. Miscarriage and breast milk are abject substances. Peyton's motives are neurotic and unreasonable. She is a childless widow and not part of a family. Her employers are a heteronormative family. The family consists of a patriarch, his good-woman wife Claire (played by Annabella Sciorra) and their two children. The DVD cover for this film depicts a photograph of the happy family (the wife's face turned towards the husband whose gaze is straight ahead). They are torn apart by the partially obstructed femme fatale, Peyton.

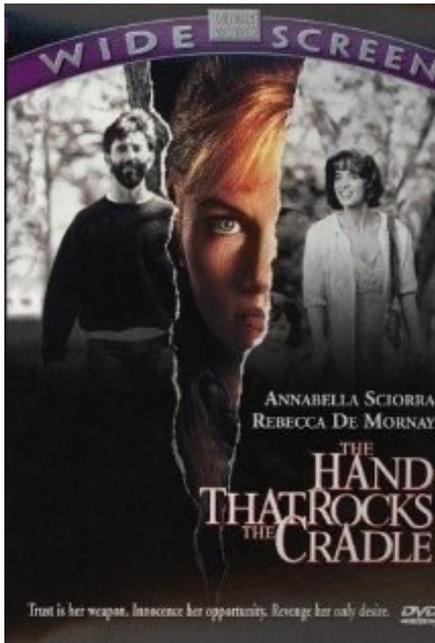


Figure 17: DVD cover for *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* depicts a happy marriage torn apart by a femme fatale (1992) [Buena Vista]

Kristeva says this about literature that confronts the abject: 'One might say that with such a literature there takes place a crossing over of the dichotomous categories of Pure and Impure, Prohibition and Sin, Morality and Immorality' (Kristeva 1982, p. 16). The same can be said about film noir and the special place of the protagonist as detective. Film noir, and its protagonist, is engaged in the abject.

The protagonist may exist in an abject world of crime and violence, but his point of view is in the symbolic. He dictates the moral landscape from his position. For example, J. J. Gittes (played by Jack Nicholson) in *Chinatown* (1974) chooses to investigate sleazy cases of infidelity. He exists on the edge of respectability. He recommends a cheated wife 'let sleeping dogs lie'. He is in control, he is paid. He is the investigator and he is the judge. He may be touched by the abject, but by the end of the film he has expelled the abject and he is no longer touched by it. The story of *Chinatown* (Gittes' catharsis) is the process of this expulsion

The femme fatale's position is in relation to a patriarchal narrative order that she has no control over. She is overwhelmed as per a pre-mirror phase child.

There is no entry into the symbolic unless it is via a male subject, for example, through punishment on his terms or through his forgiveness.

Once a femme fatal has been tainted by the abject, it becomes necessary via classical dramatic structure (phallogocentric meaning making) that she fall or be expelled in some way from the body of the narrative. This structure is a narrative movement from social transgression to patriarchal status quo. It is also a movement from the semiotic to the symbolic.

In *Chinatown*, Evelyn Mulwray (played by Faye Dunaway) has a relationship to the abject that is out of her control. She is narratively overcome by her own victimhood. She has a child who was born of incest when she was under age. She is tainted. Her death at the end of the film is inevitable, the sin must be paid for by her death. This Oedipal reference in *Chinatown* disguises the misogyny of Evelyn Mulwray's death as a classic inevitability in the same way the title of *Pandora's Box* (Wedekind 1904) suggests a mythic natural order underpins the punishment of women.

The film noir city is dark, secret and outside the law. The typical film noir detective seeks the truth but truth is embedded in the abject. It is hard to grasp, violent, and immoral. By the end of the film noir film, the abject has been rejected and some sort of order has arrived. Kristeva says, 'Corruption is [the abject's] most common, most obvious appearance. That is the socialised appearance of the abject' (Kristeva 1982, p. 16).

In *Chinatown*, the city is represented as dark, corrupt and violent. 'Chinatown' refers to a part of the city that is full of foreigners, the protagonist can't make himself understood (no one speaks English), here murder can be ignored. Chinatown is a metaphor for the abject city. There is no hope for justice and the rule of law in Chinatown.

In *Chinatown*, meaning becomes slippery when linked to the abject. In a

conversation with Gittes, Evelyn Mulwray struggles to define her relationship with Catherine:

Mulwray: She's my daughter.

Gittes: I said I want the truth.

Mulwray: She's my sister, she's my daughter, my sister, my daughter.

Gittes: I said I want the truth.

Mulwray: She's my sister and my daughter.

At the end of the film, with the death of Evelyn Mulwray and the return of Catherine to her grandfather/father, the patriarchal status quo has returned (*Chinatown*, 1974).

When two women (the 'I' and her reflecting 'other') appear in femme noir, there is an attraction. The protagonist feels a longing to reconnect with the femme fatale at the same time as feeling a need to reject her. The urge towards identification with the other is stronger than where the protagonist is male. In a femme noir film, the femme fatale is never fully rejected by the protagonist. At the end of the film, a certain union with the abject remains. Femme noir narrative is driven by an urge to join, rather than an urge to reject, the abject. Femme noir films delve into the abject world as part of the narrative. But unlike film noir, with its male protagonist, the femme noir female protagonist tends to join with or absorb the abject rather than expel it.

In femme noir, as in all film noir, the abject is constantly present. There is blood, dirt, vomit and death. In *Single White Female* (1992), Hedy soaks her bloody clothes and says it is menstrual blood. In *Black Swan* (2010), vomiting is part of Nina's daily routine. In *Mulholland Drive* (2001), there is a rotting corpse motif and a dark monster-man who lives behind the restaurant. *In the Cut* (2003) features dirty streets, a mugger, dismembered murder victims and strippers.

When Frannie discovers Pauline's head in a bloody plastic bag in a basin, she and the viewer feels the moment of abject horror as well as the relief of being alive and intact. The film's meaning oscillates for a moment between abject and non-abject. There is blood and gore, the very head expelled/castrated from the body of the femme fatale. When Frannie destroys the killer, she returns home, bloodied and wordless. She lies childlike in the arms of Malloy. The story has been a return to the abject rather than a birth into order. In the same way, the orgasmic and unifying ending of *Black Swan* is the joining of abject with the non-abject. Nina has stabbed her reflection with a shard of mirror, only to reveal she has stabbed herself. She has destroyed the Black Swan (the dark other, the femme fatale), but that is herself. She is a dancer and her entire mission is to perfectly join with the (rhythmic, stylistic, musical) order. However, this mission drives her to madness and she is overcome by the abject. She is a corpse at the end of the film. At the end of *Single White Female*, Hedy's face blends with Allison's as two photographs make the one image. In Allison's closing voice-over, she suggests that Hedy is now a part of her. At the end of *Mulholland Drive*, we learn that the rotting corpse was what Diane was becoming all along. She returns to the abject with a shot to her own skull.

When a female protagonist joins with the abject, patriarchal differentiation no longer works effectively. At this time the protagonist enters a dreamlike state and the film enters a space that resists cause and effect, if only for a short time. These moments include the sublime madness of Nina's ballet performance in *Black Swan*, the downtown sex dungeon in *Single White Female*, the temporal slips and lack of linear coherence in *Mulholland Drive*, and the dream ice skating world of *In the Cut*.

In my femme noir case studies films, part of the exploration of the abject is the taboo of same sex desire. The abject city of these femme noir films includes the dismantling of heteronormative rules of desire. In the next section, I will be looking at the theoretical lens of queer theory and the ways this provides language to discuss sexual deviance and power in my case study films.

### *Queer theory*

In her 1996 book *Queer theory: an introduction*, Annamarie Jagose explains queer theory as a critical approach that 'focuses on mismatches between sex, gender and desire' (p. 3).

Viewing my film case studies through the lens of queer theory highlights the ways femme noir films speak differently about gender within the heteronormative framework of film noir. I will examine the transience between the female protagonist and her femme fatale reflection and how this libidinous relationship is at odds with the classical film noir male/female binary.

Queer theory appeared in the early 1990s connected to proponents Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Sedgwick 1993) Judith Butler (Butler 1990) and Diana Fuss (Fuss 1991, 1992, 1993). This theoretical approach came out of feminist and critical theory in a post HIV/AIDS crisis environment. Fuelled by the newly galvanised gay political movements such as *ACT UP*, queer struggle birthed queer criticism (Wentzy 2002). Italian feminist and film theorist Teresa de Lauretis coined the term 'queer theory' for a conference she organised at the University of California, Santa Cruz in 1990 and edited a special issue of *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* based on that conference.

At this time, 'queer' became a word that concerned not just gay and lesbian characters, but all that is not heteronormative in culture. This included cross dressing, transsexualism, bisexuality and intersexuality. When films were viewed under the umbrella of 'queer', the protagonists engaged differently with the opposing locations of male and female. Gender identity and sexuality became a mismatch, a sliding scale and multiplicitous experience rather than a dichotomy of male and female. Further academic discussions on the idea of shifting gender versus defined (essentialist) sex locations positioned feminism as an older, fixed way of thinking. Jagose (2009) depicts liberal feminism as regressive when she says:

The critical tendency to corral feminism's sustained inquiries into the grounds of its own political and intellectual projects to the past by representing them in terms of the 1980s essentialism debates often works as a strategy to typecast feminist theory itself as old-fashioned and passé, temporally quarantined from new-school queer theory, which with its refusal of identity deftly sidesteps this epistemological morass (p. 160).

However, 'woman' has and continues to be an important position from which political, struggle-focused feminism may act. In fact, it can be said that ignoring the political necessity of 'woman' is a class privilege (Jagose 1996, p. 48). Butler criticises the idea that 'queer' supersedes 'feminist', suggesting that queer studies obscures feminist radical tradition, and counters that the study of gender and sexuality is 'unable to accommodate other axes of social differentiation such as "race", "sex" and "class"' (Butler quoted in Jagose 2009, p. 167). She also suggests the reproduction of normative gender supports and regulates sexuality to a large degree and therefore cannot be ignored.

In film noir, gender rules are rooted deeply in a dichotomy of male and female. Looking, fetishising and masculine violence are important aspects of noir rules. These heterosexist notions of gender are undermined in femme noir films. Using queer theory as a framework for analysis, I can identify femme noir's sexual liquidity as part of its deconstructive mission.

It is no coincidence that several femme noir films featuring female protagonists and their mirroring femmes fatales appeared in the 1990s at the same time as the wave of 'new queer cinema'. B. Ruby Rich's 1992 article 'New queer cinema' identified the proliferation of queer voices in the previous year's festival circuit (Rich 1992). Queer films such as Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), Todd Haynes's *Poison* (1991), Tom Kalin's *Swoon* (1992), and Greg Araki's *The Living End* (1992) found traction amidst a wider explosion of independent film in the early 1990s. In the new queer cinema movement, there was a transience of gender, character and undefined desire. New queer cinema celebrated the unfixed desire, the fleeting look, the ungendered image. It was certainly what Mulvey imagined when she called on artists to use existing forms

to unsettle power.

However, this college of queer filmmakers clearly privileged men, male experiences and desires. Queer male filmmakers had access to the structures of film financing, distribution and the hegemony of the feature film, leaving lesbians invisible. Through the 1980s, lesbian filmmakers more often made lower budget short film and video. Although the early 1990s saw a proliferation of lesbian features – almost double the amount of lesbian feature films were made between 1990 and 1995 as were made through the 1980s (Pramaggiore 1997, p. 6) – new queer cinema certainly intersected with the feminist struggles of lesbians.

Film noir is part of patriarchy's reproduction of itself. The rules of film noir maintain fixed positions for man and woman. Halley proposes the quasi-mathematical equation  $M/F, M>F$  to represent these fixed positions (Halley quoted in Jagose 2009, p. 170). That is to say, there exists a binary where the options are male or female, male cannot be female and male is greater than female. These are the fixed gender roles of film noir.

Femme noir destabilises the male and female fixed positions although it does so with the understanding that the patriarchy is a continuing power. In reference to Halley's formula, I propose the femme noir formula is  $P>MF$  That is, patriarchy (power, the big Other) is greater than male and female. Male and female in a femme noir are unfixed positions. Desire and power are accessible to male and female. However, patriarchy is an overwhelming force over male and female and its binary  $M/F$  is always present in the narrative. For example, in *Black Swan*, although Nina Sayers can blur the lines of heteronormative desire when she seemingly has sex with her understudy Lily, Nina is ultimately under the gaze of the male director who calls the shots.

Happy heteronormative relationships are rarely found in femme noir. In *Single White Female* (1992) there is extramarital cheating and 'mistaken identity' sex which diminishes the heterosexual relationship between Allison and Sam. In

*In The Cut* (2003), marriage is undermined by the spectre of Frannie and Pauline's philandering father. The killer puts an engagement ring on lonely women before violently killing them, this is a violent appropriation of marriage that only highlights the isolation of the victims from the positions of power occupied by those in heteronormative relationships. But Frannie learns she can trust Malloy and at the end of the film, she lies down with him,.

*Mulholland Drive* (2001) and *Black Swan* (2010) feature lesbian sex between the protagonist and the femme fatale. In *Single White Female*, a sexual kiss between the reflecting female characters undermines a heteronormative binary. In *In the Cut*, all the male/female relationships are dangerous including the relationship between Frannie and Malloy, who could very well be the serial killer, according to the evidence Frannie has. The one constant loving relationship Frannie has is with her sister Pauline.

The protagonist / femme fatale relationship in femme noir is masturbatory to some extent. Female masturbation is a challenge to hetero normative sex because there is no phallus involved. The self-contained woman is at odds with the patriarchal concept of woman as lack. In *In the Cut* Frannie masturbates as a form of protection from the outside world. Masturbation features in *Single White Female* as a symptom of Hedy's psychotic mind. Masturbation in both *Mulholland Drive* and *Black Swan* are indicators of the protagonists' descent into (disordered) madness where they truly engage with their reflections in an abject world. In *Mulholland Drive* and *Black Swan* it is not clear if the lesbian sex scenes are fragments of the protagonist's imagination and therefore more masturbation than physical commune with the femme fatale other.

Using queer theory as an analytic framework applied to my case studies helps me understand the ways a femme noir film destabilises the patriarchal gaze and sexual economy of film noir cinema. Queer theory questions essential feminist positions, such as Mulvey's 'subject'. However, the lens of queer theory allows the women in femme noir to be understood as dynamic reflections. Through this

lens, hierarchies are destabilised and identity can be examined.

In the next section I will be looking at Freud and Cixous' concept of The Uncanny. The Uncanny allows me to examine disorienting visual and narrative ideas such as doubling and déjà vu. These may be used in femme noir to destabilise patriarchal ease and plenitude found in the use of film noir pleasurable expectations (Mulvey 1975, p. 60)

### *The Uncanny*

The Uncanny is the duality of familiar and strange contained in the one object at the same time. Examples of The Uncanny include déjà vu and the unnerving sensation of seeing the back of your own head. The sensation of The Uncanny resists hegemonic notions of subject and other by acknowledging the strange and familiar without differentiation. In femme noir this sense of The Uncanny is created in the first instance by doubling the protagonist with her reflecting femme fatale. In femme noir, there is no longer a sense of difference as usually found in film noir between protagonist and femme fatale.

In her book *Unconcept: the Freudian Uncanny in late-twentieth-century theory*, Masschelein says that The Uncanny is a late-twentieth-century concept that has expanded from psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic theory to the domain of art (Masschelein 2011, p. 6). She says it is similar in concept to the sublime, or rather that The Uncanny is a kind of 'negative sublime'. She says The Uncanny is 'an alternative to the exclusive binary logics of "either/or" that must be transformed in the open-ended deconstructive "neither/nor" or, more affirmatively, in the plurality of "and/and"' (Masschelein 2011, p. 8).

In his 1919 essay *The Uncanny*, Freud explains the concept of The Uncanny as the feeling that arises when something familiar suddenly becomes strange and unfamiliar (Freud 1919, p. 2). He includes notions of repetition and doubling. In this work, he describes The Uncanny as like the sensation of retracing one's steps or seeing the back of one's head in the mirror. He also looks at moments of déjà

vu and instances of repetition and coincidence. Creed notes that Freud defines The Uncanny as that which 'is undoubtedly related to what is frightening – to what arouses dread and horror' (Creed 1993, p. 53). Freud used the word '*unheimliche*', a German word which brings together two meanings, homely and unfamiliar.

Freud says that The Uncanny is associated with the taboo and it unconsciously reminds us of our own repressed desires and fear of being different (Freud 1919, p. 16). Therefore The Uncanny reminds us of castration anxiety. In other words, the things we project our repressed desires upon (for example, things which remind us of sex) can become an Uncanny threat.

In this way, the doubled woman is a location for patriarchal fear. Examples of this in cinema include the doubled little girl ghosts who bid Jack Torrance (played by Jack Nicholson) to play with them at the Overlook Hotel in *The Shining* (Kubrick 1980). Shakespeare's three witches in *Macbeth* are another example where women are repeated to create a sense of unease (Shakespeare c.1606). Hitchcock uses doubling in *Vertigo* (1958) to contribute to the sense of unease and fear. As discussed in the part of this thesis discussing the lens of psychoanalytic theory, the doubling in *Vertigo* is a kind of fetish and is therefore linked directly to the idea of sexual taboo.

Barbara Creed acknowledges that part of the horror of doubling is the way it breaks down corporal boundaries:

The double disturbs the boundary, which establishes each human being as a discrete entity; castration fear plays on a collapse of gender boundaries and The Uncanny feeling associated with a familiar/unfamiliar place disturbs identity and order (Creed 1993 pp. 53, 54).

In her 1976 criticism of Freud's *The Uncanny* essay, Cixous states, 'The direct figure of The Uncanny is the Ghost. The Ghost is the fiction of our relationship to death, concretized by the spectre in literature... There is nothing more notorious and Uncanny to our thought than mortality' (Cixous 1976, p.32).

Kristeva argues that there is a sense of The Uncanny in the object, when a subject sees something in the object that reminds her of what it was before it was cast out (Kristeva 1982, p. 59). The Uncanny is familiar but connected to one's fear and self-loathing.

Another space in which we can discuss The Uncanny is the area of animation and visual effects. When designing human forms, artists must consider what Masahiro Mori, a robotics engineer, identified as 'The Uncanny Valley' (Smith 2014). It is the concept that the closer something comes to human, the more revulsion we feel for it. The Uncanny Valley is best indicated in graph form:

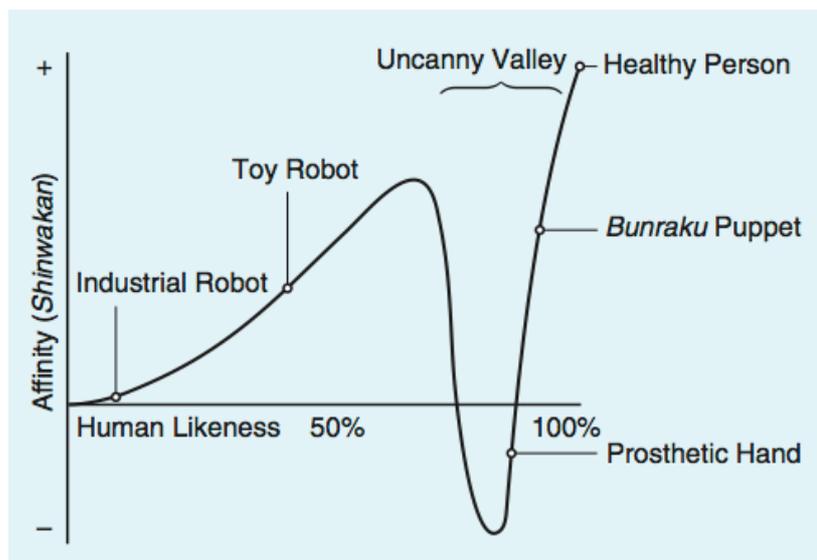


Figure 13: Graph showing Masahiro Mori's 'Uncanny Valley' [Mori 2012 (1978)]

This graph demonstrates the way affinity dips as a human likeness appears more lifelike. As a human likeness becomes closer to human, but still not quite real, it invokes revulsion. An Uncanny Valley is indicated on the graph when a likeness is not quite human.

From this graph we can see that the sensation evoked by The Uncanny is very close to our fear of death. The corpse is the ultimate familiar/disgusting thing. Therefore we can observe that The Uncanny is similar to the moment of the

abject joining with the non-abject. It gives us a feeling of attraction and revulsion (Mori 1970, pp. 33–35).

### *The Uncanny in Femme Noir*

In femme noir, I suggest that doubling is a way of unsettling meaning and joining together familiar/unfamiliar around the feminist subject. This resists dichotomous meaning. When she is doubled she is not so much 'one or the other', but 'one and also the other'. The Uncanny is part of the way the femme noir creates a non-linear space in story. Beside plot points and causation, the sensation of The Uncanny and déjà vu gives a sense of story progression and makes the audience long for the satisfaction of meaning.

In femme noir there are many moments of The Uncanny where the protagonist looks at her reflection and it is as though she sees the back of her own head. For example, when Allison sees Hedy in the mirror at the hair salon, revealing she now has an identical hairstyle and wardrobe to Allison. In *Black Swan*, Nina Sayers looks in the mirror and sees a different version of herself. But as well as these particular moments of The Uncanny, the doubled woman in femme noir creates a sense of unease that permeates the whole film, unsettling the expectations of traditional film noir.

In many ways the creative process of writing 'Lulu' evokes The Uncanny because of the déjà vu I feel when I read the strange yet familiar story of her fall and violent sexual death at the hands of Jack the Ripper. Her name is my name (Louise). As an artist writing her story, I feel that I am looking at the back of my head in the mirror as I write. The effect is somewhat masochistic. Embracing The Uncanny gives me a feeling of intellectual freedom as a feminist artist to write sexual violence and the annihilation of Lulu in my screenplay.

This chapter has been a discussion of the lenses I will engage when writing femme noir. They are also lenses I will use to view and assess my case study femme noir films. The fact that there are several lenses allows me as an artist and

as an audience member to challenge my thinking and multiply my ideas.

## Chapter 4 – Case Studies

This chapter will discuss four case studies of femme noir films. These films are *Single White Female* (Schroeder 1992), *Mulholland Drive* (Lynch 2001), *In the Cut* (Campion 2003) and *Black Swan* (Aronofsky 2010).

I will be looking at these films through the lenses outlined in the previous chapter. These lenses are liberal feminism, psychoanalysis, Kristeva's abjection, queer theory and Freud and Cixous' concept of The Uncanny.

By examining these case studies I will identify the characteristics of the femme noir category. I will demonstrate that these films have a female protagonist and a reflecting femme fatale and that this relationship works to disrupt the patriarchal status quo in film noir film.

I will demonstrate that my case study films use drama to process transgression to a point where the protagonist absorbs the femme fatale's abjectivity and she is killed or a part of her is killed. This narrative flow is different to the usual film noir pattern where the male protagonist expels transgression by forgiving or punishing the femme fatale, thereby maintaining the patriarchal status quo.

I will deconstruct the way these films both create female subjectivity and disrupt the ease and plenitude of patriarchal pleasurable expectations.

### *Single White Female*

Allison: I can do it on my own.

–*Single White Female* (1992)

*Single White Female* is a neo noir thriller film based on the novel *SWF seeks same* (1990) by John Lutz, adapted by Don Roos. The film was directed by German director Barbet Schroeder for Columbia Pictures and released in 1992.

Bridget Fonda stars as Allison, a single white female who seeks a roommate after a break up with her fiancé. Allison is beautiful, smart and stylish. She is fashionable and her business involves the creation of fashion design software. She advertises in a newspaper for a roommate. Someone just like herself, a single white female. Hedra Carlson (played by Jennifer Jason Leigh) moves in and begins to encroach on Allison's identity, violently interfering with her life. Becoming psychotic, Hedy attacks Graham, Allison's gay best friend and neighbour. She then kills Allison's sexually harassing client and rapes and kills Allison's estranged fiancé Sam by posing as Allison. Finally Allison must fight to the death for her own survival against her doppelgänger.

This film invokes classic Hollywood in several ways. Hedra's name is shortened to Hedy like old time Hollywood star Hedy Lamarr. The pair watches a late-night black and white Hollywood film. The malevolent doppelgänger story invokes the Betty Davis film *All About Eve* (1950). These references link *Single White Female* to the classic noir cycle but also to traditional Hollywood femininity as an essential position that limits Allison despite her career and independence.

*Single White Female* implies a character who is compromised by patriarchy. The term describes a woman without a man. This implies an economic handicap as well as a social one. The single Allison is a lamb in the city. Despite declaring she can do it on her own, the audience knows that she is at risk.

*Single White Female* is a patriarchal neo noir narrative where the femme fatale / female psychopath is eliminated in the course of the narrative. The film is traditional noir in many ways, from its studio conception to its classic film noir references. Its lighting, its Gotham setting and the way it uses its female protagonist as a femme spectacle is also very in keeping with the audience's expectations of film noir.

*Single White Female* is an expression of contemporary misogynist anxiety directed towards late-twentieth-century independent women. One location for this anxiety is the 'Cosmo girl' liberal feminist ideal. The Cosmo girl is a creation of the late twentieth century. She is smart, career minded, sex minded and feminine. This way of performing womanhood was defined by Helen Gurley Brown in her 1962 bestselling book *Sex and the single girl*. This was a how-to book that became a kind of manifesto for an independent, sexually liberated and consumerist way of living. This method for life was subsequently articulated by the magazine *Cosmopolitan* (*Cosmopolitan* 1965 to present) which Gurley Brown edited for 32 years from 1965.

Despite Allison being a liberal feminist ideal, I will look at how liberal feminism is not a satisfying frame through which to investigate this film. I propose that abjection, The Uncanny and queer theory are better points of engagement.

The story of *Single White Female* starts with a demonstration of the status quo. Allison is in a seemingly straightforward relationship with Sam. They discuss whether a white wedding is appropriate and how many kids they want together. Allison implies she is above the patriarchal meanings imbedded in a white wedding. However, we discover she is actually the 'other woman' and this relationship has meant the end for Sam's previous marriage.

As a 'single white female', Allison cannot sit comfortably as a 'good woman'. To be an independent woman who has it all, there must be a compromise. Sam is leaving his current wife for her. But Allison discovers via an answering machine message, that he has slept with his wife only that day. Allison kicks him out but she can't keep her new dream apartment on a single woman's income. This sets up a dynamic where Allison has to overcome her psychotic reflection, Hedy, before she can move out and move on.

This neo noir film is in many ways a modern Gothic (Jermyn 1996, p. 262). It

muses on the idea of the single woman alone in the forest of the city. Allison's doppelgänger undermines her sense of wholeness and the story can be seen to be about Allison's struggle to regain her sense of self. Doubling opens up the position of Allison to allow oscillation between different points of identity.

At the beginning of the film, Allison is an independent new woman, a Cosmo girl. However, this position brings with it patriarchal traps such as power imbalance in her relationship with a cheating boyfriend and in her work life with a sexually harassing client. Doubling opens up the space she occupies. Her dark sister Hedy opens up positions of abjection around her, especially sexually. Through doubling, Allison overcomes her restrictive positioning to absorb Hedy's psychotic violence and social/sexual freedom. In this way, *Single White Female* is a femme noir.

Jermyn notes that *Single White Female* is part of a cluster of films made in the late 80s through to the early 90s where independent feminist women were depicted as transgressive and unhinged:

In the late 80s through to the 90s there were several neo noir films in which the femme fatale presented as a liberal feminist turned psychopath. These were independent and publicly successful women turned crazy by the desire to 'have it all'. Films included *Fatal Attraction*, *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle*, *Basic Instinct* and *Single White Female*. In these films, the femme fatale is presented as an embodiment of the anxiety presented by the urban new woman. These women were single, self-reliant and sexually voracious, which made them a source of anxiety to the patriarchal status quo. Their psychotic nature came from their exclusion from traditional domesticity including heterosexual marriage and child bearing which they strived to achieve in unnatural and violent ways (Jermyn 1996, pp. 253, 254).

These crazed 'independent women' are reflected by good women who embody the correct feminine woman. In *Fatal Attraction*, Alex Forrest, played by Glenn Close, is the femme fatale opposite to the good wife Beth Gallagher, played by Anne Archer. In *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle*, the psychopath nanny Peyton Flanders, played by Rebecca De Mornay, reflects the good wife Claire, played by

Annabella Sciorra. In *Basic Instinct*, the good Doctor Beth Garner, played by Jeanne Tripplehorn, reflects the murderous lesbian killer Catherine Tramell, played by Sharon Stone. Allison and Hedy in *Single White Female* enact this opposition of good woman and bad woman.

In *Fatal Attraction*, *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* and *Single White Female*, the good woman frees herself of her own darkness by killing the psychopathic woman who threatens the patriarchal family in which she holds a favoured position. The victory is phallic and the good woman is no longer as whole as when she existed beside her dark shadow. In *Basic Instinct*, the good woman is killed, but this is presented as an alternative, tragic circumstance for the male protagonist because he has mistaken her for the femme fatale whose threat remains active.



Figure 14: Alex Forrest (played by Glenn Close) shot in the heart, in *Fatal Attraction* (1987) [screenshot from the film]

These films were made for an adult audience for relatively low budgets compared to the adolescent-focused action studio films of today. They featured meaty roles for female mid-career movie stars including Glenn Close, Rebecca De Mornay, Sharon Stone and Bridget Fonda.

Contemporary anxiety about feminism and the rising profile of women in society was identified in Susan Faludi's *Backlash: the undeclared war against women* (Faludi 1991), which became a bestselling popular feminist book in 1991,

the year before the release of *Single White Female* in 1992. In it, she critiqued the spread of negative stereotypes about career women through the 1980s:

in Hollywood films, of which *Fatal Attraction* is only the most famous, emancipated women with condominiums of their own slink wild-eyed between bare walls, paying for their liberty with an empty bed, a barren womb. 'My biological clock is ticking so loud it keeps me awake at night,' Sally Field cries in the film *Surrender*, as, in an all too common transformation in the cinema of the '80s, an actress who once played scrappy working heroines is now showcased groveling for a groom (Faludi 1991, p.3).

However, Deborah Jermyn (1996) identifies the border between female psychopath with the good woman as a location where gender and acceptable female behaviour is explored.

Firstly, there is a fairly traditional representation of woman as monstrous-feminine, embodying male fears. But there is also a more 'topical' border being explored; the border between the female psychopath and her positive inverse, problematising female identity, in an exploration brought about by changes in gender roles and what constitutes acceptable female behavior (p. 255).

Jermyn also proposes the transgressive female reflection will inevitably meet her end in a classical noir narrative. 'The female psychopath is woman's abject since she crosses the borders other women are forced to maintain, lives out their fantasies about escaping their place in the symbolic and, in her defeat at the end, represents women's necessary attempts to expel their desire for the abject' (Jermyn 1996, p. 255).

Yael Sherman has written that liberalism rejects the need for collective political aims.

Under neoliberalism, individuals must care for themselves, take responsibility for themselves, and 'enterprise' themselves. Underpinning this new (seemingly empowering) model is the reality of an attack against the welfare state (p. 79).

Catherine Spooner says the Cosmo girl is aspirational, self-helping, consumerist and ambivalent to feminism. The magazine reader is always becoming her. In the feminine space of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, there appears a gap between what the reader is and what she should aspire to be. The message of the magazine is 'you are not but you will be the woman on the cover'. Women's magazines have almost universally taken on the imprint of the Cosmo girl. They are how-to manuals for a type of ideal lifestyle that the reader doesn't yet have. Headlines include 'How to have great sex', 'How to have great hair' or 'How to get a raise'. There is a duality of reality and aspiration, and anxiety is created by the gap between the two states. Contained in the glossy pages there is also a message that this anxiety may be solved with cash (Spooner 2012, pp. 294, 295).

In women's magazines there is a focus on fashion, which is ever changing and constantly updating. Therefore, just like the model in the fashion pictorial, several different versions of an aspirational you are desirable although none of these versions are what the reader is right now. The makeover with before and after versions is an editorial staple. Duality is implied in the before and after, in the superwoman and soon to be superwoman.

Spooner links this gap implied by the Cosmo girl with *Single White Female*. She says, "This Icon, the "superwoman"" also suggests a potentially alienating gap between aspiration and achievement. To Hedy, Ally is the embodiment of this kind of woman: attractive, successful, confident and well-groomed' (Spooner 2012, p. 300). This Cosmo girl duality is not the powerful enlarging doubling of femme noir. In fact, she is anti-feminist and consumerist. The Cosmo girl is a patriarchal version of female empowerment.

One incarnation of the liberal single urban woman which dominated popular culture from the late 1990s to the early twenty-first century is *Sex and the City* (1999–2004). The hero of this HBO TV series is Carrie Bradshaw who worked as a columnist for a newspaper and later for *Vogue* (the ultimate women's fashion magazine). She is successful publicly and privately, with both men and women.

She is the ultimate aspirational Cosmo girl.

*Sex and the City* features four characters who represent different types of women. These four characters are friends, all on a journey to a life of happiness and having it all. Their sisterhood is strength, but it's not enough. It is a retreat from the front line of dating in the big city where ultimately Mr Big is the most powerful character and the ultimate prize for Carrie. Her summit of power is reached in a feature film postscript to the series when Mr Big buys an apartment with a walk-in closet to house her clothes and shoes. This public/private/consumerist feminine ideal is not so world changing after all.

In *Single White Female*, despite having the appearance of the superwoman, Allison is objectified because of her femininity. Her client sexually harasses her. By including this element in the story, patriarchy in the city is acknowledged and Allison is the victim of it. She is left seemingly defeated. The business contacts she wanted to gain from her harasser are out of reach. However, she is smart and has set a booby trap in her software. The client is out manoeuvred because of his underestimation of her competence.

This is a satisfying arc for the viewer. It suggests that maybe she can do it on her own despite patriarchy. All a girl needs to succeed is smarts, but not necessarily feminism. To paraphrase the words of Australia's conservative foreign minister, Julie Bishop, when speaking about feminism, Allison has 'got on with it' (Bishop quoted in *Harper's Bazaar* 2014). This limited liberal feminist perspective on women's power at work is too simplistic to encompass all the questions of identity, gaze and power that a femme noir film throws up.

Looking in the mirror after taking on Allison's hairstyle, Hedy proclaims, 'I love myself like this'. Hedy's sense of self is split. This fragmentation stems from losing her twin at birth (although in a flashback we see Hedy and her twin playing as little girls). She is motivated to create another twin by incorporating/invading Allison's identity. At Hedy's moment of defeat, she sees her reflection,

split in two by a fractured piece of mirror. Distracted by her own doubled reflection, she is overcome by Allison and defeated.

Meeting her double fractures Allison's sense of wholeness. Doubling is recalled throughout the film in the form of twins, mirrors, and identical hairstyles. This invokes several instances of The Uncanny. When Allison sees Hedy in the sex dungeon, Hedy is play-acting the role of confident heterosexual Allison. Allison sees herself reflected in a moment of The Uncanny. She sees herself in the transgressive queer space of the sex club. Her sense of self is breached and her subjectivity unsettled.

Freud describes libidinal development through four stages – auto eroticism, narcissism, homosexuality, and object-love (heterosexuality). He argues that women, at least the 'purest and truest' ones, are fixated in the narcissistic stage: 'Strictly speaking, it is only themselves that such women love with an intensity comparable to that of the man's love for them' (Freud quoted in Hart 1994, p. 39).

*Single White Female* shows masturbation, narcissistic mirror gazing and implied homosexuality, all in opposition to the heterosexuality of Allison's relationship with Sam.

Paulin says that *Single White Female* shows an oscillating female sexuality between Freud's stages:

*Single White Female* implicitly contests Freud's theory and his relative valuation of the stages of sexual development. While Ally does show traits of narcissism throughout much of the film, her behaviour runs the gamut from heterosexual to asexual. Her sexuality is never simply a given, nor does it progress smoothly on a trajectory; rather it is de-essentialized, placed in the context of social and personal relations (Paulin 1996, p. 58).



Figure 15: Allison Jones (played by Bridget Fonda) knows Hedra Carlson (played by Jennifer Jason Leigh) has killed her ex-fiancé in *Single White Female* (1992) [screenshot from the film]

Allison's neighbour Graham is located as queer. 'He's gay', says Allison, neatly identifying him. However, he is also sexless. He doesn't have a lover or active sex life. His previous lover has gone. 'You'll find somebody again', says Allison. Perhaps his previous lover is dead from AIDS? This film was released in 1992 and New York at this time was still feeling the impact of the AIDS crisis. Wherever Graham's partner has gone, gay sex is out of this story. This makes Graham a comforting and non-challenging version of queer. Paulin (1996) links the character of Graham to AIDS anxiety:

It seems inevitable that this progression toward colonising and sanitising the homosexual and in particular the body of the gay male, is linked to cultural anxieties about AIDS... In order to be sympathetic, a gay male character must reassure an AIDS-phobic audience that he is not contaminated and will not be an agent of infection (p. 37).

Allison's client is queer acting and this is played to dramatic effect when he sexually harasses her. He is a sexual transgressor who is positioned as opposite to Allison. This 'safe' locating of queerness opens the way for the relationship between Allison and Hedy to exist in a more transgressive and connotative space.

For a time, Hedy and Allison live together with their golden retriever dog-baby, Buddy. However, this is a same-sex family portrait that cannot be sustained.

The 'family' comes to a bloody end when the dog suspiciously falls from the balcony and dies. We can locate the fear of AIDS again here by connoting the link between gay sex and death (Paulin 1996, p. 37).

*Single White Female* resonates in several places with the 1950 film *All About Eve*. The two films are similar because they both feature a malevolent interloper invited into the personal life of the hero. The doppelgänger takes over the hero's identity. The films are also similar in the way they deal with queer sexuality via connotation rather than specifically identifying the same-sex pairs as homosexual.

The two films are good examples of the historical shift in the nature of societal anxiety regarding queer sexuality. *Single White Female* was made in the context of the AIDS crisis with its horrors of infection (Hedy infects Allison's life) and blood (Hedy's bloody murders). However, Robert J. Corber suggests that *All About Eve* demonstrates a cold war fear of queer 'passing'. That is, the fear of the queer (like the communist) passing as a normal person and infiltrating government and society (Corber 2005, pp. 4, 5).

*Single White Female* is a studio film made in the context of the 'new queer cinema' independent film wave of the early 1990s that included films such as *Go Fish* (1994) and *The Incredible True Adventure of Two Girls in Love* (1995) and influenced studio and world cinema at the time (Pramaggiore 1997, p. 59). It is an example of how Mulvey predicts that new meaning making in independent films can advance film language.

In *Single White Female*, Allison has a hunch that something isn't right with her new roommate. Hedy is childish and needy. She mourns for a dead twin who 'died at birth' (a reference to miscarriage). Hedy takes on Allison's appearance by cutting and dying her hair in the same style. Everything about Hedy is lack, she is a child-woman, she is awkward. She is a castrated woman, the monstrous feminine.

The scene in which Hedy, dressed as Allison, seduces Allison's ex-fiancé, Sam Rawson (played by Steven Webber) against his will is a classic *vagina dentata* fantasy as per Barbara Creed's 'monstrous-feminine' (1993, p.109). Creed suggests that there is a patriarchal fear that penetrative sex with a woman is connected to castration and death. In this 'rape' scene, sleepy Sam is seduced by Hedy posing as Allison. Sam's recognition of Hedy is followed closely by his orgasm. The monstrous woman then stabs him to death with her own phallic weapon. Sex equals death. Hedy is acting as Allison's avenging dark side. She punishes Sam for cheating on Allison not only with his wife, but with Hedy herself.

Hedy is unlovely. The film frames her nakedness, masturbation, spread legs, sexual deviance and bad fashion choices. When she takes on Allison's appearance, she fractures Allison's subjectivity. When the non-object Allison is doubled by Hedy, her object sister, the border between the two is breached. Allison now enters a space where she can oscillate into the object. This ultimately empowers her to occupy a larger subjectivity. Kristeva says: '[the object] is simply a frontier, a repulsive gift that the Other, having become alter ego, drops so that the "I" does not disappear in it but finds, in that sublime alienation, a forfeited existence' (1982, p. 9). This describes the conclusion of *Single White Female*, where Allison has moved out of the apartment. The final image depicts merging photographs of Allison and Hedy. This demonstrates that Allison is no longer limited to her clean-cut Cosmo girl identity and has rejoined the object. The status quo has not returned safely as in a phallic film noir film.



Figure 16: Allison Jones (played by Bridget Fonda) and Hedra Carlson (played by Jennifer Jason Leigh) merged into one woman in the final shot of the film *Single White Female* (1992) [screenshot from the film]

*Single White Female* points my attention to the way traditional Hollywood forms may be infiltrated and unsettled with references to queerness and The Uncanny. It engages with the anti-feminist anxiety of its time to become an artifact of social history, just as the Lulu plays did in the 1890s.

### *In the Cut*

It's inherent in the myths of romance and love we live with – if you haven't got a man loving you or you're not in a relationship it's as if you're not alive, as if what happens to you has no value (Jane Campion quoted in Francke 2003, p. 19).

*In the Cut* is a neo noir film directed by Jane Campion and released in 2003. The screenplay is an adaptation of Susanna Moore's novel *In the cut* (Moore 1999) and was written by Campion and Moore together. The film starred Meg Ryan in a role that departed from her loveable New York romantic comedy characters. *In the Cut* shows a very different side to romance in New York than in Ryan's signature films *When Harry Met Sally* (Reiner 1989), *Sleepless in Seattle* (Ephron 1993) and *You've Got Mail* (Ephron 1998). This film was originally packaged with Nicole Kidman in the leading role and she remains credited as a producer of the film. *In the Cut* continues Campion's theme, established in

previous films such as *The Piano* (Campion 1993) and *Portrait of a Lady* (Campion 1996), of female sexuality and the violent threat to women inherent in romantic relations with men.

Frannie is a teacher, writer and collector of slang words for a book she is writing about the language of 'the street'. While meeting with a student in a bar called the Red Turtle, she sees a red-headed woman performing fellatio on an unseen man who has a distinctive tattoo on his wrist. The woman is subsequently found mutilated near Frannie's home. In the words of detective Malloy, the woman has been 'disarticulated'.

Frannie is drawn into officer Malloy's investigation of the crime and into a sexual relationship with him. When Frannie's sister Pauline is found disarticulated (her head in a plastic bag in Pauline's own bathroom basin), Frannie suspects Malloy of the crime. When she subsequently discovers a charm from her own bracelet in Malloy's pocket (the charm was lost when Frannie was attacked on the street) Frannie comes to the conclusion that Malloy is the murderer. She restrains Malloy using his own handcuffs and contacts his partner Rodriguez who takes her to a red lighthouse. En route, Frannie realises she has restrained the wrong man and it is Rodriguez who is the serial killer of women. Both men have the tattoo she saw in the Red Turtle bar.



Figure 17: Frannie Ayers (played by Meg Ryan) and Pauline (played by Jennifer Jason Leigh) walk arm in arm in lower Manhattan in *In the Cut* (Campion 2003) [screenshot from the film]

At the lighthouse, Rodriguez attacks Frannie, but she is able to shoot him with

Malloy's gun which happens to be in her pocket from when she disarmed him in a previous scene. Frannie returns to Malloy, covered in blood and childlike and lies down on the floor next to him.

In the book, Frannie does not return to Malloy. She is murdered in the red lighthouse by Rodriguez. Rather, she sends Malloy a final message by incurring defensive injuries as she is killed.

In the film *In the Cut*, the mutilation of women victims by the killer is repeatedly described as 'disarticulation'. Frannie writes down the word like a clue. She cannot, however, bring together all the threads of the mystery and sit in a position of power, as a classical detective would in a traditional noir narrative. She misreads signs and draws the wrong conclusions. At the end of the film, there is a return to the abject. Frannie (the collector of words) is herself 'disarticulated' in the sense that she cannot speak.

*In the Cut* is a film noir film in the way it features violent urban crime, gritty night-time street scenes and camera work that draws attention to the use of light. It has an anti-hero protagonist and an untrustworthy male detective in the role of 'the girl' from classic film noir. In this instance, the male detective is not at the centre of the drama but is the object of desire and mistrust. This film is built on the sexual anxiety of women rather than the sexual anxiety of men.

In both the novel and film there is a female point of view of violence against women. It is femme noir because it is a film with a female protagonist who is mirrored by her 'loose/liberated' sister. Unlike my other case studies, this relationship is not a sexual one. However, these sisters are sexual beings and their relationship is surrounded by sex. At the heart of this relationship is the broken love affair between their father and Frannie's mother. The sisters share womanly experience of sex, the city and violence. In the case of the film, one sister faces death at the hands of the violent serial killer and one remains alive. This film uses the femme fatale / detective binary and fractures it, in effect

making Frannie the one uncovering the mystery and Malloy the untrustworthy object of the protagonist's sexual desire.

Critics praised Susanna Moore and Jane Campion's screenplay adaptation of Moore's novel because of its faithfulness (Hodgkins 2012, p. 46). However, the story of the film differs in some key aspects from that of Moore's book. In the novel, Pauline is Frannie's friend, not sister (in the film they share a father), and Pauline is not a hopeless romantic. Instead, in the novel she is a woman who distrusts men. Most horrifically, the novel ends with Frannie's own disarticulation at the hands of Rodriguez in the red lighthouse. In the film, Frannie survives. The film, however, still manages to convey the dread and foreboding of the novel, and at the end Frannie has encountered metaphoric disarticulation.

Romance is presented in this film as closely related to violence upon the female body. Pauline and Frannie recount the romance story of Frannie's mother with their father and Pauline presents a charm bracelet, featuring charms representing a courtship, to Frannie. This courtship story (one which matches the relationship between Frannie's mother and the women's father) is a romance Pauline longs for. However, romance is constantly shown as an empty concept in this film and is instead shown to be a ruse for female subjugation.

Pauline finds romance elusive and problematic. She holds desperately to the myth of love and marriage despite living above a strip club. The constant threats of violence against women in the surrounding city contradict her dreams of romance. In a surreal flashback of Frannie's parents, her mother is 'disarticulated' when Frannie's father cuts her legs off by skating over them.

Malloy seeks romance when he takes Frannie to the country and he rejects the sex she offers. This is because in romance (not necessarily sex) he can maintain power over her. Sue Thornham suggests that violence against women comes from anger in response to women's unwillingness to play into a loaded

courtship scenario:

It is Malloy who insists on romance, becoming angry and frustrated when Frannie tries to initiate sex. Yet when he asks, 'Would you get engaged to me?' it is also in conscious evocation of the killer's use of this offer. For men the myth of romance serves as a defence against the threat posed by women's increased sexual assertion and control of words and knowledge, and it is women's betrayal of the romance ideal [that] serves as a justification for violence (Thornham 2007, p. 40).

Rodriguez's gun has been revoked due to a domestic violence issue. In response to this censure of his masculinity, Rodriguez carries a water pistol. He is now a 'house mouse'; his masculine privilege is undermined. Rodriguez uses violence against women as a way to restore his sense of masculinity.

Sue Thornham notes that *In the Cut* was released within three months of the airing of the final season of *Sex and the City* (Thornham 2007, p.33). In the sixth and final series, the main character and narrator Carrie (also, like Frannie, a single woman writer in New York) achieves a romantic resolution with Mr Big, her on again, off again lover (*Sex and the City*, HBO 2004).

Thornham notes this happens as a result of the feminising of Mr Big. He is rejected by Carrie and says 'I'm starting to fucking feel like a chick' (quoted in Thornham 2007 p.33). This recalls Malloy in *In the Cut* saying, 'I feel like a chick', as he is handcuffed to a pipe in Frannie's apartment. Both of them identify that the female part in romance is a subjugated and powerless one.



Figure 18: Charlotte York (played by Kristin Davis), Carrie Bradshaw (played by Sarah Jessica Parker), Miranda Hobbes (played by Cynthia Nixon) and Samantha Jones (played by Kim Cattrall) walk arm in arm in Manhattan in *Sex and the City* (1998–2004) [HBO publicity photo]

Unlike in *In the Cut*, New York is presented in *Sex and the City* as bright, safe and feminised (Thornham 2007, p. 44). Repeatedly there is a thesis presented that romantic ideals need to be qualified by a less pleasing reality. For example, in the opening credits, a glamorous image of Carrie on the side of a bus indicates her success, but then a graffiti phallus on her image is revealed and the bus splashes the real Carrie as it drives past her through a puddle.

*In the Cut* and *Sex and the City* are two contrasting New York stories about the challenge relationships with men pose to women's power. In both Campion's violent neo noir film and HBO's hedonistic neo-liberal feminist soap opera, the central character is a woman writer who struggles against the myth of romance to construct her life. Both Frannie and Carrie expose romance in New York as a lie that must be overcome on the path to subjectivity. Campion herself embraces the love story of *In the Cut* as a positive one. She believes that true romance lies in the female body and the female experience of pleasure:

Frannie has worked her way towards a stripped-down, truthful relationship with detective Malloy. I think in this story sex and the female body are where truth lies, and Frannie feels instinctively, from the way Malloy makes love, that he can't be the murderer because he's a man who likes women (Campion quoted in Francke 2003, p. 19).



Figure 19: Pauline (played by Jennifer Jason Leigh) speaks to Frannie Avery (played by Meg Ryan) reflected in the mirror in *In the Cut* (2003) [screenshot from the film]



Figure 20: Pauline (played by Jennifer Jason Leigh) and Frannie Avery (played by Meg Ryan) dance next to the mirror and talk about their father's romantic history in *In the Cut* (2003) [screenshot from the film]

Frannie is doubled in many mirrors and reflections throughout the film. In the police car with Malloy and Rodriguez when they first interview her, they look at her via the rearview mirror. She dances with Pauline in front of a mirror and when she finds the dismembered head of Pauline, it is in the bathroom sink, under the steamed mirror.

Jane Campion often uses mirroring in her depiction of women. In *The Piano*, Flora McGrath (played by Anna Paquin) was a kind of mini reflection of her mother Ada McGrath (played by Holly Hunter). *Sweetie* (Campion 1989) and *Holy Smoke* (Campion 1999) featured relationships between sisters. In *In The Cut* Frannie is mirrored by sister Pauline. The pair dance together and discuss the

romances of their father as they are reflected in a mirror on the wall.

Pauline is the sensual and unrestricted opposite to Frannie's self-contained and controlled self. Pauline lives above a strip joint, she has affairs, she transgresses in various ways. For example, she picks up the dry cleaning of her lover's wife. Pauline is a little off kilter, a little dreamy and she spreads her love around. Frannie, on the other hand, is self-contained. She lives in an apartment that is busy but organised. Her love life seems restricted to masturbation. 'Why don't you just imagine sex?', she asks Pauline.

The other reflection in the film is that of Malloy and Rodriguez, partners in the police force. The two men are doubles of each other just as Frannie and Pauline are doubles. Pauline and Rodriguez darkly reflect Frannie and Malloy as a couple. Pauline is killed by Rodriguez while wearing his ring. Frannie also seems to be constructing a kind of doublethink in her life. She is afraid of Malloy, yet attracted to him. She is drawn deeper into the mystery of the serial killer and she takes risks, just as Pauline does.

John Hodgkins identifies that Frannie's doubling consciousness serves to undermine her wholeness:

This disruption comes in the form of what could be called Frannie's double consciousness, or perhaps divided consciousness is more accurate: as much as Frannie feels the urge to surrender herself to Malloy, his strength, his protection, she is equally motivated to avoid, 'the old brooding effacement of the female' (Moore quoted in Hodgkins, p. 54)

The fact that the doubling includes contradictory points of view is central to the reflection that is central to femme noir films. By acknowledging this doubling of point of view in femme noir, the cognitive dissonance of living under patriarchy is acknowledged.

Through the film, Frannie journeys from subject to abject. At the beginning of

the film, we see that Frannie operates in the abject Lower Manhattan among trash, hookers, crime and grime. However, she places a border between herself and the city around her. In her organised apartment, she sorts and makes sense of street language. *In the Cut* is a story that breaks down Frannie's borders and leaves her grieving, voiceless, bloody and (close to being) murdered.

Part of the violence of *In The Cut* is the sadistic way in which the killer invites his victim into the world of the non-object by placing an engagement ring on her finger. Images of Virginia Woolf's 'angel of the house' (Woolf 1929) are evoked. Campion uses the song *Que Sera Sera (Whatever Will Be Will Be)* (1959) to evoke girlish dreams of clean wifedom.

At the moment of the women's engagement, the killer thrusts them into the abject. The victims become degraded, mutilated sluts. The victims are destroyed because of their voracious desire for love, marriage, and to be included in the (non-object) world.

The story of Frannie's parents is played out by Uncanny doll-like players in black and white dream sequences. These sequences imply they are dead, especially when the father cuts off her mother's legs by skating over them. At this moment, we wonder, are we seeing corpses? This fractured dream world reflects its sense of The Uncanny onto Pauline and Frannie as they hurtle towards the abject (the lighthouse) and the man who will cut them.

It is interesting that William Goldman identifies amputation as incompatible with film story telling. He argues that the amputation in a Stephen King's *Misery* would not work in his screen adaptation of the novel (Reiner 1990) because it would be such a visual loss for the character on screen. Goldman says that amputation cannot be overcome by characters in film and therefore Paul Sheldon (played by James Caan) keeps his feet on screen (Goldman 2000, p. 40).

However, Campion seems able to use amputation effectively in her films. In

*The Piano*, Ada does overcome the amputation of her finger. It is cut off by her violent husband in his jealous rage. Her artificial finger taps on the keys of the keyboard Ada plays in the on-screen postscript to the story. *In the Cut* features the amputation of Pauline's head, but Frannie (Pauline's reflection) is intact at the end of the film as she walks back to lower Manhattan and lies in the arms of Malloy. However, we understand that Frannie is now disarticulated by grief and the loss of her sister. The amputations in these two films signify the fragmentation of the woman character on screen and perhaps even her castration. Campion uses the experience of amputation as a rebirth and a rejoining of the abject.

*In the Cut* is street slang for 'in the vagina' (Mangiarotti 2007, p. 2). The phrase conjures Freud's castrated woman. Freud proposes that masturbation is not the act of a satisfied adult woman. But masturbation in this story is part of Frannie's cocoon of safety.

The story of Frannie's parents is a primal scene and something that Frannie returns to repeatedly. In the title sequence, the film's title *In the Cut* appears on the screen as Frannie's father slices his ice skates around the text.

The motif of the engagement ring links the killer to the primal scene of Frannie's parents engagement story. Pauline gives Frannie a 'courtship story' charm bracelet as a gift. Charms on the bracelet include a baby carriage and a chapel. This bracelet proves to be a false clue when she believes a missing charm proves Malloy to be the killer. The romance fantasy of the charm bracelet and Frannie's parent's primal scene is shown to be a lie by the loneliness of the grimy city and the violence of the killer.

Pauline and Frannie's father married four women, although Pauline's mother is not one of them. Pauline wishes that her mother had married their father and she wants to get married and have a baby 'at least once' to fulfill her mother's lack.

Mangiarotti notes that Frannie's father 'leaves women' (2007, p. 3). Frannie recounts the time when she was thirteen he left her alone in a hotel room in Geneva for a week. He put her in danger. Mangiarotti suggests that this is an experience that Frannie seeks to repeat in her life:

Frannie as we can see in the film, looks for situations in her life in which she puts herself in danger: she hangs out at sleazy bars, lives in a degraded neighbourhood, doesn't have an intercom, and begins a love story with a man who might be a serial killer (Mangiarotti 2007, p. 1).

Although she satisfies herself sexually, Frannie's father's leaving has created a disconnect in Frannie. The final scene in which Frannie wrestles and kills Rodriguez is the moment when Frannie overcomes her Oedipal fantasy:

Frannie is embraced by the killer's deadly hug. Black frame. Scene in which the father kisses the mother under a flurry of snowflakes. A shot is heard. The snowflakes turn into falling stars. The falling stars show the fading of the Oedipal complex and the birth of a new star, the subject. A poet once said that everyone is a lone star in the firmament. Frannie has become her own star. Along with the killer, Frannie has killed her imaginary father and has reached a new subjective position: female singular (Mangiarotti 2007, p. 5).

The film *In the Cut* recalls Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* (1927). The film draws attention to a theme shared by both the film and Woolf's novel, that of female authorship. Frannie is a writer who teaches Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* although her male students resent studying the book because there are 'not enough dead women in it' (*In the Cut* 2003). We are reminded of Woolf's preoccupation with the notion of women writers and their struggle to articulate their point of view amid patriarchy. In *To the Lighthouse*, there is a repeated refrain that women 'can't paint, can't write' (pp. 95, 101, 180, 181, 222). In *In the Cut*, men control the language and the street. Frannie is inevitably drawn to the lighthouse where her disarticulation is the ultimate struggle, in both the sense of a violent attack on her body and in the sense of silencing her.

Frannie has a room of her own. It is a creative space where she pins words to her walls. But Frannie's room (recalling Woolf's 1929 essay *A Room of One's Own*) is threatened and penetrated by men. Cornelius (her student), Malloy, John Graham (her stalker) all enter her safe space. It is surrounded by a threatening city. The location of the red-head's murder is just outside Frannie's window.

As mentioned previously, Woolf speaks of the woman writer's (reflecting) opposite as the 'angel of the house' and stated in her 1931 lecture that it is necessary for the woman writer to kill her inner angel of the house in order to create art. The lecture was later published as an essay titled *Professions for Women* in 1942. Frannie's reflection is the romantic Pauline but it is also the romantic courtship story of her mother. When Frannie lies next to Malloy, covered in blood, she has killed her inner angel and returns to her mother's womb (Kristeva 1982).

This film uses an 'energetic' approach to adaptation as opposed to a 'faithful' adaptation. This is an approach I have adopted in my own adaptation of Wedekind's Lulu plays. It is the sense of danger and doubling that attracted me to Wedekind's Lulu plays rather than the time period or the comedy of manners elements. The intersection of romance, violence and female subjectivity in *In the Cut* are also important themes for my teenage central character.

### *Black Swan*

*Black Swan* (2010) is a psychosexual thriller film set in the backstage world of the elite New York City Ballet company. It is the story of Nina Sayers, who is chosen to play the roles of both the Black Swan and the White Swan in a production of *Swan Lake* (Tchaikovsky 1877). Through the film, she struggles to access both her dark and light sides and create a perfect performance of the Swan Queen. She must also overcome her paranoid fear that her rival, Lily, is out to get her.

Directed by Darren Aronofsky and written by Mark Heyman, Andres Heinz and others, *Black Swan* was released in 2010 and won many awards including Best Actress Oscar for star Natalie Portman. Mila Kunis played Nina's sexually liberated and transgressive rival Lily (*Black Swan* 2010).

*Black Swan* is a neo noir film in that it is set in a night-time city with almost every scene shot in tungsten light (interior or artificial night light). Although there is no central crime, there is a search. Nina must find her inner darkness. Lily is a femme fatale who confronts Nina with her sexual freedom and complicates her quest. The bloody end of *Black Swan* vibrates with the psycho-killer element of neo noir.

Although this is an original screenplay, it is also an adaptation of Tchaikovsky's ballet *Swan Lake*. It is a tragic reimagining of the *Swan Lake* story acted out by the players of the film. The *Swan Lake* ballet also features within the film. In the ballet, the Black Swan is usually performed in opposition to the White Swan by two different dancers. In the production of *Swan Lake* within the film, the White Swan and Black Swan are not sisters but two sides of the one being. These two-in-one characters are part of the femme noir elements of *Black Swan*.

In *Black Swan*, Nina must overcome her fear of her femme fatale alternate (Lily), her monstrous mother and the male gaze of her director. Doing this, she embraces a liberating duality inside herself. This allows her to achieve performance perfection that is at once orgasmic pleasure and pain as well as the beautiful grotesque.

Nina's position is expanded by her inner duality, allowing her to become the perfect Black Swan and White Swan. On stage she becomes the subject, she is looking and the looked at, male and female, ugly and beautiful. However, this state cannot last and it is ultimately revealed that she has stabbed herself believing she has destroyed her double, Lily. At the end of the film Nina dies (like

the Swan Princess in the original *Swan Lake*) returning to the abject in peaceful oblivion. Olivia Efthimiou describes the moment of Nina's moment of subjectivity thus: 'Becoming the Black Swan signifies the power dynamics in the gaze – when Nina completes her performance she embodies an all-seeing being. She alone controls the stage.' (Efthimiou 2012, p. 14)

This journey to perfection sees Nina engage with several stages of the monstrous feminine to break away from her position of good daughter, beautiful ballerina and contained subject to become the subject, the all-seeing spectacle of the Black / White Swan. This is achieved via the doubling with her lover/rival Lily, her sexual awakening and overcoming her mother's obsessive love.

Darren Aronofsky has directed several films about a genius whose undoing is attaining their moment of perfection. In *Pi* (1998), *The Wrestler* (2008) and now *Black Swan*, his heroes are tormented by their genius. As they near God-like perfection, their human frailty destroys them. These films are retellings of the Icarus myth. Aronofsky tells this same story in *Black Swan*, this time with a female hero.

Femme noir reflection is Aronofsky's method of accessing a female subject. Just like Nina's swan in the ballet within the film, he depicts a fully realised woman-artist character. The female subject is depicted here via oscillation between two points of reflection. *Black Swan* is therefore a femme noir film.

*Black Swan* is set in a female workplace. The prima ballerina is one of the only roles in which a woman is paid more and has higher status than her most senior male counterpart. However, in this film, the role of the director as the patriarch is clear. It is he who chooses to discard the previous leading dancer Beth Macintyre (played by Winona Ryder) for Nina Sayers. A sexual relationship between the director and his leading lady is presumed and Nina seeks out, but is challenged by, his private attentions.

*Black Swan* identifies the physical labour of becoming the feminine ideal. This

work includes arduous ballet training as well as a restricted diet and casual bulimia. Nina is dutiful in this work and at the start of the film is the ultimate feminine. She speaks in a quiet girlish voice, she wears pink, she makes silly exclamations with her mother such as 'pretty!'. Nina's bedroom is pink and children's toys overwhelm her single bed. A delicate music box containing a dancing ballerina sits on her bedside table. Nina is like the tiny ballet dancer of the music box and not a grown woman. Nina's journey to subjectivity must include her breaking away from this restrictive, powerless and childish feminine position into a powerful position of liberated womanhood. In one moment of her journey to liberation, she takes her pink toys and thrusts them down a waste chute.

This film can be read in a liberal feminist framework, with Nina's death at the end a tragic result of patriarchal pressures. However, ideas of mirroring, The Uncanny and the abject open up the film to a more powerful engagement with Nina's journey towards realising subjectivity.

In this psychosexual thriller film, duality is both a major part of the story and a powerful metaphor. Mirrors feature throughout the film. There are several scenes in which Nina gazes at her own reflection in dressing rooms, dance studios, costume fittings and in her home. Nina's rival Lily, who is sexually mature, free in her body and transgressive in her social life, reflects Nina. Nina's mother, Erica Sayers (played by Barbara Hershey) and her retiring ballet idol, Beth, also mirror Nina. Just like Eve Harrington in *All About Eve* (1950) and Hedy in *Single White Female* (1992), Nina steals things from her idol (makeup, jewellery) in an attempt to both reflect her idol and occupy the same space. Through these reflecting characters, Nina expands her position as she incorporates parts of her reflections into herself.

Nina's reflections are framed by the metaphor of the reflection between the Black Swan and the White Swan, both of whom Nina must perform. Nina is the perfect White Swan, the 'good girl'. Lily is the transgressive Black Swan. Nina's

challenge is to incorporate everything Lily is in order to achieve the performance of the Black Swan. Nina sees Lily as more perfect than herself. This recalls Lacan's mirror stage of child development (Lacan 1949, p. 503).

Nina's director Thomas Leroy, played by Vincent Cassel, challenges her. He is the personification of the Other. He wants Nina to access her personal darkness. At the beginning of the film, her understanding of her reflection is always under his gaze. The director directs Nina sexually, asking her to masturbate in order to access the dark sexuality of the Black Swan. His gaze is implied as Nina begins to touch herself in bed, only to discover that her mother is sleeping in a chair next to her bed.

On a meta level there is a star/role reflection, in the fact that Natalie Portman married (in 2012) and has had children with her onscreen ballet partner Benjamin Millepied (Brucclieri 2017). In the film, Benjamin played the role of the dancer who performs the role of the Prince in *Swan Lake*. In fact, Natalie Portman was heavily pregnant with their son Aleph when receiving her Academy Award for her performance in *Black Swan*. Natalie's moment of abundant and full of life Oscar triumph was White Swan to Nina's triumphant and deathly Black Swan moment of triumph.

In the concluding on-stage performance of the film, Nina's mother looks at Nina for a long moment, agog at her achievement. This is seen from Nina's point of view. She looks back, returning the gaze. Unseen in this interaction is the big Other gaze of Aronofsky. Aronofsky, as an auteur, is the doppelgänger of the ballet director in the story, the ultimate Prince.

The finale of the film is an orgasmic union of Black Swan and White Swan and Nina achieves subjectivity by joining both her dark and light sides. With one last look at her neurotic and controlling mother (who is looking back at her), Nina as the White Swan leaps to her death. A self-inflicted stab wound is revealed and Nina dies in the arms of her director. He says: 'My little princess, I always knew

you had it in you' and Nina's dying words are: 'It was perfect' (*Black Swan* 2010).

She has achieved unification of herself and reflecting other, but this moment of perfect subjectivity cannot survive. Just like Icarus, she cannot maintain her triumph. She slips away under the gaze of the Other.

Looking at *Black Swan* through the lens of Kristeva's theory of abjection, we see many opportunities for deconstructive thought. At the beginning of *Black Swan*, Nina is a good woman, feminine and girlish. She is dedicated and disciplined, although this discipline is focused on her female body and includes vomiting and physical pain.

The film opens with Nina hacking into a pair of pretty pink ballet slippers to break them in. In this image, the performance of femininity is shown to be closely connected to the abject. By the end of the film, she has become a corpse in a total return to the abject.

Barbara Hershey, in the role of Nina's mother, seems neurotic and controlling. She draws countless drawings of Nina, at once objectifying and mirroring her. She cuts Nina's fingernails to stop her from clawing her shoulder – a condition not acknowledged by anyone else. She eventually locks Nina in her room to try to stop her from achieving her ultimate triumph on stage. Barbara Creed, in her book *The monstrous feminine* (1993) identifies the monstrous mother as one of the main female horrors.

In becoming the Black/White Swan, there is a moment of The Uncanny when Nina pulls a feather from her shoulder, her eyes red like a swan. She becomes the animal (see figure 26).



Figure 21: Nina Sayers / Black Swan (played by Natalie Portman) becomes animalistic during her performance in *Black Swan* (2010) [screenshot from the film]



Figure 22: Nina Sayers (played by Natalie Portman) examines her shoulder for signs of an injury that might be imagined in *Black Swan* (2010) [screenshot from the film]

Towards the end of the film, during the performance of the ballet, upon looking into her own eyes Nina actually becomes Lily, her understudy, her lover and her rival. It is at this point Nina is taken over by her dark side and stabs the vision of Lily with a shard of mirror. She tries to hide the bloody mess and dispose of Lily's corpse. We discover that she has actually stabbed herself. The final image of the film shows her after she has leapt to her on-stage/off-stage death, blood seeping across her abdomen, fouling her pretty ballet costume. It is a double death. Efthimiou writes that this descent into the abject is Nina's pathway to transcendence and total subjective power over herself:

Orgasm and abjection become signposts by which the artist achieves her ultimate goal of transcendence, producing a haunting representation of the monstrous sublime in the process (Efthimiou 2012, p. 1).



Figure 23: Nina Sayers/ White Swan (played by Natalie Portman) leans over her own corpse (dressed as Black Swan) in *Black Swan* (2010) [screenshot from the film]

Through the film, the moments of madness that mark Nina's descent into abjection are marked by moments of The Uncanny. Her reflection becomes untrustworthy and different. Ageing ballerina Beth Macintyre seems to stab herself in the face with a nail file. Nina sees her own reflection above her in the bath. She pulls feathers from her shoulder. Her reflection moves independently. In these moments, Nina flirts with the deathly Uncanny on the journey to her own abjection.

Nina's relationship with her mother opens the way for a psychoanalytic reading of *Black Swan*. At the beginning of the film, Nina's mother controls her in several ways. The food that her mother provides is not sustaining and must be expelled from her body.

Part of Nina's relationship with her mother is the story of how her mother gave up her own chance to be a ballet star to have Nina. This story is part of Nina's prison and must be defeated for Nina to become the Black/White Swan.

'You were 28!', Nina yells at her mother, deconstructing for the first time the sacrificial narrative that has shaped their relationship. When Nina wakes to discover she is late for her triumphant performance, she then realises her mother has locked her bedroom door. Nina must overcome the barrier and metaphorically kill her mother. In this moment, she has overcome her pink Oedipal prison. She is a ballet star in her own right.

In *Black Swan*, lesbian sexuality is depicted as part of the awakening of Nina's inner Black Swan. At first her awakening sexuality is guided by the gaze of her director who invites her to masturbate as a way to open up her sexual dark side. This is too difficult, given his and her mother's implied gaze. It is not until she has enjoyed an unsanctioned bacchanalian night with Lily, taking drugs, having sex and locking her mother out of her bedroom that Nina enjoys her sexuality on her own terms. She has entered a forbidden space. The final image of the sex scene is Nina's own dark face going down on herself. Did this sex actually exist outside her mind? Lily does not remember it and she teases Nina for having 'lezzie dreams'. Through this lesbian experience, Nina achieves a sexual duality, which opens the way for her to become the Black/White Swan subject. She has broken out of her ultra-feminine and ultra-heterosexual prison, which is a location of very little sexual power.

Throughout *Black Swan*, the character of the Swan Queen is doubled. Nina and her understudy Lily are doubles. Nina and her mother are doubles. Nina and the retiring company star Beth are doubles. On a meta level, Nina is also Natalie Portman, Oscar winning actress. This film demonstrates how reflection allows for female subjectivity to exist at the same time as acknowledging the patriarchal paradigm women exist and 'perform' in. However, this film suggests the achievement of subjectivity is too intense for the female artist to survive. As with Icarus, Nina is both triumphant and dying at the end of the story. Reunification with the abject has been achieved.

*Black Swan* informs my creative project by highlighting the way in which The

Uncanny can represent the internal madness of my central character.

### *Mulholland Drive*

First the narrative doubling (of *Mulholland Drive*) entails a doubling of the femme fatale figure. This way, a more traditional femme fatale character is problematised by the introduction of a slightly less traditional and decidedly more disruptive dangerous woman. Second, the narrative instability...offers gaps and contradictions through which the epistemological binding between the femme fatale and the narrative can be reconsidered (Beckman 2010, p. 32).

*Mulholland Drive* is a 2001 film written and directed by David Lynch. Naomi Watts stars as two characters: Betty Elms, a newly arrived Hollywood starlet, and Diane Selwyn, a failed actress. Laura Elena Harring plays the dark-haired amnesiac femme fatale Rita and successful actress Camilla Rhodes. Brunette Camilla is blonde Diane's object of jealous desire.

The film opens with a mysterious brunette who escapes a murder attempt by hit men only to become a post-traumatic amnesiac. She seems to be a classic beautiful, dark haired femme fatale. There is also Betty, a blonde from out of town. Betty seems to be a classic film noir good girl, signified by her bobbed blonde hair, her twinset and her toothpaste smile. Betty discovers Rita naked in the shower of Betty's aunt's apartment. Betty helps the amnesiac woman piece together clues about her identity. When the pair set out to solve the mystery of Rita's identity, it seems like a classic film noir beginning.

The second part of the film reveals Betty is actually Diane. Diane has been romantically rejected by Harring's character who is now revealed as the successful and beautiful Camilla. Driven by jealousy, Diane engages a hit man to kill Camilla. This action thrusts her into a gloom of despair and regret.

*Mulholland Drive* was originally made as a TV pilot, intended to be presented as a high-end series in the same vein as Lynch's earlier TV series, *Twin Peaks*

(1991). However, the ABC television network rejected the series, and after a year, funding from Canal Plus enabled Lynch to shoot more footage and turn the pilot into a feature. According to Vernon Shetley, the pilot and the feature differ only in small particulars until the pilot ends at the point where Betty has given Rita a blonde bob to hide her identity (Shetley 2006, p. 123).

Lynch invokes film noir of the classic cycle in several ways. Firstly there are the tropes of femme fatale and good girl and the mystery of Rita's identity. Also, much of the film is set at night and the seething city of Los Angeles features in different ways throughout the film. We see Los Angeles as a cruel city from its grimy back streets through to its clean but corrupt upper echelons.

*Mulholland Drive* recalls the 1950 feature *Sunset Boulevard*, not only in the title of the film (Mulholland Drive is the name of an iconic LA street) but also its backstage Hollywood setting which uncovers the darkness behind the delusional Hollywood facade.

However, *Mulholland Drive* does not have a traditional film noir structure. It hijacks the audience's expectations of film noir and changes direction and characters. We are lured into thinking this film will be a typical unfolding noir mystery where Betty helps to uncover Rita's real identity. Our expectations are reversed when promising starlet Betty is revealed to be the dream persona of failed actress Diane, who is in reality obsessed with the brunette Camilla.

The first half of the film has largely been interpreted as the wish-fulfilling dream of Diane who longs to go back and have both career success and a loving relationship with Camilla. Diane wishes Camilla to be the compliant and needy Rita and for herself to be the hopeful and shining Betty.

As mentioned above, the second part of the film reveals Diane has ordered a hit on Camilla. She has killed her love object. This is a trauma from which Diane can't recover. In the reality section at the end of the film, faces from Betty's

fantasy world are recast in different roles. For example, Camilla is now in love with Adam Kessler, the director Betty was set to impress in her audition.

Frida Beckman suggests trying too hard to impose a narrative continuity on *Mulholland Drive* robs it of its potential progressive meaning:

I would contend that the very suggestion that we need to install narrative continuity in Lynch's work is problematic. These kinds of domestications of Lynch's narrative unruliness constitute an underestimation of its disruptive potential, especially where female characters are concerned (Beckman 2012, p. 32).

I believe that it is in the reflections between characters and its revisionary narrative structure that *Mulholland Drive* provides us an opportunity to read women on screen in a way that expands the filmic space they occupy.

The expectations created by film noir tropes and symbols are undermined by *Mulholland Drive's* narrative loop. The mysterious Rita is not revealed or punished in the usual sense. Instead we see the pristine Betty degraded as Diane. By undermining Hollywood symbols and film noir expectations, *Mulholland Drive* resists the usual patriarchal mission of film noir, which is to reveal and punish the transgressing femme fatale and reward the good girl for her passivity.

In the 1946 classic noir film *Gilda*, Rita Hayworth plays Gilda, a femme fatale who is revealed and domesticated. Famously, Gilda performs a strip tease to the song *Put the Blame on Mame* (1946), literally revealing herself for a male gaze (Doane 1991, p. 99). The strip tease is like a play within a play. It is a miniature of a film that reveals and subdues her. A poster for *Gilda* hangs on the wall of Betty's apartment and the mystery brunette gazes at it before choosing the name Rita.



Figure 24: Rita / Camilla Rhodes (played by Laura Elena Harring) notices a poster of Rita Hayworth in the role of Gilda reflected in her mirror in *Mulholland Drive* (2001) [screenshot from the film]

However, Lynch's manipulation of time and narrative challenges the usual noir trajectory whereby the power and mystery of the femme fatale is stripped away. The patriarchal mission of a traditional film noir narrative is blocked and thus the femme fatale is somewhat freed. 'The shifts between the actual and the virtual keep us from "resolving", and thereby eventually disarming, the femme fatale' (Beckman 2012, p. 35).

The split between the first part and the second part of the film is first signaled by Betty's unease at the backstabbing talk between casting directors (Hollywood is not the ideal place Betty hoped it would be) followed by her refusal to audition for the director Adam Kessler, despite her love-at-first-sight connection with him.

Betty says she has a previous arrangement with a friend. The previous arrangement is actually the inevitable intersection of the dream with tragic real events. Betty and Rita, with identical blonde bobbed hair (Rita is in disguise, hiding from hit men), enter the surreal Club Silencio where things are not what they seem. All the music is mimed. The women discover a blue box and the film changes direction.

On opening the box, the camera dives into the blackness inside, leading to the sleeping figure of Watts now in the role of Diane. 'Hey pretty girl, time to wake

up', says the mysterious Cowboy. Diane wakes up from her happy dream. The figure of the Cowboy in this sequence suggests that it is the nasty Hollywood realities that have destroyed the hope of dream girl Betty and created the disappointed Diane.

The climactic turning point of the film is the scene where Diane is at a table and director Adam Kessler is marrying / having a baby with (the nature of their announcement is not revealed) Camilla. In the background, The Uncanny figure of the Cowboy passes by, reminding us of his prediction, 'You will see me one more time if you did good, you will see me two more times if you do bad'. This scene finally connects the dream with reality. Diane is devastated and sets in motion cause and effect that she can't dream away.

Diane had hoped to be cast by director Adam Kessler. Adam is on a search for 'the girl' for his movie. 'The girl' is traditionally a passive role, an uncomplicated character with little narrative reach. 'The girl' in Hollywood films is usually subject to the male gaze. She is the male protagonist's goal, stakes or motivation.

The mysterious heavies in the meeting with Adam Kessler state, 'this is the girl', and he is told who to cast in his film. The temporal narrative loop created in *Mulholland Drive*, along with the reflections of Betty/Diane and Rita/Camilla, do not allow us to settle and restrict 'the girl' in this film. In *Mulholland Drive*, 'the girl' is repeating and in flux. She is freed from demarcation and objectification.

Looking at *Mulholland Drive* through the liberal feminist lens, we note that the film features two female leads who exist in the patriarchal Hollywood power system. There are other stock female characters: the casting lady, the waitress, the wife who cheats on her husband (Adam Kessler) with the pool cleaner. Men are undoubtedly the ones with power.

Adam Kessler is the director of the '*Sylvia North Story*', the film within the film. Above him are the film's male producers who seem to be beholden to mafia-

like heavies. An unnamed disabled man who controls everything from behind a two-way mirror without uttering a word controls these mobsters.

There are also the masculine hit men threatening violence featured in the first scene when they attempt a hit on Rita and later when they rough up Adam Kessler's home. The ephemeral Cowboy seems to be the spiritual centre of Hollywood. He is the ultimate Hollywood icon, the male film hero.

Within this masculine and threatening context, Betty seeks success. But as a starlet, she must be discovered rather than work to achieve success along an obvious path. Betty's big audition is with an older man. He has matinee-idol good looks and his tan makes him seem almost inhuman. This coupling seems inappropriate at first, and yet this man and Betty also make a typical Hollywood couple, the older man with a gorgeous young blonde. Her stunning performance comes alive when she plays the scene as a teen minx.

She has previously run these lines with Rita as practice and can't find the sexual nature of the lines, but in the audition Betty successfully plays a character who is untrustworthy and sexual. She plays a femme fatale. Something that only appears when she is playing opposite a man.

Using the lens of abjection, we see that the narrative of *Mulholland Drive* takes us to Betty/Diane's inevitable demise as the rotting corpse. At the beginning of *Mulholland Drive*, we are presented with tropes, the blonde good girl and the dark femme fatale. We long for dark and light to meet, for the abject to rejoin with the non-abject. We long for the usual film noir catharsis of female mystery revealed.

Betty is performed by Naomi Watts as a kind of automaton. We wish for her to be roughed up a bit. Betty becomes abject when she changes to the character of Diane. Diane is rejected and spat out by Hollywood. Eventually Diane becomes the corpse.

Rita is dangerous, without history, traumatised. We long for her to be saved and brought into some sort of order in the non-object. By the end of the film, Camilla begins to occasionally speak in Spanish, a language that is foreign to her.

The repeating image of the monstrous homeless man is the ultimate abject nightmare. He is a clue to what Betty denies about Hollywood. She is the one who sat in Winkie's diner and arranged for Camilla's murder. In the final image of the film, the nightmare homeless man finally signifies the gross, seething city.

When we look at *Mulholland Drive* through the lens of psychoanalysis, we notice the ways it invokes Hitchcock films. Betty's ice blonde hair-do, pearls and twinset allude to Hitchcock's untouchable women. Like Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), *Mulholland Drive* has a backward narrative pull that revises the audience's experience of the first part of the film (Shetley, 2006). It also invokes *Vertigo* in the sequence when Betty makes over Rita by cutting her hair and giving her a wig. This echoes the transformation of Judy into the reflection of Madeleine in *Vertigo*.



Figure 25: Rita / Camilla Rhodes (played by Laura Elena Harring) and Betty / Diane Selwyn (played by Naomi Watts) discover a blue box in *Mulholland Drive* (2001) [screenshot from the film]

Shetley also identifies that in *Vertigo* Scottie's desire for Judy is visual, making masturbation the only possible sexual pleasure. He notes the similarity with

*Mulholland Drive*, in which Diane masturbates thinking of Camilla. She is also in the position of an outsider, observing and fantasising about the glamorous star who is beyond her (also our) reach (Shetley 2006, p. 120).

Mirrors are a recurring image and metaphor in *Mulholland Drive*. These allow us to look at *Mulholland Drive* through Lacan's mirror theory and also using ideas of The Uncanny. There are mirrors in Betty's aunt's apartment, where Rita searches her own face for her identity. There is also the mirrored glass behind which the unspeaking Hollywood heavy observes Adam Kessler's meeting. There are also mirroring characters, actors and even a reflecting loop in the story. *Mulholland Drive* reflects itself. This creates a feeling of déjà vu as the meaning oscillates between different points. Beckman (2012) says Lynch's portrayals of Hollywood women can be seen as commenting on 'the way film reflects, reveals, and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle' (p. 37).

The film replays several elements first as Betty's fantasy and then as the truth. For example, the scene in Winkie's when the man describes his nightmare is later replayed as Diane ordering the hit on Camilla. There are clues in the first scene that are recognised in the second version. The man describes seeing the other man at the cash register. In reality, Diane sees the man himself at the cash register. The waitress at Winkie's is called Betty, the name of Diane's wishful self.

In another mirrored character, Adam Kessler's dismissive mother turns out to be Coco, from Diane's fantasy, the mothering manager of the apartment complex where she stays. In a reflecting scene, Betty and Rita discover Diane's home and corpse. This is later shown to be the true fate of Diane.

These mirroring scenes undermine cause and effect and instead create a déjà vu sensation and moments of The Uncanny. These reflections are morphed versions of each other. In the same way, in a femme noir, the reflection of the protagonist and the femme fatale is not exact. They comment and reveal each

other with refractions that do not lead the audience to cause and effect meanings or towards a reveal. Instead, the reflection creates a space for resonating meanings that can work outside of patriarchal film noir limitations.

The oscillation created by these reflections breaches the boundaries of character and story. When Rita wears a wig, she looks like Betty. Betty is also Diane. Rita is also Camilla who is also played by another actress (Melissa George). This is an example of how femme noir operates using mirroring and The Uncanny to create the collapse of dichotomies.

*Mulholland Drive* is, in part, about performance and same-sex desire. These themes open it up to a reading using a queer theory lens. Betty is the performance of Diane. Laura Harring's character searches for an identity to play and chooses Rita. Together these unfixed characters fall into a sexual relationship. But for an audience viewing this queer femme fatale, the gaze is somewhat male and the queerness of Camilla contributes to aligning her with the double-agent femme-fatale trope.

Farrimond notes that, 'The presence of this [male] viewer constantly looms over the bisexually active femme fatale's sex with women: he is invoked by the soft-core-influenced bedtime scenes in *Mulholland Drive*' (Farrimond 2012, p. 141). She quotes from a scene in which Betty invites Rita into her bed, where they begin to kiss:

Betty: Have you done this before?

Rita: I don't know

Farrimond comments on this dialogue: 'I would like to consider [these lines] in terms of the double agent, erasure of bisexuality and affirmation of the slippage between sexual action and orientation' (2012, p. 151). Of this slippage between sexual action and orientation, she says it provokes: 'important and uncomfortable questions about the potential disconnect between desire and

behaviour. These characters also sit at a point of slippage between patriarchal appropriation and useful and potentially subversive representations of the bisexual woman as double agent' (Farrimond 2012, p. 152).

Later as Diane and Camilla, the two women make love on a couch. Then, with Camilla lost to her, Diane masturbates and cries. She is heartbroken because Adam Kessler has won Camilla. Previously, in Diane's fantasy world, Adam Kessler is cuckolded by his pool cleaner. Adam covers his wife's jewellery (heterosexual prizes for a trophy wife) in pink paint. He spends the rest of the day with splatters of pink paint on him, symbolising his diminished masculinity.

At Adam's house at the end of the film, Camilla sits with Adam, ready to make an announcement. We don't hear the announcement, we only see Diane's pain. This betrayal takes us to Winkie's diner, where she pays for the hit that will kill Camilla.

*Mulholland Drive* exists almost entirely in a dream space. The symbols of Hollywood are featured but they are both familiar and unfamiliar and that is where The Uncanny lens comes into play. For example, jitterbug champion Betty arrives fresh faced in Hollywood. She is discovered by casting agents who just happen to be there to see her first audition. This is the discovered-starlet myth perpetuated by Hollywood.

The Uncanny in *Mulholland Drive* includes moments of Hollywood referencing/homage. The man looking on to the meeting, the unseen Other controlling the strings, is a deformed actualisation of Hollywood's corruption. The repeating Cowboy character mocks the Hollywood dream. Hollywood symbols become The Uncanny, as with the unearthly cowboy figure. Linear time is disrupted and elements mirrored and distorted as in a dream. When these two women meet, meaning slips away to be replaced by fear, amnesia, suspicion, corruption and death.

We try to make sense of the film but all we are given is déjà vu and The Uncanny. *Mulholland Drive* hangs together through the use of The Uncanny as a kind of narrative tool. The film directs us several times to feel familiarity, to sense that we have almost seen this before.

The second part of the film is made up of several layers of déjà vu that end with Diane's death. The only sense of order we get is recognition; we remember this corpse from before. We don't remember Rita. We have amnesia. We've forgotten her name. We must fill it in with the name from the poster, Rita. Movie tropes are our only clues to meaning. In the Hollywood context, the Cowboy seems familiar, but we are not sure if he is human or not. In this film, The Uncanny unsettles the symbols it apes. We can no longer rely on the symbols of Hollywood to be honest in their meanings. In this shifting narrative with shifting meaning, the femme fatale is truly disrupting and her fate is anything but sealed. In the Club Silencio, the Spanish singer is another instance of The Uncanny. She does not sing with her own voice, it was a recording all along.

In *Mulholland Drive*, the dream of the Hollywood starlet, set up in the first ten minutes of the film, becomes loneliness, lost hope and despair. This film is an autopsy of the Hollywood dream. When we see the dark homeless man, he is the symbol of Hollywood's skid row, the boulevard of broken dreams. *Mulholland Drive* ends with an image of this man in his camp behind Winkie's diner. In this way, Lynch suggests that the homeless man is the true Hollywood sign.

*Mulholland Drive* is a tale about a woman artist operating in a patriarchal world that, although it seems to welcome her, is rigged against her. Rather than embracing a nihilistic reading, I believe that *Mulholland Drive* provides a demonstration of how film noir symbols may be used to destabilise the traditional misogyny of film noir. This film creates a loop where the femme fatale's sexuality is not solved by the film. At the end of traditional film noir, the audience usually feels safe by the return to status quo, but in *Mulholland Drive*, there are infinite reflections of female character and queer sexuality that cannot

be clearly explained.

From *Mulholland Drive* I take the lesson that the cause and effect inevitability of film noir is at the heart of its patriarchal mission.

Examining these case studies has enabled identification of the way film noir narratives and tropes can be hijacked to provide more feminist meanings in femme noir films. These forerunner femme noirs have shown me ways to write my own femme noir screenplay.

The next chapter will look at the work I am adapting as a screenplay - the Lulu Plays by Frank Wedekind. This examination further illuminates my argument that feminist meanings can be created in noir films. I show that in these noir plays there are already aspects of the emergence of the femme noir type of story. It also involves a discussion of the historical context of the plays and shows how in contemporary times a backlash against powerful women echoes the period in which the Lulu Plays were born.

## Chapter 5 – The Lulu Plays

The creative component of this research takes the form of a femme noir screenplay adaptation of Frank Wedekind's Lulu plays. This screenplay demonstrates the femme noir category and supports my hypothesis that feminist meaning can be created in film noir.

In this chapter, I will discuss Wedekind's work, its historical context and why it continues to have contemporary significance.

As mentioned in my introductory chapter, the Lulu plays are, in fact two works – *Earth Spirit* (*Erdgeist* 1895) and *Pandora's Box* (*Die Buche der Pandora* 1904). They were originally written as a single play. The original manuscript was called *Pandora's Box: A Monster Tragedy*. The last act of *Pandora's Box* was so shocking it was edited and the play was produced without its ending in 1895. This truncated work was titled *Earth Spirit. Pandora's Box*, including the violent ending featuring Jack the Ripper, was not performed until 1904 in a small production in Berlin. Together, these works are known as 'the Lulu plays' (Wedekind 1985/1904).

The Lulu Plays have been rewritten (even by the playwright himself), adapted, censored, revived and translated in various mediums from plays (there are several versions in a variety of languages) to opera to films. The 1894 version was written in three languages, German, French and English. There cannot be said to be a definitive version of Lulu. My creative work is an adaptation without a central starting point. It is therefore difficult to privilege original over translation. This gives me freedom to rewrite Lulu onto my blank screen without the sense that my work is of less value than other versions.

Karin Litttau notes that in all of these many versions of The Lulu plays; the character of Lulu resists patriarchal order.

“Lulu acts as a paradigm from which to recast questions of rewriting and gender, precisely because – whilst she is a screen onto which the male protagonists in the play project supplements of themselves, and the screen onto which her rewriters, censors, translators, adaptors, dramaturgs and critics project their Lulus – she nevertheless disrupts the order of re-presentation with every attempt to capture her anew.” (Littau, K 1995)

The Lulu plays feature mirroring female characters, Countess Geschwitz and Lulu. In the plays, these characters represent a binary of sexual availability and unavailability to men. Lulu is a sexually free social climber who dies a streetwalker. Countess Geschwitz is a frigid lesbian aristocrat who debases herself in her devotion to Lulu. Both female characters are punished for their desires by Jack the Ripper.

The plays are set in an urban world on the edge of polite society. They feature sex, ambition and death; perfect elements for noir cinema. The plays include a plot point where Countess Geschwitz takes on the identity of Lulu in order to switch places with her. This merging of female characters makes the play ideal for adaptation as a femme noir screenplay.

The plays were written by Benjamin Franklin Wedekind (known as Frank Wedekind), born in Hanover in 1864. His work often criticised bourgeois attitudes to sex. Wedekind was part of the movement of epic theatre in modernist Germany. He was a contemporary of August Strindberg.

Critics and historians often describe Wedekind’s work as cutting edge and sexually progressive. His works are said to liberate theatre and sex from bourgeois manners (Styan 1981). However, in this ‘liberating work’, he assigns a patriarchal moral code where a woman cannot go unpunished for having too much or too little sex with men.

Lulu and Countess Geschwitz are victims of a cause and effect that complies with a phallic moral code.

The inspiration for these works is said to come from a pantomime entitled *Lulu* by Felicien Champsaur which Wedekind saw in Paris as a young man. The plays also seem to be based on contemporary serial murderer Jack the Ripper, who committed several violent killings in London in 1888 (Finney 1989, p. 89).

Writing about the plays consistently notes censorship. The Lulu plays were restricted and censored because they were considered smut. However, as Noah Cross (played by John Huston) in *Chinatown* said, 'Politicians, ugly buildings and whores get respectable if they stick around long enough' (*Chinatown* 1974). The same can be said of Wedekind's tale of crazed lust, sexual disease and sex-murder; in recent times, the Lulu plays have joined the canon as an important work of epic theatre in modernist Germany (Styan 1981, p. 16).

#### *The historical context of the Lulu plays*

To understand the setting of the original Lulu plays in the 1890s I must take into account the contemporary misogynist and capitalist influences which existed in the context of nationalistic war posturing across Europe. Understanding the historical and political context of the work is part of my methodology in creating a contemporary adaptation.

#### *Jack the Ripper*

The serial murderer known as 'Jack the Ripper' was a 'sex killer' (a term used by Lulu in the play) in London in the 1880s. Jack the Ripper is an almost mythological figure of psychotic misogyny. This man was responsible for at least five violent mutilating murders of sex workers in London in 1888. An 1891 police investigation into eleven murders of women in the Whitechapel area was unable to connect all the crimes. Five murders between 31 August and 9 November 1888, known as the 'canonical five', are the ones most likely to be linked (Perry 2001). The 'canonical five' are Mary Ann Nichols, Annie Chapman, Elizabeth Stride, Catherine Eddowes and Mary Jane Kelly. These murders included deep throat slashes and abdominal and genital mutilation, the removal

of internal organs (including uteruses) and facial mutilations.



Figure 26: Mary Jane Kelly murder scene [City of London police archives, photographer unknown]

### *Events leading to WW1 in late-nineteenth-century Europe*

Reading the Lulu plays today, we can identify a certain blindness to the looming European conflict of the twentieth century. The plays are set in Berlin, Paris and London and 'crossing the border' is referred to in Act 5 and Act 6. Understanding contemporary European politics informs these settings.

The Franco- Prussian war from 1870–1871 was won decisively by Prussia and led to the unification of Germany. Reparations for this war paid by France to Germany led to anti-German hostility in the general population, which was compounded by the German annexation of Alsace-Lorraine. A web of alliances across Europe between countries led to Germany and Austria-Hungary being effectively circled by hostile nations. In the July Crisis of 1914 these alliances were triggered by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand to create the opposing forces of World War 1 (Allan 2002).

### *Women's rights in Germany*

The unification of Germany in the late 1800s was powered by the idea of a German 'Fatherland'. Patriarchy and military conquest went hand in hand with

the idea of German identity. When, at the end of *Pandora's Box*, Geschwitz decides to go home and work for women's rights, what does this mean? Genteel women's groups working towards women's rights sprang up in Germany from 1860 with a coalition of organisations known as the Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine (Union of German Feminist Organisations) formed in 1894. An hierarchical concept of the ideal German woman was part of the culture of these groups and their arguments around women's suffrage. Working-class women were not welcome in this union. Working women organised through socialist organisations. Women's suffrage was gained in Germany in November 1918, in the aftermath of World War 1 (Ofen 2000).

#### *Contemporary context*

“The alternative is the thrill that comes from leaving the past behind without simply rejecting it, transcending outworn or oppressive forms, and daring to break with normal pleasurable expectations in order to conceive a new language of desire” (Mulvey 1975, p. 60).

I developed my version of the Lulu plays during a time of backlash against women in power. During development, Hillary Clinton was defeated in the 2016 United States presidential election despite winning the popular vote (Sims & Buncombe 2016). Donald Trump loomed as the antidote to inconceivable progressive female leadership.

Clinton was brought down amid a storm of online social media hatred. Trending fake news (a contemporary term for propaganda), much of it Russian in origin, made such claims as that Hillary Clinton is a criminal, a man, a witch, corrupt and a murderer (Graham 2016). Through the election campaign and Donald Trump's presidency, rational journalism became unacceptable to his alpha-masculine narrative and it was therefore rejected (Waldman 2016).

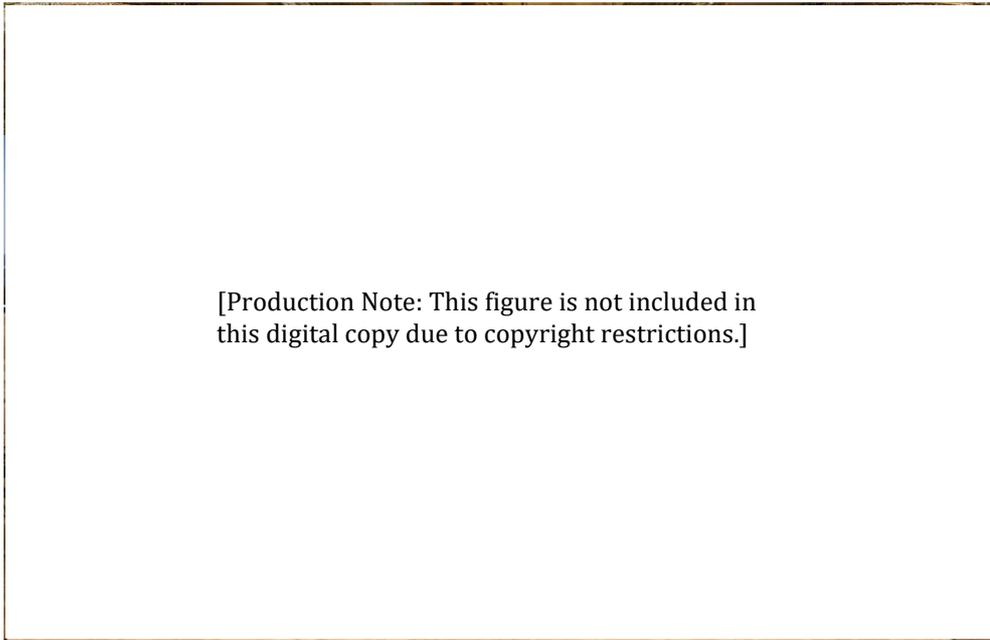
Rational discourse, including verifiable facts, was replaced by conflicting statements which challenged citizens to question whether they believed their own eyes or the perceived certainty of a strong-man billionaire (Sullivan 2017). Crowds at his rallies booed the media and chanted 'lock her up' at the mention of

Hillary Clinton's name (Bierman 2016).

In the traditional print media, Hillary Clinton received an unprecedented 57 newspaper endorsements compared to 2 for Donald Trump, suggesting that she was a rational choice for leadership (Kutner 2017). But, as power leaves the traditional media, there is a rejection of its conventions, including journalistic standards, causing political discourse to want for the enlightenment value of reason.

Both Clinton and Trump are New Yorkers. Their use of Gotham imagery is very different. Trump has been pictured in his gold-leaf, frescoed penthouse at the top of Trump tower where he looks down on the city. Clinton's planned victory party was to be held under the glass roof of West Side's Jacob K. Javits Convention Center and would have featured a fireworks display above the celebrating crowd symbolising a liberal feminist finally smashing the 'glass ceiling' (Engel 2016).

Hillary Clinton's lost presidency is a major setback for liberal feminism and the work of a generation of second-wave feminists. In November 2016, the liberal feminist mission of equal representation was landed a body blow.



[Production Note: This figure is not included in this digital copy due to copyright restrictions.]

Figure 27: Donald Trump, third wife Melania and their son Barron in Trump Tower, New York [Getty Images ]

In the context of today, Lulu's story is vital. Her downward mobility under the pressure of misogyny feels contemporary. Searching for feminist meaning in the dark city is vital.

## Chapter 6 – Creative process

'Theatre resists film'

Linda Seger 1992, p. 33

There have been many adaptations of The Lulu Plays before me. Karin Littau says:

"There have been so many editions, translations and adaptations for film, theatre and literature based on Frank Wedekind's infamous seductress, Lulu, that one might say that there has been something akin to a Lulu industry." (Littau 2004)

Why do I want to add my version of Lulu? Lulu is always a reflection of women in contemporary society and the feminist struggle. Littau contends that the many translations of The Lulu Plays "offer a comparative framework which can help us not only assess ideological, but also map out crucial historical, shifts in practices and strategies of reading." (Littau, K 2004)

I write my version of Lulu in a world of Trump and fake news and climate change denial. The Arctic and the Amazon are on fire at the time of writing and so is political and ideological discourse. I write my Lulu for the world right now.

Themes of sexual and urban anxiety surround the body of a dangerous central female character in Wedekind's Lulu plays. This makes them ideal for adaptation into a neo noir screenplay. Film noir typically features the femme fatale character as a shadow or antagonist to an anti-hero or detective protagonist. In my adaptation, Lulu is the femme fatale to Countess Geschwitz's (anti) hero.

In the Lulu plays, the death of Lulu at the hands of Jack the Ripper helps us identify the misogyny of the moral landscape of Wedekind's work. The Ripper appears at the end of *Pandora's Box* to kill Lulu, witnessed by her lesbian admirer (Wedekind, 1904). We are led to read this as inevitable because of Lulu's free spirited transgressions.

The prologue of the Lulu plays describes the 'moral'. It lays the blame for Lulu's death in her own hands, 'Don't decide to go out whoring when the Ripper's at the gate' (Wedekind 1904). Only in the moral landscape of patriarchy does this make sense in terms of cause and effect. The Lulu plays as written imply an inevitable outcome within patriarchy. Lulu's multiplicity is stopped only with death by stabbing.

My case studies and reading has added to the many voices surrounding Lulu. I draw on all of this to inform my creative process

Film noir often follows a tragic structure with a death generally featuring in the third act as a result of a transgression at the end of the first act. For example, Nina Sayers dies at the end of *Black Swan* (2010) . The cause can be found rooted in the first act when she shows her sexual immaturity. At the end of *Sleeping Beauty* (Leigh 2011) the character Lucy stops breathing for a moment before waking to find a dead client next to her in bed. This is because at the end of the first act, she agrees to engage in an unusual form of sex-work. Tragic structure animates the idea that punishment will be invoked by female action resisting patriarchy. In a film noir film, tragic structure follows female transgression. The drama seeks a resolution to bring back the patriarchal status quo.

*Pandora's Box, a patriarchal tragedy*

Lulu is often linked to the Greek myth of Pandora's Box. For example the 1929 Pabst film adaptation is called Pandora's Box. Pandora's Box is a story from Greek mythology. The box contained all the evils of the world and when Pandora opened it, all the contents were released except for one item – hope. In *The Greek myths* (1960) Robert Graves describes Pandora as 'foolish, mischievous and idle as she was beautiful' and 'the first of a long line of such women' (p. 378). Graves suggests that as feminist readers we either take the Pandora story as a misogynist fable or as a warning to men not to pry into women's business. The myth can also be seen as expression of the notion that once unleashed evil cannot be put back in the box, but must be endured or played out, as in the case of Lulu, to her death.

Karin Littau connects the many faces of Lulu with creation myths of Pandora (also Eve and Lilith). She says that the various versions and origins of The Lulu Plays connect Lulu to the untethered feminist nature of Pandora.

“...not unlike the multiple origins of the play, itself a rewrite of numerous different sources; not unlike the Lulu plays with their many subsequent spin-offs; not unlike Lulu herself, a character of very uncertain parentage.... Pandora herself is “in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or end” (Littau, K 2004)

Fairy tale scholar, Angela Carter wrote a feminist adaptation of Wedekind's Lulu for the National Theatre in 1987 but it was never performed because of differences of opinion in the creative team. It was instead performed in Leeds in the mid 1990s. It was published posthumously in 1996 (as part of the collection, *The Curious Room: Plays, Film Scripts and an Opera*,) revealing a feminist rewriting of the plays, which was an extension of Carter's work of reworking fairy tales in a feminist manner. Peter G. Christensen says “Wedekind's Lulu plays end with the murder of Lulu by a Jack the Ripper- style murderer. However, for Carter, Lulu's death is not to be seen as a deserved end to a femme fatale figure

but rather the undeserved slaying of a woman driven to prostitution in a male world indifferent to her plight.” (Christensen, P.G. 1998 ).

Carter links the character of Lulu to the nymph and the mermaid. That is, a naturally good but soulless feminine spirit, come to save men from the corruption of power through gentleness. An example of this archetype is the Little Mermaid. In these tales there is a tension between nature on the one hand and society on the other. The resolution of this tension in fairy tales is sometimes utopian but as in the case of Lulu, it is sometimes tragic. The character of Jack the Ripper resonates with the murderous Bluebeard.

#### *What lead me to Lulu?*

I was initially attracted to the Lulu plays because of their tone. The plays were written in Europe in La Belle Epoque amid the nationalistic posturing that lead to World War 1. The Lulu plays dwelt on a masochistic young woman’s sexuality. These plays conjured for me images of screenprint art, cafe culture and burlesque. It connected these images and ideas with the misogynist violence of Jack the Ripper.

I wanted to keep the energy and tone of the 1890s work. I liked the idea of Lulu as a will-o-the-wisp, living on the edge of the abyss, laughing at the world. I also wanted to engage some of the relationships around her, such as Countess Geschwitz, Dr Schön and Alwa.

Linda Seger suggests that theatre resists capture by a screenplay: “The essential magic that creates theatre can’t be translated; but with the right play, new magic can be created for film’ (Seger 1992, p. 43).

In order to make my screenplay a work that has a reasonable chance of production, I needed to keep the budget low. That meant writing it as a contemporary work set in Australia. I needed to find a way to write a work that delivered the danger and sexual thrills of the original work but handled the

sexual politics in a way that was satisfying to my contemporary female audience.

### *Adaptation choices*

My first decision as adapter of the plays was to make the protagonist of the screenplay Ruth Geschwitz. That is, a version of the role of Countess Geschwitz in Wedekind's plays. In the plays, she is a woman with a certain amount of economic and social freedom. She is in love with Lulu and, like Lulu's male lovers, is ruined by her.

Lulu remains at the end of the Lulu plays a sexual and moral will-o-the-wisp who has been finally drawn into her own demise. She eludes sexual restriction and this makes her an interesting femme fatale. Seger warns that these qualities are not ideal in the central character of a film: 'Be careful of material where your main subject is his or her own worst enemy. If the subject causes his or her own problems, we may lose sympathy' (Seger 1992, p. 56).

One problem I discovered in my adaptation was that the sexual power positions of the women in the 1890s plays felt unlikely in contemporary Australia. I have overcome this to some degree by making the main characters in my screenplay, Lulu and Ruth, teenagers. Making them teenagers, there are more social restrictions on the characters and Lulu's sexual 'depravity' retrieves its shock value for the modern world

As a contemporary teenage realisation of Countess Geschwitz, Ruth is a useful neo noir protagonist. She is clearly positioned in the gender politics of her society. Although she is from an upper-middle-class family and a student in an expensive private school, she is trapped by her female position. Meeting Lulu is Ruth's 'call to action' to leave her gilded cage.

In Wedekind's play, Geschwitz is masochistic and unlikeable. However, she has an identifiable goal. She wants Lulu and this is the goal I have focused on as central to my screenplay. This is a strategy endorsed by Linda Seger:

“Most successful American films have a main character who is likeable, sympathetic, and identifiable. While watching a film, we like to cheer for the protagonist, wanting the best for this character and wanting him or her to achieve specific goals. We want the character to win in the end” (Seger 1992, p. 5).

The Dr Schön character in the Lulu plays has high status as a wealthy man in the 1890s. I needed to give my Dr Schön character Sean a power position that gave him real power over the lives and destiny of Lulu and Ruth. To achieve this, I made him Ruth’s father. There is no relationship between Dr Schön and Geschwitz in Wedekind’s plays. Making Sean Ruth’s father underlines the patriarchal bind Ruth finds herself controlled by. But it also throws up new and interesting Freudian energies in the story. Desiring her father’s lover creates an Electra complex for Ruth. Mirroring Ruth and Lulu creates an Oedipal complex around Dr Schön.

Lulu’s parasitic ‘father figure’ Schigolch is present in the plays right to the end. He is still with Lulu at the close of Wedekind’s *Pandora’s Box*, encouraging her to engage in sex work to buy food for himself and Alwa. I don’t include Schigolch in my adaptation. However, Sean as Ruth’s father absorbs Schigolch. Ruth and Lulu have wounds in place of their missing mothers. They both reject Daphne as a surrogate and the girls’ love for each other replaces their missing mothers. They are each other’s missing limb, their wounds healed by their reflections.

The original Lulu plays are set in contemporary 1890s Europe. That setting provides a certain amount of historical baggage including sexual, class and racial oppression. The original play has blindness to economic realities and looming war.

I have set the screenplay on Australia’s Gold Coast in the present day. This is an area that I am familiar with from living in Brisbane in the mid 2000s. This location resists a ‘Gotham’ film noir motif. But film noir has been realised in

locations by the sea in *The Maltese Falcon*, set in San Francisco (Huston 1941), *Body Heat*, set in Florida (Kasdan 1981), and *Chinatown*, set in Los Angeles (Polanski 1974).

What I think the Gold Coast offers as a setting for my screenplay is an interesting nightscape. The Gold Coast's tall towers and buzzing highways splash light on the ocean and there is a seedy air of Queensland corruption (overdevelopment) and sex trade (roadside billboards for strip clubs). There is also a sense of conflict between the city and the natural world, with the voracious tropical foliage of the hinterland threatening to overtake the city in the case of apocalypse.

Gotham (New York) settings are used in *Single White Female* (1992), *Black Swan* (2010) and *In the Cut* (2003), but *Mulholland Drive* (2001) is set in urban LA and the underbelly of the Hollywood dream factory. All these settings are stylised by the filmmakers and in all these films the ideas embedded in the settings are key to the films. I intend the Gold Coast to operate the same way in my screenplay.

In shaping the storyline for a Lulu screenplay, I was informed by structure and motifs in film noir, neo noir and my femme noir case studies. Intentionality is key to driving film story. 'Ruth wants Lulu but Lulu wants freedom' is the driving force that I have chosen to build my screenplay from.

The most all-pervasive screenwriting principle today is the three-act structure. In *Alternative scriptwriting: writing beyond the rules* (1991, Dancyger and Rush say:

"In the past 10 years, structure as applied to film has come to mean Act One, Act Two, Act Three. Each act has its own characteristics: Act One introduces character and premise; Act Two focuses on confrontation and struggle; Act Three resolves the crisis introduced in the premise" (p. 2).

Screenwriting guru Syd Field in *The screenwriter's workbook* describes the three-act structure as 'set up', 'conflict' and 'resolution'. (Field 1984). This structure invokes Aristotle who identified the nature of narrative progression when he said:

“Of all the plots and actions the episodic are the worst. I call a plot episodic in which the episodes or acts succeed one another without probable or necessary sequence” (Aristotle quoted in Seger, 1992, p. 68).

The three-act structure of 'Lulu' is as follows: in Act One, Ruth falls in love with Lulu, her father's mistress. In Act Two, there is conflict when Lulu marries then kills Ruth's father and Ruth takes the blame. Then, in Act Three, a resolution is achieved when Lulu is killed.

Another key structure for screen writing is the hero's journey. The concept of the hero's journey entered the screenwriter's toolbox with Joseph Campbell's book *Hero with a thousand faces* (c.1949). The hero's journey is a structure that is built around an individual on a quest. Famously it influenced George Lucas in his development of *Star Wars* (Higgs, 2015). It has developed as a screenplay strategy inspiring Chris Vogler's screenwriting manual *The writer's journey: mythic structure for storytellers and screenwriters* (Vogler 2007).

The stages of the hero's journey in my screenplay 'Lulu' are:

- 1) Ordinary World (Ruth has a restricted life at boarding school).
- 2) Call to Adventure (Ruth meets Lulu).
- 3) Refusal of the Call (Ruth nurses Sean).
- 4) Meeting with the Mentor (Lulu helps Ruth get a fake ID).
- 5) Crossing the First Threshold (Daphne leaves Sean and Ruth is 'free').
- 6) Tests, Allies, Enemies (Lulu marries Sean and Lulu kills Sean).
- 7) Approach to the Innermost Cave (Ruth and Lulu make love).
- 8) Ordeal (Ruth takes the blame for Sean's death, Lulu leaves Ruth for Alan).
- 9) Reward (seizing the sword), (Lulu returns to Ruth).
- 10) The Road Block (Ruth kills Alan).
- 11) Resurrection (Ruth lives with Lulu).
- 12) Return with the Elixir (Lulu dies, finally freeing Ruth of her obsession).

Tragic structure is linked to Greek theatre and Aristotle's writing about cause and effect in plotting. In tragedy, the protagonist's downfall is inevitable because of a flaw in himself or herself. For example, in Sophocles' play *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus is destined to marry his mother and kill his father and his efforts to avoid these things actually cause him to do them (Sophocles). There is a pattern of disharmony, harmony, disharmony:

Disharmony (Prediction Oedipus will marry his mother and kill his father.)

Harmony (Oedipus leaves everyone he knows so that this may not happen.)

Disharmony (Oedipus marries his mother and kills his father.)

Although the Greek myth about *Pandora's Box* has been traditionally linked to Lulu (it is the title of the second Lulu play), I reject the idea that Lulu's sexuality is the cause of her downfall. In my screenplay adaptation, I blame patriarchal rules controlling women's sexuality. In changing the protagonist of the story to Ruth, I have changed the location of the flaw which drives the story. Ruth loves Lulu because she exists outside the rules of patriarchy. Living outside the rules of patriarchy leads Ruth to lose Lulu. In writing 'Lulu', I have followed the pattern identified in *Oedipus Rex*:

Disharmony (Ruth is constricted in her private school world.)

Harmony (Ruth is love with Lulu.)

Disharmony (Ruth and Lulu cannot be together.)

Themes in 'Lulu' include masochism, misogyny and female perversion (incest, sexual fluidity). These are all themes that appear in my film case studies: *Black Swan*, *Mulholland Drive*, *Single White Female* and *In the Cut*. These themes are

integrated and played out in screen story as well as the *mise-en-scène* of the films.

Screenwriting author and UCLA screenwriting academic Richard Walter (1997) says that the themes of a screenplay must be all-pervasive and internal to the story:

“In order to exploit thematic considerations in a screenplay most effectively, writers need not merely know their theme, they must own it. And to accomplish this, they need to grasp a theme’s relation to idea and story, for it is from idea and story that theme is ultimately derived and articulated” (p. 44).

In articulating the story, certain ‘inevitable’ became apparent because of the way theme was part of story and character. These included the perversity of patriarchy as embodied by the triangle of Sean, Ruth and Lulu.

As mentioned previously, the closing of Wedekind’s play troubled me. How could I justify Lulu’s death at the hand of Jack the Ripper? Wasn’t this a *deus ex machina* ending unless I accepted that Lulu’s freedom required resolution via a violent death? Initially I read Wedekind’s ending as exclusively a misogynist punishment and resisted this tragic resolution. For several drafts I had what I thought was an ending with sufficient ambivalence. In that ending, Lulu and Ruth drove into an uncertain future having inherited Sean’s wealth. I even placed a gun in a handbag, mirroring the *Basic Instinct* ‘ice pick under the bed’ ending. In doing this, I was following Linda Seger’s advice about a downbeat ending:

“As a rule, Americans don’t like their major characters to lose or to die at the end. We like happy endings. Perhaps it’s part of our idealism or optimism as a country, but most American films show the villain getting his comeuppance and the hero and heroine living happily together. Part of making it commercial means knowing your market” (Seger 1992, p. 6).

However, in the course of this study I realised that a drive towards destruction is part of a femme noir journey and certainly features in all of my

case studies. The Lulu plays featured a masochistic drive towards the abject that I couldn't ignore.

Researching the Lulu plays led me to discovering the perspective of actress Louise Brooks who played the role of Lulu in the 1929 film *Pandora's Box* (Pabst 1929). She embraced a masochistic reading of Lulu. In her opinion, Lulu had always desired her own destruction and was therefore responsible for her own death:

“It is in the worn and filthy garments of the street walker that (Lulu) feels passion for the first time and comes to life so that she may die. When she picks up Jack the Ripper on the foggy London street and he tells her he has no money to pay her, she says 'Never mind, I like you'. It is Christmas eve and she is about to receive the gift that has been her dream since childhood. Death by a sexual maniac (Louise Brooks in *Lulu in Berlin 2007*”(1984)).

This idea that Lulu drives her own masochistic destruction relieved me of the patriarchal transgression/punishment reading of the play, which had led me to seek a happy ending for Ruth and Lulu. I realised that feminist catharsis, not feminist justice, was what I needed to achieve with my ending. Ruth's transgression of loving and protecting Lulu needed to be resolved. Lulu's marriage and murder of Sean needed to be brought to resolution. The death of Lulu at the end of the screenplay is the cathartic resolution of these transgressions.

This pattern reminds me of another feminist tragedy, *Thelma and Louise* (Scott 1991). In *Thelma and Louise*, two friends end their run from the law by driving their car into the Grand Canyon rather than be captured by police. This tragic ending was set in place when Louise killed a man attempting to rape Thelma at the end of Act One. In this case, the catharsis satisfies because these women have finally tasted freedom (or, like Icarus, touched the sun) and must die because they can never consent to be captives to patriarchy again. In fact, a case can be made that *Thelma and Louise* is a femme noir film.

In conclusion, I have found that the femme noir tends to follow the following structure: in Act One, a female protagonist finds a mirror femme fatale who fills her lack (flaw); Act Two sees the sexual maturation of the protagonist via her relationship with her femme fatale mirror image; finally, in Act Three, the protagonist's transgressive relationship with the femme fatale creates a narrative progression toward the moment of destruction for the protagonist and absorption of her antagonist. At the end of a femme noir film, the protagonist will never be the same again.

Femme noir is tragedy. Female subjectivity may be realised in femme noir, but the female subject brings about her own destruction. The woman viewer experiences the transgression and wholeness as created by the two mirroring women in femme noir, but this creates a chain of events leading toward a welcoming oblivion.

In this chapter I have examined my own process of adapting the Lulu Plays in order to further my argument about the ways to write and structure a femme noir screenplay and in so doing disrupt the patriarchal narrative of most noir films. This discussion also illuminates the ways in which my broader understanding of noir and the various different theoretical approaches to it have found their way into my screenplay.

## Chapter 7 – Conclusion

This study has identified a new subcategory of neo noir film called femme noir. I have shown this via my four film case studies and through the creation of a new femme noir work by developing an adaptation of Frank Wedekind's Lulu plays. I have been informed by classical and neo noir film and my femme noir case studies.

I have found that film noir has depicted society in the United States of America from a critical position since the appearance of the vamp female character in moral tales from the silent era of filmmaking. The classical film noir cycle from the 1940s through to 1960 set the rules for this genre, drawing from the masculine voices of war-era crime pulp fiction. These rules and expectations have been exploited in the neo noir era (from 1960 onwards), testing boundaries, double bluffing expectations and pushing the envelope of violence but seemingly always with a view to protect the patriarchal status quo.

In this study, I have come to the conclusion that film noir uses tragic catharsis to resolve the patriarchal anxiety created by feminism. Female transgressions in film noir include overt sexuality and female agency. The femme fatale character personifies these transgressions. Generally in film noir stories, the femme fatale creates or complicates a crisis that, with seeming inevitability, moves toward resolution. My wide reading about and viewing of film noir films supported this conclusion and I have detailed instances of support throughout this exegesis.

I have noted that film noir films contain motifs, rules and pleasurable expectations that work in concert with patriarchal gendered binaries. This study has looked at these expectations and the ways these have interacted with the development of contemporary feminism.

Within the neo noir canon, I have identified a type of film noir where the

patriarchal binaries are collapsed, and instead of restoring the patriarchal status quo at the end of the film, a boundary-slipping, woman-centred tragedy occurs. I have named this type of film femme noir. This study has identified that when there is a female protagonist mirroring a femme fatale, binaries of male privilege are collapsed and there is a slip in character boundaries. Women characters and viewers are no longer negotiating patriarchal expectations to stitch together womanly subjectivity. Subjectivity is achieved for women characters and viewers because reflections, multiple points of identity and the loop of looking and being looked at is enacted between the two women.

In my case studies, I have noted that, ultimately, whereas film noir narratives drive toward the expulsion of the abject female, the femme noir protagonist ingests and absorbs the abject sister / femme fatale, becoming whole. In my examination of four film case studies and writing a femme noir screenplay, I have found that the femme noir film is an echoing, bloody chamber of female subjectivity, which ultimately ends in death.

For my creative work, I have developed an adaptation of Frank Wedekind's Lulu plays (1895 and 1904). This work features the vamp / femme fatale Lulu and it ends with her death. As a subtitle to his plays, Wedekind describes the story as a 'Sex Tragedy'. This statement implies there is inevitability in Lulu's demise because of her overt sexuality. In this way, the Lulu plays codify and reproduce patriarchy. By making Countess Geschwitz the protagonist of my screenplay, Lulu's death is changed from a tale about the expulsion of the transgressing woman to one which involves the incorporation of Lulu's darkness into the Countess Geschwitz character (Ruth in my screenplay.)

I have noted that femme noir breaches character boundaries. The two reflecting women absorb each other's identities. For example, Hedy takes on Allison's identity in the sex dungeon in *Single White Female* (Schroeder 1992), Nina looks in the mirror and sees Lily in *Black Swan* (Aronofsky 2010), Betty/Diane and Rita/Camilla change characters and looks in *Mulholland Drive*

(Lynch 2001) and Frannie is proposed to by Pauline's fiancé/killer in *In the Cut* (Campion 2003). In my own screenplay, Ruth's identity is taken on by Lulu and together they form an Oedipal relationship with Sean (Ruth's father).

In this study I have noted the way femme noir films diverge from traditional narrative pathways, diverging into a dream space where cause and effect are not anticipated. For example, *Single White Female's* sex dungeon, Nina's lesbian/masturbatory fantasy scene and her murder/suicide scene in *Black Swan*, Frannie and Pauline's dream narrative about their father in *In the Cut* and *Mulholland Drive's* narrative slip and loop around Diane's wishful dreams of Hollywood success and love. In my own screenplay, time and space slip when, after Sean's death, nothing is what it seems.

In this study I conclude that transgression across gender binaries of film noir in femme noir includes transgressive same-sex and masturbatory desires. For example, the kiss between Hedy and Allison in *Single White Female*, the sex scenes and masturbation in *Black Swan* and *Mulholland Drive* and, in *In the Cut*, the decapitation of a killer's fiancées. In my screenplay, there is a sexual relationship between Ruth and Lulu.

Finally, in femme noir, the scopophilic quality of film noir becomes The Uncanny because of doubling and because of the déjà vu created by narrative slips. This, too, is a breach of pleasurable expectations. Death itself is fetishised and unsettled by femme noir. For example, Allison sees herself descend the stairs in the hair salon in *Single White Female* and later she sees herself in the sex dungeon. In *Mulholland Drive*, characters change faces and faces change characters with repetition and a narrative trajectory that incorporates déjà vu. In *Black Swan*, doubling leads to Nina stabbing her own body and, in *In the Cut*, strangeness in repeated marriage and courtship motifs includes the injured bride on the train platform.

### *Further research*

This thesis has identified the femme noir subcategory of neo noir. Within this subcategory, the abject character of the femme fatale becomes a mirror to the protagonist and the boundaries of character dissolve in a process of absorption. This provides scope for a woman audience member to view the film noir narrative in a way that does not subjugate her point of view.

However, missing from these films are women of colour. Where is the black in noir? In all of my case studies and referenced films, women of colour do not exist except on the outer periphery. Although there is a mirroring gaze in femme noir where a white woman can see and be seen, there are no women of colour seen (let alone seeing) in femme noir.

I suggest there is much to be said about this lack and about the exclusion of blackness despite the absorption of the abject white woman. Subjectivity can be achieved by breaching barriers between white good and bad girl sisters but women of colour are erased completely in film noir films. There isn't even a fragmented existence for women of colour and there is much to be said about that.

Further analysis of other films that may fit my proposed subcategory of femme noir could be undertaken to see if they refute or further evidence my proposition that this new subcategory exists and disrupts the normal patriarchal narrative of film noir and neo noir.

## Appendix I

### Summary of Frank Wedekind's Lulu plays

#### *EARTH SPIRIT*

#### Act One

#### Scene One

- Artist Schwarz paints a picture of Lulu in his studio. Dr Schön, a gentleman and newspaper owner, looks on.
- Lulu, a young wife with her elderly husband, Dr Goll, enter. He is Public Health Officer. Lulu is there to pose and Dr Goll to supervise and make notes to the artist. Dr Schön explains he is there to see the painting of his fiancé. Lulu admires the painting then changes into a revealing satin Pierrot costume.
- Dr Schön's son, Alwa, enters and admires Lulu. He is a director and is due at the theatre.
- Goll, Alwa and Dr Schön leave Schwarz alone with Lulu. Lulu flirts and Schwarz is overwhelmed. He chases Lulu, knocking over 10 weeks of work. Now he has 'nothing to lose!' He chases her more. Lulu leads him to believe she is a virgin.
- Dr Goll enters to see them in a compromising position and dies on the spot.

- Lulu realises she is now very rich. Schwarz prays for the strength to be happy.

## **Scene Two**

- Lulu and Schwarz are now married and living in bohemian luxury. Schwarz is a successful painter.
- A beggar comes to the door. It is Schigolch. Schwarz leaves them alone. Schigolch is an old veteran. He seems to be Lulu's father.
- Schigolch leaves and Dr Schön arrives. Dr Schön asks Lulu to stop calling on him. He threatens to speak to her husband (Schwarz) about taking more control over her movements.
- Dr Schön is engaged to a society gentlewoman.
- Dr Schön has married Lulu to two men through their relationship. Lulu is in love with Schoen since he took her off the street at age twelve. He wants to keep Lulu occupied until he has established himself well with a good marriage.
- Schwarz returns. He says Lulu is better bred than he who grew up poor.
- Dr Schön admits to Schwarz that Lulu used to be a flower seller on the street. He entrusted her to a woman who Schwarz thought was Lulu's aunt.
- Dr Schön admits to Schwarz he set up Dr Goll with Lulu.
- Dr Schön tells Schwarz that Lulu's 'father' was the beggar.
- Schwarz breaks down because Lulu swore she was a virgin. He goes to

another room.

- Alwa arrives, a revolution has broken out in Paris. He says the newspaper staff are in shock.
- The sound of Schwarz cutting his own throat.
- Dr Schön breaks down the door to the other room and they see the dead body of Schwarz.
- Dr Schön is afraid his society engagement will be over because of the scandal. Alwa tells Dr Schön he should have married Lulu 'when her mother died'.
- The police ring. Lulu tells Dr Schön 'you'll marry me in the end'.

### **Scene Three**

- Alwa and Lulu sit in a theatre dressing room. Lulu is a performer, backstage between acts. She asks if Alwa's father (Dr Schön) is in the audience – he seems to be avoiding Lulu.
- Dr Schön enters and asks if Prince Escerny has been by.
- Lulu enters dressed in a sexy flower girl costume.
- Lulu and Alwa are alone. They discuss how Lulu sexually interfered with Alwa as a teenager.
- When Alwa's mother died, Alwa insisted Dr Schön marry Lulu and threatened to fight a duel.
- Lulu says Dr Schön brought Lulu to the theatre so a millionaire would fall for her.

- Lulu leaves to go onstage and Alwa muses about writing a play about Lulu. 'Act 1 Dr Goll, Act 2 Schwarz, Act 3 Prince Escerny?' he suggests.
- A bell rings, something has happened on stage. Lulu enters. She fainted on stage. She saw Dr Schön sitting with his fiancé in the audience.
- Dr Schön enters. Alwa goes to bring the next act forward. Lulu and Dr Schön argue about her place in society, her vulgarity and his ennobling influence or lack thereof.
- Lulu says the Prince will take her to Africa. She confronts Dr Schön about why he doesn't get married and implies it is because of her.
- Lulu says she can't be defined as a femme fatale or as salt of the earth (she says Dr Schön sees her as both).
- Dr Schön promises to get married in a week and begs her to not let him see her again. She begs him to whip her and mocks his uptight fiancé.
- He breaks down and Lulu makes him write a letter to break off his engagement.

#### **Scene Four**

- In a Renaissance drawing room featuring the portrait of Lulu, Countess Geschwitz looks forward to seeing Lulu at the lady artist's ball for which she must dress as a man.
- Alone, Dr Schön laments that he lives in filth.
- Dr Schön has his fortune at stake in the stock market. Lulu fights with him about having his life controlled by possessions and for not marrying her.

- Dr Schön leaves and Geschwitz returns to hide and listen.
- Schigolch and his companion Rodrigo (a circus strong man) arrive.  
Schigolch comes every stock exchange day.
- Lulu enters in a revealing ball gown with orchids on her wide décolleté.
- Lulu says she isn't dressing for the Prince, he is on a trip. Rodrigo says the Prince wanted to marry her originally. Schigolch says everyone wants to marry her but never regrets not doing it. He says he wanted to. (He isn't her father.)
- They feel Rodrigo's bicep. He is strong and big.
- Rodrigo hides under the table and Schigolch hides behind a fire screen before Alwa enters.
- Alwa notices Schigolch sneaking away. Lulu says he is an old army friend of Alwa's father (Dr Schön).
- Ferdinand the servant is tempted by Lulu's flirtatious clothes.
- Dr Schön sees Rodrigo hiding.
- Alwa worships Lulu as on a pedestal, 'You stand so far above me'. Begs her to 'finish him off'.
- Dr Schön points his revolver at Rodrigo, who escapes. Dr Schön calls Lulu a succubus. Lulu tells him to shut up and kill her.
- Dr Schön gives Lulu the revolver. She shoots the ceiling and Rodrigo jumps out and runs off.
- Dr Schön takes the revolver from Lulu and searches the room, finds Geschwitz, shoves her in a room and locks it. Dr Schön fights with Lulu saying divorce is not an option because she is part of him. Lulu begs for her life.

- Rodrigo distracts Dr Schön and Lulu shoots Dr Schön. As he sits in a chair mortally wounded, Dr Schön calls for Alwa. Lulu on her knees declares he is the only man she has ever loved. Rodrigo says she is innocent. Lulu offers champagne. Alwa opens the door and Countess Geschwitz comes out. Dr Schön dies.
- Lulu begs not to be handed to the police. She claims she shot in self-defence.
- The police arrive.

**PANDORA'S BOX** (a continuation of the *Earth Spirit* narrative)

### **Scene Five**

- In the same room, Rodrigo sits in a servant's uniform, Countess Geschwitz, in black, sits in an armchair looking thin and unwell. Alwa paces.
- Rodrigo plans to marry Lulu when she gets out of prison, take her across the border and on to London to be circus performers (Lulu will be a trapeze artist).
- Alwa has produced his play *Earth Spirit* about Lulu in a fringe production.
- Geschwitz broke Lulu out of prison using an elaborate plan. She swapped hospital beds with Lulu. Rodrigo lay in hospital for three months as recognisance and paid lots of bribes to hospital staff.
- Schigolch arrives, comes into the darkened room. He leaves with

Geschwitz.

- Alwa sold his father's newspaper and only produced the one play.
- Lulu comes downstairs supported by Schigolch. She is unwell and wears black. She sparks up a little, but Rodrigo is disappointed at her physical state and leaves.
- The Countess Geschwitz did a course in nursing and attended a cholera epidemic where she put on a dead patient's underwear. She then visited Lulu in prison and swapped under wear. They both came down with cholera on the same day. Countess went to hospital and changed her appearance to look like Lulu. She was released as cured and just now took Lulu's place in prison as the murderer of Dr Schön. Lulu says she pretended to be ill coming in to get Rodrigo off her back.
- Schigolch still plans to take Lulu away.
- Alwa has a lover in a flat who he hasn't seen in six weeks. He says his work and sexuality is intertwined. He has a choice of either putting Lulu in a play or making love to her.
- Lulu dreams of dying at the hands of a sex murderer.
- Alwa and Lulu kiss. She remembers going with him to a fancy-dress ball dressed as a page boy. The countess crawls after her, begging Lulu to rub her shoes on the Countess' face.
- Alwa and Lulu kiss passionately, Lulu invites Alwa to join them in London. The two make love (implied) on the bed his father died on.

## Scene Six

- Alwa, Rodrigo, Masqui Casti-Piani (bored socialite), Lulu, Geschwitz and Bianetta (a wealthy woman) move around a Paris salon which features a gaming table. Rodrigo proposes a toast for Lulu's birthday.
- Casti-Piani enthuses at Lulu's good breeding. They discuss buying 'Virgin' shares, as they are rising in value.
- The group tease Geschwitz and she leaves.
- Casti-Piani is a police spy. He weighs up the profits of either getting a reward for Dr Schön's murderer or selling Lulu to an Egyptian brothel.
- Lulu offers to pay him off in shares.
- Lulu refuses to sell herself, 'that's worse than prison'.
- Casti-Piani goes to the gaming table, leaving Lulu. Alwa returns with a securities note. He's doing well.
- Lulu and Geschwitz fight. Geschwitz has given her everything, Lulu finds her disgusting, calls her a monster.
- Everyone returns, they have all won in the stock market. They celebrate.
- Rodrigo has a new woman who has three kids, but he is following Geschwitz around, trying to get her into bed because she is high born. He demands money from Lulu, tells her to get it from Alwa by making love to him. Insists she go with Casti-Piani. Threatens to turn her in to the police.
- Casti-Piani receives a message. The shares have crashed.
- Schigolch enters. He also has a woman who needs money.
- Lulu begs Schigolch to take her home with him, her 'head's on the block'.

- Schigolch promises to 'take care' of Rodrigo and Lulu promises to give him money for his sweetheart. He goes.
- Rodrigo is jostled in by Casti-Piani. Rodrigo confirms that he made a play for Lulu. Casti-Piani leaves.
- Rodrigo is angry at Lulu for telling Casti-Piani he tried to seduce her.
- Lulu tells Rodrigo to sleep with Geschwitz. Lulu is offered 20,000 marks by Geschwitz to 'save herself' from sex with Rodrigo. If Rodrigo has sex with Geschwitz instead of herself, Lulu will give Geschwitz's money to him.
- Rodrigo leaves and Lulu puts the proposal to Geschwitz. She begs not to have to have sex with Rodrigo but Lulu promises Geschwitz can 'have her' in the morning.
- Geschwitz (resigned) and Rodrigo leave together.
- Lulu swaps clothes with Bob the servant.
- Casti-Piani, Bianetta and Alwa come from the gaming room. The shares have fallen drastically. Bianetta's fortune is gone.
- Lulu comes in and says the police are on their way. Alwa and Lulu get away.

### **Scene Seven**

- In a dilapidated attic room Alwa on the chaise lounge and Schigolch on a bare mattress. They dream of better days.
- Lulu comes up the stairs. They tell her to go out and earn money for food.

Alwa has tried everything to make money including cheating at cards. She goes.

- Alwa remembers when he first met Lulu, getting dressed in his father's house. She came to a ball at the Spanish Embassy. Dr Goll asked Alwa to dance with her so she wouldn't do anything stupid. She stared at Dr Schön all night.
- Alwa first kissed Lulu in her bridal gown but 'she refused to remember afterwards'.
- They hear steps and hide.
- Lulu has brought Mr Hunidei, a comic figure who doesn't make a sound and tries to stop Lulu from making a sound. She takes him to the other room.
- Alwa kneels by the door. Schigolch checks Hunidei's pockets to rob him.
- Alwa and Schigolch hide again and Hunidei comes out with Lulu. He leaves and Lulu gives Alwa and Schigolch her earnings.
- Geschwitz enters. Her only possession is the portrait of Lulu. Geschwitz is pathetic. Lulu is mean and calls her a monster.
- They all compare the picture to Lulu now.
- Geschwitz goes down with Lulu to the street. Alwa and Schigolch think Geschwitz will scare off customers.
- Lulu returns with an African king. A very racist comic depiction ensues but Lulu does not have sex with him. He leaves.
- Lulu leaves again for the street.
- Geschwitz enters. She soliloquises about her pathetic masochistic love for Lulu.

- Lulu enters with Jack. Lulu tells Jack that Geschwitz is her mad sister. They negotiate and Lulu agrees to have sex for free. Lulu says again that today is her first time. Jack and Lulu go into the other room.
- Geschwitz decides to get money from her mother and go home to Germany to fight for women's rights.
- Lulu comes out of the bedroom screaming. Geschwitz gets her revolver and shoots the ceiling as Jack knifes her. Jack grabs the revolver.
- He takes a screaming Lulu into the other room. Lulu is killed (unseen).
- He comes out and washes his hands. Geschwitz declares her love for Lulu and dies.

## Appendix II

Timeline of the history of the Lulu plays, 1895 to present day

1895 *Earth Spirit (Erdgeist)* is printed

1898 *Earth Spirit* premiered on the 25 February production by Carl Heine

(Wedekind played the role of Dr Schön)

1904 *Pandora's Box (Die Buche der Pandora)* this production was restricted by the censor

1905 *Pandora's Box* Viennese premiere, restricted by the censor, starring Tilly Newes (who later became Wedekind's wife), Jack the Ripper was played by Wedekind

1923 *Pandora's Box* – a film by Leopold Jessner starring Asta Neilsen

1929 *Pandora's Box* – a silent film starring Louise Brooks, directed by G. W. Pabst

1937 *Lulu* – an opera by Alban Berg (written in 1935 and performed posthumously).

1970 English translation by Peter Barnes brought the two original works together in an English translation for the first time as 'the Lulu plays'

Oct Production of Barnes' adaptation at the Nottingham Playhouse

Dec Nottingham production moves on to London's West End at the Royal Court Theatre

1980 *Lulu* – a French television film directed by Walerian Borowczyk

1988 Original one-play version published in German magazine *Theatre Heat*

1989 A production of the German original produced in Hamburg directed by Peter Zadeck

1991 Publication of Eric Bentley's adaptation as commissioned by Jean Cocteau Repertory Company and Applause Theatre Books

1996 Publication of Angela Carter's adaptation in *The Curious Room: Plays, Film Scripts and an Opera* (commissioned by the National Theatre in 1987 but unproduced until a production in Leeds in the mid 1990s)

2011 *Lulu* – an album collaboration between the rock musician Lou Reed and Metallica

## Appendix III

### Scene by line summary of creative component: Lulu screenplay

- Ruth in a choir at school.
- Opening titles.
- Ruth with smoking girls. Is a little shy.
- Ruth rushes back to boarding school, hears boys.
- Ruth is introduced to Bradley in corridor. She hides him in her room.
- Ruth and Bradley make out – are caught by Mrs Clooney
- Dinner – Ruth is threatened by fellow student re: don't tell about boys.
- Ruth goes to headmistress' office – Sean and Daphne there. Dad tries to negotiate, suspension.
- Arrive home to big Gold Coast house. Dad pissed.
- Ruth goes to her princess room. Dad drives off. Daphne tries to discipline her – is not good at it. Takes phone and credit card.
- Ruth wakes to rhythmic thump.
- Brother Alan hitting tennis ball on the wall.
- Daphne tries an over-complicated family meal. Alan pushes dad to invest in his dance party plan. They fight.
- Ruth pulls weeds at Sean's plastic surgery clinic, sprinklers come on, she goes home.
- Ruth arrives home to the sound of sex in dad's bedroom. She sees Daphne outside.

- Ruth hides in library – Daphne arrives home.
- Daphne prepares for her friend’s arrival for pre-drinks.
- Sean shoves Lulu into the library.
- Daphne reminds Sean who is coming.
- Ruth speaks to Lulu.
- Daphne and Sean talk about clothes.
- Lulu and Ruth hide– they are nearly caught by Sean.
- Lulu and Ruth discuss her suspension.
- Morgans (guests) arrive.
- Ruth knows what to do.
- Daphne catches Lulu and Ruth trying to escape through the window – they pretend to be friends – Lulu toys with Daphne.
- Lulu draws attention as they attempt to slip past the guests – they pretend to be going to a party – they psych out Sean.
- Girls triumphant as they leave out the front door.
- Ruth asks Lulu if she is having an affair with her dad.
- Lulu pimps Ruth’s appearance in the public toilets.
- Lulu brings Ruth drinks.
- Bartender asks Ruth for ID – Ruth works it.
- Ruth and Lulu walk along main beach – Lulu invites her to her apartment.
- Ruth and Lulu in Lulu’s apt, they discuss the painting of Lulu. Lulu cuts Ruth’s hair to match her own.
- At breakfast, Sean is uncomfortable with Ruth’s hair – Daphne wants to send her to finishing school not back to boarding school.

- Ruth sells jewellery – she gets \$50.
- Ruth calls Lulu. Lulu – invites her over.
- Daphne makes a list in pantry – music blasts out of Ruth’s room.
- Outside – Ruth climbs out window.
- Ruth opens garage door, sees Daphne’s moving boxes – she rips one open.
- Inside Lulu’s apt, brilliant Pacific view.
- Ruth sees Lulu’s princess bedroom – Lulu makes her up – she is dad’s dirty little secret - Ruth is made to look sophisticated.
- Transport and Motoring office – Ruth pretends to be Daphne with forged birth certificate – gets a new driver’s licence.
- Ruth and Lulu leave the office triumphant – she has an adult driver’s licence.
- Ruth and Lulu prepare for night out – in her apt – Ruth tells Lulu she is leaving at the end of the month. Lulu gets a message – hides Ruth in the stairwell.
- Ruth sees Sean arrive and go to Lulu.
- Ruth prepares Daphne’s birth certificate and envelope for Lulu’s room key in Sean’s study.
- Ruth slips envelope into Daphne’s handbag – takes back her credit card.
- Daphne reads letter and finds key.
- Daphne walks in on Lulu and Sean. Daphne and Sean throw punches.
- Daphne leaves Sean, throws engagement ring.
- Ruth and Alan watch as Sean tries to stop movers with Daphne’s boxes. He does his back in.

- Ruth nurses Sean, he asks her to get drugs from the clinic.
- Ruth gets drugs from the clinic, speaks to receptionist re partners filling in for him.
- Sean injects pain killers.
- Ruth and Lulu at sea pool. Hit on by nasty teen boys.
- Sean takes drugs.
- Ruth and Lulu make a cake, Lulu takes it upstairs to Sean.
- Ruth (alone) cleans kitchen – sex upstairs.
- Lulu walks into Ruth’s room. They spoon to sleep.
- Lulu has a nightmare.
- Lulu is playing a game on the computer in the night.
- Ruth wakes with Lulu asleep next to her.
- Ruth arrives home from a swim.
- Ruth overhears Lulu and Alan talk in the kitchen about her past.
- Ruth and Lulu put on face masks under the painting in Ruth’s bedroom.
- Ruth and Lulu get nude in a bubble bath and take off the face masks.
- Ruth walks upstairs.
- Ruth and Lulu bliss out in the bath – Alan walks in on them, Ruth yells at him.
- Ruth gives Sean a sandwich – he says it’s time for Lulu to go home to her apartment.
- Ruth and Lulu sleep in Ruth’s bed again.
- Ruth wakes to an empty bed.
- Sean doesn’t approve of Ruth spending time with Lulu.

- Ruth helps Sean dress – he gives up.
- Ruth dresses for school.
- Ruth stops when she sees Alan drive up with Lulu in the front seat – they've been to see the sunrise at Mount Byron. Alan is taking her to a party.
- Rainforest dance party – Alan and Lulu having more fun than Ruth. Ruth goes to rest.
- Ruth rests on the edge of the party.
- Lulu finds Ruth – splits with her.
- Ruth and Lulu walk through the rainforest at daybreak – party people pass.
- Ruth and Lulu have breakfast at a café.
- Ruth and Lulu swim in the sea – Lulu can't swim, Ruth promises to not let her drown – they kiss.
- Ruth and Lulu sleep on the beach.
- Lulu dreams of a different life, tells Ruth that Sean is her saviour.
- Ruth and Lulu hitchhike – they get a lift in a truck.
- The girls arrive home exhausted – Alan is already home.
- Sean chastises the girls. Tells Lulu to sleep in the spare room.
- Ruth takes Lulu to the spare room – invites her into bed.
- Ruth sees Sean very out of it – says 'good night, Dad' – goes to sleep in her own room.
- Alan asks Sean about Lulu's flat – what are his plans with her? – Sean is on opiates.

- Ruth wakes the next day in her own room.
- Ruth goes to Lulu in the spare room – they make love – Alan catches them.
- Kerry Morgan arrives with soup.
- Ruth watches Kerry help Sean with physio exercises – Sean asks about Daphne. Lulu comes in and she and Sean piss off Kerry. Sean tells Kerry he is marrying Lulu.
- Ruth takes photos of the bride and groom.
- Alan drives Ruth home – she deletes video of kissing Lulu that morning.
- Montage of Ruth alone in the house – missing Lulu.
- Ruth dreams of Ruth posing for the painting.
- Lulu and Sean return from honeymoon.
- Ruth asks Lulu how it's going to work. Sean is off the opiates.
- Alwa sees Ruth leave Lulu's room.
- Ruth dreams about Lulu, Lulu doesn't return a blown kiss.
- Ruth wakes, finds weakened Sean in the kitchen.
- Ruth watches an infomercial with Sean – holds his hand.
- Ruth strips Sean's bed – makes Alan help her.
- Ruth and Alan fight, Lulu helps Sean.
- Ruth stands up to Alan's threatening tone – goes to make Lulu lunch.
- Ruth takes out Lulu's rollers – they kiss.
- Alan fights with Sean over money – Ruth opens door on the girls making love.
- Ruth and Lulu stop and cover up, Sean slaps Lulu which turns into a fight.
- Lulu grabs a gun and shoots him.

- Sean is dead, Lulu is terrified of going to jail, Ruth will take the blame.
- Ruth demands Alan punch her as hard as he can (motive) as ambulance comes closer.
- Ruth interviewed by police, she says it was an accident because he was beating her for having an affair with his wife.
- Ruth arrives home to an empty house.
- Ruth calls Alan and Lulu, no response.
- Ruth grieves for Sean on his bed.
- Ruth wakes in the night – remembers what has happened.
- Ruth searches empty house.
- Ruth sees herself in the mirror and calls Lulu's voice mail – she notices Lulu's stuff is gone.
- Alan's stuff is still there.
- Ruth runs out to garage.
- No car in driveway/garage.
- Calls to Alan and Lulu go to voicemail.
- Ruth opens the safe, takes out a gun.
- Ruth watches the same infomercial with gun and phone next to her. She's tense.
- The coroner calls and tells Ruth the corpse is ready to pick up for the funeral.
- At the funeral Daphne sits closest to the coffin, Alan and Lulu hold hands.
- Mourners comfort Daphne, and Ruth talks to Lulu who doesn't want to see her, Lulu and Daphne confront each other.

- Daphne and Ruth ride behind the hearse.
- The wake – Ruth escapes.
- Ruth’s credit card is refused at the café.
- Credit card refused at automatic teller machine.
- Ruth at the accountant – bank froze credit card because Sean is dead, Alan is executor.
- Ruth checks the safe – someone has taken stuff, smashed cash box is empty.
- No one answers at Lulu’s apt . voice mail to Lulu and Alan.
- Ruth ducks under closing car park door.
- Ruth leaves a note on Alan’s car ‘I really need money’.
- Ruth dials Lulu from a public phone. Lulu makes her feel better.
- No money for the bus now, she walks.
- Police car at her house when she arrives – do you have someone to act as your guardian?
- Ruth calls Daphne. I don’t have anyone.
- Police interview – they ask about her claims Sean hit her, Alan had bruised knuckles.
- Police interview cont. – they show Ruth a video of someone buying a gun, it appears to be Ruth. They present Ruth with with a copy of the fake driver’s licence with Daphne’s name and Ruth’s photo. Ruth sees a copy of her note about needing money to Alan.
- Daphne drops Ruth off, tries to get her to say Lulu did it.
- Ruth’s dream world – she is shot by Lulu.

- Ruth wakes up from her nightmare to knocking, she is a mess, the house is a mess.
- Lulu at the door crying and begging forgiveness, says Alan wants Ruth dead.
- Lulu says Alan made her kill Sean and he wants to put Ruth in jail so he can get money, Lulu's dad is sorry and has grounds for appeal, Lulu wants to steal back the \$250,000 from Alan's office and run away.
- Ruth gets into the club.
- Ruth finds bonds and iPad.
- Ruth stops Alan at the door and confronts him about framing her. Alan says Lulu planned it.
- Ruth finds revenge porn on iPad.
- Ruth brings money to Lulu and confronts her about Alan, Lulu says she really loves Ruth and will kill Alan.
- Ruth and Lulu buy golf umbrella.
- Security camera POV of umbrella ducking under garage door.
- Elevator – Ruth and Lulu. Ruth has her gun.
- Ruth and Lulu enter dark apartment.
- Ruth sits and Lulu lies in wait, Lulu goes to bathroom, Alan enters. Alan says Lulu is crazy, begs Ruth to kick her to the curb, Ruth shoots him point blank.
- Ruth at accountant – money is gone.
- Ruth and Lulu living in apt. Have no money.
- Ruth and Lulu pick up a guy in a club.

- Ruth and Lulu try to rob him. He kills Lulu.
- Ruth struggles with Jack and kills him.
- Ruth leaves the apartment at daybreak, taking the painting of Lulu.

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